

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

MINISTER ELFERINK'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair. I will take the opportunity to make my opening statement because it contains the names of people here.

First, I introduce those sitting at the table with me, the Chief Executive of the Department of Attorney-General and Justice, Mr Greg Shanahan, and the Chief Financial Officer, Ms Jacqueline Dowling.

I will now make a brief statement in relation to the portfolio of Attorney-General and Justice. The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice continues to focus on delivering legal services to government, supporting the government's legislative program, providing support to victims of crime and administering a strong and responsive justice system.

The department comprises a variety of output groups, one being Legal Services, which provides government with quality legal advice, representation and policy development and supports victims of violent crime. The department continues its work in the area of legislative reform including tenancy reform, domestic violence, criminal procedure, vulnerable witnesses, victims of crime, fines recovery, sex offenders and organised crime.

Implementation of the highly successful cross-agency Pillars of Justice framework continues to progress, focusing on reform throughout the whole criminal justice process from before arrest to beyond parole.

The Court Support Services output group provides administrative support services to enable delivery of justice to the Northern Territory community by courts and tribunals. This year work will begin to fit out the new Supreme Court facility in Alice Springs, continuing the government's investment in developing the town's justice precinct. Budget 2015-16 also allocates \$600 000 to upgrade one of the courtrooms in the Darwin Supreme Court to a fully-equipped jury facility, with an additional \$500 000 to establish a stand-alone youth justice court in Darwin.

The Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal is now operational, and offices have been established in Darwin and Alice Springs. The department will continue to progress the transfer of jurisdictions from around 35 commissioners, tribunals, committees and boards, to cut red tape and provide Territorians with a single, central, easy-to-use mechanism for civil and administrative appeals.

It is important to note that while the CEO is responsible under the *Financial Management Act* and the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act* for the administration of the department, many of its arms are independent in the delivery of their functions by virtue of statutory appointment.

The Director of Public Prosecutions is one such statutory office. The DPP continues to provide an independent public prosecution service to the Northern Territory and to support witnesses and victims throughout the criminal justice process.

The Independent Offices output group, which includes a range of independent statutory authorities, continues the important role of protecting the community's legal rights and property interests.

New to the department is the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, which was transferred from the Department of the Chief Minister under the machinery of government changes in December 2014, bringing 12.8 full-time equivalent positions and a budget of \$2.064m. This unit continues to provide important legislative drafting services to progress the government's legislative reform agenda.

I note that Output 4.6, Health and Community Services Complaints Commission, and Output 4.7, Children's Commissioner, come under my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for Health and Minister for Children and Families respectively, and should be directed towards me at that point in the schedule.

Output 5.0, the Domestic Violence Directorate, is a new output established by the department in the 2014-15 financial year. The Northern Territory government, in partnership with the Commonwealth

government, has committed \$6.07m in the 2015-16 budget for the domestic family violence reduction strategy which aims to address, reduce and prevent domestic violence across the Northern Territory. The Domestic Violence Directorate has been established to facilitate an integrated response from government and non-government organisations and coordinate local reference groups in Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek to drive the strategy on the ground.

The Corporate and Governance output group continues to deliver high-quality corporate services to the department and will implement a range of measures to reduce red tape and streamline internal service delivery in the coming months. I now will take questions from the committee.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first, followed by committee members and finally other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on that output.

You have made your opening statement. Are there any questions on the minister's statement?

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

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider estimates of proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2015-2016 as they relate to the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Ms WALKER: Yes, I have a couple of questions on whole-of-agency for the minister. I seek direction first as to where I will ask questions about statutory boards you have responsibility for.

Mr ELFERINK: It depends where they fall. If they are under Ombudsman and that sort of thing and they are funded by the department directly, you will find them in Output Group 4.0. If they come under the Health portfolio area, as I said in my opening statement, they come up in Health when we cover that in Outputs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5.

Ms WALKER: Minister, we had requested of the independent officers to ask if the Information and Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner could appear today.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms WALKER: Thank you. In whole-of-agency, I note that the 2015-16 staffing, as noted on page 131 in Budget Paper No 3, is 477 full-time employees, an increase of 27.6 based on the 2013-14 annual report, which listed a grand total of 450.6. What has caused the increase in employees in the agency? Is it linked to positions which perhaps had previously been outsourced to legal firms now coming back in-house?

Mr ELFERINK: Not that I am aware of. These numbers in the annual report and on the staffing figure are actual numbers at the time. Numbers, as you will appreciate, will fluctuate up and down as time passes so that at any given moment in time we will have staff on board or not as vacancies come and go.

This is particularly pronounced in other departments like Health. You will also realise that we have expanded some roles that I described in my opening statement, particularly when we picked up Parliamentary Counsel. We have a Domestic Violence Directorate now which does a number of things for us as government. With creating a new directorate, as well as things like Parliamentary Counsel, that is pretty much what captures the field.

Your point goes to the outsourcing of work ...

Ms WALKER: I have more questions on that if you want to leave it until then.

Mr ELFERINK: In that case I will let you ask those questions.

Ms WALKER: That difference in full-time employees is just to do with the movement of workload and the shifting responsibilities at the agency.

I should have said at the outset as well, because we had more questions around staffing levels and a range of other things under global questions that were submitted to your agency ahead of estimates. Do you have those answers and are you able to table them?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. Which question number is that? Yes, I have them here. I will just read out the answer. The question you put to me was: how many staff in each agency or authority detailed by full-time equivalent, permanent part-time contract or temporary contract?

The total staffing within the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, as at Pay 20 in the 2014-15 year, was a total full-time equivalent of staffing numbers of 477.18 FTEs, total ongoing permanent employees of 306.95 FTEs including 13.02 ongoing permanent part-time employees. Total fixed-term temporary contract employees were 141.46 FTEs including 6.46 fixed-term temporary contract part-time employees. These figures include eight statutory appointments in the independent offices which we have included under the banner of authorities. The figures exclude judiciary casual staffing and board members.

Ms WALKER: Given that that was one of a number of questions, I am asking again if you are intending to table the answers to those global question?

Mr ELFERINK: I seek direction from the Chair here. What was the ...

Ms WALKER: The Speaker tabled her questions, other ministers have not.

Mr ELFERINK: My understanding is that they were to be read on to the record.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: He can choose to table them or not.

Ms WALKER: I am just asking him would he table them and if he says no then ...

Mr ELFERINK: My understanding is that it was to be read on to the record, so I will read it on to the record.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Very good, you have the ability to make that call.

Ms WALKER: Okay. It is disappointing. The Speaker obviously chose to make her answers available. But that is all right, I am sure they will be coming my way soon. I trust this comes under a whole-of-agency-type question, minister. I am sure the Chair will rule it out if it is not.

While it is a federal matter, you must have been pleased and relieved when your federal counterpart, the Attorney-General Senator George Brandis, restored funding to legal aid services. It was a terrible decision, without a doubt, which would have impacted very negatively, particularly on the Indigenous Territories I represent in Arnhem Land. Did you make representation to the federal Attorney-General on this funding matter?

Mr ELFERINK: I am so glad you asked that question. Yes is the short answer. The long answer, which I will also give you, is that I not only made direct representations but I pointed out very carefully some of the impacts that decision would take. I can place on the record that I have a great deal of sympathy with the federal Attorney-General's argument about CLCs using taxpayers' funds for what are primarily political or public policy-type purposes, rather than the delivery of services. That is a comment on a national scale, it does not apply to the CLCs operating in the Northern Territory. They do a fine job.

It is a slightly different contextual environment in the Northern Territory, but nationally taxpayers' funds are used for essentially what is often public policy, if not outright political purposes which is inappropriate. So does the federal minister. For that reason he sought to truncate the amount of expenditure, particularly in the area of CLCs. That also washed over into the providers of legal services directly to clients in courtrooms. That is a very important distinction to make and I ask people to be mindful of that distinction.

The consequence was that there was a substantial cut - I think some \$23m - out of the delivery of legal services across the country. I spoke to the federal Attorney-General Senator George Brandis at some length over this issue on more than one occasion. On those occasions I was able to convince him to take the matter to the Prime Minister, and \$23m has been restored to these agencies across the country, particularly the legal aid agencies.

The reason I am claiming this directly is because he has publicly acknowledged my role in the restoration of this money. He has now done so on a number of occasions, both in the media and other places. I am grateful to him because the arguments I put to him were sufficient to convince the Prime Minister that they had to step away from this decision.

I continue to have sympathy with his arguments in relation to the CLCs in other jurisdictions, but it has meant the restoration, and indeed the increase of money, to local legal aid providers. I will try to do this off the top of my head. I think there is \$300 000 more for CAALAS, some \$700 000 extra for NAAJA and about \$1.5m for legal aid in the Territory. We have done particularly well out of this arrangement - perhaps, a reward for lobbying, I do not know. They do this by a formulaic process. I presume the formulae have worked. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the ear of the federal Attorney-General and the Prime Minister on this issue.

Ms WALKER: I commend you for your representation to your federal colleagues to have that funding restored because it is incredibly important.

In that same vein, have you also made representation to the federal Attorney-General on the cessation of funding to community legal services like the Environmental Defender's Office Northern Territory which supports important environmental matters, and as you would be aware, had a significant victory in the NT Supreme Court last Friday in a case against the minister for Resources around water allocations. In your earlier answer you referred to CLCs and the way some operate being regarded for political or public purposes. Have you lobbied to see the continuation of funding for EDONT which is defunded as of 30 June?

Mr ELFERINK: No. I have lobbied in relation to CLCs and the other community legal centres which provide day-to-day legal services. These have landed on equal – I think they have dropped about \$15 000. I am looking at what we can do in that space to make up the difference, but no promises can be made. In relation to the Environmental Defender's Office, it got a mention but it was not high on my list of priorities. If you compare the need for Aboriginal Territorians who find themselves in the criminal justice system to be effectively represented, particularly in the circumstances of indictable offences, that is where my focus was and remains.

Ms WALKER: So your focus is not on protecting the environment and on those many stakeholders who have lobbied for the protection of the environment over water allocation licences? Given this was the first case the EDONT had taken to court with the Environment Centre and won, many people believe it is significant and demonstrates there is a need for such a community legal service.

Mr ELFERINK: I am satisfied the environmental protocols and controls that operate in the Northern Territory are fit for purpose. We are the government that introduced an independent EPA, not the former government. That organisation continues to service people of the Northern Territory. Regarding the Environmental Defender's Office, as the Attorney-General, I am focusing on matters which deal particularly with representation of clients who would otherwise be unrepresented in our criminal justice system.

Ms WALKER: That is very interesting, minister. Obviously, this case has been very significant. What has been shown through findings of this Supreme Court case announced last Friday is the government has made an error in how it reviews water licences. Without a publicly-funded resource like the Environmental Defender's Office of the Northern Territory stakeholders have nowhere to go. I believe, as do many others, it is an important service in holding government to account, to be able to have recourse to justice collectively for people representing a bunch of stakeholders about important issues like water allocation licences. I am sure there are others. You have said your piece; I find it disappointing.

No further questions on whole-of-agency.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – LEGAL SERVICES

Output 1.1 – Solicitor for the Northern Territory

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0, Legal Services, Output Group 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: A couple, Mr Deputy Chair. Minister, in the Legal Services output there is a drop of about \$0.5m overall. What is that reduction as a result of?

Mr ELFERINK: I presume you are talking about the line item Legal Services. I draw your attention to footnote one. The decrease in the 2014-15 estimate and 2015-16 budget mainly relates to the transfer of the Commonwealth-funded Alice Springs Transformation Plan to the new Domestic Violence Directorate. If

you go to Legal Policy you will note that the budget for 2014-15 was \$14m and in 2015-16 the budget is \$10m. If you then glance down the column to the Domestic Violence Directorate line item you will see we have committed nearly \$7m in the final estimate of the 2014-15 and nearly \$7.2m for the 2015-16 year.

Ms WALKER: Okay, that is fine. When we get to the appropriate output, which is Output 5 and the Domestic Violence Directorate I will be asking some more questions about that funding.

Mr ELFERINK: If it had stayed within the Legal Policy framework you would have found the Legal Policy framework would have been in the order of around \$16m or \$17m this year.

Ms WALKER: You mention it in your opening statement, but could you just provide further explanation as to the cost benefit or otherwise of transferring Parliamentary Counsel from DCM into your agency?

Mr ELFERINK: I am not sure if there is a great cost benefit that flows from it, but the relationship between my portfolio area - bearing in mind whilst I have been an assertive pursuer of policy changes there are a number of other bills that come before the House which are just functional bills. There will be clarification required by an interpretive issue arising out of the Supreme Court from time to time. There will be national agreements and those types of things that require fix-ups from time to time and as a consequence I, as the Attorney-General - and this is probably true for most Attorneys-General - have carriage of half the legislative instruments that pass through the House. It has a certain logical resonance. Where the bulk of the work is done there are straight lines of communication between draftsmen and those people who help create drafting directions or give instructions to the drafters. A matter of administrative convenience is the best way to describe it.

Ms WALKER: I note with interest the key performance indicator listed on page 135 of Budget Paper No 3 is by pages of legislation. Presumably that measure of 7000 pages drafted and reprinted is what is produced. What is the budget to operate Parliamentary Counsel?

Mr ELFERINK: The exact budget? It is in the line items. If you go to the independent offices you will see there is a budget. Yes, 7000 is a lot of pages. I am always fascinated by parliamentary draftsmen. They are truly unique and amazing human beings. If there is a definition of hell for me it is I will die and find myself in an office of Parliamentary Counsel because the work they have to do is so careful and fastidious. My ADD would kick in well before I got through page one. They methodically, carefully and conscientiously work their way through 7000 pages of legislation every year, draft it and marry it up to other legislative instruments. It is an art form to be admired and to be awe struck by, and I am. I place on the record my great thanks and admiration to the people who work in that area.

Ms WALKER: Indeed, minister. Sorry, I entirely missed the budget figure. It is there right under my eyes.

In regard to Legal Services in solicitor hours, the 2013-14 annual report, page 47, shows that hours spiked to 84 126 from the estimated 75 753 hours. How do we account for this? Is it a busy period in getting legislative reform through?

Mr ELFERINK: We do legal stuff, which means we have a number of things to do. For example, take native title matters that have to be settled. A budget is a best guess more than 12 months out from when the annual report is put together. There is an element of being demand driven even in the department. We would like to best guess how much work we will do on an annual basis, but you are not always right. In fact, it is impossible to land exactly on the figure you estimate going forward.

If you want more detail of the type of work that is being done, some of it will be legislative. I push pretty hard for a number of reforms. I suspect if you include, for example, the summary legislation I hope to pass on Thursday evening, and compare that with NTCAT and things like that, this would have been one of the most substantial periods of law reform in the Territory's history since becoming a self-governing jurisdiction. That puts pressure on people. I put pressure on my public servants and demand a lot of them, but they always step up to the mark as the true professionals they are.

Ms WALKER: That same table I referred to in the annual report about solicitor hours also highlights an estimated doubling in solicitor hours under files opened for domestic violence matters, as a result of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory taking carriage of DV applications on behalf of police. That came into place in January 2014. Has that estimate for DV cases to increase from 700 to 1400 cases been realised?

Mr ELFERINK: I suspect in the final estimate domain we are probably in about that space – I looked to my left briefly and I got a nod. The fact is we have removed police officers from the courtroom with a view to getting police officers back into their professional role, and we now have lawyers doing the lawyering.

I took the opportunity to travel to or sit in courtrooms at the bar table some months ago to watch the lawyers operate to give me comfort that they were doing the job effectively. I got the impression that these were professional lawyers going about their business. As a consequence these files are now being funnelled through the DPP which is why you are seeing such a sharp increase.

As government has asserted itself in the domestic violence space by the creation of a directorate and the aggressive maintenance of the no-drop policy you will always see increases in these files. It is fair to say that we are capturing domestic violence that was already out there and had been out there for years. We can now take some comfort that more and more of these brutes are finding themselves in a courtroom answering for their actions.

Ms WALKER: As I indicated earlier when we get to Output Group 5.0 I will pursue that line of questioning further about the work of the Domestic Violence Directorate.

I flagged earlier that I would ask you something about the outsourcing of legal services. It was something I asked you about in my first year of estimates when I had this responsibility in our shadow Cabinet. Unless I have missed it, reporting in Budget Paper No 3 this year does not capture the solicitor hours broken down to those provided by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory and those outsourced. It had in a previous budget paper. Can you provide those numbers to me for current estimates?

Mr ELFERINK: There is a measure. It is hard. We could probably get the numbers as to how many people we have briefed files out to, but the amount of hours done inside an organisation is a matter for that organisation. Yes, we worked very closely with the local profession. When I became the Attorney-General the poor man on my left had to put up with the fact that we leaned out the department. I made no bones about that at the time. Many of those people are now the recipients of work they may have done whilst they worked for the department as they set up their own firms. I wish those people the very best of the future.

A number of criticisms were levelled at government in relation to how the work was outsourced and how much was kept in-house under the former government. My challenge to the local professionals was that if they reckoned they could do it better then make the case. There were a number of meetings. Ms Meredith Day from the department went through the process of speaking at length with the local professionals, dealing with a number of their issues, not least of which was the assertion that they could do it cheaper.

When we created a like-for-like comparison with local firms we discovered we were probably one of the more competitive law firms in the Northern Territory. Nevertheless we changed the system so the panel contracts which were in place were far more accessible by the local firms, and where necessary we still farm work out to those local firms, particularly in instances where we have to create Chinese walls.

Ms WALKER: In a previous report, those solicitor hours were broken down to those provided by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory and those outsourced. Is it possible to provide those numbers this year or not?

Mr ELFERINK: I am being advised it is not immediately available at the moment. We will try to scratch something together for you, and see if we can give you the best of what we have.

Ms WALKER: That would be helpful so I can compare how it has been travelling since the time you implemented it. Mr Deputy Chair, do you want me to repeat that question for Hansard?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes. Fire away.

Question on Notice No 6.1

Ms WALKER: Can you provide solicitor hours broken down to those provided by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory and those outsourced in the current financial year?

Mr ELFERINK: We will accept that question on notice with the qualification, as best we can.

Ms WALKER: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That question will be allocated No 6.1 for the purpose of Hansard. Continue your line of questioning.

Ms WALKER: On the outsourcing of legal services, minister, is it saving taxpayers' money and what figures can you provide to support that?

Mr ELFERINK: The outsourcing of work will occur when it needs to occur. As I said, when we did an assessment of ourselves, we turned out to be one of the leaner firms. Doing a like-for-like measure in whether it save taxpayers' money is difficult because the nature of the work ebbs and flows. If you think about the example of hours worked before, where we put an estimate of 75 000 and got a final result of 84 000, it demonstrates that you get that ebb and flow.

One of the things I have made clear, as the minister, is that when this work goes out it is for a good reason and whoever gets the work has to be competitive in the space. I tend to have a commercial bent in relation to how we do things, so I have said to the department that if we do this it has to be competitive.

Ms WALKER: If I wanted to ask questions about billing arrangements with external providers, particularly legal companies, can I ask it here or do you want me to take that to the Corporate and Governance output?

Mr ELFERINK: Here is good.

Ms WALKER: Are you satisfied that billing arrangements for outsourced legal services are properly managed? Have there been any instances of overcharging the Department of Attorney-General and Justice as there has been with your other agency, the Department of Children and Families? While there was some overcharging from a handful of firms, Maley & Burrows overcharging in DCF amounted to about \$80 000. I am interested to know what checks and measures you have internally within your agency to keep on top of this. Have there been instances of overcharging and how do you manage this?

Mr ELFERINK: There is always an audit trail. We put audits in place. My understanding is that through these audits we pick up a number of these issues when they occur. When a bill comes in and it is questioned by the department - the firm which is billing the department or any other department I think are all managed through our department? Not anymore. Okay. All departments should have an auditing process.

The Treasurer's Directions require there be an audit committee established in every department which meets on a quarterly basis. That committee does all sorts of audits - occupational health and safety - and includes these sorts of issues. The fact that a number of firms, including Maley & Burrows, had been picked up in this process demonstrates to me the auditing process is working effectively.

Ms WALKER: It is working effectively. In the past year there has been no overcharging through the agency you are responsible for?

Mr ELFERINK: Not that I am aware of.

Ms WALKER: Do you want to take that question on notice so that we can get an answer?

Mr ELFERINK: The answer is not that I am aware of. For a clearer answer, the auditing process continues to quiz bills as they come in. If there is a dispute between the department and the billing law firm, then that dispute will be resolved either in or out of the courtroom.

Ms WALKER: It was as a result of that auditing that significant overcharging across a few providers was detected in the Department of Children and Families? You are saying those auditing processes will continue within the Attorney-General and Justice department and if there are anomalies they will be detected?

Mr ELFERINK: And in all other departments, I would expect.

Ms WALKER: So there could be anomalies; there could be instances of overcharging?

Mr ELFERINK: As I said, if there are billing disputes between the government and whoever they bill out to - and it is not just law firms, any firm that provides service to government ...

Ms WALKER: No, I appreciate that.

Mr ELFERINK: ... then those billing disputes are resolved through the normal fashion: conciliation, mediation, and ultimately within a courtroom if you have to.

Ms WALKER: Mr Deputy Chair, I do not have any more questions for Output Group 1.0. Hang on, yes, I do, Output 1.2.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes questions for consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Crime Victims Services Unit

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Crime Victims Services Unit. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Minister, I note a slight increase in Budget Paper No 3 on page 131 for this output. You should have the answer there because it was one of the questions we put on notice. Can you advise what grant, program, project and operational funding is provided by your department to non-government and external organisations, and the terms of the funding agreements, to provide a service to victims of crime?

Mr ELFERINK: It does not strike me as being familiar. I am just checking my questions on notice.

Ms WALKER: Maybe not, maybe I worded it slightly differently. I am looking at answers to written questions.

Mr ELFERINK: You are asking for detail. Yes, we can take that on notice and get back to you. We are happy to do so. As part of the Pillars of Justice strategy which I brought to the department and asked them to implement, which I referred to in my opening statement, one of the pillars is about supporting and looking after victims. All too often in the courtroom the focus is on the accused, rather than the people the accused has touched. I would always defer to the public expectation to the rights of the victims over the rights of the offenders, which is why you see an increase. I can now happily announce just under \$1m has gone to Victims of Crime NT to roll out the government's Safe Home policy across the Northern Territory. I wish them the very best.

That is one particular grant which is just under \$1m, but they received some other grants, as well. In total it is worth about \$1.3m to them.

Ms WALKER: Under the Safe Homes policy you are saying it is around \$1m ...

Mr ELFERINK: Just under, yes.

Ms WALKER: The Safe Homes policy was about people who had been victim of crime. It would allow them to purchase and install safety equipment at their homes such as locks, surveillance equipment, lights ...

Mr ELFERINK: The policy will also be extended to getting advice, support and those sorts of things.

Ms WALKER: That is fine thanks, minister. Sorry I interrupted you.

Mr ELFERINK: In short, if you want to then put that question on notice I am happy to accept it.

Question on Notice No 6.2

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record.

Ms WALKER: Minister, can you please advise what grant program, project and operational funding is provided by your department to non-government and external organisations and the term of the funding agreement to provide a service to victims of crime?

Mr ELFERINK: We accept that question, Mr Deputy Chair.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That question will be allocated No 6.2. Continue your line of questioning.

Ms WALKER: I do not have any other questions for Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Legal Policy

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 1.3, Legal Policy. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Minister, I am sure you will have an answer for this. There is a drop in the appropriation amount in this output and it is due to?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, we touched on it before. This is the unit which provided support to what is now the Domestic Violence Directorate.

Ms WALKER: Okay, thank you. That is all for me on Output Group 1.0, Mr Deputy Chair.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – COURT SUPPORT SERVICES

Output 2.1 – Higher Courts

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Court Support Services, Output 2.1, Higher Courts. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Not in Higher Courts, Mr Deputy Chair.

Output 2.2 – Lower Courts and Tribunals

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 2.2, Lower Courts and Tribunals. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Yes. Minister, in the annual report on page 56, Court Support Services, statistics listed for criminal cases lodged for lower courts at major centres and circuit courts are well above the estimates. For example, at major centres the estimate is 11 500 cases but was actually 14 130 cases, and in the circuit courts the estimate was 3500 but the actual figure was 4626. From a funding perspective it is difficult to see how the lower courts can cope with this demand without a budget increase, but there is a very slight decrease. Can you tell us why this is so? Would this not also indicate quite a dramatic increase in crime, given the government's commitment to reduce crime by 10%?

Mr ELFERINK: Sure.

Ms WALKER: Sorry, there is a lot in there.

Mr ELFERINK: It invites a long answer, I am afraid, but here we go.

Ms WALKER: Do not be afraid, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: I draw your attention in the recent crime statistics to page 39 of 52 pages. I point out to you in regard to steps by government that in 2012, the last year of the Labor government, in yearly crime statistics there were 20 344 total property offences. The next year stayed static - slightly up to 20 519. The year after that it dropped to 17 500. In the second year of our government there was a substantial drop, indeed in excess of 10% at that point. In the most recent year that number has come up to 19 800, but is still substantially lower than it was in 2012. We have seen a fall.

You and I and everybody else are aware of the ice epidemic which has unfortunately become manifest. Many of these property offences may well be linked to what is going on with ice. This is not peculiar to the Northern Territory. It is recognised on a national stage, evidenced by the requirement of the Prime Minister to establish a national task force. The other component of this particular crime wave is that it might well be ascribed to a smaller numbers of perpetrators who are extremely active.

If you take then assault numbers for that same period – I have the wrong bit of paper in front of me. In any instance, I am as frustrated as you are with the recent increase, compared to the year before. But in how

we are tracking now and how the Labor government was tracking in 2012, we are still lower than the Labor government was back then.

In presentation to courtrooms, we discuss with the courts their requirement to do their job. If for whatever reason they need more resources as the year goes on, that will become evident as the year goes on. We establish budgets in accordance with their needs. Of course there is a conversation and a bit of negotiation between the courts and the department as to what they are funded to do their job, but we are interested and concerned to make sure that we continue to have an effective court system in the Northern Territory. As the Attorney-General, my question is whether the courts do their job in a timely fashion. The answer is, if you compare it to a national scale, yes, they do.

Ms WALKER: You did warn me that would be a lengthy answer. Whilst crime statistics sit with your agency, that discussion around crime statistics and how they might be interpreted or otherwise I will leave to the Leader of the Opposition when he sits with the Police minister tomorrow. I wanted to make comment that currently, as you and I know only too well, property offences in Darwin and Palmerston are through the roof.

Mr ELFERINK: Compared to when?

Ms WALKER: Linking it to ice may be a convenient excuse, but the reality is the people on the ground in Palmerston and Darwin are suffering at the hands of these offenders.

Mr ELFERINK: If property offences are through the roof now, what were they when you were in government, when they were higher?

Ms WALKER: It is disputable as to whether they ...

Mr ELFERINK: These are the crime statistics that we released on a monthly basis ...

Ms WALKER: I do not have the crime statistics in front of me. I am leaving it to the police ...

Mr ELFERINK: ... which you ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, hang on. We will ask a question then answer a question. We will not do this natterly thing. This is appropriation. If you have a question about appropriation, please ask it.

Mr ELFERINK: I will answer the question. If they are through the roof now, by her estimation, then what were they when you were in power, stratospheric? They were higher then and that is a convenient oversight by the member. The second component is I will not belittle the ice problem. It is a clear problem in the community.

The third point I make is the reason we have crime statistics so readily available is we report on a monthly basis. The former government made great play in the early noughties about reporting quarterly, then they cut it back to annual reporting. Nobody was allowed to look at all. We have accepted our responsibility as a government to report monthly, so that is what we do.

It is disingenuous for the member to suggest that somehow crime rates are through the roof, when they were higher - and hidden - under a former Labor government.

Ms WALKER: We will continue to argue that one, minister, but the reality is that right now, on the ground, people of Darwin and Palmerston will not buy that. They know that property offences are through the roof; you statistics demonstrate that. I look forward to the Health portfolio where we can talk about ice and what government intends to do.

Mr ELFERINK: I am not suggesting that I am satisfied with it; let us be honest about this.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Hang on. This is not a forum for you to make whatever statement you want, member for Nhulunbuy. Can we just get back to the business of asking questions about lower courts and tribunals, as it relates to the Appropriation Bill?

Ms WALKER: Mr Deputy Chair, speaking to your point of order, I point out that there is a conversational nature that goes with the estimates process, and it is ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, I am aware of what the process is ...

Ms WALKER: ... an area of opportunity where I can make comment in the same way the minister makes comment ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The process, as it stands at the moment, is that we will not have political bickering back and forth in this Estimates Committee. You will ask questions about the Appropriation Bill, and the minister has the right to answer them or take them on notice. Can we get back to asking appropriation questions on lower courts and tribunals please?

Ms WALKER: Mr Deputy Chair, I have sat on estimates for six years and I have sat in that chair. There is more latitude under a Labor Chair.

Next question, minister. One of your strategic issues listed for this budget is enhancing services and support for all courts and related functions across the Territory, including improving facilities for juvenile courts. I note in your opening statement you talked about the work that is happening with the Supreme Court facility in Alice Springs and also in the youth justice court in Darwin.

As somebody who represents constituents in a remote area, I want to ask you about court facilities in many regional and remote areas which you and I know are woefully inadequate, insofar as there are areas where there are families of victims and defendants - the facilities are outrageous and would not be tolerated in other parts of the country. Interview facilities in some remote communities are under a designated tree. You just hope it is not the Wet Season when it is raining. There is lack of privacy and all of those things that you are familiar with, minister.

What is happening under your government and what investment is being made to upgrade our bush courts?

Mr ELFERINK: This is a good question, but I will track back a little. Yes, I have had a commitment to improving court facilities for a number of years across the Northern Territory. Not much was done in the area of courts. Frankly, as I cast my mind back, not since the building of the new Supreme Court in State Square in the 1990s has there been an investment in the Northern Territory court system. Nichols Place replaced what was then the Jock Nelson Building which was the building that used to stand not far from the site we are sitting on now. It was a large public service-type building that ran makeshift local courts. Nichols Place became operational, I would be guessing, about 30 years ago.

In Alice Springs that court building, if memory serves me, became operational in about 1984. I could stand corrected on these dates; it was a long time ago. I remember as a very young constable operating in each of these buildings many years ago. I am now grizzled, old and somewhat overweight, yet these courts buildings remain unchanged.

Part of my focus as the Attorney-General is to try to improve on things. I was deeply concerned with what had been allowed to grow, in Nichols Place in particular, with juveniles being within earshot of adult prisoners; moreover males and females being in direct physical lines of sight with each other in that cell block there. It is not a good look. Indeed, the former Chief Magistrate Hilary Hannam made a number of public comments in relation to it, which you would be well aware of.

I have, since day one, listened to what the former Chief Magistrate had to say. I would love to be able to announce we are building a new juvenile justice court, but there are financial constraints so we do the best we can. Whilst it has been frustrating, it has taken a couple of years to get to the point - but we are finally there - where we will have a purpose-built youth court away from Nichols Place in the very near future.

I can tell you lining up ducks to make that happen was almost like one of those 1950s comedies where to get result A you had to make deal B, and to get deal B you had to make deal C, and to get deal C you had to make deal D. We finally had those ducks lined up, and after a couple of wobbles we have arrived there. The intent - and I do not think this is now a public secret - is that the federal circuit court, which used to be the federal Magistrates Court will now occupy court space in the Supreme Court. Sorry, the Family Court, I apologise for that.

I place on the record my great gratitude and thanks to the Chief Justice Trevor Riley for his forbearing in relation to accommodating the needs of the Northern Territory in this fashion. I have spoken to a number of justices of the federal court who are looking forward to moving into the very spectacular premises which is our Supreme Court. It frees up the Family Court for courts that are already almost purpose built for

juvenile justice work. The physical shape, particularly of one of the courtrooms, is attractive for those purposes. It also means we get kids out of the cells at Nichols Place, so we are happy with that.

The Supreme Court in Alice Springs - I understand work has started there?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: Work has started on the new Supreme Court. It will be the tallest building in Alice Springs by two storeys. It will be a splendid building. We can obtain the poster to show you. I am very proud of it. We are now building a new Supreme Court which will be the envy of supreme courts in many remote and regional places.

In what you are saying about bush courts, you bet, they are not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. I saw a photograph of the Coroner, Greg Cavanagh, standing next the one in, I think it is Milingimbi or it could be Maningrida – I cannot remember which. It was a tin shed which in very bright pink paint had clearly written two words – well I cannot repeat the first word but we are talking about a four letter carnal adjective beginning with the letter 'F' and 'you' written on the side of the courtroom wall. These are not perfect institutions. I continue my conversations with the now Chief Magistrate, John Lowndes, about these issues.

One of the things I picked up in my much-publicised trip to the United States was the use of electronic media as a vehicle to conduct court in remote areas. I had some hesitation about it but I have subsequently spoken to the Chief Magistrate. What I have seen in the United States gives me comfort that much can be done in that space. We are exploring a number of options of being able to deliver court services in this remote fashion.

We do it increasingly every day. Many people now appear in court from prison or, alternatively, from the Don Dale Centre, for simple matters like remand. It is quite conceivable that you could run a bush court in a similar fashion. That would enable a level of flexibility that would see less of the interview room under the tree manifestation and more efficient systems where people can appear in front of a magistrate.

The other issue is the cost of transport would easily cover the cost of implementing such systems because much of this is done by charter flights.

Ms WALKER: I look forward to seeing what your government's plans are to upgrade the facilities in bush courts. I understand governments have competing priorities about where they spend money ...

Mr ELFERINK: Here it is. So we can see, this will be the new Supreme Court in Alice Springs. People would agree it is truly a splendid building. It will be a substantial improvement over the vacant block which currently occupies the site.

Ms WALKER: How wonderful. I look forward to an invitation to the opening, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: I will be happy to invite you. I just hope I never go there as either the accused or the defendant.

Ms WALKER: You and I both, minister.

That provides us with an interesting segue to community justice, which is about trying to keep people out of the court system. What is the budget for the Community Justice Centre within this year's budget and what was that figure last year?

Mr ELFERINK: We will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.3

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Could you please restate the question?

Ms WALKER: Can you please advise what is the budget for the Community Justice Centre within this year's budget and what was that figure last year?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, we will take it on notice.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That question will be number 6.3. Continue your line of questioning.

Ms WALKER: Minister, according to the Community Justice Centre Annual Report 2014 there is a massive need for their services as per the chart on page 18. This chart demonstrates the target for mediation advice for intake of files was 500; the actual figure was 808. That is an increase of 160% in the demand for this service. Without knowing how they are being funded – because you have taken that question on notice ...

Mr ELFERINK: Can you quickly re-run that mathematics for me please?

Ms WALKER: According to this table in the annual report the mediation advice described as the intake of files had a target of 500, the actual figure was 808.

Mr ELFERINK: Which is an increase of?

Ms WALKER: 160% according to ...

Mr ELFERINK: Really?

Ms WALKER: I am reading off the statistics in the annual report.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, but is the target of 160% in the stats? I think it might be 60%, not 160%.

Ms WALKER: Sorry, the increase to target is 160%. Given there is clearly a demonstrated need for this type of service - and nobody would disagree with trying to mediate matters before they proceed and steer it away from court - is it adequately funded?

Mr ELFERINK: It is funded adequately to do its job. If it is reporting that it managed to do 800 or so matters over a projected target of 500 matters within budget, then clearly it is funded to do its job.

Ms WALKER: I will have to take your word on that because you have taken on notice what the funding is. It appears there is a huge demand for this service.

What investment is being made into other early intervention mediation services to ensure that matters are dealt with and prevent them from going to court before they escalate? The investment being made to support successful initiatives like the Ponki mediators on the Tiwis and Mawul Rom in northeast Arnhem Land?

Mr ELFERINK: My first suggestion to anybody who finds themselves in a point of conflict with another person is to resolve it between the two of you. Have a chat, have a conversation. That is not always the case as there is bad blood and those things, but sometimes we miss the logical and commonsense steps of the social environment.

If I have a dispute with my neighbour over an issue of, for argument's sake, a tree hanging over the fence, the starting point should be that I knock on their door and say, 'I have a problem with your tree hanging over my fence, let us find a way to sort it out'. Generally a six-pack of beer and a sober discussion will get you there, but it is not always the case. At that point government is asked to intervene.

The traditional mechanisms to do that are the courts, but the courts have somewhat become expensive for those types of disputes. That is why we create community justice centres and those things to try mediation. If you have a problem with government, we now have established the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal. There are lawyers who can mediate and discuss things between two people so matters do not have to proceed. We continue to support those principles as far as we can and will continue to do so into the future.

If you want to ask specific questions about how much the service on the Tiwi Islands will cost or be budgeted for, or alternatively how much the service on the Gove Peninsula area will be budgeted for, then we will have to take that on notice.

Madam CHAIR: Would you like to take that on notice, member for Nhulunbuy?

Ms WALKER: If he could, if it will not generate a ...

Question on Notice No 6.4

Madam CHAIR: Could you please restate the question for the record.

Ms WALKER: What investment is being made in other early intervention mediation services to ensure that matters are dealt with and prevent them going to court before they escalate? What investment is being made to support successful initiatives like the Ponki mediators in the Tiwi Islands and Mawul Rom in northeast Arnhem Land?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, will you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, we accept the question. Perhaps I can farm this out to Mr Shanahan as he seems to know a bit more detail about those organisations.

Ms WALKER: That is only two I have mentioned. I know there are others in the Territory.

Mr ELFERINK: Perhaps if we take the question on notice more broadly, unless you feel confident to cover the field?

Mr SHANAHAN: I do not know if they budget specific amounts for different areas. It is global funding and they respond to demand as it goes along. The best we could do is probably give you a global funding figure.

Ms WALKER: Yes, that would be helpful. Thanks, Mr Shanahan.

Madam CHAIR: That will be question number 6.4.

Ms WALKER: I do not have any other questions. My next questions are Output 2.3.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Fines Recovery Unit

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output 2.3, Fines Recovery Unit. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Just one, Madam Chair. The Fines Recovery Unit has an expense of \$2.3m and 42 000 enforcements were processed. Can you give an indication of how much revenue this generated for government?

Mr ELFERINK: Not off the top of my head ...

Ms WALKER: Do you want to take it on notice?

Mr ELFERINK: However, I do not believe it met the cost of running the unit.

I stand corrected; it would easily have met the cost of running the unit, which is something we are grateful for.

What has been allowed to deteriorate over a number of years is the quality of fines recovery. As a government we have taken a number of steps to recover the authority in this space. Many years ago if you failed to pay a fine, that fine would ultimately confer into a thing called a warrant of commitment or, alternatively, a warrant when summons is disobeyed depending on the channel or pathway it went through the system.

Either of those two warrants ultimately meant that there was an arrest warrant issued for the person who owed the government money or failed to obey a summons to appear.

In the case of warrants of commitment, they were colloquially known as 'money or the body' warrants. Basically, you would fine person A and say to them, 'You owe Her Majesty \$1000; do you have \$1000?' If the person replied, 'I do not have \$1000', then you would arrest that person and they would cut out the fine, when the system was operational, at \$100 per day. Someone would do 10 days, then they would be released back into the community having served their penalty to the community.

The former government determined that this was an unsatisfactory state of affairs and there was an expense involved with it, so they then created the Fines Recovery Unit. This went down the path of pursuing people for their fines rather than necessarily arresting them, which was previous to that a police function. However, it reached the point where the Fines Recovery Unit was pretty much a paper tiger until recently.

You may recall about 12 or 18 months ago we pointed out in the media that there were a number of people in the community who had, in some instances, six-figure amounts of outstanding fines and many other people who had five-figure amounts of outstanding fines. To my dismay, some of them turned out to be middle-level public servants. They would cop a parking fine, screw it up, throw it on the floor of the car and ignore it.

I am pleased to report that we have had a substantial increase in response to my suggestion that we start executing these warrants that underline these fines. We have seen a substantial recovery in that space.

Ms WALKER: That is all detailed in the annual report; I have seen those stats. I commend you for that. I want to go back to the original question, which was how much revenue has this unit generated for government?

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, we will find that out. But we will not step away in this space. We will also now, subject to Cabinet approval - and I have already made this comment publicly - look at wheel clamping, and naming and shaming the worst of the offenders.

Ms WALKER: Very good, minister. Madam Chair, do I need to repeat that question on notice?

Madam CHAIR: Yes please.

Question on Notice No 6.5

Ms WALKER: The Fines Recovery Unit has an expense of \$2.3m and 42 000 enforcements were processed. Can you give an indication of how much revenue this unit generated for government?

Mr ELFERINK: I accept the question. I also ask if we should add the number of associated custodies or execution of matters by other means than just fine recovery?

Madam CHAIR: Do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: I accept the question.

Madam CHAIR: That question will be number 6.5.

Ms WALKER: Thanks, minister and Madam Chair. I have no further questions in Output 2.0.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – Integrated Justice Information System

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 2.4, Integrated Justice Information Service. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.4, and Output Group 2.0.

OUTGROUP GROUP 3.0 – DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS
Output 3.1 – Director of Public Prosecutions

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Director of Public Prosecutions, Output 3.1, Director of Public Prosecutions. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No, Madam Chair, in the interests of time.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – INDEPENDENT OFFICES
Output 4.1 – Consumer Affairs

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0, Independent Offices, Output 4.1, Consumer Affairs. Are there any questions?

Mr ELFERINK: While you are there please, Madam Chair. I have just been handed an answer to an earlier question in relation ...

Madam CHAIR: Yes. Do you have the number?

Mr ELFERINK: It is in relation to the Community Justice Centre budget.

Madam CHAIR: This answer will be No 6.3.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.3

Mr ELFERINK: The Community Centre Justice budget for the year 2014-15 is \$448 000, to be increased in the next financial year 2015-16 to \$453 000.

Madam CHAIR: Deputy Leader of the Opposition, did you have any questions for 4.1, Consumer Affairs?

Ms WALKER: No.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Anti-Discrimination Commission

Madam CHAIR: We will now move to Output 4.2, Anti-Discrimination Commission. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.2.

Output 4.3 – Information and Public Disclosures Commission

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 4.3, Information and Public Disclosures Commission. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: I introduce Brenda Monaghan, the Information Commissioner of the Northern Territory.

Ms MONAGHAN: Good morning.

Ms WALKER: Good morning, Ms Monaghan. I have a few questions. I am not sure if I ask them of you, minister, and you direct them to the commissioner?

Mr ELFERINK: In deference to the independent status of her office, you can ask the questions directly of Ms Monaghan.

Ms WALKER: Thanks very much. Commissioner, can you provide the committee with a breakup of the \$1.61m you have been allocated in 2015-16? Further to that, are there separate allocations to the Information Commissioner and the Commissioner for Public Interest Disclosures, or is it one and the same?

Ms MONAGHAN: Brenda Monaghan, Information Commissioner. The amount I receive to run the office is \$1.03m. The rest of the budgeted amount goes to corporate support that is provided by the Department of Attorney-General and Justice for finance, HR support and other departments such as DCIS, etcetera. The way I run the office - even though there are obviously Chinese walls with respect to the complaints I deal with - the budgeted amount is essentially, for running one office. We have one business manager for the office.

Of my six staff, one is part-time, so it works out at 5.8 FTEs plus me. Of those six staff generally three are principally on public interest disclosures matters. I always try to make sure there is 1.5 to two of the other staff on FOI and privacy matters. I try to ensure the staff are skilled on both sides of the office so the peaks and troughs of complaints can be dealt with within the office. That is just a broad overview.

Regarding a further financial breakdown, over the past year my operational budget was \$131 000, personnel \$899 000, which led to the total of \$1.03m.

Ms WALKER: Thanks very much, commissioner, you have effectively answered my next two questions. From what you have said it sounds like you utilise your staff wisely while having that capacity to move across disclosure and privacy matters. Are the resources available to the Commissioner for Public Interest Disclosures adequate for you to perform your statutory responsibilities?

Ms MONAGHAN: It has been to date. I am managing this year to essentially remain within budget. There is one consultancy that may go a little over but that is a matter I will discuss with the CE. It is always a bit hard to judge and give total confidence because we are essentially a complaints body. If a huge number of matters come in, they impact.

At the moment our figures for this financial year show we have nearly double the number of FOI and privacy matters that have come through. We are 25% down regarding the numbers with public interest disclosures. There are the peaks and troughs.

Noting that we have been able to manage this year since we have experienced staff, I am confident I should be able to manage within budget next year. It will simply depend on if there are major matters that take a lot of time and expertise from external consultants, such as getting legal advice for a court hearing. They are matters I simply cannot contain within my budget and I would speak to the Chief Executive. For the basic running of the office, I am confident we can manage the peaks and troughs.

Ms WALKER: I recognise as a complaints-based agency there are circumstances beyond your control. I am staggered to hear that you have had double the number of FOI and privacy matters brought to you. There is a legislative requirement about the time frame you have to respond to those, so it must mean that staffs are stretched?

Ms MONAGHAN: Staff work hard. They seem to be managing. With the matters that have come in we have managed to comply with the statutory time frames. It gives me great confidence that the staff are managing well.

Ms WALKER: Am I able to ask for a year-on-year comparison – you may need to take this on notice – of the number of FOI inquires and privacy matters you have received?

Ms MONAGHAN: So you want a comparison this year and last year?

Ms WALKER: Yes, knowing you have already said that it has doubled. What were the numbers last year and what are they currently, either year to date or to the end of the first quarter?

Ms MONAGHAN: I have those figures here. You have to remember these are the external review complaints that have already gone through the departmental process, the internal review. then they come to us as a complaint. There are 36 FOI matters to date and 12 privacy matters. Our target we generally

estimate we will get is around 20 FOI matters and six privacy matters. Looking at last year – my apologies, I do not seem to have last year's with me.

Essentially last year was noted at 30 FOI and six privacy.

Ms WALKER: Thanks, commissioner.

Ms MONAGHAN: In fact, in saying it is double, it is not double from last year, it is nearly double the estimated number for FOI.

Ms WALKER: Are you able to provide statistics on the number of disclosures you had on hand at 1 July 2014, how many you have received since, and how many have been investigated to finality?

Ms MONAGHAN: Could I take that on notice because I am not quite sure how many were carried over from the previous year?

Ms WALKER: Of course, that is fine.

Question on Notice No 6.6

Madam CHAIR: Minister, you might have to authorise that question to be taken on notice just as a matter of process?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, please restate the question for the record.

Ms WALKER: As Commissioner for Public Interest Disclosures, are you able to provide statistics on the number of disclosures you had on hand at 1 July 2014, how many you have received since, and how many have been investigated to finality?

Madam CHAIR: The minister accepted the question and it will be number 6.6.

Ms WALKER: In 2014-15 how many public interest disclosure investigations were undertaken by commission staff and how many were undertaken by external resources?

Ms MONAGHAN: This is public interest disclosures you are talking about?

Ms WALKER: Yes.

Ms MONAGHAN: One matter was undertaken by an external consultant. On our books at present, throughout the year we have handled about 45 public disclosures. Some of them are not yet completed, but one has been by an external consultant and the rest have been in-house.

Ms WALKER: Why was the former Victorian Deputy Ombudsman, John Taylor, commissioned by your office to investigate former Police Commissioner John McRoberts? I am assuming that is the one external resource?

Ms MONAGHAN: It was. As you know, I have been a commissioner for a number of years now. I was aware that the Police Commissioner had a friendship with one of my other colleagues, and I considered it would be inappropriate for me to deal with the matter. It is so important for our office to maintain its integrity, and in those circumstances it was appropriate for a senior external person to investigate the matter.

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, I appreciate your position. Why was that Deputy Ombudsman commissioned? You must have looked at the other jurisdictions. Is there a reason why you landed there?

Ms MONAGHAN: I approached interstate colleagues and sought advice from them in regard to who would be an appropriate person to deal with such a matter. From memory, three names were provided. I did not choose the person because I was conflicted and I removed myself from the process and arranged for the decision to be made by others. That decision was made by senior investigators within my office.

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, could you provide the committee with the total itemised cost incurred for the work undertaken by the former Victorian Deputy Ombudsman to conduct this investigation?

Ms MONAGHAN: The consultant's fees were \$30 030, and there were other costs, such as incidentals, fares, accommodation and meals. Do you want the whole breakdown? Ultimately it came to \$38 274. Essentially that was the cost of the investigation to our office. It was much less than I had originally anticipated. The other cost to our office was simply the internal support of certain staff in regard to administration and investigation skills.

Ms WALKER: But that in itself, being an internal arrangement, did not generate any more costs for your office?

Ms MONAGHAN: No.

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, when did Mr Taylor complete his report and who was it provided to?

Ms MONAGHAN: Because I kept myself completely apart from the process, I am not in a position to tell you. I genuinely kept myself apart from it. I did not see the report; I have never seen the report. We could take that on notice and I would be able to provide that information to you.

Ms WALKER: That would be helpful if you could. I understand your position, having stepped aside from this for reasons you have already stated, but it would be helpful if we knew when the report was completed and who it was provided to.

Question on Notice No 6.7

Madam CHAIR: Do you want to just restate that again, member for Nhulunbuy?

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, can you please advise when did Mr Taylor complete his report and who was it provided to?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. That question will be number 6.7.

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, on what date - if you recall - did you advise the government? Who did you advise that you had stepped aside from the investigation into the former Police Commissioner, John McRoberts, because of a conflict of interest?

Ms MONAGHAN: Regarding the date, I would have to take that on notice. I have not come here to answer that, I am sorry.

Question on Notice No 6.8

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, can you please restate the question for the record?

Ms WALKER: On what date did you advise the government, and who did you advise, that you had stepped aside from the investigation into the former Police Commissioner John McRoberts because of a conflict of interest?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Sure do.

Madam CHAIR: That question will be number 6.8.

Ms MONAGHAN: Generally I do not know the date, but I became aware that a public interest disclosure was coming to my office. I advised the Solicitor-General before the complaint had even been received at my office, so it was very much from the outset. After that, my involvement was simply to ensure that on behalf of my office there was an appropriate system set up to deal with it.

Ms WALKER: You might need to take this one on notice, I am not sure. Can you advise the committee on what date you received the referral from the government to investigate the former Police Commissioner John McRoberts?

Ms MONAGHAN: I have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.9

Madam CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record.

Ms WALKER: Can you advise the committee on what date you received the referral from the government to investigate the former Police Commissioner John McRoberts?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: That question will be number 6.9.

Ms WALKER: Under your act are you able to initiate investigations into breaches of the law or probity issues on your own initiative, or do you require a public interest disclosure referral of complaint?

Ms MONAGHAN: The latter.

Ms WALKER: The Commissioner for Public Disclosure undertakes a vital role in protecting integrity and probity of the public sector. Do you advertise your role and services to the public, and if so, what media do you use to get that message out?

Ms MONAGHAN: We certainly attempt to. The reality of many organisations such as mine is we have a limited amount of money to give to any media campaign so that is not normally the way we do it. We have a good website which we are, in fact, in the process of upgrading, hopefully over the next six months. We see that as an important tool so if people google the words 'whistleblower', 'improper conduct', 'complaint', 'disclosure', 'Northern Territory' they will get to our website. There is a training package on our website so people can get to understand what the reality is if they make a disclosure to us, or if they receive a disclosure and have to deal with it.

We also make ourselves very available to public bodies for training and to make sure they understand what their responsibilities are. If people approach local government councils, other government departments and public bodies with a concern, then they know about us and they can refer people to us.

Ms WALKER: Okay, you have answered my next question. I recognise the work that goes into electronic media to make sure people are aware of your existence. You have answered my next question which was about holding information sessions. You obviously with your staff try to get out and attend meetings and publicise the role you provide.

Ms MONAGHAN: I can add that one of the most recent of those meetings was in Tennant Creek. The Local Government Association NT held its large meeting there, so we met with all of the Chief Executives and a number of the mayors to make sure they understood our role. It means we then have a line of communication. People out bush often go to either their local member or to their council if they want to complain about things. We see that as a very important link.

Ms WALKER: When we first met was in my office. You came and spoke with me, as a backbencher in the former government, about your role and what was happening. I am delighted to hear that you have been to Tennant Creek. Have you or your staff managed to get out to other remote areas like Nhulunbuy?

Ms MONAGHAN: I would love to say we have been to Nhulunbuy, but in the last two years we have not. We have been to Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek ...

Ms WALKER: Is it workload or budget, or a mixture of both?

Ms MONAGHAN: A mixture of both.

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, I do not have any further questions for you. I thank you very much for appearing today.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions on 4.3? That concludes consideration of output 4.3.

Output 4.4 – Registrar-General

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 4.4, Registrar-General. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No, I have finished with Output 4.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.4.

Output 4.5 - Public Trustee

Madam CHAIR: Output 4.5, Public Trustee. Any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.5.

Output 4.6 – Health and Community Services Commissioner

Output 4.7 – Children's Commissioner

Output 4.8 – Office of Parliamentary Counsel

I note that questions regarding Output 4.6, Health and Community Services Commissioner, will be answered by the Health Minister later today. I also note that questions regarding Output 4.7, Children's Commissioner, will be answered by the Minister for Children and Families later today.

Questions regarding Output 4.8, Office of Parliamentary Counsel, were answered by the Chief Minister on Wednesday 27 May.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DIRECTORATE

Output 5.1 - Domestic Violence Directorate

Madam CHAIR: We will now move to Output Group 5.0, Domestic Violence Directorate, Output 5.1, Domestic Violence Directorate. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Minister, I understand the Domestic Violence Directorate is a whole-of-government approach to dealing with reducing domestic and family violence but your agency takes the lead, the coordinating role. That is correct?

Mr ELFERINK: That is correct.

Ms WALKER: How many people are employed in the Domestic Violence Directorate and what designations are they?

Mr ELFERINK: Off the top of my head, I think it is only about four or five but I could stand corrected on that. There you go. Nine.

Ms WALKER: Sorry?

Mr ELFERINK: Nine FTEs as of Pay 20.

Ms WALKER: Thank you.

Ms WALKER: I flagged earlier that I would ask for further clarification about your funding. According to Budget Paper No 3, page 131, the directorate was established with Territory and Commonwealth funding with a total of \$7.192m listed in the output.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms WALKER: I understand the Commonwealth funding has been directed from the Alice Springs Transformation Plan. Can you clarify for me what the breakdown is of how much each jurisdiction has provided to the directorate?

Mr ELFERINK: Off the top of my head, from memory it is about 50:50. The Commonwealth money is limited to the expiration of the transformation plan, but we are good for the next couple of years. You are frowning.

Ms WALKER: When did that funding agreement come to an end? Is it the end of this financial year or next?

Mr ELFERINK: It is 2015-16.

Ms WALKER: So we have another year.

Mr ELFERINK: That is the last year of the Commonwealth money.

Mr ELFERINK: This is the last 12 months?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. I want to pause briefly because you refer to it as a whole-of-government approach and you are right, it is, but not in the sense that it traditionally is. I am sure you will appreciate the philosophy we applied in the traditional whole-of-government approach. The government will announce a whole-of-government approach so an executive director will speak to another executive director across a number of departments. They will set up a committee and direct it down into their respective silos. We know silos continue to be a challenge from an administrative point of view for any form of government.

The rationale here is fundamentally different. It is to get decision-making as close to the front line as we possibly can. This has been the challenge for us, which is why this has not been a cheap exercise. It is changing some pretty fundamental precepts of how government goes about its business. Picture, if you will - in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and we are looking at a couple of larger remote communities - 11 government departments, NGOs, as well as a Commonwealth presence sitting around a table where the decision-makers are not Executive Directors or CEOs of departments, but the frontline workers themselves.

I went to one of these meetings in Alice Springs where there would have been at least 20 people sitting around the table from various government departments, NGOs and the federal government, talking about case managing a family where domestic violence became manifest within the family group.

By way of example, Bill Smith is arrested by police for a domestic violence offence. The police follow the government protocol of charging him with the aggravated assault, and in the normal routine of things that would have been pretty much the end of it. If Mary Smith had been injured as a result, an ambulance would have come along so Mary would have been conveyed to the hospital to have her injuries looked after, but that would have been the end of it. The police do what they do, the hospital does what it does and unless there is any other information that flows into the rest of the public service or NGOs, that is the first and last time we hear of Bill and Mary Smith until he hits her again. We have a circumstance where the response is sufficient for dealing with the immediate issue.

What this is attempting to do is case manage, for lack of better words, individual families. When you have 11 government departments sitting around a table on a fortnightly basis with NGOs and the federal government presence from Centrelink, then you have the capacity to respond to the problem within the Smith family itself. The police will walk in and say they arrested Bill last week for giving Mary a biff around the ear. Health asks what their role is and education asks what their role is and how they help and support this family. Of course, the police will be prosecuting Bill for his crime of violence. Child protection will ask whether the Smith kids are subject to any form of intervention from them. There might be another NGO at the table, for argument's sake St Vincent de Paul, which asks about the circumstances of the Smith family. You end up surrounding that family.

But the people who make that decision are not executive directors because they are the workers in that environment. This means they know the Smith family and can create a system or a response which is quite peculiar and particular to that family. When the Brown family has a similar problem the response might be quite different because of the way that response becomes manifest. The further we are away from the decision-making process the more general our policy assertions have to be and the clumsier they land.

One of the great problems with the intervention was not that it was ill-intended; it was intended will all the goodwill in the world. However, the decision-making was so remote that it was impossible to land. the presumption that you can make a decision from Canberra for an individual in Yuendumu, when you cannot find Yuendumu on a map, means that your policy structures are clumsy. This is also true for the Territory government, so we are trying to get closer to the decision-making being done by the frontline workers, which means teachers need to know what is happening with the kids in their classrooms.

Ms WALKER: Absolutely.

Mr ELFERINK: It raises the issue of privacy and those things, and I will turn to that later in other questions. The fact is this is quite new and I am confident we will be successful in this. It is somewhat experimental. I am confident enough that we will get good results and it will become a policy that becomes the envy of other jurisdictions across this country.

Ms WALKER: I recognise this is a very new entity and way of doing things. I do not underestimate the task government has in front of it. Given quite a significant price tag of \$7.192m, which is good, it is important that we address and reduce domestic and family violence in the Territory.

How will the directorate report to parliament and taxpayers about the work of the directorate? What sort of measurable targets will be in place? Are there reporting requirements to the Commonwealth under this funding arrangement, given they are stumping up 50% of it?

Mr ELFERINK: The Commonwealth will be just as interested as everyone else. I expect the reporting will occur through the normal annual reporting process. The measurement I have seen postulated is the return rate of individuals back into the system.

Where the trial was originally run just in the Alice Springs area there was a return rate of three per 100 presentations. If it is a small group statistically there is a lot of variance. The standard deviation from a small group would be fairly pronounced and I will not go into the statistical anomalies. Even if it gives you an indication - and all it will do is give you a flavour of it - as a return rate that will be the statistical measure that will be most pronounced in its influencing factors.

I am looking forward to seeing what that return rate will be with some trepidation because what we are doing is quite unique. If we can replicate something like a three in 100 return rate Territory-wide, then we will be on to something which will be closely observed by other jurisdictions.

Ms WALKER: I am buoyed by your confidence that we will have success in trying to measure what success is. I think you have answered that for me.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not think I will ever be accused of being backward in coming forward in trying stuff that will work - some of it will not work and some of it will.

I was in the United States, as you are aware, on one occasion and I discovered that in Oregon state there is a law that says you cannot do something until there is an evidence basis for it. I am mystified at a law like that.

We occasionally have to create policy around our personal experiences and our belief systems, etcetera, and to press on even in the absence of evidence. I would be quite proud for ours to be the first jurisdiction to provide good evidence for other jurisdictions to follow.

Ms WALKER: I might skip a couple of questions because I am very conscious of time and my colleague, the member for Casuarina, wants to get started on Children and Families.

I will talk about crime statistics. From what I have here in front of me the crime statistics show that since the change of government in 2012 in the Northern Territory overall, domestic-violence-related assaults are up 6%. Alarming these statistics for domestic violence are up in Darwin 38.2%, Palmerston 16.1% and in

my own electorate 84%, recognising the very small population and statistics and how that affects Nhulunbuy. I also acknowledge that domestic violence statistics have reduced in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

From its 2014 report which was tabled at the Senate hearings – and I am surprised you were not at them; you must have been away, minister - the Alice Springs Women's Shelter advised that it had provided care to 413 children and 561 women that year, which translated into 7025 bed nights. The service also reported, however, that it was unable to support 1700 individual women and children on 2346 occasions. In its report this averages almost seven people a day being turned away. I guess when we look at Alice Springs, the DV crime statistics have dropped, but there is still clear evidence that there is an unmet need to support the victims of domestic and family violence.

Mr ELFERINK: Do I take it from your line of questioning that you are making a commitment to increase the funding to the Alice Springs Women's Shelter should you form a government?

Ms WALKER: I would say where there is unmet need it obviously needs to be looked at. But by the same token, I would temper that with the words of Dale Wakefield who runs that service. I listened to her as she gave evidence at that Senate inquiry. They do not want to increase the number of beds, they want to see the investment into preventative strategies. I guess it is the same as whether we want to keep building more prisons to put people in; that is the conjecture we follow. What I would like to see is the investment up front so we are not dealing with the crises for predominantly women and children.

Mr ELFERINK: Let us cover the field - and thank you very much for your observations - there are a couple of things out of this. Where domestic violence has not been involved there has been a drop in assaults since we came to government. In 2012 there were 3001 non-domestic violence-related assaults in the Territory. That dropped down to 2891 in 2014; it has come up slightly now by 12 to 2903 in the 2015 year. That is non-domestic violence-related assaults, and this is the Territory-wide figure.

In domestic violence, yes, there has been an increase, no doubt about it, specifically from 3749 in 2012 to 4616 in 2014. I take some heart from that because those assaults have always occurred, but as a matter of policing we are going after it now, and have been going after it since day one. From a policing point of view, where you put your resources is where you deliver results. More arrests for domestic violence offences, in my opinion, reflect the fact that we have always had that problem and there has been a burden of silence.

I take great comfort that in the last year, since the 2014 figure I just gave, there has been a fall of some 500 in the domestic violence space. From 2014 to 2015, domestic-violence-involved total assaults has fallen from 4616 to 4169. I believe – touch wood - we are getting closer to putting downward pressure on the offending itself.

I also agree in relation to what we do at the front end, which is what the Domestic Violence Directorate is all about. We have just described to you how it works; you appreciate how it works. As I said, there is an element of risk in trying something new and novel. But, in the comments you just related about Dale Wakefield and the policy we are rolling out, I presume that Dale Wakefield would cast a positive eye over what we are trying to do through the Domestic Violence Directorate.

I believe that a spouse - whether it be a common-law spouse or a married spouse or any form of domestic relationship, be it gay, straight, lesbian, black, white, brindle, or whatever - should be an environment of safety because it involves trust. Domestic violence is one of the most abhorrent breaches of that trust you can possibly engage in. That is why I personally have taken this as a crusade on my part, to the point where it has been somewhat widely reported that I have engaged in stepping between a husband and his wife on a couple of occasions. When I see it I respond; it is something I concern myself with.

I hear what you are saying in relation to a proper response at the front. I would rather see these women not come back - which is what we are trying to achieve through the domestic violence response. This is an area where the Northern Territory government has been ahead of the national debate, I suspect, by about 18 months to two years.

Ms WALKER: Of course, mandatory reporting introduced under the former Labor government would have had a role in highlighting this issue. I am pleased to see that you have instigated a review into the *Domestic and Family Violence Act* and that issues paper is currently on your website. The member for Nightcliff had a question in this area.

Ms FYLES: Women's safe houses were federally funded, but that funding ceased for several of them nine to 12 months ago. Which locations are continuing? I am assuming it is under Northern Territory government funding?

Mr ELFERINK: I understand the conversation. I could not tell you the locations off the top of my head. I am aware of the issue. We are in negotiations with the federal government about that funding for those safe houses. It is under the Children and Families area. Give us the heads up now - and clearly you have - and when we get to DCF, fire the question again and we should have an answer for you by that stage. But I am pretty sure we have gone back to the feds. I tend to lobby the feds aggressively on a number of issues. I am not sure, but there was an indication there might be some comfort. What that is, I cannot tell you at this stage.

Ms WALKER: My last question on the Domestic Violence Directorate. The key performance indicators for the directorate on page 135 of Budget Paper No 3 quantifies 30 NGOs engaged in integrated service delivery. Can you provide a list of who those NGOs are, the service they provide, and the value of the contract?

Mr ELFERINK: Not off the top of my head, but we can take that one on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.10

Madam CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record.

Ms WALKER: Key performance indicators for the Domestic Violence Directorate on page 135 of Budget Paper No 3 quantify 30 NGOs engaged in integrated service delivery. Can you please provide a list of who those NGOs are, the service they provide, and the value of the contract?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I do.

Madam CHAIR: That question will be number 6.10.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you, Mr Shanahan. Mr Shanahan has just whispered in my ear as a reminder that these NGOs also are funded from other sources and we may be nothing more than a coordinator in some circumstances, if that assists.

Ms WALKER: Thanks for clarifying that.

Ms ANDERSON: Would you be able to give us a breakdown of the data collected by the Commonwealth of the Northern Territory's DVs? Are we in the whole scheme of things at the Commonwealth level because we see we are heavily funded by the Commonwealth so our data must be in there somewhere. How can we see a document developed by this government as to the policies of domestic violence in the Northern Territory, bringing in the Commonwealth as well? How do we fit in?

Mr ELFERINK: In the numbers themselves, if you look at the way we report our statistics in the Territory, it reflects a standardised model used by the ABS. Crimes against the person and crimes against property are standardised models. When all jurisdictions report domestic violence or whatever violence, they do it within certain parameters so you are comparing apples with apples across the jurisdictional boundaries.

In funding from the Commonwealth, the principle of horizontal fiscal equalisation applies weightings, which are just that - weightings. There is other funding through national partnership agreements and ultimately SPPs, which are project-based arrangements. You also have funding arrangements through IGAs. This is not Independent Grocers of Australia, this is Inter-Governmental Agreements. These IGAs will be for specific payments, such as for the Alice Springs Transformation Plan.

In our policy structure I pretty-much well-described what we do. When we get to the annual reporting process of the Domestic Violence Directorate, you will find reporting not only to the people of the Northern Territory through the Annual Report of the Department of Attorney-General and Justice but also reports to the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth will be looking because they are part of this process.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, is there data or a policy document we can see, as backbenchers, or ...

Mr ELFERINK: Sure is. There is the plan itself which I can have run down here from my office. It is a single sheet of paper showing how the strategic plan works. Then there is a fair amount of paperwork underneath that to support it. I am happy to make that available to you anytime.

Ms ANDERSON: Where is the directorate placed? Where is the office?

Mr ELFERINK: The directorate was located in Admiralty House in Darwin. It has now moved to Casuarina, I have been told.

Ms ANDERSON: Are people in the Northern Territory advised this office in Casuarina is where people can go in and access information or ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, it is now how the directorate works. The information is available on our website.

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, but not everybody is privy to computers. The people we are addressing the issue of domestic violence to are not privy to computers, so they would not be able to access the information on the website.

Mr ELFERINK: Sure. If you are talking about somebody, let us say, from Papunya or Mount Liebig, I suspect a computer will be closer to them than an office in Casuarina. Yes, I understand some of the difficulties with navigating computers but, as the former local member for Macdonnell, I spent a lot of time explaining how systems ...

Ms ANDERSON: The one that I beat?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I am fully aware of that. I have even acknowledged you were probably more qualified to be the member for Macdonnell than I ever was. I believe I tried very hard to be a decent local member. I supported my community very closely. When people came to me requiring guidance and how to navigate their way through the systems of government, I provided that. I am sure any other number of public servants on the ground - police officers, teachers and health workers - would also provide that navigation for a person requiring information on how the system works.

But you do not go to the office in Casuarina if you have a domestic violence problem because it defeats the purpose of the exercise.

Ms ANDERSON: That was not my question, minister. My question was is the directorate able to give people information from that office at Casuarina or is it just a ploy to get someone elected? Is it there just as an election office, or is it really there to help people out? It is important when you address ...

Mr ELFERINK: The difference between you and me on this issue, I suspect, is that I genuinely would like to make a difference because I used to put bodies into a body bag when people died.

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, well I used to identify them in the morgue, too.

Mr ELFERINK: Frankly, I will not even humour what you are suggesting in passing because it is not what it is about. It is not what I am trying to achieve, it is not what government is trying to achieve ...

Ms ANDERSON: That is where my question was going. You have a directorate in Casuarina. Where is the equivalent office in Alice Springs, Katherine or Tennant Creek?

Mr ELFERINK: When these committees meet they meet using all the resources of the 11 local government departments, plus NGOs, plus the federal government that come together to deal with these issues. The directorate directs service delivery and it is done through a completely different model.

Ms ANDERSON: If those services are being closed on the ground in remote Aboriginal communities, how then is the directorate helping these services?

Mr ELFERINK: Which services are you particularly referring to?

Ms ANDERSON: The question the opposition just asked you. The last question before me.

Mr ELFERINK: I did not announce that they were being closed, so you are making an assertion which is not correct.

Ms ANDERSON: Or defunded or not funded properly.

Mr ELFERINK: I said we are still in negotiations with the Commonwealth.

Ms ANDERSON: Is the directorate helping those services on the ground to put out the information to victims of domestic violence?

Mr ELFERINK: Victims come to the system by their exposure to responses. If a victim presents to police because police have been called, then they are in the system. They do not voluntarily go to the system. The moment the police are called they are in the system, then the system will respond to needs not only of the victim but the victim's family.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, you know that some people never come forward.

Mr ELFERINK: When police are called to a situation, which we are ...

Ms ANDERSON: Are these services appropriate and necessary at the grassroots level to get the information out to those victims that perhaps cannot get in front of the police, or may be too scared to talk about their domestic violence?

Mr ELFERINK: Well, that is why we have a no-drop policy.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE **Output 6.1 – Corporate and Governance**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output Group 6, Corporate and Governance, Output 6.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 6.0.

Mr ELFERINK: Madam Chair, I have in front of me the one page strategic plan, Safety is Everyone's Right. I table that document for the edification of the member for Namatjira.

Madam CHAIR: Was that taken on notice?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not think it was taken on notice, but I directed her to the website. This is a model for the integrated program.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

Ms ANDERSON: No.

Madam CHAIR: This now concludes consideration of all output groups related to Department of Attorney-General and Justice. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who provided the minister with advice today. Given that we have been going for two hours we will give the minister a 10-minute break. We will come back with the Department of Children and Families in 10 minutes' time. Thank you.

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, I add my thanks to the minister and his officers from Attorney-General and Justice and the independent officers who appeared today. Thank you very much.

The committee suspended

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back after the break. We are with the Department of Children and Families. Minister, if you could please introduce the officials accompanying you today, and if you would like to please make an opening statement.

Mr ELFERINK: On my immediate right is the CEO, Anne Bradford, who I welcome today. On my immediate left is the Chief Financial Officer, Kim Charles. I thank both officials for joining me at the table today. Madam Chair, I will accept your invitation to make an opening statement.

The Department of Children and Families continues to focus on the key output areas of child protection, out-of-home care and family and parenting support through the delivery of statutory and community-based services either directly provided by the department or via contracted arrangements with the non-government sector.

The department continues to experience demand pressures across all areas of child protection including a noted increase in notification numbers, investigations and children in out-of-home care. Children and Families is a difficult portfolio that exists to respond to the failings of others, to be a safety net for those who are most vulnerable in our community, namely the children.

The Northern Territory government recognises the challenges of the portfolio and the increased demands for child protection services. This government has increased funding for the department in 2014-15 by more than \$16m. A revised estimate for 2014-15 is \$179.94m, an increase of \$16.3m including \$8.5m ongoing to meet the cost of care for increased numbers of children in out-of-home care, and \$3.1m to meet the cost of emergency response measures to severe Tropical Cyclone Lam and Tropical Cyclone Nathan.

In February and March of this year the Department of Children and Families led the establishment and operation of the emergency evacuation centre for the residents of Waruwi on two occasions. It also operated the evacuation centre at Galiwinku following the devastation of severe Tropical Cyclone Lam and assisted those affected with hardship and personal goods replacement payments.

The 2015-16 budget for the Department of the Chief Minister commits \$172.35m to protecting children in the Northern Territory. This includes the additional \$8.5m provided this year to meet the cost of care for an increase in the number of children in out-of-home care. Compared with 2014-15's final estimate of \$179.94m there is a reduction of \$4.09m. This is largely as a result of a planned decrease of Australian government funding. We will return to that issue shortly.

The Northern Territory government is in negotiations with the Australian government for a refresh of the arrangements and outcomes under the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement now known as the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. I am confident these negotiations will ensure more consistent and flexible funding arrangements for the Department of Children and Families over the next five years and that this, in turn, will result in better service outcomes.

The commitment to child protection services has been maintained in the 2015-16 budget with a total investment of \$33.7m. This commitment is important because the demands on the child protection system are evident in the reported increase in notifications and investigations being conducted by the Department of Children and Families.

By the end of the 2014-15 financial year the Department of Children and Families expects to receive more than 16 500 reports of child abuse from neglect, 3000 more than last year and 6000 more than the year before. Each and every one of those reports made to the Department of Children and Families is individually assessed, and 42% meet the threshold criteria for an investigation. As a result there is increased pressure on the front end of child protection and a corresponding increase in the number of reports proceeding to investigations.

Inevitably more reports and notifications will translate into a requirement for more investigations. The volume of investigations undertaken by the Department of Children and Families has grown more than 50% in this last year. At 31 March 2015 there were 1506 child protection investigations in progress. While this is a significant number, a higher number than the previous year, it should be considered in the context of the higher numbers of notifications received and investigations that have been completed during the period overall.

During 2013-14 there were 4246 investigations closed, an increase of 18% on the 2012-13 financial year. In the first nine months of the year, the Department of Children and Families has completed 4762 investigations, or 459 more cases than all of last year. The Department of Children and Families is on track to complete over 6000 child protection investigations in 2014-15 financial year.

Despite a significant increase in the number of completed children investigations there has not been a corresponding increase in the number of substantiated cases. As at 31 March 2015 the Department of Children and Families substantiated 1412 cases where children have been harmed. This compares to previous years. Of these substantiated investigations, in the first nine months of 2014-15, 238 individual children had been taken into the care of the CEO.

In 2015-16 the Northern Territory government will invest \$88.6m to support and protect the increasing number of children in out-of-home care, an increase of \$1.3m over the revised 2014-15 estimate and more than \$9m promised last year. The 2015-16 budget now represents the highest level of funding directly targeted to out-of-home care services in the Northern Territory since self-government.

On 31 March 2015 there were 967 children in the care of the executive officer. This is 49, or 5%, more than June last year and 218 more than the year before that. In fact, this figure has increased significantly over the last five years.

Increased investment will ensure that the department can meet the cost of caring for children who, for their own protection, cannot remain at home without sacrifice to the standard of care they receive. Children in care do best when placed in safe stable families, which is why the government has also allocated a further \$0.5m from 2014-15 to promote foster care and kinship care across the Northern Territory. This government wants to increase the number of families who will open their homes to care for children in a loving stable environment, something children deserve.

Turning to Family and Parent Support Services, the 2014-15 final estimate has increased from \$7.9m to \$46.2m. This is a combination of funding provided as a one-off to address our emergency response measures and additional Australian government funding. In 2015-16 government will commit \$40.4m. Although this may seem to be a reduction of funding when compared to 2014-15, the final budget of \$46.2m, once you factor in the one-off funding provided this year, is an increase of \$2.1m to address indexation on grants paid to the non-government sector to meet the government's commitments under the social and community services pay equity decision.

Family and parenting support is an area that will be subject to significant reform in the next financial year with a roll-out of the department's family intervention framework. Under the family intervention framework family and support services either delivered by the Department of Children and Families or by its non-government partners will be reoriented to provide services to reduce demand on the statutory child protection system and help prevent the number of children entering and remaining in out-of-home care. This includes services such as child safety interventions, intensive family preservation and reunification support services, as well as services which assist kinship carers to maintain placements. I am committed to the family intervention framework as an effective means to ensure that our services to support families are focused on those most vulnerable in our community.

Turning to the last output group, Corporate and Governance, members will note a small increase of \$600 000 for the 2015-16 budget. This is not about increasing corporate or back office functions in the Department of Children and Families, but is due to the decision by government to decentralise communication staffing with the associated transfer of budget from the Department of the Chief Minister.

I am well aware, after many years of participation in estimates hearings, the interest members take in staffing levels in government departments. I assure you that the staffing number of 606 shown in the 2015-16 Budget Paper No 3 of the Department of Children and Families is not the planned staffing number of the agency. It is simply a point-in-time measure of employment using the average staffing number between January and March 2015. Whilst the figure is 28 less than the 2014 published figure of 634, you will note in the agency's operating statement the 2015-16 budget commits \$74m for the employment of staff, an increase of \$1.5m on 2014. There is absolutely no pressure on, or expectation of, the department to reduce staffing at a time when its demand is at its greatest.

Child protection is an area that is difficult to recruit to and is a highly-competitive process across all Australian and, dare I say, international jurisdictions. The work is challenging. The agency continues to work hard to attract and keep the right people.

The government is committed to improving the lives of the Territory's most vulnerable children and families. The budget reflects a focus on the services provided directly to Children and Families and is a testament to this government's commitment.

I have introduced Ms Bradford and Ms Charles. I will now take questions.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions on the statement?

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much, minister, for that statement. I will start where you finished around agency staffing numbers. You are correct, it is always a point of interest for everybody who sits here and asks questions.

You talked about the staffing numbers reducing from 634 to 606 and the issues we all know occur in child protection around retention and recruitment to those vital child protection roles. What recruitment and retention strategies are currently undertaken by the department? What is planned by the department around those recruitment and retention strategies?

Mr ELFERINK: It is an ongoing pressure, as you are well aware and have acknowledged. We have the usual recruitment processes in place. The department has to cast a slightly wider net than merely recruiting staff; it also has to recruit carers. We continue to press on in that environment as well.

We have an establishment of 711. One of the historical challenges for the department is meeting the establishment number. We never do and the former government never did. I do not think we have ever met establishment because of the challenges recruiting to this tough environment. We go through all the regular advertising processes. If we are concerned about a particular number, or are shedding at a particular rate, then we ramp up the effort we make in that space.

It is with some comfort that I can report to the committee the normal turnover, which is in the high 20%, has reduced to about 15% in the last 12 months. So we have had a much smaller turnover and that bodes well for stability going forward.

Ms MOSS: What do you put that down to?

Mr ELFERINK: Stability in government focusing on service delivery. I would also like to think there is an element of messaging. I have spent a lot of time travelling to departments, despite the somewhat unfortunate press that seems to have generated. I do some pretty unusual things as a minister. One of the unusual things I say to my staff is, 'take a risk'. There is no person better than those on the ground, on the front line, to make a decision in relation to a child protection matter.

If you think about it, a child protection officer in the frontline position is being lied to and having information withheld from them, so they have to make a best-guess decision. Nine times out of 10, I suspect they make the right one. Every so often they might screw up, but they will make the right one. I encourage staff, my CEO and all of my senior managers to take a risk. As long as they act in good faith, and as long as they are on the right side of gross negligence or criminality, we will back them even if their decision is wrong.

Considering the amount of noise and uncertainty that has existed in this space over the last number of years, it has put a great deal of pressure on those individual staff on the front line. Many of them were almost like soldiers on the front line with their little tin helmets on. I am encouraging them to get out of the trenches and do the job they wanted to do when they joined child protection after they received their degree or whatever qualification they have.

I hope that messaging to the front line, through an array of morning teas and those sorts of things, has given staff the confidence to know that they are supported by the very highest levels of government. It is important to continue signalling that, and I invite any staff member in my department listening to this broadcast now to take this on board. Do your job, enjoy it and do it with passion and love in your heart and you will be amazed what you can achieve.

Ms MOSS: I appreciate that, and the incredibly hard job that child protection workers have to do every day. If we can just keep the questions around staffing. Are you able to provide how many staff there are within the agency broken down by full-time equivalent, permanent part-time, contract, temporary contract?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, any second now. I have people shovelling through bits of paper.

Ms MOSS: Can we get a breakdown by location as well?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I think we can. I will see what we have. Yes. In full-time equivalent staff, as at 31 March 2014, to give you a comparator - actually no, I will ...

Ms FYLES: 31 March 2015?

Mr ELFERINK: 2015. I was going to give you a comparator, but I will just read it straight out. Full-time equivalent staff 609.83 FTEs, of which 278 – I will not read the points I will round them up or down - were administrative, 271 were professional, 46 were physicals, and executives were at 14.5, which overall makes up about 2% of the department. In terms of ...

Ms MOSS: How many of those roles are frontline service delivery roles?

Mr ELFERINK: The professional staff, I presume, would all be frontline service delivery roles. There we go; it is all plotted out in front of me. Direct to the public, 57.2% ...

Ms FYLES: Can you give us a figure of actual staff, please?

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, yes. It is 349, indirect to the public, 113, and then service to agencies and governments, 148.

Ms FYLES: Can I clarify, minister? On 31 March 2013, frontline staff - in your own figures from estimates last year - were 678, and on 31 March 2014 frontline staff were 696. Now you are saying that it is 349? That is a significant drop. Could you clarify?

Mr ELFERINK: No. Direct to the public last year was ...

Ms FYLES: The figures you quoted for frontline staff last year in estimates were those figures I just read to you. If we could get the comparable figure for this year I would appreciate ...

Mr ELFERINK: What you are talking about now is totals. So 640.29 was the figure at 31 March 2014; at 31 March 2015 it was 610.

Ms MOSS: Minister, can we get those figures for the permanent part-time contract and temporary contract? You have already run through this.

Mr ELFERINK: No. I do not have those in front of me. We are trying to dredge them up now, but I can give you the breakdown across the Territory.

Ms MOSS: Yes, please.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. Central support Darwin, 109; greater regional support, 10; Darwin city, which is the CIT and CAT team, is 33; Casuarina office, 37; Palmerston office, 37; Katherine northern regional support, five; Katherine office, 35; East Arnhem office, 16; Northern remote office, 27; Alice Springs regional support, 24; Alice Springs office, 65; Barkly, 13; remote services, 87; out-of-home care, 112. That is the total of 609. I have rounded those up and down. I do not want to go down to the silly decimal points. If there is a variation it is because I have rounded.

Ms FYLES: Minister, in Alice Springs, what is the total number of establishment positions?

Mr ELFERINK: Establishment or current people on location? I can give you ...

Ms FYLES: Both as one.

Mr ELFERINK: I can give you the one that is on location now. We have 65 plus the support component of another 24 in regional support in Alice Springs.

Ms FYLES: What is the establishment of positions for the Alice Springs office?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not have the establishment specifically. I can get that for you later.

Ms FYLES: Are we able to get that?

Ms CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record.

Ms FYLES: If we could get the establishment positions for the Alice Springs office.

Mr ELFERINK: Here it is. The whole Central Australian region is 110.

Ms FYLES: Last year there were 148 positions?

Mr ELFERINK: If there is a variation, it is not because we have cut those positions. We are probably not comparing apples with apples. Bearing in mind there is also remote services of 102, which operate in part in Central Australia, and out-of-home care services as well with 133.

Ms FYLES: Just trying to clarify because these numbers seem significantly different from last year. The Casuarina office last year had 45, yet this year it has 37; Katherine had 41 positions last year, now it has 35; Palmerston is down from 44 to 37. It is concerning that these positions seem to have dropped in offices across the Territory.

Mr ELFERINK: We have a budget for Alice Springs of 62.6; Barkly 12; Casuarina increased to 43; Palmerston 42; East Arnhem 16; Katherine 30; and northern remote 23. All of those have increased budgets for those positions. From last year's budget we have increased the amount of money available.

Ms FYLES: We are talking about people on the ground doing the job. I am getting these figures from where you read them in estimates last year. There are significant drops in a number of the offices across the Territory. Is there an explanation for that?

Mr ELFERINK: I am just trying to navigate my way through these documents. I am told that these are FTEs on the ground.

Ms FYLES: Yes. And that is what I am reading off last year.

Mr ELFERINK: These are positions funded and what I gave you before is on the ground.

Ms FYLES: So, for example, using Casuarina office last year, we had 45 positions on the ground. This year there are 37 positions?

Mr ELFERINK: As I said from the outset, recruitment continues to be a problem.

Ms MOSS: Minister, how many roles within the department are currently vacant? How does that compare to last year?

Mr ELFERINK: Based on the numbers we just had - what are the vacancy rates? The variance is from the establishment of 711, we currently have 606 on the ground. We remain in active recruiting position.

Ms MOSS: I understand you have three regional executive director positions.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms MOSS: Are those currently permanently filled?

Mr ELFERINK: Ms Bradford, if you want to ...

Ms BRADFORD: Anne Bradford, Chief Executive Officer. We currently have not filled the Katherine position.

Ms MOSS: I am assuming there is someone acting in it. How long has that been ...

Ms BRADFORD: No one is acting in it at the moment because we are unable to recruit a suitable applicant. We have closed down the recruitment process and are going back out to the market.

Ms MOSS: So how long has that been vacant?

Ms BRADFORD: At least three months.

Ms FYLES: How is that? That is a pretty significant position to have unfilled. Surely, that would put huge amounts of pressure on staff? How is that currently being dealt with? We are talking about a huge area of Arnhem Land, Katherine region, with no one in that position.

Mr ELFERINK: The Katherine position was suddenly made vacant because of circumstances that occurred. I do not want to go into that too much in the public domain. I am more than happy to brief you behind closed doors because of matters arising out of it. Suffice to say staffing has always been a challenge. The required oversight of the Katherine office will be, and is being, done from Darwin, so the management challenges in that area are being covered.

The challenges for the department are ongoing. You guys went through it when you were in government, and should you form a government in the future you will have this problem again.

I will respond to your question with a question. What would you do and how much would you be prepared to spend to cover off on the areas that you are identifying?

Ms FYLES: Are you able to provide some detail to how many recruitment actions there have been and when is the next scheduled one? You said you shut down recruitment for that position. It is a pretty important position.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, and we have gone back to the marketplace so there are two recruitment drives. If we do not have a suitable applicant we recruit again. There are two recruitment drives around the one position.

Ms FYLES: I was told that recruitment for that position has been shut down, but I am now being told that there are two recruitment drives happening.

Mr ELFERINK: We subsequently went back to the marketplace for the same position.

Ms FYLES: I am trying to clarify. It is huge for staff if they do not have a team leader for that area as such. What exactly is happening?

Ms BRADFORD: Member for Nightcliff, I have shut the recruitment process down. At this stage we have not put another advertisement in. There is no point going immediately out to the market when no identified suitable people to put in the first time. For Katherine, as the minister said, we have split the region. Katherine now reports to Alice Springs and the northern region reports to the Darwin ED. There has been no change other than I have two EDs taking responsibility for a region, and we have split it.

Ms FYLES: We do not have a time frame for the replacement advertising?

Ms BRADFORD: I have not signed off on a new recruitment at this stage.

Mr ELFERINK: I am sorry, I misunderstood.

Ms MOSS: Given the responsibility for that position has now been split between the two remaining regions what are the costs associated? Is there travel associated with that to ensure there is direct contact with regional executive directors?

Ms BRADFORD: There is travel associated with that. At the moment I have the Executive Director of Central Australia sitting in Katherine this week. Yes, we fly her to Darwin, and she then drives down to Katherine and spends four days once a month there.

Ms MOSS: To go back to the FTEs, in estimates last year, minister, you were quoted talking about the established positions being 811, and they are now at 711. Can you explain the difference?

Mr ELFERINK: I am just as confused as you are because the number I have in front of me is 681 FTEs and then 711 this year.

Ms MOSS: It says the total of established positions over those two dates was 801 and 811. I wanted to clarify those numbers because it is a significant drop.

Mr ELFERINK: I am curious as to what is happening. I suspect we are not comparing apples with apples. We will have to go back and see exactly what was answered last year to make sure we are comparing apples with apples. We are certainly not reducing establishment numbers.

Ms FYLES: If we say it is 811 from estimates last year, what do you say it is now?

Mr ELFERINK: It is 711.

Ms FYLES: What did you say it was last year?

Mr ELFERINK: You are saying I said 811. What I am saying is ...

Ms FYLES: You just quoted a figure of 780.

Mr ELFERINK: No, 681.

Ms FYLES: Still a significant shortfall of staff within the department.

Mr ELFERINK: In my opening statement I acknowledged that. This is the same shortfall problem the former government had, to the point they started recruiting from places like Ireland to try to cover the staffing shortfall. Unfortunately that has not worked out as well as it could.

Ms FYLES: Minister, we need to highlight we have significant position vacancies across the Territory which would put huge pressure on staff.

Mr ELFERINK: I accept those staff have been working under difficult circumstances. What I said before, and maintain again, is part of the process of supporting them is making sure we continue to recruit, which we do. We have seen a significant decline in the number of people leaving the job in the last 12 months and I hope that trend continues. That has dropped to 15%, which is well below Health, which is closer to the high 20%. We take some heart from that. We appreciate there are challenges for staff in these areas and we try to support those staff as best we can.

Bear in mind all of this is the product of parents failing in their jobs. There is an inference in all of this that government is not doing enough. The argument in the past has been that the government never does enough. What we do not hear, particularly from the Labor Party in the Northern Territory, is the call that parents should do a lot more to create an environment where we do not have to take these kids into care.

We have more kids in care today than we have ever had in the history of the Northern Territory, so much so that the words 'Stolen Generations' have been directed at me. I am not engaged at the moment in anything like that. What I have to cope with, and what you had to cope with as a government, is an abandoned generation. Yet the questions in relation to what parents are doing are not evident in the public debate, and should be. It should be front and centre of the public debate and it is not.

Ms MOSS: We all agree that parents need to take responsibility for their children; that is a given. I am hoping ...

Mr ELFERINK: Clearly it is not a given.

Ms MOSS: I am hoping we can get back to the questions we have here. There are a number of questions throughout all the outputs ...

Mr ELFERINK: It is not a given and that is the problem. The first time that you mention it is once you get prompted to do so. It is not a given in the public debate and it should be.

Ms MOSS: Minister, can we ask for the caseloads that your child protection staff are carrying by office, please?

Mr ELFERINK: I will refer that question to Ms Bradford.

Ms BRADFORD: By office, member for Casuarina, is that correct?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Ms BRADFORD: Tennant Creek office currently has an average caseload of 53, Alice Springs has 28, Casuarina has 28, Palmerston has 40, East Arnhem has 32, Northern Remote office has 44 and the Katherine office has 46, with an average caseload ratio of 36 – which is up four from last year, as you would be aware.

Ms MOSS: Last year it was 32?

Ms BRADFORD: That is correct.

Ms MOSS: Up to 36?

Ms BRADFORD: Yes.

Ms MOSS: The reasons for that, as we have already discussed around positions and ...

Mr ELFERINK: Not entirely. Some, yes; not entirely, though. From time to time the department will continue to keep cases open deliberately and maintain watch on those cases for a number of reasons. That caseload includes investigations. Bear in mind you have a vast increase in the number of reports, and these primarily come from police – do we have that annual report there? This is a very important distinction to make.

This is last year's annual report. I will show it to you here and it should be evident even at this distance. There is a number of sources of reporting – police, school, non-professionals, health, other professionals, and other in general in regard to the number of reports. These are the people that ring up the central intake and say they have a problem with child A, B or C or whatever.

You will note that there has been a minor increase in the number of health reports from 2009-10 to 2013-14, but what you also see is a substantial increase from 1500 matters to nearly 6000 reports from the police alone. Clearly there has been a change in policy from the policing perspective. That then throws up a pressure in caseloads, because caseloads are a product of how a report tracks through the system.

A report comes through to central intake and many of those reports are discounted at that point. We have a very experienced child protection officer sitting at central intake. They have done four years of university, they have an extra four years in the field, as a general principle, and they understand the type of report that is coming through to them.

With the change in police policy of reporting regularly, that means central intake deals with many more reports, many of which - about half - are dealt with at that level. But it means that a number of others have to go for investigation, because a person at the other end of the telephone has only a limited resource in determining whether or not a person qualifies. There is a standard model that is used by which you check the information you receive. You can then discount a number of those reports.

You then refer a number of those reports which form part of the caseload to workers. Because you have an increased number of reports, you then have an increased number of investigations. However, investigations have not climbed anywhere near as sharply as reports have. This has raised the issue where we have now been communicating with police as to what qualifies as a child in need of care or a child that needs to be reported. That work continues, as I understand it. We have not yet seen a reduction or a levelling off in the number of police reports.

Ms FYLES: To clarify, the caseloads we are talking about are the number of cases that an individual worker is responsible for?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, which includes ...

Ms FYLES: So they have been investigated ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, no, it includes investigations.

Ms FYLES: I was of the understanding that caseloads - for example in Tennant Creek the staff there are responsible for 52 individual cases which means they are working with those families. The reporting is additional to that?

Mr ELFERINK: No, no, my understanding is those ...

Ms FYLES: Can we get some clarification?

Ms BRADFORD: Would you repeat the question?

Ms FYLES: For example, in Tennant Creek, the caseload is 52 ...

Ms BRADFORD: Fifty-three.

Ms FYLES: Fifty-three. Sorry, last year it was 52. That means the staff in Tennant Creek are responsible each for 53 child protection cases. So that means they are managing 53 cases. They have been investigated and have been found that there is intervention from the agency needed? Is that correct?

Ms BRADFORD: Caseloads include all open cases, not just investigations.

Ms FYLES: Okay.

Mr ELFERINK: It includes investigations.

Ms BRADFORD: It does include ...

Ms FYLES: It is just that ...

Ms MOSS: But it might mean those ongoing that they are also monitoring?

Mr ELFERINK: Getting back to the answer I was giving before, you had an increased number of investigations. What we are not seeing - and this is what I wish to impress upon people - is an increase in the number of substantiations. I am now referring to page 50 of the latest Children's Commissioner's report which shows that we have been tracking somewhere between 1400 and 1700 per year of actual substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect. So a large slice of that caseload is the investigation caseload brought about by a number of reports.

I am anxious to make sure that we stay on top of this, but it applies pressure to the system. Substantiated number of cases - these are the actual established cases of child neglect or abuse - remains static and has remained pretty much static since 2010, with ups and downs.

Ms FYLES: We are seeing it increasing, year on year across the Territory. For example, the Palmerston office in 2013 had a caseload of 15, last year it was 27, now it is 40. Surely that is enormous amounts of pressure on your staff?

Mr ELFERINK: I am acknowledging that there is pressure, but some of it is investigation and some of it is substantiated cases. You also have to remember once we have a case on the books, it is very hard to get rid of it. Sometimes we close the files after a passage of time, but quite often these files will remain open, partly because of the level of dysfunction of some of these families. What you ...

Ms MOSS: What is the length of time that some of these cases are open for? What is average length of time?

Mr ELFERINK: Well, how long is a piece of string? Once a case is opened you have to be comfortable that you step away from that family, particularly that child, before you shut down a case.

Ms MOSS: Of course. Are the P1 and P2 staff the only ones carrying caseloads? Are there others carrying caseloads?

Mr ELFERINK: As far as I know just the P1s and the P2s.

Ms MOSS: Excellent, thank you. We know that every notification needs to be screened and assessed for whether or not it needs further action. In Budget Paper No 3 there is only \$1m extra for the Child Protection Services output. In the discussion this morning of the budget papers, we talked about the decrease in staff from 634 to 606 currently. How are you planning to meet your time frames for child protection investigations?

Mr ELFERINK: We press on with the resources we have. We continue to recruit. Hopefully those numbers will come up, particularly now we have a better retention rate than we have ever had. We will

always be challenged - as the former government was - with these sorts of things. I am hoping the number of reports from the police will at least plateau. I am anxious to make sure we direct those resources to those kids who need protection.

Ms MOSS: I have some questions about police notifications. I note the budget paper discusses the initiative of developing a mandatory reporting guide. Are those two things linked? Is the mandatory reporting guide coming out of the police reporting?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine it is. Some time ago when I became aware of the spike in police notifications, it was clearly a change in policy by police. They have decided they will report these things far more regularly, probably because of the exposure they feel they might carry under mandatory reporting ...

Ms FYLES: Minister ...

Mr ELFERINK: Excuse me, I am trying to answer the question.

We have responded to that because so many of those reports do not qualify - they do not make it past central intake. We are now trying to create a guide so the police and other people have a yardstick to measure what is neglect, abuse, and in some instances, nothing more than bad parenting.

Ms MOSS: Who is involved in the development of that guide?

Mr ELFERINK: Police and the staff from DCF.

Ms MOSS: We would not want to cause people to go the other way and not report if they really felt they should be.

Mr ELFERINK: No, that is not the intent of this at all. At the heart of a problem you have the heart of the problem. Everything within the heart of a problem is what you are trying to attend to. But then there are shades. There is no an arbitrary border - in out, in out, - and it is not always immediately apparent. Sometimes you will often see something that is well out of that border, where you could comfortably say that is not child abuse. I throw my kid into a swimming pool, as I often do at home. She loves that and she loves being thrown around. Mind you she is getting big now and a bit hard to throw around. Let us say one day she bumps herself on the edge of the swimming pool because of her boisterous dad. That is not child abuse; that is an accident.

Ms MOSS: I appreciate that but I also appreciate that is probably not what police are ringing in to report.

Mr ELFERINK: I understand that, but then you have a scale to that extreme end from outright abuse to what occurs on the peripheries. I suspect the police are erring on the side of caution. I can understand why they are doing it. What we now need to do is put some clarity around that.

Ms FYLES: Minister, it is clear from your answers there is significant pressure on staff with increased demands and infinite resources ...

Mr ELFERINK: I would love infinite resources!

Ms FYLES: Sorry, finite resources. Is that a fair assessment?

Mr ELFERINK: There is always pressure in the system, and there always will be for a number of reasons. The question I have for you is: what is enough?

Ms FYLES: Considering all this, why have you authorised departmental staff, as a priority, to get new lanyards?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not think it is a ministerial authorisation. If you believe that is how government works then I suspect your departments will have a tough time every time they want to order a packet of paper clips.

Ms FYLES: But do you not think it is interesting against a backdrop of increased demand, pressures on staff and the department on almost every front, that we now have lanyards for 630 staff as a priority? Do you think Territorians would agree that is a sensible use of resources, both human and financial?

Mr ELFERINK: Wow! I do not know what the unit price for a lanyard is on a bulk purchase but if this really is what you are concerned about in the child protection environment then I suspect you have allowed politics to creep into the area of healthcare.

Ms FYLES: It is quite an interesting question. Is it not correct that your department has just ordered new lanyards even though there are, as I understand, boxes in the cupboard?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine they order paper clips and Stabilo Boss highlighters.

Ms FYLES: Are you able to answer the question, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: Of course I can answer the question, but I do not want to because it is such a complete departure from common sense.

Ms FYLES: Is it a question you are not willing to answer or are you not sure?

Mr ELFERINK: No, I am trying to highlight that the question is so lame and inane that it is designed to be focused on politics rather than child protection. If you desperately want to know what 630 lanyards are worth I will get you the price. This may well be something like a safety issue, but the fact is if that is the quality of leadership you will show at a ministerial level - that you concern yourself with the purchase of paper clips, lanyards and Stabilo Bosses - then as a minister you will have a hard time of it.

Ms FYLES: Talking about the workplace, do you think it is appropriate for you to walk into the Department of Children and Families unannounced?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms FYLES: We have a workplace where public servants have separation from the government. Why do you feel that you can walk into the workplace unannounced?

Mr ELFERINK: Because I have the key. Hang on, just wait for a second.

Ms FYLES: Do all ministers have keys to their government departments?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not know. I do not know how other ministers do their jobs but I ...

Ms FYLES: Do you have keys to your other government departments?

Ms FYLES: Yes, I do. I have been doing this since the day I became a minister. I regularly walk through departments and I speak to people ...

Mr ELFERINK: Unannounced?

Mr ELFERINK: Wait! Now you will do me the courtesy of listening to the answer because you are being rude. Generally I am warmly received. I know there are some union members who feel that I am scrutinising them, but I also apply a number of very strict rules to what I do. I will listen to whatever a public servant has to say, but they will never hear from my lips a criticism of their upper line. If I hear something that is of concern to me I raise it with the CEO of the department and the CEO only, because the CEO is my conduit into the department. Nevertheless, it is an opportunity for public servants to tell me what they are doing, what they are proud of, what they care about, what they are concerned about, and they do so regularly.

The first time I did this was in the Department of Attorney-General and Justice shortly after I became the Attorney-General. By the time I reached the third floor, the eighth floor knew I was there because the e-mail network went haywire. After a couple of visits, people realised I was concerning myself with the welfare of public servants who worked through the system, never raising a criticism and occasionally joking with them or speaking to them about matters that concerned them. If I walk into the Attorney-General's department now, or Corrections, I walk into a department where the e-mail system does not go haywire. People are now used to seeing me and are open and forthright with me, as I expect them to be.

The assertion that there is some separation between a minister and a department is not entirely correct. You are mistaking that for the separation of powers. As a minister of the Crown I form part of the executive

arm of government not just the legislative arm, which means I have access to those departments. I do nothing to embarrass any public servant. As I said, if there is a concern I take it up with the CEO.

Ms FYLES: Respecting due process, do you not think it would be a better conduit to speak to the Chief Executive rather than arrive unannounced in the public service workplace?

Mr ELFERINK: My goodness gracious me. Is this the future of the Northern Territory under a Labor government, where ministers ...

Ms FYLES: Minister, you might like to joke, but these are serious questions members of DCF have raised with me. They feel uncomfortable with your unannounced arrival because you have a key to the department. Do you not think we should respect the separation of powers and use the Chief Executive?

Mr ELFERINK: Can you tell me how the separation of powers works?

Ms FYLES: Public servants want to do their job and we need protocols in place. A minister arriving unannounced ...

Mr ELFERINK: You are quoting the separation of powers. Can you tell me what the separation of powers ...

Ms FYLES: ... with a key to the department ...

Mr ELFERINK: You do not really know, do you?

Ms FYLES: Absolutely I know, but minister we are talking ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, you do not. Then explain it to me.

Ms FYLES: ... about you arriving to departments unannounced. You have a key to DCF in Darwin Plaza and you just wander in. Do you not think that would make staff feel uncomfortable and put them sometimes in a position of compromise with you ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Standing order. You are asking the minister for an opinion.

Mr ELFERINK: No, I want her to keep going down this path.

Ms FYLES: Sorry, Mr Deputy Chair.

Mr ELFERINK: I want the public of the Northern Territory to see how embarrassing this is. What you are saying is should you ever become a minister of the Crown you will, without reservation, have only one conduit of information coming to you.

Ms MOSS: With all due respect, I do not believe that is what is being said.

Mr ELFERINK: That is precisely what is being said ...

Ms MOSS: We will move on to ...

Mr ELFERINK: Well hang on, no.

Ms FYLES: The Chair has pulled me up.

Mr ELFERINK: This is, of course ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has chosen to answer your question. Kindly listen to his answer.

Mr ELFERINK: This is a product of contact between the union movement and the members opposite. The union has hardly, in recent times, covered itself in glory in some of the things that it has not only leaked to the Labor Party, but also leaked to the media. Much of the material which was leaked has been wrong and mischievous in intent.

As far as I am concerned, I will not walk into an operational area. If I wanted to visit the Casuarina office, I will not just stray in there because they deal with these families. But these families do not come up to the administrative sections and I enjoy talking to the staff. The staff are not obliged to talk to me. They can say hello and then go back to work and I will not interrupt them. If they have an emotional response to that which is anything other than, 'There is the minister', I encourage them to understand that my intent is to create a conduit. If they want to talk to me about their job, passions and beliefs, I encourage them to do so.

Ms MOSS: Minister, in December last year there were some administrative order changes made to a number of government agencies. I understand there were plans to relocate the Social Policy Unit back to Department of Children and Families, where I believe it was a few years ago - Multicultural Affairs, Young Territorians, Senior Territorians ...

Mr ELFERINK: Where did you get that from?

Ms MOSS: I have heard it from public servants, and this is ...

Mr ELFERINK: What, the tea lady?

Ms MOSS: I am asking the question, minister. If I can just finish asking the question you can provide me with an answer ...

Mr ELFERINK: Do some homework. Do not just sit there and say I have listened to some public servants ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, if you would allow her to ask the question that would be great.

Ms MOSS: That obviously has not happened. We understand that the relocation did not go ahead. We are hearing that there will be shortly more changes to the Department of Children and Families and its functions. Can you confirm whether or not this is the case, and if so, what the changes might be?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not know what you are hearing.

Ms FYLES: Last year the administrative orders were changed in December, and then they were changed back again.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not know what you are hearing.

Ms FYLES: We are hearing that will happen again.

Ms MOSS: Are there any planned changes to the functions of the Department of Children and Families?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not know what you are hearing. You are trying to ask me a question about some 'stuff' that you have heard. What have you heard? Be specific.

Ms MOSS: Will there be any changes? I have other questions that are probably linked to this about ...

Mr ELFERINK: Departments change all the time. I am not quite sure exactly what you are driving at here. I am somewhat confused at your line of questioning and the source material is wretched.

Ms FYLES: Last year in December, administrative orders were changed and Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth were put into DCF. Without any explanation they were withdrawn. We are asking you, can you categorically rule out any changes to the functions of DCF this year? Yes or no?

Mr ELFERINK: I will not pre-empt - I will not lock down the department to a future of this is what the thing will be. If I did that, in Attorney-General's department we would not have a Domestic Violence Directorate ...

Ms FYLES: But, minister, last year there were admin orders that were changed.

Mr ELFERINK: This is something the member for Nhulunbuy had absolutely no problem with.

Mr CONLAN: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chair! I believe this question is out of order. Any change to administrative orders is at the discretion of the Chief Minister, and that question should be directed to the

Chief Minister. The Attorney-General, the Minister for Children and Families, has sufficiently answered the question.

Mr ELFERINK: What is happening here, so people understand, is this is the operation of the CPSU which is perpetually feeding misinformation into the system ...

Ms FYLES: The admin orders last December was not the CPSU.

Mr ELFERINK: There is currently no planned change. However, I will not say there will not be because government has to be more flexible than that as a general principle.

Once again, I hear the member for Nightcliff especially becoming increasingly excited about this. Frankly, with her focus on lanyards and administrative orders, which are established by the Chief Minister's department, she is losing sight of the real issues that face this department as we go forward.

Ms MOSS: Minister, can you advise us what other interagency working groups or task forces the department is currently participating in?

Mr ELFERINK: They have the CAT teams that operate. I am glad you have mentioned this because I am quite concerned about a couple of things, particularly across the Department of Health, DCF and Police. Whilst I cannot announce anything because it is not government policy yet and there are cost implications, there are things that are worth visiting in how several departments work with each other.

One of the reasons I went to the United States over the Christmas break was so I could see what happens in Phoenix in particular. In Phoenix there is a unit that works across a number of what are city agencies in that department, which deals with SARC investigations, criminal investigations, child protection issues and provides assistance to families in need out of the one centre. We currently do not do that. There is a lot to be learned from something like that.

If we have a SARC investigation there is a unit in Casuarina which deals with it. If we have a criminal investigation where we have the CAT team that involves both child protection officers and police officers working hand in hand, that happens at the Berrimah police complex, the Peter McAulay Centre. If a child is injured then the child goes to the hospital. We can do that better and I would like to try to do that better going forward. We are currently having conversations with a number of CEOs about stepping through that process. There is a lot to be learned from other jurisdictions in this space. Once again, this idea of having departments working much more intimately together is something I am striving for, and will continue to do so.

Ms FYLES: Can you provide details of how the CAT team is currently staffed?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I suppose. Would you like to know how many lanyards they have?

Ms FYLES: Possibly.

Mr ELFERINK: CAT team and the MPRT is ...

Ms FYLES: Sorry. The CAT team and the ...

Mr ELFERINK: Just the CAT team intake. That is the central intake authority.

Ms FYLES: Just specifically the CAT team?

Mr ELFERINK: Thirty-three.

Ms FYLES: That is central intake, but what is the CAT team's current makeup.

Mr ELFERINK: Thirty-three.

Ms FYLES: So central intake ...

Mr ELFERINK: Sorry, no, I misspoke – 33.

Ms FYLES: The CAT team has 33 DCF staff members?

Ms BRADFORD: We do not have them separated.

Ms FYLES: The CAT team is where police are involved in that operation?

Mr ELFERINK: Of course they are.

Ms FYLES: There are currently police participating in that CAT team?

Mr ELFERINK: I would imagine there would be. They certainly were the last time I was there.

Ms FYLES: I wanted to clarify, as I had heard otherwise. Thank you for updating me on that correctly.

Mr ELFERINK: A phone call can achieve the same result. By the way, I am not sure how many lanyards they have, but I will get back to you on that.

Ms MOSS: Minister, can you clarify the role of the Department of Children and Families in any current governance relating to youth matters in the Northern Territory?

Mr ELFERINK: Sorry, say that again. I am just not sure I understood the question.

Ms MOSS: Can you clarify the role of the Department of Children and Families in current government projects relating to youth matters in the Northern Territory? I understand there is a body of work being done around particularly youth issues in Alice Springs. I am interested in the department ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, now I know what you are talking about. I suggest to you that every single person who works in the department with some function has a youth-related matter. I know what you are driving at, but you have to ask the question better. Seriously, Children and Families, what ...

Ms MOSS: Okay. Minister ...

Ms FYLES: You are a bit grouchy this morning, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: It is not grouchy, you guys can do a bit ...

Ms FYLES: You were picking on me, telling me ...

Ms MOSS: Minister, I understand there is some work being done to map youth services across the Northern Territory ...

Mr ELFERINK: I understand the Chief Minister had made some announcements and refer further questions to the Chief Minister in relation to that.

Ms MOSS: In March last year you delivered a ministerial statement to parliament and promised to report back each year. Why has this not occurred so far this year?

Mr ELFERINK: A ministerial statement in relation to what issue reporting ...

Ms MOSS: To Children and Families on child protection and ...

Mr ELFERINK: I am reporting now. We report in the annual report. What specific reference are you referring to in what sort of reporting?

Ms MOSS: A ministerial statement in parliament.

Ms FYLES: March last year, you said you would report yearly to the parliament in a ministerial statement.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. In that case, it will be a matter that I will report on.

Ms MOSS: The strategic issues for the Department of Children and Families outlined in Budget Paper No 3 include amending the *Care and Protection of Children Act* to improve its application to contemporary child protection practice. What are the areas of child protection practice that require improvement and what work will occur?

Mr ELFERINK: There are a couple problems. One of the problems I had with the act is its lack of clarity. Bearing in mind we inherited this legislative instrument from the former government, one of my concerns about the former government was it was hypotensive to criticism in this area. I do not want to get political about it, but one of the risks you run in the child protection space and spaces which are subject to high levels of public scrutiny, is you get knee-jerk responses. You then had things like the *Little Children Are Sacred* report which threw up 147 recommendations and a commitment to implement those recommendations sight unseen. Some of those recommendations, if you drilled into how they would operate, were not philosophically consistent with each other. That found its way into the legislation.

Let me give you an example. There is a requirement under the existing legislation to as far as possible apply kinship care principles. There is also a requirement under the legislation for the best interest of the child to be maintained. It is not always possible to reconcile those two positions. I would be comforted if the member for Casuarina would be able to reconcile those two propositions for me, because they are not easily reconciled. Those are parts of the challenges.

I would like to create a legislative instrument that captures a clear pathway forward for the staff to use. This law is a tool that staff have to use. However, the tool at the moment has some inherent tensions which means it is less than ideal. The legislative instrument has kinship placements and best interests of the child but they may not reconcile comfortably in all instances. How is that a useful tool for staff?

Those are the things we now have to panel beat out of the legislation so somebody can come to this jurisdiction, open up the act and it says this is what you are doing, and it is a clear pathway forward. That is something not captured in the current legislative instrument.

Ms MOSS: Who will you consult about those potential changes?

Mr ELFERINK: Almost everybody. These are the things that attract a great deal of attention. As the Attorney-General I have generally been a very wide consulter on legislative instruments. I would be on this case. There are these tensions which are reflected in the general community. Some people tell me that you should never ever remove a child from an Aboriginal family. Other people tell me we should remove all children from Aboriginal families. I am sure these people would like to have input across that range of opinions. By the way, I do not subscribe to either of those views; I am just explaining to you what other people have said to me.

Ms MOSS: I understand that. In strategic issues for DCF Budget Paper No 3 includes revising the department's policies and procedures to focus on timely reunification with families. What are the current departmental policies and procedures that might be acting against that reunification?

Mr ELFERINK: Once again a part of it is in the act itself: the best interest of the child. You have a requirement to look after the best interests of the child which is a good and noble idea. I would prefer to see kids stay with families because as much as government would like to be, it never is a good parent. It cannot be.

We have a Royal Commission on foot right now because of institutional sexual abuse of children placed in various institutions for whatever reason. These sorts of inquiries are not restricted to this country; they have happened in Canada and a number of other jurisdictions. If you look at the *Bringing them home* report, those institutions did not do as well as they could for a number of reasons. There is noise around what happened in the Retta Dixon home in Darwin.

You are stuck with a situation where, as a government, you would much prefer not to take any child away from their parents at all. When a child is raped by someone in their family or is physically abused or neglected by the family you have to step in. We are the best of two bad options. The worst option is that the kids stay with their families, whereas the option is we do our best to protect those kids but we will never be a loving family. If I could legislate for love I would be a much better man than I am.

Ms MOSS: A recent Australian Institute for Health and Welfare report for 2013-14 found that child protection notifications have almost doubled in the past five years. You spoke about many of these issues in your opening statement and that the NT has the highest rates of abuse and neglect in the country. You talked previously in different forums about this being the consequence of passive welfare. Are you leading any work to reduce the number of Territory children requiring statutory child protection?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, constantly. A week ago I was sitting in front of the collective Attorneys-General of this nation, including the federal Attorney-General, and said passive welfare is one of the most corrosive

forces in our society today. The direct results of it can be seen on our streets, in our small communities, as well as in our large communities. Passive welfare, in my opinion, has killed more Aboriginal people in particular than any other policy of government since Federation. It sucks away a person's identity. It leaches from them a capacity to even make a choice. I wish I had the quote in front of me but I do not have the book at Parliament House ...

Ms FYLES: Thank goodness.

Mr ELFERINK: ... which talks about this. I will pick up on the interjection from the member for Nightcliff, 'Thank goodness'. Perish the thought that we should cast a critical eye over this policy which has caused so much damage over the years, yet we continue to do it. The federal government spends millions of dollars in this jurisdiction every fortnight so another arm of government, namely the Territory government, can spend millions of dollars a fortnight cleaning up the mess.

I wish the government could issue dignity, self-worth and a sense of direction to people, but it cannot. An attempt to do so through the passive welfare system amplifies the problem, not reduces it.

Ms MOSS: In a similar strain, in relation to that report you also told the *Centralian Advocate*, 'When parents are disengaged we will always be responding to this'.

Mr ELFERINK: Sure.

Ms MOSS: What new work or activities is your department proposing to address these issues of disengagement?

Mr ELFERINK: We are spending \$179m dealing with that disengagement in the current financial year and \$176m in the next financial year. We have a number of processes including the family intervention framework. However, we come back to this point: I would rather spend zero dollars on these interferences but for miscreant, disengaged parents failing to do their jobs as parents.

Ms MOSS: Would you be able to provide a bit more detail around the family intervention framework for us?

Mr ELFERINK: It just so happens I have a document in front of me.

Ms MOSS: That is very handy, thank you. Also, are there any allocated support staff and child protection officers to support the implementation of that framework?

Mr ELFERINK: An amount of \$6.6m of grant funding will be allocated to external services through the implementation of the family intervention framework. Do you want the rest of it?

Ms MOSS: Okay.

Mr ELFERINK: The family intervention framework prioritises efforts to reduce the number of children entering and remaining in the out-of-home care system. The family intervention framework prescribes the type of supports to families that DCF will provide and fund, and clarifies which families can receive which type of support.

The four service streams are: child safety intervention for families with low to moderate child safety concerns to prevent future child abuse and neglect; intensive family preservation for families with a high level of child safety concerns to prevent the removal of the child into care of the CEO; reunification support for families where the child has been removed and intensive support is required to reunify the child with their family; and relative and kinship carer support to kinship carers who are caring for a related child in the care of the CEO.

Ms MOSS: In previous estimates you have tabled lists of NGOs that are contracted by the department to deliver those family support services. I was wondering whether you might provide that?

Mr ELFERINK: Did we already commit to doing that, or was that the last time? No. We will provide that. I think we have it here. We have the following: BoysTown; Crisis Line; NT Christian Schools Association; CatholicCare NT; City of Darwin; Melaleuca Refugee Centre; Darwin Toy Library; Relationships Australia; Somerville Community Services; Gathering Inc CatholicCare which also provides a service into Katherine; Good Beginnings Australia, a Katherine-based service ...

Ms MOSS: Minister, would you be willing to table that document?

Mr ELFERINK: No I will keep working on it. ... Nhulunbuy Community Toy Library service; Relationships Australia, which is a therapeutic intervention for Katherine and Milikapiti; Wurli-Wurlinjang Aboriginal Corporation in Katherine; (inaudible), which provides services into Alice Springs; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, which provides preschool service programs; Australian Aboriginal Congress, which also provides family support services for Part A, B and C; Children Services Support Program Central Australia Inc, through family support; Relationships Australia Counselling Services; Relationships Australia therapeutic services for children; Tangentyere Council provides a program also for the Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre and a further program in family support services; CatholicCare in Tennant Creek; and Anglicare Intensive Youth Support Services in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs.

There are also the following for Aboriginal and Islander women's shelters: Magdalene Safe House in Darwin; Darwin Aboriginal Women's Shelter, known as DAWS; Dawn House provides women and children services as well as domestic violence community education development services; Dawn House also provides domestic violence counselling services; Salvation Army provides support for Catherine Booth House; the Young Women's Christian Association, the YWCA domestic violence and family centre; CatholicCare again at Milikapiti and Nauiyu; Children's Services Support Unit at Wadeye; Crisis Accommodation Gove; Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association's Borroloola Safe House; Katherine Women's Crisis Centre and accommodation; Gunbalanya Safe House; the Alice Springs Women's Shelter Inc provides a domestic violence outreach program, victim support advocacy service, a safe house, crisis accommodation, domestic violence community education development and domestic violence counselling services; Tangentyere Counselling Inc; Tangentyere Women's Group; Barkly Regional Council; Ali Curung Safe House; Barkly Regional Council; Elliott Safe House; Tennant Creek Women's Refuge Inc, crisis accommodation outreach support, domestic violence counselling services, and community education; and Yuendumu Women's Centre Aboriginal Corporation, which runs the safe house.

I also note that we provide a total of \$19m-plus to 30 external service providers through grant agreements to deliver a range of family support services, intensive youth services and family violence crisis accommodation. This is to support vulnerable at-risk children, young people and their families with services primarily located across the Northern Territory in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

Of the funding, 86% for family parenting support services comes from the Northern Territory government and the Australian government kicks in \$2.63m. Of the total \$19.2m, \$7.5m goes to 26 services in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs aimed to vulnerable at-risk children, \$1.2m or a smidge under is allocated to three dedicated youth services based in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs, and \$10.33m goes to crisis accommodation services - eight support services for women and children escaping family violence.

Ms MOSS: Minister, how much of that is for out-of-home care services?

Mr ELFERINK: The out-of-home care budget – are you talking about provided ...

Ms MOSS: Yes, NGO provided.

Mr ELFERINK: Same sheet of paper you have before you has some numbers in it.

Ms MOSS: Is any of the \$19m that you just raised for out-of-home care?

Mr ELFERINK: Out-of-home care for kids?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: No. It is crisis accommodation which is the sort of stuff that I mentioned before. I do not even know what those squiggles mean. We will just leave it at that.

Ms MOSS: Yes, that is fine.

Ms FYLES: None of that \$19m is for out-of-home care?

Mr ELFERINK: No.

Ms FYLES: Thanks.

Ms MOSS: Minister, can you please advise whether any resources have been allocated in 2015-16 to address the recommendations of the Select Committee on the Prevention of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder? I noted there were about three recommendations specific to child protection.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. Those resources are the ones we use now to deal with the kids who are affected by this sort of thing and are in child protection now. We have resources. One of the difficulties with FASD is that you are trying to describe a spectrum of disorder. If a kid comes to us with some cognitive impairment brought about by their mother's drinking, then they can well be classified as FASD.

If that child was in need of care, we will provide services. If that child is in need of disability services, we provide those through the health budget. If that child is in need of some other health intervention, then we provide it through different budgets in the healthcare system. We already spend lots of money in this space.

I am curious how you want me to break that down any further. What are you recommending in what should be expenditure in that space?

Ms MOSS: Given that there were a range of recommendations, we are seeking some more information about where they might have been factored into the budget for the coming year.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms MOSS: It is a problem facing many communities across the Northern Territory, and an issue important enough to have a select committee in parliament.

Mr ELFERINK: That is right. I will tell you what I specifically asked that select committee. As the Minister for Child Protection, where does my role as the protector of children start? Once a pregnancy is either actively or passively to be brought to completion – I am not entering into debate about whether or not a mother wants a child. Once the mother determines that pregnancy will proceed, what is my role in child protection if that mother turns up in a park on The Esplanade, in Alice Springs or Tennant Creek on almost a daily basis and she is pie-eyed drunk? How am I supposed to protect that kid? That was my primary question for that committee.

The committee, unfortunately, has not quite turned its attention to that issue as stridently as I would have liked. The answer, of course, is we could have an education program. Well, I can tell you, some of these mums do not read the education material we put out. So I am still lost. That was my primary concern or cause for interest from that committee.

Did I know it would to find FASD was a problem? Of course I did. You do not have to be a rocket scientists to figure that out. How bad is it? Bad! How do we respond to it? We currently do. What do we take out of that committee? It had – what – 26 recommendations from memory?

Ms MOSS: I cannot remember ...

Mr ELFERINK: Whatever.

Ms MOSS: I think it was about 26, yes.

Mr ELFERINK: About 26 recommendations. What do we take out of that we do not already do in one fashion or another? We already do many things. Yes, we will do education programs; there are posters all over the walls of health clinics now saying, 'Mum, don't smoke'. There will be posters that will go out at some point that say, 'Mum, don't drink'.

It does not deal with my most pressing issue of what do I do with the unborn child whilst that child is in utero, as the Child Protection minister. It is a tough call. I am not saying this is an easy pathway forward ...

Ms MOSS: It is not an easy issue ...

Mr ELFERINK: It is a hard question to ask.

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: It is politically risky to ask it because there was a lot of criticism when I made those comments.

Ms MOSS: In the last annual report the outgoing Children's Commissioner reported that over 1000 cases of at-risk children had not been allocated to staff or had been completed past the expected mandated 28 day time frame. Earlier this year it was reported that as of 1 January 2015 there were 1347 child protection investigations not completed in the mandated 28 days. What actions have you taken to address this issue?

Mr ELFERINK: We have discussed this; this comes back to the recruitment process. Not all, but some of the investigations are allowed to run over their time frames because it is better to do it that way. One of the difficulties with these sorts of measures - picture yourself as an investigator. You have an investigation come to you and you say, 'All right, I will go and knock on the door. This might be within the boundaries. I will keep this file open for a little longer'. Then the investigation is not completed until such time after the time frame. That is a surprisingly common occurrence. That is a part of the reason. Another reason is we have those increased notifications we spoke about before and an increased number of investigations we have on foot.

Ms MOSS: I acknowledge that, yes, there are cases that will be required to stay open for a length of time for different reasons. Do you know how many have currently not been allocated to staff members?

Mr ELFERINK: Just bear with me for a moment while I read this document very carefully. I understand the question is about non-allocation. These are cases that are sitting and not allocated to a case worker. The advice I receive is that allocations are automatic; somebody will be allocated a file. The speed with which they attend to that file in turn is within the response times regarding priorities.

I can report there are four priority areas. The first one is within 24 hours. These are the ones that central intake will perceive as serious and they need to do something about. That might be an allegation of child sex abuse, gross neglect or something like that. Then using the standard tool we then put a weighting against it as to whether it is a Priority one, two, three or four and that is then allocated. We try to complete the investigations within certain parameters.

We get to the vast majority of Priority one cases within the requisite one to 24 hours in 88% of cases. We get to the Priority two cases, which is within three days, 78% of the time. The Priority three cases are 71%. The Priority four cases, which are within 10 days, are 58% of the time. There is the cycle and we are getting through it.

This is where I say to case workers I trust their judgment. Even when they have a case like a Priority one, they will be able to make an assessment that they need to attend to it immediately. Those things that present as clear and present dangers to children are attended to by our staff well and effectively.

Ms MOSS: Can you advise by office the performance against the set targets for Priority one, two, three, and four?

Mr ELFERINK: I refer to the answer I just gave. I touched on all of that.

Ms MOSS: But by office?

Mr ELFERINK: By office? We will have to take that one on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.11

Ms MOSS: Can you advise by office the performance against set targets for Priority one, two, three, and four of child protection notifications?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That question will be number 6.11. Proceed.

Ms MOSS: I will ask a question that was provided on notice about agency travel. Can you provide the total cost of travel in each agency broken down into international, interstate and intrastate?

Mr ELFERINK: I was in discussion, I apologise for that. Would you ask again?

Ms MOSS: That is okay. I am asking about one of the written questions provided on notice relating to agency travel.

Mr ELFERINK: Agency travel.

Ms MOSS: Can you please provide the total cost of travel in each agency broken down into international, interstate and intrastate?

Mr ELFERINK: What you are asking for is this agency.

Ms MOSS: Sorry, yes.

Mr ELFERINK: No, that is fine. You have a standard question and are working from that. For international travel we have spent zero dollars, interstate we have spent \$74 000, and intrastate we have spent \$2.33m.

Ms FYLES: Of the interstate travel, are you able to give a brief explanation of what that was? Was that reuniting children with families?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine it would be a combination of education programs, reuniting children, travelling with children, that sort of thing. I imagine the \$74 000 would be across a raft of those things. If you want a specific breakdown I suppose we can get it, but in the scheme of things that would strike me as being a little on the low side to be honest.

Ms FYLES: Was any travel undertaken by the minister paid for by the agency?

Mr ELFERINK: No.

Ms MOSS: Are you able to detail all travel and costs undertaken through Latitude Travel?

Mr ELFERINK: Did we use Latitude? None.

Ms MOSS: Moving on to legal costs, can you please detail the cost in 2014-15 of legal services provided by private legal firms to the agency?

Mr ELFERINK: As at 31 March 2015 the Department of Children and Families expended \$895 000 for outsourced legal services. I have to do sums because of the way it is laid out. In regard to the CEO representative: Darwin \$152 000; Katherine \$111 000; and Alice Springs \$95 000. For separate representation: Darwin \$120 000; Katherine \$228 000; and Alice Springs \$159 000. A total of CEO representative is \$358 000 and just a smidge over \$0.5m in relation to separate representation. There are some minor matters - youth matters etcetera - which was \$20 000 and \$10 000 respectively.

Ms FYLES: I asked you in Attorney-General about women's safe houses that were federally funded but the funding ceased for several of them around Nightcliff ...

Mr ELFERINK: I have some good news in this space.

Ms FYLES: Perhaps you could update me and then I might ask my question.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, this is ongoing. It is continuing to be on foot; however, the indications we are getting from the federal government is that none of these safe houses will be shut down. I was ...

Ms FYLES: They were touted to be closed nine to 12 months ago. The NTG has been funding them in the meantime, and now the feds are saying they will fund them? Is that incorrect?

Mr ELFERINK: My understanding is they were identified by the federal government as no longer requiring to deliver the service. I was resistant to that and tasked my department with ongoing negotiations. I am pleased to report that those negotiations seem to have fallen on the successful side of the Northern Territory.

Ms FYLES: The NTG has been funding them in the meantime, or the agreement had not expired yet?

Mr ELFERINK: I think we actually threw some money at them. Yes, we did.

Ms FYLES: Are you able to supply details of the amount you threw at them, so to speak?

Mr ELFERINK: Gosh, a good question. I reckon it was more than a bit; it was several hundred thousand dollars, from memory. I would have to double-check the numbers. Yes, we threw money at them.

Ms FYLES: Are you able to provide locations of those safe houses? Has there been any evidence or research to justify the ongoing expenditure, apart from anecdotal evidence?

Mr ELFERINK: Community expectation is that we keep the service going. This is a rock and a hard place-type of question. If we did not support it we would be a pack of so-and-sos, and if we do support them we are a pack of so-and-sos for being irresponsible. The truth is we made a judgment call and we kept it.

Ms FYLES: But you said it is more than just a bit of funding. Surely the community has an expectation that there would be some research or evidence behind ...

Mr ELFERINK: I know what the community expectation was: keep them open.

Ms FYLES: But surely we could have some research or evidence as to why, as well as the outcomes. Obviously the expenditure ...

Mr ELFERINK: There was a need. The outcome would have been that they closed.

Ms FYLES: Has there been any research of the positive outcomes that they have provided the community?

Mr ELFERINK: I know this much: in each of the communities there are a number of people employed.

Ms FYLES: It has not stopped you cutting services in other areas. Are you able to provide the locations of those safe houses?

Mr ELFERINK: Stop there. If you ask a question do not predicate it with a smart-alec comment, just ask the question.

Ms FYLES: What are the locations of those safe houses and the total expenditure?

Mr ELFERINK: I remember them coming through the system. We can look at them. We can get you the details. I am not ashamed of this; we are quite happy that we did this. These are safe houses that provide services to the people of the Northern Territory, particularly Aboriginal people in these remote communities.

Ms FYLES: Why did the federal government indicate that they would discontinue the funding?

Mr ELFERINK: Because the federal government, unfortunately, has the same problem we had when we came to government after we had years of Labor government. They have a debt to manage, which was excessive. They then had to make tough decisions, as we had to make in government until we had that under control. We now have that debt more restrained than it was in the Northern Territory. I point to Budget Paper No 2.

The federal government is dealing with the same problem after the Gillard/Rudd years of spending more and more. They now have to scratch around. It is a sad truth that if the Labor Party just showed a modicum of restraint in expenditure from time to time, particularly in the use of the credit card, these types of decisions would become less frequent.

Ms FYLES: Are you able to provide the answer, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: I just gave you an answer: the Labor Party is reckless with money.

Ms FYLES: No, I asked you a question about the locations of the safe houses. I believe a piece of paper was put in front of you but you do not want to read that.

Mr ELFERINK: We have a number of ...

Ms FYLES: It is a pretty simple question: the numbers and the expenditure of funding.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: It is up to the minister how he responds to the question.

Ms FYLES: He just said a second ago that he would and he was getting ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: You do not have to remind him of his options. Minister, you have the option of whether you answer the question, table it or take it on notice.

Mr ELFERINK: There are a number of scrawled notes on this which I need to translate into Elferink before I can articulate them here.

Ms FYLES: I am sure they are in English.

Mr ELFERINK: No, the problem is they are handwritten notes I am trying to navigate. I would like to give you accurate information.

The ones that are funded by the Australian government but run by us are: Angurugu; Ramingining; Maningrida; Wurrumiyanga; Peppimenarti; Ngukurr; Wugularr; Lajamanu; Kalkarindji; Yarralin; Ti Tree and Ntaria.

The ones that are Australian government funded and run by non-government organisations are: Wadeye; ASWS transition house; Gunbalanya; and DAWS transition house, which is urban.

Then we have the Northern Territory Children and Families grant funded, which includes: Ali Curung; Elliott; Tennant Creek; Alice Springs; Borrooloola; Yuendumu; Katherine; Darwin; Gove; Milikapiti and Nauiyu.

The ones we threw some support at were: Ali Curung; Borrooloola; Yuendumu; and Nauiyu. That is what those squiggles mean.

Ms FYLES: There was a number that were funded and managed in different forms ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms FYLES: But you threw money at three or four. Correct?

Mr ELFERINK: Four.

Ms FYLES: At four. Why did you choose those four to ...

Mr ELFERINK: Because they were the ones that were being defunded.

Ms FYLES: The rest were still funded through the federal government and the NTG?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms FYLES: Was there a reason given why that four were defunded?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine the federal government decided that through their ERC process they needed to find savings somewhere.

Ms FYLES: Who were those four that were defunded run by? Do you know? Were they NTG or NGO run?

Mr ELFERINK: Children and Families grant funding. It was grant funding. I am not sure if ...

Ms FYLES: No, I am just ...

Mr ELFERINK: I am trying to understand your enthusiasm for this. We were providing services to people in these communities. I am a little confused as to your enthusiasm about this. Where are you going with it?

Ms FYLES: I just wanted to know what the locations were and was there ...

Mr ELFERINK: As far as I know ...

Ms FYLES: As I asked you, has there been any evidence or research about these? I wanted to know which locations and in what circumstances was the funding discontinued, and now continued. That is all.

Mr ELFERINK: Without understanding the thrust of what you are trying to make, that is the answer you have.

Ms FYLES: That was the question I asked, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: All done?

Ms FYLES: That is on the opening statement.

Ms MOSS: I am happy to move on too.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Wonderful. That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES **Output 7.1 – Child Protection Services**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 7.0, Children and Families, Output 7.1, Child Protection Services. Are there any questions?

Ms MOSS: Yes, thank you. The budget papers indicate a review of the service delivery of central intake. Five years ago, structured decision-making was implemented to assist in improved triage and assessment notifications. What is going wrong there to prompt the review of service delivery?

Mr ELFERINK: It is called quality management and improvement. Every business should do it.

Ms MOSS: What has been the trigger for the review?

Mr ELFERINK: Without going any further and drilling into it, I have not ordered it. What I have said to my CEOs across government is constantly review and keep an eye on what they do; find ways to do it better. A quality assurance structure is an important part of any organisation, including government. It is about quality assurance. Maybe the model can be improved within the Northern Territory context. You are using a standard measuring tool when you pick up the phone which may have been developed in another jurisdiction. Models like that would almost certainly have to be modified for the Territory context, particularly for telephone calls from remote areas. So this is part of ongoing quality assurance.

If I was running Coca-Cola or Nike I would be quality assuring my produce all the time. Why would it be any different for child protection?

Ms MOSS: I appreciate that, minister, thank you. What is the time frame for the review?

Mr ELFERINK: As I said, it is ongoing quality assurance. Are we doing anything specific in that area, a particular review at the moment? It is scheduled over the next 12 months.

Ms MOSS: What is the current rate of reported substantiations of abuse within 12 months of initial notification and assessment?

Mr ELFERINK: Sadly, high. I will get you some exact numbers.

Ms MOSS: Thank you.

Mr ELFERINK: I can give it to you for the last four years. I will put some definitional boundaries on it. We are talking about a child who is repatriated, investigated, or discovered to be substantiated, then you go back within a 12 month time frame?

Ms MOSS: Yes, please.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. I can give you the last four years.

Ms MOSS: Yes, that is fine.

Mr ELFERINK: For 2010-11, 322; 2011-12, 291; 2012-13, 231; and 2013-14, 328.

Ms FYLES: That is any notification or just substantiated?

Mr ELFERINK: No, that is substantiation.

Ms FYLES: What about previous notifications?

Mr ELFERINK: Do we have that on record? I am not entirely sure we have that here. A notification is dealt with and dismissed if it is not substantiated. It is pretty hard to track that. If not substantiated, it is like a crime - if you are found not guilty, it never happened.

Ms FYLES: Is there a reason why that figure has jumped back up?

Mr ELFERINK: Because the minister has made it pretty clear to his CEO that he expects children to be protected.

Ms FYLES: So in previous years the minister did not make that known?

Mr ELFERINK: No, I will not speak for other ministers. I know what I believe; children should be protected. It come back to what I said before that the best place for a kid is with their family. We are a poor distant second. If that kid is not being effectively protected, we keep an eye on them. I am not embarrassed or ashamed to say so. If that means a higher rate of resubstantiation, so be it.

Ms MOSS: Do you think that increase - which is quite substantial - is simply down to a directive from the minister?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine it is the staff taking it on. Do you remember I said earlier I expect my staff to take a risk, do their job, be passionate? There is an element of that in there. People are taking up the responsibility of being a child protection officer. The reason they are doing so is they know their minister will protect them when they make these judgment calls.

Ms MOSS: In your opening remarks in estimates last year, you inferred the number of children being sexually abused in the NT was declining. Later the Children's Commissioner asked why only 17 cases of sexual abuse were reported. He said at the time, anecdotally, that it was a lot more than that.

Mr ELFERINK: One would presume it was more than that, yes.

Ms MOSS: I am quoting. The Children's Commissioner's last annual report noted that some sexual abuse notifications were being incorrectly classified in DCF intake as neglect. Can you outline how such an error could occur within that system?

Mr ELFERINK: I will not focus on particular cases, but sexual abuse reported in 2009-10 was 8% of kids that came to us. In 2010-11 it was 5%, 2011-12 was 3% and down to 1% last year. It is up to 2% this year. In the last three years it is flexing between 3% and 1%. If the Children's Commissioner said there is a failure to identify, then those processes have to be improved. That is a part of quality assurance process the Children's Commissioner brought to this particular environment.

I am certain we deliver a correct assessment of what the child is undergoing. If children being 'misdiagnosed' for a lack of better words has been a problem in the past then we will correct that because the Children's Commissioner has pointed it out.

Ms MOSS: What risk management arrangements have been put in place to mitigate against that kind of mistake happening in the system?

Mr ELFERINK: That is constant quality improvement. That is what I was telling you before. You asked these questions about why we look at the standard model for doing assessment. We do management improvement. Times changes, circumstances change.

For some of the kids we take into care, youth particularly, ice might be an issue. These issues manifest in different ways. What may have been the definition of indecent assault 50 years ago may be different today. Changes occur and you have to keep up with the best practice of the time, as well as make sure you are covering the field effectively.

Ms MOSS: Absolutely. As a result of acknowledging there have previously been incorrect classifications, can you point to specific management arrangements that have changed as a result of responding to the Children's Commissioner's observations?

Mr ELFERINK: We are doing a review. There will be incorrect assessments today, tomorrow and the day after. The reason for that is a frontline worker is being lied to by the people they are dealing with, particularly if they have done something horrendous. I have never spoken to a frontline worker who has said to a person, 'What is happening with your kid?', and that person's response is, 'Oh, I had sexual intercourse with my five-year-old last week'. They lie about these things. 'Yes of course I bashed my child last week; I do it for fun' is not what is said. People will obfuscate and try to mislead child protection workers, particularly if those people have done heinous things.

A child protection worker in the field must make an assessment on the evidence they have before them - in part, misleading or dishonest information being given. They will not always get it right, but by gum, I will back them every time, if and when they are trying to do the right thing. There will be criticism from time to time. I get that. But by God, that is part of the tough job they do. We have to acknowledge that they will not always get it right. I am genuinely surprised how often they do.

Ms MOSS: I will go back quickly to caseloads. Can you provide some more detail about how caseloads are allocated, taking into account different priority levels? How is that assessed per worker?

Mr ELFERINK: That is through an internal process. Once again, I imagine you are dealing with a management issue. When I was a shift sergeant at a police station, there were some police officers I could happily load up with substantial caseloads because they were competent, capable, really good at doing their job. As a shift sergeant there were other police officers who needed a little more support and a slightly lighter caseload because they were still learning the trade or for whatever reason. You do that on a case-for-case basis. As a supervisor, you determine who can carry, and would be more challenged with, heavier loads.

There will be experienced case workers you give particularly difficult cases to. Case loads are clumsy in the sense that there will be some investigations that are highly complex, involved and very difficult with a large number of people involved, and there are other investigations which are very streamlined and simple. If you say that person A has four cases, and person B has 10 cases, and you immediately think person A is not loaded up, in actual fact their actual workload could be manifold times more demanding than the person with 10 cases. Once again, it is a judgment call, I imagine, done on the front line. But I am sure the policies and procedures are in place to ensure that is done properly.

In fact, I have just had it shoved under my nose that separate case types incorporate case complexity and worker capability, and they follow, of course, the mandatory reporter guide.

Ms MOSS: What is the average ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Wonderful. What we will do is call it there. It is 12.30 pm. Put a note where our question is and we will come straight back to that one when we return in 30 minutes.

The committee suspended

Madam CHAIR: Thank you very much for everyone joining us after the lunch break. It is 1 pm and we are back with the Department of Children and Families in Output Group 7.0, Children and Families, Output 7.1, Child Protection Services.

Ms MOSS: Minister, I was hoping you could provide us the total number of notifications and investigations.

Mr ELFERINK: Year to date?

Ms MOSS: Yes please. Probably up to March.

Mr ELFERINK: I have here notifications year to date 2014-15, 12 593.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.11

Mr ELFERINK: Before we go on, I have your breakdown in relation to your question No 6.11.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Ms FYLES: Sorry minister, what was that figure for the total number of notifications?

Mr ELFERINK: Year to date 12 593. Be mindful of course that year to date means year to date and not the final number for the year.

Ms FYLES: Did you provide the number of investigations just then?

Mr ELFERINK: Investigations proceeded year to date was 5304; did not proceed to investigation after the initial assessment through central intake was 7289. So substantially more than half, about 58% by the looks of that off the top of my head, did not proceed to investigation.

Ms FYLES: Are you able to break down the number of notifications that did proceed to investigation into the four categories?

Mr ELFERINK: Year to date, Priority one, within 24 hours – oh, I see what you are saying. No, I cannot. All I can do is tell you – yes, I can apparently; just give me a second. Just making sure I am marrying sets of numbers correctly so I do not want to give you a bum steer.

Priority one, 11 051; Priority two, 13 097; Priority three, 15 072, and Priority four, 11 023. That is a slight variation to the year to date because this is the year to March. You will find the total for that will be 5243 not the 5304 I gave you a minute ago.

Ms FYLES: No worries. Of those investigations what was the percentage of Priority one cases investigated within the 24-hour time period?

Mr ELFERINK: As I said before, 88%.

Ms FYLES: If you could repeat them, please.

Mr ELFERINK: Priority one, 88%; Priority two, 78%; Priority three, 71%; Priority four, 58%.

Ms MOSS: How many investigations were unable to be completed?

Mr ELFERINK: An investigation which is not complete is an investigation that is still afoot or terminated for some reason.

Ms MOSS: But I understand last year there were 446 where there was no further action possible - whether the child moved interstate or there were other reasons. I was wanting a comparable figure ...

Ms FYLES: How many did you write off?

Mr ELFERINK: How many did we write off? We do not write off any.

Ms FYLES: Last year you wrote off 446 where there was no action possible.

Mr ELFERINK: Writing off is not something we do. An investigation may be terminated because there is nothing further to investigate. We do not write them off. That is not an expression I have heard in child protection.

Ms FYLES: Last year there were 446 investigations where there was no outcome possible. You are saying they were either completed or there was no need to proceed to investigation this year?

Mr ELFERINK: I have a percentage of 23% where no action is possible. This means they do not qualify for any further investigation beyond failure to substantiate.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, minister.

Ms MOSS: Can you provide the figure for how many notifications were screened out?

Mr ELFERINK: I gave that to you before: 7289.

Ms MOSS: There are circumstances under which children in the child protection system have to be sighted within four weeks or within an eight-week period. Are you confident all of the children are being sighted within that two-month period?

Mr ELFERINK: As confident as I can be. I imagine from time to time, for whatever reason, it may not always occur within those policy parameters. I have the expectation that people would make every effort to make sure they are within those time frames. It will not always occur but, once again, I trust my frontline staff to make judgment calls when appropriate in relation to making priority decisions.

Ms MOSS: What was the average caseload across the NT? What are the target caseloads for Aboriginal and remote?

Mr ELFERINK: Can I ask you to start listening to some of my answers because I have given you these numbers before lunch. It is 36.

Ms MOSS: Across the Territory, 36 is the average? What are the targets? We have not asked about the target caseloads.

Mr ELFERINK: Targets? What is manageable is the target. I prefer to see these caseloads slightly lower. Many of these cases are ongoing investigations, many of which will not lead to substantiations. This is the point I made before lunch. At the outset we were talking about all of these matters.

Ms MOSS: I understand that, minister. We are just looking for more detail about this. I understand there have ...

Mr ELFERINK: Then ask more detailed questions, not the same questions again.

Ms MOSS: We have not asked about target caseloads in this session until now. I understand previously there have been targets around caseloads, whether that is broken down by urban and remote - it is 15 to 20 in the urban area and 20 to 25 remote. What are the current target caseloads?

Mr ELFERINK: The target caseloads - the ideal situation recommended by the board of inquiry was 15 to 20 for the greater Darwin area.

Ms MOSS: What was it for remote?

Mr ELFERINK: Remote areas were 10 to 15.

Ms MOSS: What actions are in place at the moment for the department to try to - obviously 36 as an average caseload is significantly higher than both those targets.

Mr ELFERINK: That is right, it is.

Ms MOSS: What work is happening at the moment ...

Mr ELFERINK: Mind you, bear in the mind when the board of inquiry was put together we did not have the number of reports coming through the system.

Ms MOSS: Absolutely.

Mr ELFERINK: Bear in mind again - this is why I want you to listen carefully because I suspect you are not - substantiations have not significantly changed up or down in the last 10 years. There have been variations within a range of a couple of hundred but they have not changed. This caseload is a product of much increased reporting leading to somewhat increased investigations. This is the reason we have been dealing with this issue around the police, particularly because of the protocols they should be applying in relation to reporting, because that is what drives up these caseloads.

The board of inquiry was talking about active caseloads at the time, including investigations. They were not dealing with the numbers we are dealing with now, the vast majority of which are knocked out at the report or investigation stage. The nature of what is being investigated and managed as part of a caseload has changed over time. To a substantial degree you are trying to compare apples, being the board of inquiry recommendations some years ago, to oranges, which is what actually occurs today.

Ms MOSS: What would be an acceptable level of caseloads from your perspective?

Mr ELFERINK: What is manageable. I agree the caseloads are high and there is pressure on. I said that in my opening statement. I am not saying that is not a problem. I am saying if you are to rely on a board of inquiry figure in the context of the reporting structure today, you are not comparing apples with apples. The best test is what can people manage? We are asking people to manage increased numbers. Do we have a shortfall in staff? Yes, we do. I said that before. We know that.

Ms FYLES: Minister, to clarify something - and I apologise for going back over it - a total of 23% of cases were screened out for various reasons. Is that correct?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, that is the number I have before me.

Ms FYLES: Are you able to give detail on some of the reasons why they were screened out ...

Mr ELFERINK: For whatever reason they are screened out. Without going into individual cases ...

Ms FYLES: I was about to finish my question.

Mr ELFERINK: Sorry.

Ms FYLES: If is too much detail then that is fine. But are there any ones that come up repeatedly? Why are they screened out?

Mr ELFERINK: They will be screened out for a number of reasons. You have described some of them. You are inviting me to go into a level of detail that may protrude into the potentiality for identification. I am a little cautious about that.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, minister.

Madam CHAIR: Any other questions on Output 7.1?

Mr BARRETT: Yes. Can you please outline the negative impact when media promulgate incorrect information on contentious or highly-sensitive issues involving the Department of Children and Families?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. There have been a number of instances in recent times which have caused me some concern. I thank the member for the question. There was a time not so long ago where people leaking information from inside the department had, on those occasions, determined it necessary to mislead the media.

The case that springs to mind in recent times dates back to July last year, when people inside the department said that a woman, as a result of bullying inside the department, had committed suicide. That was faithfully reported by the *NT News*. Despite denials by this department it was not until the Coroner took the unusual step of issuing a preliminary finding to say that the woman involved - and my sympathies

go out to her family particularly if you consider the circumstances in which the way the death was used - had died of natural causes.

There have been, over a number of months, various leaks from inside the department where people who either are ill-informed or deliberately inclined to mislead, have leaked information to the press. That includes information in relation to matters that are still under investigations, such as coronial investigations.

It causes me great concern that people seem to think they can shortcut their way to the press. The press will always treat a leak as a hallowed piece of information, but sadly all too often matters which are published are simply not true. The departments do not lie about these sorts of things. When departments say to the media that something is untrue or to wait for the coronial investigation because there might be something else to it, they do so for a very good reason.

In recent times, sadly, there was a child who died, and the *NT News* reported that the child had been injured in the care of a carer. I have no idea why that child died. That is not for me to determine, but equally it is not for the *NT News* or any staff member within the department to determine.

We now have a situation where there is a substantial differentiation between the information I have in relation to the passing of that unfortunate child, and the information that went to the *NT News*. To that end, I have written to the Coroner of the Northern Territory and asked that he at least make an attempt to discover what the source of the information is, in case that source is correct, and for whatever reason the information I am receiving is wrong.

I encourage that person who believes they have information in relation to the death of a child in care to make that information available to the Coroner. I say to that person, if you are not prepared to come forward and if you are not prepared to stand up and be counted, I can only assume your motives are of the most mischievous and dishonourable nature. If you have information that is subject to a coronial investigation, contact the police or the Coroner directly and make sure that information is forthcoming.

The *NT News* or other media outlets are not necessarily conduits which should be used, particularly by people in the public service, to try to spread this misinformation. That is something that concerns me deeply, and the fact it has happened more than once continues to concern me.

I will leave that comment there, but for goodness sake, whoever you are - whether there may be more than one of you - think about the job we are trying to do to protect kids in the Northern Territory. If you think politics is something you want to play with, then you may want to reconsider your career options.

Ms FYLES: Picking up on a point you made, how many coronials have had recommendations to the department that they should implement?

Mr ELFERINK: Over what period of time?

Ms FYLES: In the past financial year.

Mr ELFERINK: There was one coronial I am aware of in relation to a child who died in Alice Springs. If memory serves, the Coroner did not make any substantive recommendations arising out of that. There is another matter on foot which is subject to a coronial investigation. I am not sure what the Coroner will recommend, but we will wait for the Coroner to make those findings.

Ms FYLES: Recapping - in the past there have been coronials in previous years that have made recommendations to the department that were in train. Some were incorporated into the board of inquiry and other documents. Have those recommendations been enacted?

Mr ELFERINK: If you take something like the coronial for Deborah Melville, the lass who unfortunately died in the back yard, that was a tragic scenario across the whole sphere. I do not think that any light can be drawn from that at all; it was truly a dark episode. Clearly it prompted the board of inquiry, if I have to the chronology right in my mind. Being a little on the old side, I cannot quite remember things in order. It prompted a lot of responses from the government of the day. Ultimately we ended up with the legislation we have now. As I said, there are some of the problems arising out of it because of some of the inconsistent recommendations that came out of the inquiry.

There is also the issue of what you can afford to do. You do what you can afford to do. This is a demand-driven business. We provide more money for wages than we pay in the hope that we get more people

through our advertising processes and get them on board to share some of the workload. But there are not always people available. Just because we advertise does not mean we fill these positions. It is a tough gig; people move on quickly. You get burned out in this job.

Ms FYLES: So there are potentially some coronial recommendations outstanding?

Mr ELFERINK: If you want to go back to when Coroners' investigations were done in the Northern Territory dating back to settlement, I am sure there are coronial investigations that may have recommendations that may even be superseded by the change of technology over time.

Ms FYLES: I do not want to go back to the beginning of the Territory. There were some clear recommendations which the board of inquiry incorporated ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms FYLES: The CLP government scrapped the board of inquiry's recommendations, or chose not to ...

Mr ELFERINK: Once again, I ...

Ms FYLES: I am wondering if any coronials have been missed.

Mr ELFERINK: We were more critical of the board of inquiry, but we have ...

Ms FYLES: But have any coronial recommendations been missed, is my question.

Mr ELFERINK: Having not read every coronial report from the Coroner ...

Ms FYLES: I am not expecting you to, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: ... in the last 10 or 20 years, or whatever span of time you might be thinking about, I will say that when the Coroner makes recommendations we closely and carefully look at them, and consider them in our ability to roll them out. He does not make those recommendations lightly. If, for whatever reason we would not implement a recommendation, we would not overlook that recommendation lightly.

Ms FYLES: Am I able to ask the question and perhaps you could seek a response from your department officials: are there any coronial recommendations outstanding as of today?

Mr ELFERINK: Their answer would be substantially the same as mine, so we can just leave this.

Ms FYLES: So I am not able to get an answer to my question: were there any ...

Mr ELFERINK: You have a perfectly good answer to your question.

Ms FYLES: So we do not know if there are any coronial recommendations outstanding from the Department of Children and Families as of today?

Mr ELFERINK: You have your answer.

Ms FYLES: Which is?

Mr ELFERINK: I just gave it to you.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, the minister has answered the question.

Ms MOSS: Minister, I want to clarify some numbers. I have been listening; I want to make sure I get these numbers correct. If we can get, as at 31 March for the 12 months preceding, how many child protection workers joined the agency and how many separated?

Mr ELFERINK: We will take it on notice.

Madam CHAIR: No problem. Please restate the question for the record?

Ms MOSS: How many child protection workers have joined the agency and how many have separated from the agency as of ...

Mr ELFERINK: I can say that there was a 15% turnover in that period, so I suspect fewer have joined and fewer have left.

Madam CHAIR: Sorry. Restate the question.

Ms MOSS: Yes. So in the 12 months preceding 31 March 2015, how many child protection workers joined the agency and how many separated?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: There is a variance of 105 individuals, which is 15%.

Ms FYLES: Minister, just one more staffing question. Is the department's Vocational Graduate Certificate still available to staff?

Mr ELFERINK: I presume so. I will have to look at my CEO.

Ms BRADFORD: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms FYLES: Are you able to give us an update on how many staff have completed that program to date? There was a three-year plan, as I ...

Mr ELFERINK: We do not have it in front of us. Whilst I appreciate the estimates process is about discovery, you would have known that you wanted the answers to these questions. You could have written to us in advance. This is the reason I say to you ...

Ms FYLES: This is the same answer you gave last year.

Mr ELFERINK: What a surprise. Perhaps you may have thought on last year's advice. We will take it on notice.

Madam CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record.

Question on Notice 6.12

Ms FYLES: How many staff members have completed the Department of Children and Families Vocational Graduate Certificate?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, sure.

Madam CHAIR: That is question number 6.12.

Madam CHAIR: Any further questions on Output 7.1? That concludes Output 7.1.

Output 7.2 – Out-of-Home Care Services

Madam CHAIR: We will now move to Output 7.2, Out-of-Home Care Services. Are there any questions?

Mr ELFERINK: In relation to the question that you asked before, I was interested about your fascination about the lanyard.

From time to time staff have to deal with families who are angry at the staff for what they do. The staff might even be under risk of physical assault. This item hangs around staff's neck and there is a very high

breaking threshold. Something like this, without a proper failsafe built into it, is a safety issue for people whose neck is hangs under to deal with.

I have been told in the break the reason the lanyards were replaced is because it was an occupational health and safety issue for the staff who might be set upon by some of the people they have to work with. I fully and comprehensively support my staff in relation to them having a safe work environment.

I am sorry about that. I did not quite expect that one to give way the way it did, but you can see the lanyard could easily be an unpleasant thing around your neck when you have 100 kg father hanging off your neck. Sorry about that, apparently we need some new lanyards.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina.

Mr ELFERINK: I apologise for that, Madam Chair, I did not expect that to happen.

Ms MOSS: Minister, please can you confirm whether a desktop study was done to project the numbers of children and carers for whom permanent care orders might be an option?

Mr ELFERINK: The anticipation at the time that it was put together was in the order of some 10% of current foster carers. I encourage people to look at it seriously, particularly those people who feel they have developed a relationship in an environment where the likelihood of that child returning to their biological family is next to nothing. These people become very fond of the kids they foster. I often struggle to imagine how you could let a child go back to a family comfortably after you have looked after and nurtured that child for a number of years.

There is very strict criteria in place. The determining body is not the government, it is a court. The court makes the final arbitration as to whether or not a child becomes subject to a permanent care order. Nevertheless, the guesstimate was 10%. I hope it is higher.

Ms MOSS: What information has been provided to current carers in relation to the implementation of permanent care orders and through what mediums?

Mr ELFERINK: We have been passing that information by way of letter directly to those people who we know are foster carers. To date we have had 17 inquiries in relation to it; 12 of them were made by persons who are currently caring for a child. It is not a huge uptake but it is just another weapon in the arsenal in child protection.

I have spoken to these kids. One of the greatest dreads they have is when the child protection officer knocks on the door and does an assessment. It creates great uncertainty in these kids, particularly if they are happy with their placement. What we offer through a process of permanent care is we step away as a department, close the file and that kid gets on with their life without a DCF officer knocking on the door every so often and saying, 'I want to talk to you about your placement'.

If caring for a child means giving them stability – something we all agree on - surely the pursuit of a permanent placement in certain circumstances is desirable?

Ms MOSS: Thank you, minister, I appreciate that information. I was interested in the second reading of the bill where you referred to the financial savings that will come from permanent care orders. Could you provide some further detail about what you are expecting there?

Mr ELFERINK: Financial savings are a component. Gerry Wood said it particularly well when he dealt with it. There is a component of it, but it is a peripheral rather than a central component. The central component is stability and security. When a person takes out a permanent care order they are essentially taking over responsibility for that child as pretty much their own. It is not quite an adoption, but it goes a long way down the road to that environment.

That question does not come with a financial tag. We offer \$5000 to a person awarded a permanent care orders, but the relationship between the foster parent and the child, by that stage, is so close that money is not the issue for those people. Gerry Wood raised the issue then talked himself pretty much out of it, if I recall. He captured the notion particularly well when he said you are no longer talking about money, you are talking about a human relationship that child would otherwise be deprived of. That is where the focus should be, not necessarily on the dollars either side of the argument.

I mentioned it in the second reading speech as one of the consequences, but my focus has been, was at the time, and continues to be for a permanent sanctuary for a child who otherwise would not have one.

Ms MOSS: Absolutely. I was wondering if any projections have been done around that given that it was mentioned.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, it has not been foremost in my mind and I suspect not in the department. These 17 applications we are talking about are generally foster carers. The foster carers are paid different rates depending on the child they have. Compared to out-of-home care services, foster parents are not an expensive option for government so it is not really that high on my list of things.

Ms MOSS: How many staff are dedicated to resolving contractual disputes with out-of-home care providers, and how many disputes are being managed on average per month?

Mr ELFERINK: This is the direct result of an instruction I gave the former CEO in relation to clearing up some of these contractual arrangements. I had become concerned, particularly once I became the minister, about some of the contractual arrangements in place.

The most difficult to fathom was a 17-year-old youth who drove himself to school. The carer was being paid \$300 000 per year to care for that youth. That was subsequently negotiated to something far more reasonable. I asked for a review of all those contracts and we have been doing that. We made up a lot of ground because there were a number of contracts about which alarm bells were ringing.

What we gained on the swings we lost on the roundabouts because since that time we have taken many more kids into out-of-home care services. Where I had hoped to restrain some expenditure out of these contractual arrangements we lost in that we had more kids in out-of-home care than we have had before.

Regarding the number of people looking at it, I think we had one person looking at it full-time and doing the renegotiation process. But there were a lot of contracts out there and a lot of work to be done.

Ms MOSS: What is the average being managed per month currently?

Mr ELFERINK: I can tell you how many kids – if we do it this way it is probably better. At 31 March, in foster care we have 262 kids; kinship care, 206; purchased home-based care, 35; family day care, 282; residential care and family group homes, 95; and other types, 87.

Ms MOSS: How many disputes are being managed on average?

Mr ELFERINK: I could not tell you. What is a dispute? If I am a foster carer and am not happy with my case worker, and have a grizzle about my case worker, that is technically a dispute. In that case we manage lots of them.

Ms MOSS: How many with providers?

Mr ELFERINK: You talking about some of the providers like Kentish and that sort of thing? Once again, I could not tell you. No, at best we can take it on notice. It will be hard to drill down into because - what is a dispute? In a definitional sense it is very difficult. If Kentish has a problem with government or the department, for whatever reason, over a particular payment or a way a payment is made, that is technically a dispute. I am not quite sure how we would even put a definitional boundary around that.

Ms MOSS: Going off the figures you have just provided, how many children in out-of-home care are cared for by NGO service providers?

Mr ELFERINK: We have a series of ongoing contracts. We could find out the names of those contract providers. In fact, they are: Lifestyle Solutions providing certain services in Queensland; Anglicare which provides services in Katherine through a group homed; Lifestyle Solutions in Tennant Creek children's care service; Anglicare in Alice Springs through a family group home; Community Staffing Solutions Australia Pty Ltd, a sibling family group home; Life Without Barriers, therapeutic services for children with disabilities, which has two separate contracts to provide similar services; Tangentyere Council, which provides services to safe families; Industry Education Networking Pty Ltd through general residential care in Darwin, and the same contract is listed three times so they provide for three different facilities; Anglicare NT general residential care; Lifestyle Solutions providing through two different facilities on two separate contracts; Anglicare also in Katherine ...

Ms MOSS: Minister, are you able to provide how many children are cared for by NGO service providers?

Mr ELFERINK: I am answering the first question; I will get to the next question.

Ms MOSS: But that was the question.

Mr ELFERINK: I will give you this because I want to make sure that I am fulsome in my answers. Anglicare NT general residential care in Katherine; Anglicare general residential care, there are two contracts in Alice Springs; and Industry Education Networking Pty Ltd also providing services in Alice Springs.

As I said before, the number of children being provided purchased home-based care is 35, family day care is 282, residential care in family group homes is 95.

Ms MOSS: On average how many children are in the care of a foster carer at any one time?

Mr ELFERINK: Are you asking an average figure?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine just over one is my expectation. But there are some foster carers who have more than one child. If you want me to tally up all the foster carers and divide by the number of kids, I can give you an average, but I imagine it would be just over 1.5 or 1.6.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much.

Answer to Question on Notice 6.12

Mr ELFERINK: I have an answer to question 6.12 if you like.

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: A total of 14 DCF staff completed the Vocational Graduate Certificate this year. There are a further 12 who are currently enrolled.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much. Minister, how much was spent on family day care placements in the last financial year?

Mr ELFERINK: Family day care was the largest consumer with 882 individuals – for how much money?

Ms BRADFORD: I am not sure we have that.

Mr ELFERINK: It is 282 individuals for lots of money.

Ms MOSS: Do you want to take that on notice?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, we will get it for you. Do you want a breakdown across the board? This stuff is not secret. I want to make sure there are no commercial-in-confidence issues here.

Ms MOSS: That is fine; if I can have a breakdown that would be fantastic.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, that is fine; I am just qualifying on that one.

Question on Notice No 6.13

Madam CHAIR: Would you like to repeat the question for the record?

Ms MOSS: How much did you spend on family day care placements in the last financial year?

Madam CHAIR: Do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: We accept that.

Madam CHAIR: That question will be number 6.13.

Ms MOSS: The last Children's Commissioner's annual report noted that 60% of young people in care, 15 years or older, do not have a leaving care plan to transition out of care. What current actions are being ...

Mr ELFERINK: Sorry? Say that again.

Ms MOSS: The report noted that 60% of young people in care, 15 years or older, do not have a leaving care plan to transition out of care. What actions are being taken to improve that?

Mr ELFERINK: The first question I ask is: do we need to improve it? The reason I ask that question is simply that I imagine that many of those kids are going back to their family home - would that be a fair assertion? I think it is - which is the object of the legislation. Staff will have worked with families to improve the quality of care those kids get. In many instances, we hope we can land those kids back into those families without having to continue to oversight those families.

Sometimes the re-substantiation issue you raised earlier does not quite work out. But with all the best plans in the world, with the 40% that leave with plans, those plans would be appropriate for the purpose at the time. It is very hard to know, beyond the raw number that you just quoted, what the requirement is. If there is a requirement for further plans, then I expect the staff would make those plans.

The second question is what those plans look like and how are they policed. It is all well and good to have a plan, but a plan written on a piece of paper without somebody there to police it - if you think a plan is required - is the next issue you would have to deal with.

Ms MOSS: I am aware of time. How many children the subject of care orders are currently residing in the correctional facility?

Madam CHAIR: Do you need to take a break, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. Madam Chair, can I get just a couple of minutes, please?

Madam CHAIR: Of course. We can take a five-minute break and resume at 1.45 pm.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you.

The committee suspended

Mr ELFERINK: Madam Chair, in fairness to the members if we run overtime for two minutes or whatever I apologise for that. It was genuinely a surprising note.

Madam CHAIR: That is okay, we can just take that out of our next break or anything like that so there is no problem. We are just in Output 7.2, Out-of-Home Care Services.

Ms FYLES: We are also very conscious of time so we might put the rest of our questions about this through as written questions. There is a lot of detail we would like but we have limited time. We would like to ask some questions of the Children's Commissioner for a few minutes. To let your staff know, we do not image being more than 15 minutes with the Children's Commissioner before we move on to Health.

Mr ELFERINK: We will pass it up the line. Thank you for that.

Ms MOSS: We appreciate your time very much.

Madam CHAIR: That closes Output 7.2.

Output 7.3 – Family and Parent Support Services

Madam CHAIR: Any questions on Output 7.3?

Mr ELFERINK: I have to go up to my office. Am I right for about 10 minutes?

Ms FYLES: We just had a couple of questions for the Children's Commissioner.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Output 8.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output Group 8.0? Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

That concludes considerations of outputs related to the Department of Children and Families. On behalf of the committee, I thank the departmental officers who attended today. The committee will now consider the Office of the Children's Commissioner, and we will just have a five-minute break for the changeover. We will come back at 1.50 pm.

The committee suspended

OUTPUT GROUP 9.0 – CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

Madam CHAIR: We are returning after the break. For anyone upstairs in minister Elferink's office, if I could get a proper authorisation from the minister that we can commence with the Acting Children's Commissioner, Hilary Berry, in his absence, I need that before we can commence proceedings.

Sorry minister, normal practice is that the minister is still here, so if you are happy for Ms Berry to take questions in your absence that is fine.

Mr ELFERINK: Sorry about that. I can explain to people the surprise and the unusual steps.

Madam CHAIR: We all saw it on Facebook.

Mr ELFERINK: I understand the two young gentleman, for lack of better words, who escaped custody at Don Dale are now back in police custody. They have just rammed Don Dale with, presumably, a stolen car. They have been captured on-site and I understand that nobody else has been injured.

The details are very sketchy at this stage. The matter is still under operational parameters of the TRG, which is the Tactical Response Group in police. We will keep the committee and Territorians posted as details come forward. I do not believe anybody else has escaped and the two gentleman are now in custody. I am sure that charges will be forthcoming. I am genuinely surprised, once again, at the level of commitment to criminality these two young gentlemen have displayed. It demonstrates that we have entered a new era of criminality in regard to some individuals in this jurisdiction - perhaps one too many Hollywood films.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I note that the Office of the Children's Commissioner sits within the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. However, as the responsible minister questions relating to the Office of the Children's Commissioner will now be answered. Minister, please introduce any officials accompanying you, and if you wish to make an opening statement.

Mr ELFERINK: Hilary is here, and no, I will not make an opening statement. I have always treated the Children's Commissioner as an independent officer and I expect that she is at liberty to answer such questions as she sees fit.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Ms Berry, are you happy for us to move straight to questions?

Ms BERRY: That is fine, thank you.

Ms MOSS: Thank you, Ms Berry, for being here and for waiting so patiently. We will probably keep it quite short given the time frame, but we really appreciate your time today.

In relation to Budget Paper No 3 there is a note about the increase in complaints from 75 to 120, which is due to the increase in the public's profile of the activities of the Children's Commissioner. Is that something you have noticed in the office? Why do you think that complaints are increasing and what areas of complaints are being referred to you?

Ms BERRY: Yes, we have noticed there has been an increase in the number of complaints. We believe it is due to the number of public education sessions, plus access to our website.

Ms MOSS: What areas of complaint are you finding are being referred to you most often?

Ms BERRY: It goes across the board. We investigate and receive complaints on behalf of vulnerable children in child protection, mental health, youth justice and volatile substance areas.

Ms MOSS: How many complaints have you had to address in 2013-14 relating to abuse of children when they are in out-of-home care? Is there some greater detail of what those complaints are about?

Ms BERRY: This year in our annual report would be the first time we look at that in any detail.

Ms MOSS: Will that break down some of those themes across the complaints?

Ms BERRY: Yes.

Ms MOSS: Are there any budget measures you would identify as a priority to reduce the number of children coming to the attention of authorities because of neglect?

Ms BERRY: The provision of family support and preventative services would be a positive move.

Ms MOSS: Are you able to adequately deal with the increasing number of complaints within existing resources?

Ms BERRY: Yes.

Ms MOSS: What exactly is the current status of the Office of the Children's Commissioner? Do we have a long-term replacement for Dr Howard Bath?

Ms BERRY: At the moment I am the Acting Children's Commissioner. I believe there will be a new Children's Commissioner appointed shortly.

Ms MOSS: Is recruitment still occurring for that role?

Ms BERRY: I am unsure.

Ms MOSS: While working recently as the Children's Commissioner, former police officer Colleen Gwynne was reported in April this year to have said that she thought interagency cooperation could be improved in support of improved child protection. Do you agree? What do you see as the key areas in need of improvement?

Ms BERRY: It is my view too that protecting children is everybody's business across the community. Everybody should have a role and responsibility in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children.

Ms MOSS: The *Centralian Advocate* reported in October last year continuing concern of the Children's Commissioner of the rise in child protection notifications, but a lack of corresponding investigations. It said that four or five years ago it took 10 notifications to translate to one investigation. I believe the Children's Commissioner, Howard Bath, talked about this in estimates last year, and that the ratio was 33 notifications to one investigation. What risk assessment has been done in respect of investigation of the circumstances of children at risk falling through the cracks?

Ms BERRY: That is probably more a question for the department. We will be reviewing the statistics in our annual report.

Ms MOSS: Acting Commissioner, what are you seeing as the big pressing issues for the financial year ahead?

Ms BERRY: In terms of?

Ms MOSS: In what work your office will be doing. What are the priority areas that have been identified by your office?

Ms BERRY: We will be continuing to work to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable children by the manner in which we investigate complaints, which is one of our main functions.

Ms MOSS: We will leave it there today because of time's sake. The member for Nhulunbuy is ready to go on health questions as well. Thank you. I am happy to put forward more questions out of the session.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions for the commissioner? That concludes consideration of the Office of the Children's Commissioner. On behalf of the committee, I thank you, Ms Berry, for coming today and answering questions. We will now move on to consider outputs relating to the Department of Health and have a two-minute quick changeover for staffing. Thank you very much.

The committee suspended

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Madam CHAIR: Minister, if you would introduce the Department of Health officials accompanying you today then feel free to make an opening statement.

Mr ELFERINK: I will start by naming the people at the table otherwise I will spend the next hour describing everybody else here.

Madam CHAIR: That is sufficient. The people sitting at the table will be fine.

Mr ELFERINK: To my immediate left, we all know the wonderful, fabulous Dr Len Notaras, CEO of the department. Then we have the two COOs – an unfortunate acronym, but that is what it is – the Chief Operating Officers of the Top End Health Service on my distant right, Mr Michael Kalimnios, and on my distant left, Ms Sue Korner. There is also Ms Allison Grierson, who is the Acting Executive Director of Funding.

I will go into my opening statement. Please bear with me; this is half as long as the original one that was written for me.

With the committee's indulgence, I will go through the changes and the final position of the structure that occurred between the Department of Health between budgets 2014-15 and 2015-16 so as to better equip the committee in interpreting information before them as outlined in the 2015-16 budget papers. I understand with the changes that the budget papers or the line items will be about as easy to read as spaghetti.

With the *Health Services Act 2014* effective from 1 July that year, over the last 12 months the Department of Health has consolidated the transformation of the health system into two separate services, the Top End Health Service and the Central Australian Health Service. The evolution of this structure is enabling the Department of Health to focus on its role as a system manager, which includes governance, strategic policy development and regulatory functions. To this end the department is continuing the transition of most of the remaining services to health services over the next 12 to 18 months.

A key principle of the new structure is that major operation decision making relating to service delivery is at the health service level, where cross-program synergies can be maximised to leverage better outcomes for Territorians. Under the *Health Services Act 2014* the two health service boards are to ensure their respective services are managed effectively and efficiently, as well as providing strategic direction that is consistent with the needs of the services community. It is designed to deliver greater control of healthcare decisions, improved flexibility, responsiveness and innovation capacity of the public health system and provide more effective and efficient health services.

This major reform has created a significant change in the output group structure compared to the previous budget papers. The major change in the 2015-16 budget papers – this is the spaghetti effect I referred to earlier – is that the Department of Health's Top End Health Services and Central Australian Health

Services are treated as separate entities, with expensive and appropriation summaries on output and performance treat discretely rather than in a consolidated fashion.

In accordance with the regionalised approach, performance activity is now reported via health service rather than a physical location, for example, at an individual hospital level. Hence synergies across the health services are created rather than the former silo approach where policy and service delivery was managed centrally. The approach is underpinned by the service delivery agreement with each health service.

In regard to the output groups, there are some variations between the 2014-15 estimate and the 2015-16 budget. The variations are largely due to the transition of health services, as well as timing issues of Commonwealth funding including Commonwealth own-purpose expense agreements.

There are significant highlights from the health services since their inception in 2014. The Top End and Central Australian Health Services have successfully transitioned primary healthcare services from three pre-existing branches in the Department of Health into an integrated primary healthcare service in regional areas. They have also worked to improve patient journeys and access to health services, including a focus on telehealth clinics and specialist outreach services.

The operational responsibility for mandatory alcohol treatment services will also be transitioning to the Top End and Central Australian Health Services from July this year. The Stringybark Centre, which is located at Berrimah and will have a total capacity of 90 beds, is a 12-bed assessment service which will be run by health services with 78 treatment beds being operated by Saltbush Mob, a private provider. Similarly, in Central Australia the alcohol mandatory treatment services provided by the Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit will be expanding from 20 to 36 treatment beds. A sum of \$12.9m is being provided to the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Units, or CAAAPU, for the construction of an assessment facility on their site. Assessment services are provided in Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. Mandatory residential treatment services are provided in Darwin, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

Construction of Palmerston Regional Hospital will be under way by the end of this year, with the first patients being treated in mid-May 2018. While this is the biggest public infrastructure project currently on the horizon, this is much more than a capital works program. It is about meeting the growing needs of the Top End community and complementing and supporting existing services already available at Royal Darwin Hospital.

The Health department has been assiduously working over the past year to ensure that clinical services provided at the Palmerston Regional Hospital meet community needs. The hospital will deliver 116 beds, a 24-hour emergency department, birthing suites, medical and surgical services including cardiology, renal management, cancer services and antenatal and post-natal obstetric services.

The 2015-16 budget provides \$25m for hospital construction, including \$15m from the Commonwealth built into the current Northern Territory budget. Following the federal budget, the contribution from the Commonwealth for 2015-16 is anticipated to be \$55m. The Commonwealth support for the project has not wavered, with a commitment of \$110m as planned.

The Country Liberals government continues to show its commitment to improving health services across the Territory in a tough budget climate. Overall, the Northern Territory government's investment has increased by \$24.8m. This means the 2014 Health budget represents the biggest Northern Territory investment in health. This delivers on the government's promise to expand health services, improve infrastructure and includes the next phase of the Country Liberals' plan to tackle chronic alcohol abuse.

As occurs each year, the department is negotiating with the Australian government across a range of agreements that will affect the funding to be provided in 2014-15. We expect the agreement to be reached shortly, after which time these variations will be incorporated into the department's 2015 budget and reported in the mid-year review.

We have delivered a responsible Health budget that targets areas of greatest need and delivers the government's key election initiatives. The budget is designed to enhance sustainability in the face of population growth and ageing, escalating costs of health services and rising consumer expectations. The significant investment is spread across a range of areas. In the Department of Health centrally highlights include: major technological initiatives such as \$10m to undertake detailed planning, analysis and market testing for the new Core Clinical Systems Renewal program to create a comprehensive contemporary package of clinical business systems which is essential to the successful operation of public health

services inside the Northern Territory; \$2.8m to implement upgrades as part of the new patient index system; \$1.8m to improve procurement processes that support the continuity of patient care; \$900 000 to undertake major upgrades to data warehouse infrastructure as part of the modernisation project; \$3m for the staged replacement of equipment to provide increased capacity for diagnostic functionality; \$830 000 for a major upgrade program to service infrastructure; \$700 000 to implement an extended program for electronic document records management; \$1.17m to increase the number of Aboriginal health practitioners in the workforce; and \$920 000 for pathway to community controlled programs to create a framework to support Aboriginal community control in planning, developing and managing primary healthcare and community healthcare services.

The major highlight in each of the health services is substantial investment and infrastructure to improve provision of healthcare and benefit to the broader Territory economy. For the Top End Health Service the budget supports the health and wellbeing of Territorians with major upgrades to health facilities and services, including the following: \$40m for the staged redevelopment of the Royal Darwin Hospital, which includes refurbishment of the hospital courtyard, entrance foyer, outpatient clinic, allied health and public access areas, a new eye clinic and the upgrade of air conditioning systems; \$7.6m to relocate the ambulance centre in Katherine out of the flood zone; \$4m of Territory government funding in addition to \$11.9m Commonwealth funding for the refurbishment of the paediatric ward at the Royal Darwin Hospital, which is well overdue; \$2.5m to upgrade the fire safety systems of the Gove District Hospital; \$5m for a scoping study for a stand-alone ambulatory facility at the Royal Darwin Hospital; \$3.89m to continue to operate a 12-bed emergency medicine unit within the Royal Darwin Hospital emergency department; \$200 000 to resource the sonography outreach service to enable service delivery to community clinics in Katherine; increased funding for mental health services across the child and adolescent inpatient unit; remote mental health clinicians; court liaison services and mental health access teams.

For the Central Australian Health Service major upgrades include: – I am nearly there, folks - Alice Springs facilities of \$34.2m to continue remediation works and other upgrades at the Alice Springs Hospital, including fire rectification works and a new Commonwealth-funded training facility; \$720 000 to continue the expanded Hospital in the Home service for the Alice Springs community; the expansion of mandatory alcohol treatment in 2015-16, including \$7.9m to continue the construction of a purpose-built secure assessment centre and expansion of treatment services in Alice Springs; \$350 000 to continue midwifery group practices, which provides continuity of care to urban and remote women during pregnancy; \$1.875m to continue subacute mental health, which integrates community mental health services with inpatient unit and recovery, rehabilitation support services; and increases in mental health services across the Top End and central regions totalling \$3m.

Our emergency departments are extremely busy, with over 106 800 patients treated in the financial year to the end of March. The percentage of emergency department presentations by triage category seen within the recommended time has improved in 2014-15. We have the highest ratio of emergency admissions involving surgery, with 21 emergency admissions involving surgery per 100 000 of the population, against the national average of 11 per 100 000 of the population.

As I previously stated, the \$1.42bn budget for the Department of Health in 2015-16 is the largest of any government agency. We are continuing our commitment to major capital works projects across the Territory. The budget delivers on the Northern Territory's promise to bolster health services for all Territorians. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions relating to the statement?

Ms WALKER: Given the spaghetti nature that is health and outputs, I am inclined to follow the chronology of those outputs. It will not surprise the minister, as this is an important and the most topical issue at the moment, but I wonder if I might tackle and ask you questions about the Palmerston Regional Hospital.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms WALKER: It will be the only question in relation to the statement then I will go back to the outputs.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I am happy to do that now.

Ms WALKER: Clearly, on the subject of the Palmerston Regional Hospital, the delays, the funding issues and what have you since change of government have been quite significant. Obviously health is a very important issue to Territorian, especially those people in the growing Palmerston and regional area who believed they would have access to a hospital before change of government which would have been by the

end of this year. Then it was 2017, and now we are looking at 2018. It is my view and that of the opposition and many Territorians that to date it has been a bit of an unmitigated disaster.

Let us get some clarity about the completion of construction and opening. Your website says March 2018 for the completion of construction. You have said May 2018 for the opening. You emphasised that in your statement. You said the first patients will be treated by mid-May 2018. Your colleagues, the Treasurer and the Chief Minister, during estimates last week both said it would be the third quarter of 2018. Which one is it, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: I have to deal with the opening statement you have made. You talked about delays and inappropriateness and all those sorts of things, and I am hearing you.

This landed on my desk a couple of days ago. Somebody had been ferreting through some old files upstairs and they discovered this. This is a document *Palmerston Hospital Planning to August 2012* which was the product of the previous government. I note that according to your time lines clinical services planning and early works were to be completed by June 2012. This was not on the site we currently have identified for the Palmerston hospital. This is ...

Ms WALKER: No, which has created further delays and costs.

Mr ELFERINK: I listened to you in patience. I ask you to extend the same courtesy to me.

This was not a well-selected site because it did not allow for substantial future expansion. Your modelling was limited to 'we want to build a Tier 3 60-bed hospital'. I get all of that. The fact is the quality of project management and leadership we saw from the former government was somewhat light on the ground. We have seen that on a couple of major projects the former government managed, not least of which was the prison that still continues not to have landed effectively.

But returning to this proposed project, your site was too small for substantial future expansion, and you did not meet your own time line, according to this document, which meant you would have had early works completed by 2012.

Before we took over government – this was April 2012 - in a photo of early works on the site which was too small, it looks like a number of people standing around. I think I can see Mr Vatskalis and Mr Henderson's head there. Some pipes had been laid on the site – and when I say laid, placed on the ground at the site. I notice there are a number of other vehicles parked there - a backhoe, it looks like some sort of frontend loader and there is a white truck. That was at the time when your early works were supposed to be just about completed, and they were not. What you guys are doing is a bit cute.

We looked at your proposal from opposition and ...

Ms WALKER: This is about your proposal. We have had a change of government. You promised to deliver on the Palmerston hospital ...

Mr ELFERINK: I am answering ...

Ms WALKER: ... it is behind ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, the minister is answering the question.

Ms WALKER: I appreciate the history lesson ...

Mr ELFERINK: You started a question with a very long preamble which is substantially wrong, and so I have to now correct ...

Ms WALKER: No, I asked you about the completion date and why it is that your ...

Mr ELFERINK: ... again on the public record your dishonest representation as to what is occurring.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, please do not interrupt the minister.

Ms WALKER: But he is not answering the question.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, are you answering her question?

Mr ELFERINK: I am answering her question in great detail and at great length.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms WALKER: About why your time frame ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy!

Mr ELFERINK: Part of the problem we have, Madam Chair, is that this block over here ...

Ms WALKER: ... is different to the Treasurer's and the Chief Minister's.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, you can be quiet or you can leave, it is really up to you.

Mr ELFERINK: ... is substantially smaller, as you can see, to the block which has finally been chosen by the government. The reason we chose that site is because that is a 45 ha site, many times larger than the block chosen by the previous government, to enable future expansion. If you look at the original proposal in the document I referred to earlier you will note more than half the site is already taken by the hospital and car park. This is a Tier 3 hospital being designed for the people of Palmerston and rural area.

I remember when the Royal Darwin Hospital was under construction in 1978 or 1979 ...

Dr NOTARAS: In 1980.

Mr ELFERINK: In 1980 when it was opened. The hospital was built – snow shutters and all – on the site and everybody said, 'What a big site, why is the site so big?'. Now you are flat out slipping a piece of paper between some of the buildings out there, because hospitals expand.

The presumption behind the original construction of the Royal Darwin Hospital was that Darwin would continue to grow up towards Lee Point, but it never did after the design and construction of Palmerston which happened in the early 1980s. Now all of the population growth being recorded in the Territory is almost exclusively in the Palmerston and rural area. We are building on a site which will be able to accommodate hospitals into the future.

If the biggest issue you have is that one website it says March and I say it is part of the agreement ...

Ms WALKER: It has to do with an election commitment and what you have promised to people, and conflicting stories between you and two of your very senior Cabinet colleagues.

Mr ELFERINK: Let us run a book ...

Ms WALKER: No, let us just answer the question; that would be the easiest ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy.

Ms WALKER: ... about why you are at odds with the Treasurer and the Chief Minister.

Mr ELFERINK: I am happy to run a book. I am saying May ...

Ms FYLES: It is about when a commitment will be met.

Mr ELFERINK: I am saying May. I am confident it will be May.

Ms WALKER: All right, I will accept that as your answer then.

Mr ELFERINK: No, wait. Projects run ahead and behind time. If you were still in charge of the prison project you still would not have signed off on it, despite all the promises you made. We are talking about years of difference. You are focusing on a couple of months, so let us run a book. Ms Fyles said the hospital would never be built ...

Ms WALKER: If I could go back to your answer of May ...

Mr ELFERINK: ... so I would be happy to give her 100 to 1 odds right now that it will. I will be happy to take her money from her because what she did and what you are doing is the normal misinformation. You are so bad at it you could not even brief the shadow Health minister because she was talking about her commitment of \$70m. Well, if she commits \$70m then it is clear that you are prepared to allow the Commonwealth to rip \$40m out of the project.

There was some hurried shuffling around when I mentioned this on radio. The next time she did a piece to camera she had the number right, but it shows you how poorly organised your attack is ...

Ms WALKER: Even your federal colleague, the member for Solomon, said 2017. You are all over the shop, you lot. So minister you are saying May, and that is on the record and is what Territorians and the people in Palmerston will be holding you to. We have two members representing Palmerston people sitting here and perhaps they have questions on this.

Are you aware that by saying May will be when the first patients will be treated, you have thrown the Treasurer's budget out of whack? He is proposing a surplus in 2017-18 based on the fact that he will not be having a Palmerston hospital operational in 2017-18. You have just contradicted the Treasurer, Treasury and the Chief Minister. Would you agree that the government's proposed move to surplus is now shattered?

Mr ELFERINK: Oh, lord! The clutching at straws here is nothing shy of extraordinary, Madam Chair. If this is the best ...

Ms WALKER: You are at odds with your Cabinet colleagues.

Mr ELFERINK: If this is the best you can manage you should try a lot harder. Try saying this Palmerston hospital is needed and we recognise the efforts of government to bring the hospital ...

Ms WALKER: I have not said to the contrary. I have said it is overdue.

Mr ELFERINK: Do you agree that the time line in the agreement with the Commonwealth government of May 2015 is the appropriate time line?

Ms WALKER: I am not here to answer the questions; it is your project. I will ask the questions and I hope you answer. Territorians hope you answer, but you are not doing very well on that front.

Mr ELFERINK: You are the alternative minister. What are you committing to?

Mr CONLAN: Madam Chair, I have a question on the Palmerston hospital if that is okay?

Madam CHAIR: Just following on the line of inquiry?

Mr CONLAN: Following the line of inquiry. Minister, would it be fair to say the Palmerston hospital promised by the Country Liberals government will be delivered in a shorter time frame than it took the previous Labor administration to deliver the oncology unit in Darwin?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, yes and then yes. I thank the honourable member for his question because it demonstrates the yawning chasm between what Labor thinks they can do and what they deliver. The oncology unit is an example, but also the fact they suggested a much smaller hospital than will be delivered for the people of Palmerston. The gaol project is another example of delays in the process. The promises they made about the waterfront development still have not been realised in the time frames they had. They are very good at sitting on the peripheries making merry, but their track record of major projects is pretty poor.

Ms WALKER: We are talking about your major projects and failure to deliver as well. In relation to Palmerston Regional Hospital, the need and the discussion around an additional \$50m from the Commonwealth has also featured in your government with your predecessor, the member for Araluen. Perhaps part of the issue is we have had three or four health ministers in just over two-and-a-half years. You are on the record talking about the conversation you had with the federal minister about the \$50m the Territory was looking for in addition to what had already been provided by the feds. You said:

When I became the Health minister I spoke to Sussan Ley, who is the federal Health minister, and that offer of the extra \$50m proved to be somewhat illusory.

Fair enough ...

Mr ELFERINK: In fact, completely illusory.

Ms WALKER: Last night at federal Senate estimates the matter of \$50m was raised and the Assistant Secretary of the federal Department of Health, when asked about the NT's claims that we needed and had sought an extra \$50m in funding, said:

We have looked closely at the claim and we can find no one in the Commonwealth at a bureaucratic or political level who is aware of any discussion in that regard.

Even a spokesman for Ms Ley said the supposed \$50m was never raised with her, as claimed by you. Can you please, once and for all, clarify the story, the illusory mist around who said what about the \$50m because it does not stack up, does it?

Mr ELFERINK: Once again, that is not a question; that is an accusation with a question mark.

Ms WALKER: No, it is a question about getting to the bottom of this \$50m and negotiations with the Commonwealth to secure it or otherwise.

Mr ELFERINK: Have you read the agreement with the Commonwealth?

Ms WALKER: I have read parts of it.

Mr ELFERINK: You have read parts of it. How long is it?

Ms WALKER: Just answer the question, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: How long is it? You have not even read it, have you?

Ms WALKER: Just answer the question.

Mr ELFERINK: You are going off half-cocked. You have no idea about the document.

Ms WALKER: I doubt that you have read it either. You simply do not know.

Mr ELFERINK: I have. I have read it from cover to cover. You know why?

Ms WALKER: Then tell us about the \$50m.

Mr ELFERINK: Because it does not take that long to read. It is actually a fairly short document.

Ms WALKER: Tell us about the \$50m.

Mr ELFERINK: The fact is, as the shadow Health minister it behoves you to read the documents you refer to ...

Ms FYLES: Will you answer the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Well ...

Ms WALKER: I read a lot of documents, minister. If you could just answer the question it would be helpful.

Mr ELFERINK: Clearly you have not read this one.

Ms FYLES: Answer the question.

Ms WALKER: There are certain documents I would love to read, like the \$5m scoping study but you will not release it. I would also like to read the report you were required to put in on 14 May on progress ...

Mr ELFERINK: Even if I gave it to you, you would not read it.

Ms WALKER: ... which is contingent upon extra funding coming through. You will not release that either.

Mr ELFERINK: I draw your attention to paragraph 21 of that document, which is two lines long and says as follows:

The Commonwealth's funding contribution will not be reduced where the Northern Territory secures funding from other activity partners through innovative and collaborate partnerships.

That places onto the record the nature of the arrangement. As I understand it, the former Health minister, minister Lambley, and the former federal Health minister, minister Dutton, discussed the capacity for further money to be attached to it. It was not entirely clear to me exactly where that money was coming from, but I inquired with the Commonwealth the moment I became the Health minister as to whether that money was there or not. The response I got from the Commonwealth was it was not, which is why I referred to it as illusory. That is the same answer you have. It is an illusion. However, the figure was in the ether when I became the Health minister and I had to find out one way or another.

Minister Dutton, as I understand it, was anxious to see a PPP arrangement pursued. There was merit in the idea because there was a chance that anybody replying to the EOI might come back to the Northern Territory government with a suggestion that they could throw some more money into the mix, because it was exactly that, a D-bomb model. They may, as part of their bid, throw some more shekels into the mix to improve the D-bomb model. There were eight responses to the expression of interest, none of which threw any more money than what was already on offer from government. It is for that reason I determined that the \$50m figure in the ether was illusory and I reported that back to Cabinet.

That being the case, I said to Cabinet that I was of the impression we should remove a layer of complexity out of this arrangement to make certain we would meet the time lines. That layer of complexity which was removed was the public private partnership. Cabinet agreed with that and as a consequence we have gone to a straight design construct model. For that reason I am now confident we will be opening the doors of the hospital for patients in May 2018.

Ms WALKER: What is the estimated annual operational cost of this 116-bed hospital in Palmerston with an emergency department?

Mr ELFERINK: The Treasurer was quite clear on this the other day; the forward projection is in the order of \$25m. The forward projection is just that. A bit of education about how budgets are put together. The further you budget ahead, the harder it is to know exactly how the budget will operate going into the future. You have a best-guess model. When you are dealing with four years ahead, those numbers will change.

The advice I have from Treasury is this is by no means a locked down number yet. A consequence of all of this is they are running on a figure they currently have. I have no reason to doubt them. As we step forward we will get a more accurate picture. If you look at a budget and a final estimate you will see that even within a 12-month budgetary period there are variations that occur.

That is why I have consistently said, and will say again to you now, that the servicing of the Palmerston hospital will be demand driven. Demand will determine resources. Health services in the acute and chronic areas are demand driven. We are driven by the presentations of need we have in the community. That is how hospitals work.

Ms WALKER: You are comfortable that \$25m in the forward estimates is adequate to begin running the hospital?

Mr ELFERINK: What I am saying to you is that is the ...

Ms WALKER: The Treasurer says otherwise. Sorry, I am listening.

Mr ELFERINK: No, you are not.

Ms WALKER: Yes, I am.

Mr ELFERINK: You are being exceptionally rude.

Ms WALKER: It is conversational in nature and I am just chipping in.

Mr ELFERINK: No, you are being exceptionally rude; every time I try you just talk away.

The answer from the Treasurer was that the \$25m was expected to be spent. I have spoken to the Under Treasurer about this and, as I expected, as we step forward we will firm those figures up.

Ms WALKER: In light of that, there is no expectation, as the Treasurer had indicated in estimates last week, that resources from the Royal Darwin Hospital will be redirected to the Palmerston Regional Hospital to provide adequate services?

Mr ELFERINK: What I have just said to you is the delivery of health services is demand driven. The reason we are building the Palmerston hospital is because there is a demand in the Palmerston and regional area for hospital services. The reason the Royal Darwin Hospital was built is there was a demand in the northern suburbs from the original Darwin Hospital which was at the end of Mitchell Street, and which was a much smaller hospital. Prior to that there was an even smaller hospital made out of fibrous cement in the post-World War II era.

As populations grow, you build your hospital system to meet demand, then you pay for both the capital and recurrent costs accordingly. You do a best guess as you are going forward as to what the needs are. It would be simply asking what the interest rate will be like in four years' time. The answer is I do not know. What you do know is what you work with, then you deal with the unknowns as they become more apparent.

Ms WALKER: I understand that, but not before there has been a certain level of alarm created by the Treasurer's statement last week, not the least of which was amongst our hard-working nurses and midwives, who saw those comments as a threat to delivery of services. That is right, there is ...

Mr ELFERINK: An alarm that you embraced and encouraged to be out there as much as you possibly could.

Ms WALKER: When one is asked for comment, one responds. On the back of what the Treasurer had to say, on the record, that it would mean shifting resources from the Royal Darwin Hospital, that is how people see the situation.

I ask about the progress and reports that are required by the federal government in demonstrating that you are meeting deadlines, and with that the next payments that flow. On 8 March the federal government threatened to withhold payments on the hospital because ...

Mr ELFERINK: Who says?

Ms WALKER: ... you had not hit deadlines.

Mr ELFERINK: Who did?

Ms WALKER: We saw that.

Mr ELFERINK: Where?

Ms WALKER: I have seen that, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: Where? Where did you see it?

Ms WALKER: I do not have it with me right now, but the next ...

Mr ELFERINK: You saw it. Other than the *Northern Territory News*, where did you see it?

Ms WALKER: The next deadline was 14 May, so where are these ...

Mr ELFERINK: No. Where did you see it? You said you have seen this thing. Where did you see it?

Ms WALKER: Where are these reports? The next one was due on 14 May. Does that report demonstrate ...

Mr ELFERINK: Hang on. You say you saw something. What you read was a leak in the *Northern Territory News*, which was wrong.

Ms WALKER: So the next report ...

Mr ELFERINK: And you have not decided to verify that by telephoning me and asking me. So you are more than happy ...

Ms WALKER: The next report was due ...

Mr ELFERINK: ... to spread the alarm from a position of ignorance because knowledge would deprive you of the opportunity.

Ms WALKER: Minister, that is not so. My next question is ...

Mr ELFERINK: It is.

Ms WALKER: The next report was due on 14 May. What does that report say to the federal government about meeting deadlines? Does that report ...

Mr ELFERINK: I refer you to the Senate estimates last night.

Ms WALKER: Does that report mean that the next tranche of funding is flowing through because you have met all of the deadlines?

Mr ELFERINK: All the present indications are – if you had watched the Senate estimates last night you would be aware of it ...

Ms WALKER: I was watching estimates here, minister. I am pretty multiskilled but, no, I could not be observing two.

Mr ELFERINK: I suspect there was a strategy being played out, using Senator Nova Peris in an effort to try to extract from public servants in Canberra some position contrary to the position described by the Northern Territory government. We have here a strategy rather than you not watching Senate estimates. The problem is, of course, that Senate estimates confirmed everything we have said. We provided the report on time and they have not indicated to us any problem with the report we provided.

Ms WALKER: Will you table that report then so we can see ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, because I am ...

Ms WALKER: ... it and receive those assurances?

Mr ELFERINK: ... cautious to make sure that the information in that report relating to commercial advantage will be maintained discreetly. Neither did the federal government table it last night.

Ms WALKER: Before I move on from the Palmerston Regional Hospital I want to be clear about forward estimate's time frames. Yours is at odds with the Treasurer and the Chief Minister. The Treasurer is saying that the hospital will open in the October quarter of 2018, which is the 2018-19 budget. You are saying in May 2018, so that is in the 2017-18 ...

Mr ELFERINK: Whoever is sending the text down to the member, as I said earlier ...

Ms WALKER: So that ...

Mr ELFERINK: ... so for your information ...

Ms WALKER: I have not finished my question ...

Mr ELFERINK: ... we are more than happy and comfortable with budgetary implications for the Northern Territory budget in the steps we are taking. We will deliver the hospital on time.

Ms WALKER: What it means is there is no money in the budget in 2017-18; it is in the 2018-19 budget. That is the important difference ...

Mr ELFERINK: Since when did the Labor Party concern itself with budgetary management? Goodness gracious me!

Ms WALKER: That is the important difference. Is your ...

Mr ELFERINK: Seriously! The Labor Party talking about budgetary management is like listening to Dracula talking about how the Red Cross should run the Blood Bank.

Ms WALKER: We will talk later about how you run St John and the ambos out of an EBA.

Mr ELFERINK: We do not run St John.

Ms WALKER: The important thing is that the budget is wrong about the time frames you are telling me compared with the Treasurer and the Chief Minister and how the \$9m surplus predicted for 2017-18 disappears.

Mr ELFERINK: As I said to the person who is sending you the text, we are more than comfortable with the arrangements.

Ms WALKER: One last question on the Palmerston Regional Hospital. Is the government considering this site as the location for the private medical facility proposed by Gina Rinehart?

Mr ELFERINK: Which one, the Palmerston hospital site?

Ms WALKER: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: You would really ask me that question?

Ms WALKER: We asked that of the Treasurer and the Planning minister last week and he said it was a matter for the Health minister.

Mr ELFERINK: One of the challenges you face as a minister is sometimes you receive questions which are so poorly researched they defy reasonable belief. I am just double checking with my CEO to make sure I am not going quite mad. There was a public announcement as to where that was going the other day and, no, it is not going on the Palmerston hospital site.

Ms WALKER: Okay, that is all I needed to know. Thank you very much.

Mr ELFERINK: Why did you not just do the homework?

Ms WALKER: I do a lot of homework. There is a lot out there to read and take on board.

Mr ELFERINK: You do not read the agreements, and clearly you do not ...

Ms WALKER: I do not sit here without a lot of paperwork before me without demonstrating ...

Mr ELFERINK: Clearly your advisers or whoever upstairs are not telling you the announcement was made the other day where the proposed site is.

Ms WALKER: Well, minister, your advisers on the fifth floor between the Treasurer, the Chief Minister and you are also out of whack, but that is an issue for you to clear up with Cabinet.

They are my questions around your opening statement. Which output can I ask questions in regard to the service contract of St John Ambulance? Which output does that come under?

Mr ELFERINK: Output Group 5. Sorry, you will have it down as 10 or something, will you not?

Ms WALKER: Health starts at Output Group 10.0.

Mr ELFERINK: Output Group 14.0.

Ms WALKER: Corporate and Governance.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms WALKER: Thank you. Under which output would I ask questions around human resource-type issues within the Health department?

Mr ELFERINK: Stick it in the same area. We are happy to answer them as part of Output Group 14.0.

Ms WALKER: For last year's estimates I was not here as the shadow for Health and you were not here as the Health minister. It was different people, although I note Mr Kalimnios and Dr Notaras are still here. I want to go back to that discussion about federal funding. There was quite significant news delivered to the Territory and other jurisdictions following the handing down of the federal budget that saw significant cuts to health. I go back to that conversation to see how we have travelled 12 months down the road.

If I compare the 2012-13 federal budget to the 2015-16 one I can see in the national health reform alone we would have been receiving a full \$20m more this year under those old arrangements than we are currently. What decisions and cuts have you had to make to accommodate this?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, sorry, just before you answer. Member for Nhulunbuy, have we now moved to whole-of-government questions or are you still on questions on the statement?

Ms WALKER: Sorry, Madam Chair. I am on whole-of-government questions.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, all right.

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2015-16 as they relate to the Department of Health. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy? Minister, when you are ready you can answer that question.

Mr ELFERINK: Sadly, yes, the Commonwealth has announced a number of cuts. Typically, they tried to repair the damage done by the Labor government before them to try to live within their means. It is always unpopular but necessary.

I understand there are a number of areas potentially affected. They are either continuing funding in 2015-16, currently under negotiation but unlikely to cease, or alternatively the funding will cease with no extension. The one I am most concerned about is Indigenous teenage sexual health and parent support, a remote program which was cut by a fraction over \$1m. The funding ceases on 30 June with no new funding.

The other one that concerns me less but is nevertheless not much fun is a \$36 000 cut to Central Australian hospitals. It is the \$1.03m in relation to remote sexual health and parent support that concerns me. We occupied this space. We have the Centre for Disease Control and a number of other organs which are attached to the Northern Territory government, not least of which is remote area nurses and clinics and those things which will continue to do testing and work in these areas. We do not welcome the loss of that \$1m. It is not a complete loss of sexual health services but it is a dent, yes.

Ms WALKER: The former Health minister, the member for Araluen, last year highlighted what she saw as some particularly serious cuts. I would just like to follow through on those but appreciate perhaps there has been a recalibration of what those priorities are. She had raised the six mental health subacute beds in Alice Springs that were potentially under threat with these costs. What has happened? Are they secured or are they still under threat?

Mr ELFERINK: They are still there as far as I know.

Ms WALKER: No threat?

Mr ELFERINK: I visited the site the other day and they looked like they were all still up and running. There are eight I am told.

Ms WALKER: Even better.

Mr ELFERINK: Not really, I would rather have no mental healthcare beds for want of demand, but I understand what you are saying.

Ms WALKER: The minister also raised - perhaps this is part of what you have just been talking about - preventative health programs for Indigenous youth. She referred to \$617 000 per year - a potential cut there for preventative health funding - which would see the ongoing loss of preventative health programs for children and schools. Is that one and the same?

Mr ELFERINK: No, in fact there is somebody who knows a lot more about this sitting next to me. I will flick it to you, Michael. This is Mr Kalimnios, the COO for the Top End Health Service. He can answer that question with far more accurately than I can.

Mr KALIMNIOS: Of the items that were listed last year the only one we have funded internally on an ongoing basis is the mental health beds. All the others were NPAs that have effectively ceased so those services have ceased. The NPA the minister is referring to is another one that is ceasing this year. It is not related to the ones in the previous year.

What the previous minister committed to last time, particularly around the subacute mental health beds in Central Australia, was to look at whether or not we would continue to fund those using NTG money, mainly on the basis that if we did not fund them we would cause additional cost in the acute beds in the hospital. That process has happened and there has been a reallocation of funds to ensure that service continues. The others basically stopped.

Ms WALKER: Those services that have cut or stopped are a direct result of the loss of Commonwealth funding?

Mr KALIMNIOS: Correct, yes.

Ms WALKER: It might be easier if I ask a question on notice to understand exactly what those services or programs were that had to cease under that. Would that be all right?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, no problem.

Madam CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record?

Ms WALKER: Minister, can you please provide a list of the programs and services in Health that have ceased as a result of the end of Commonwealth funding agreements?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: I can answer it now if you like.

Ms WALKER: If it is lengthy it is probably just as easy to take it on notice.

Mr ELFERINK: No, it is six lines.

Ms WALKER: Okay.

Mr ELFERINK: For the Indigenous Teenage Sexual Reproductive Health and Young Parents Support I gave the figure for Central Australia before, but it casts a wider net and is \$4m across the Territory. The delivery of renal health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Central Australia was \$1.7m; digital technology for BreastScreen is minus-\$600 000; improving public hospital services one-off reward funding is minus-\$214 000; and Shingla Hospital AusAID was minus-\$99 000, with a total minus-\$6.545m.

Ms WALKER: That \$4m for the Indigenous teenage health program is obviously a real blow. It is a very significant cut. What efforts were put in place to lobby the Commonwealth to somehow - I am sure with every other Health minister around the country lobbying for their jurisdictions needs ...

Mr ELFERINK: I have spoken to the feds about this. I have spoken directly to Sussan Ley about this, and other things I might add, particularly the ongoing funding in relation to activity-based funding which concerns me for the 2017-18 year onward. We are exposed in a number of areas. So far the response from the federal government in relation to this has been, 'get stuffed', and there is a rude letter following.

However, we continue to press on and we are having some success in other areas in negotiating ongoing funding. The federal government has made its decision in this space and we will continue to strive for better funding.

Once again, much of this funding is a response to people's lifestyle choices. You know what I think about passive welfare and the effect on health and those sorts of things. Realistically speaking, I remind all Territorians that your health is in your hands, look after it, it is the only one you have.

Ms WALKER: Unfortunately, for some of our most disadvantaged Indigenous teenage kids in our remote and urban areas, accepting that sort of responsibility is pretty tough. Anyway, I am sure we agree, minister ...

Mr ELFERINK: You know what? I hear the point, but we should also ask them to accept that sort of responsibility. I do not think it is an outrageous ask for them to look after themselves a bit. I get what you are saying. I understand all the arguments about advantage, disadvantage and all that sort of thing. Frankly, they have a role to play as well in their own health, and sometimes we make excuses where we should have expectations.

Ms WALKER: I will not comment further on that. You have lived in remote area, as do I, so I am devastated by it. Minister, the ...

Mr ELFERINK: I am not defending the Commonwealth cut, do not get me wrong there.

Ms WALKER: I know you are not. The \$1.7m reduction in renal health - given that we have a growing need for haemodialysis.

Ms GRIERSON: The \$1.7m was previously provided to an Aboriginal health service in Central Australia for renal dialysis services. That will cease in the 2015-16 year. There is also an agreement of \$10m, which is led through Housing, for remote renal housing and dialysis services.

Ms WALKER: Is the provider we are talking about Western Desert Dialysis services, which operates the Purple House and other communities?

Ms GRIERSON: Correct.

Mr ELFERINK: Purple House, yes.

Ms WALKER: I am struggling to understand, given the growing demand for renal dialysis services, that money would be withdrawn. At the same time I recognise it is a different bucket of money and the \$10m has been sitting there with Housing. Minister, a bit of a no-brainer here?

Madam CHAIR: Can I interrupt for the benefit of Hansard? That was Allison Grierson speaking previously.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, 60% of all presentations across the Northern Territory is for renal dialysis. If memory serves me, when I was the member for MacDonnell, whilst there were a number of people receiving renal dialysis in Kintore the elevated creatinine levels was a much more concerning problem because it showed an underlying and growing problem which is becoming manifest today. We continue to provide as many renal dialysis ...

Ms WALKER: Minister, I do not think your microphone is on.

Mr ELFERINK: Oh, I am sorry.

Ms WALKER: Not as sorry as Hansard, I imagine.

Mr ELFERINK: They are probably grateful not to hear me.

We continue to provide as many renal dialysis services as we can. There is an underlying problem that we have to be very mindful of. The capacity will eventually reach a threshold where there is only so much we can deliver. Then what? This is why I am trying to change the conversation about where the responsibility lies. I understand there are those issues, but the fact is this expectation that the government will wave a

magic wand and look after your kidney failure is something we will attend to, but we cannot do it indefinitely to a point where we spend the whole Territory budget on it - or more.

This is a challenge for us, and I seek to see improvements in people's behaviour. So much of what comes through the health system in the Northern Territory and in other places around the world is often the response to bad decisions by the people who get themselves into those chronic phases.

Ms WALKER: I cannot let that answer pass without comment.

Mr ELFERINK: Of course not.

Ms WALKER: It is not necessarily the behaviour of some of our most disadvantaged people that sees them end up on renal dialysis. I have constituents who have never touched a drop of alcohol in their life. It is to do with the predisposition that Indigenous Territorians have. To put it back on them accepting responsibility for their behaviour and their lifestyle, the same as Indigenous teenage kids, I find a pretty disappointing comment.

There needs to be a revisit of how dialysis services are delivered. I applaud the Purple House and Western Desert Dialysis for the arrangement they have moved into with Miwatj Health in my electorate. We now have people who are able to move from Darwin back to home country for treatment, and not take up chairs or accommodation here. The whole healing process is better on country.

Mr ELFERINK: How much should we spend? I am just curious. As the alternative Health minister, how much would you spend on renal dialysis?

Ms WALKER: I am not here to answer those questions. Of course we consider these things. I am not about to announce ...

Mr ELFERINK: You must have an idea.

Ms WALKER: I am not about to announce Labor opposition policy or what we would expend. I am deeply concerned we have a federal government which fails to adequately fund our service on a needs base. I know that you are disappointed with it as well, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: Of course I am disappointed. I will not say that for every person who has renal failure it is exclusively because of their lifestyle decision, but so many are. Too many are. When that occurs, I am trying to communicate to people that there eventually comes a time when the state may not be able to help them. I ask people to think about that now.

Ms WALKER: Thanks, I have no further questions. I am ready to move through to Output Group 13.0.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies.

OUTPUT GROUP 10.0 – TERRITORY-WIDE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE **Output 10.1 – Territory-Wide Primary Health Care**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 10.0, Territory-Wide Primary Health Care, Output 10.1, Territory-Wide Primary Health Care. Are there any questions?

Nyet? That concludes consideration of Output Group 10.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 11.0 – PENSIONER CONCESSIONS **Output 11.1 – Pensioner Concessions**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now consider Output Group 11.0, Pensioner Concessions, Output 11.1, Pensioner Concessions. Are there any questions relating to this? No?

Ms WALKER: I have not said no. I have one. Can you detail the issues about the administration of this scheme? For example, have you had an internal investigation into the scheme and the travel rorts associated with it? How were these alleged rorts supposed to have occurred? What is the alleged total cost?

Mr ELFERINK: I understand we have done internal auditing. I am a little on the horns of the dilemma here. I am the Attorney-General and I understand there is a matter sub judice in relation to the pensioner concession scheme. As the Attorney-General I am a little cautious about making any observations. An auditing process has occurred. Perhaps I can refer you to my CEO of Health to deal with this because of the difficulty I find myself in. I hope you do not mind, but I consider it more appropriate I do it that way.

Ms WALKER: No, that is fine. I understand.

Mr ELFERINK: Dr Notaras.

Dr NOTARAS: Len Notaras, CEO of Department of Health. Through you, Chair. Member for Nhulunbuy, there are two components of this. One component is the pensioner concession scheme which provides financial subsidies for services and goods to eligible senior citizens. That was reformed or changed in May 2014. There were certain changes which were not related necessarily to the matter you have raised.

The second aspect of this surrounds the investigation that has gone into that. My predecessor, Jeff Moffatt, was alerted to some irregularities midway through 2013 and at that time introduced the group Ernst & Young to audit what was thought to be irregularities. As the result of that, those irregularities were shown to be likely in place so the matter was then handed to a committee established that involved the Department of Health, the Solicitor for the Northern Territory, Police, Fire and Emergency Services representation and the Department of Treasury. That group has continued to audit 28 travel agents in the Northern Territory. I am not aware what the full outcome of that in-depth assessment is at this stage. Suffice to say one in particular has been the subject of extensive media coverage.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, Dr Notaras. No more questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 11.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 12.0 – DISEASE PREVENTION AND HEALTH PROTECTION **Output 12.1 – Environmental Health**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 12.0, Disease Prevention and Health Protection, Output 12.1, Environmental Health.

Ms WALKER: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: No? If there are no questions, that concludes consideration of Output 12.1.

Output 12.2 – Disease Control

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I call for questions on Output 12.2, Disease Control. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 12.2 and Output Group 12.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 13.0 – COMMUNITY TREATMENT AND EXTENDED CARE **Output Group 13.1 – Alcohol and Other Drugs**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 13.0, Community Treatment and Extended Care, Output 13.1, Alcohol and Other Drugs. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Yes. Minister, I turn to alcohol mandatory treatment, an incredibly costly system implemented by your government with very little evidence-based data to support its success or otherwise. The increase in Budget Paper No 3 for community treatment and extended care budget is attributed to the construction of the purpose-built AMT secure assessment centre ...

Mr ELFERINK: Are you talking about Stringybark Centre?

Ms WALKER: CAAAPU?

Mr ELFERINK: Oh, CAAAPU, yes.

Ms WALKER: Also the secure assessment facility at the Alice Springs Prison, I believe, so there is a total budget of \$7.9m going to Alice Springs to expand services there. Can you provide time lines and details on this?

Mr ELFERINK: I was at CAAAPU the other day. They still have the temporary arrangements in place. However, they were talking about starting work very shortly. Are you able to tell me more off the top of your head?

Dr NOTARAS: It will go to tender in the next couple of months, minister.

Ms WALKER: It will go to tender in the next couple of months. Thank you. The annual report states that there is a 20-bed unit that will be built in Katherine this year.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms WALKER: My understanding, if I believe the media, is that it is not proceeding. Is that correct?

Mr ELFERINK: No, it is not. I will tell you why. We have introduced the TBLs into Katherine. Whilst we had nothing shy of an astonishing effect in Tennant Creek when we introduced the TBLs, in Katherine the effect has been equally as pronounced. The \$5m which was set aside for that is probably not a good spend when we are now producing 1.7 eligible clients per month, which means probably about 15 to 18 clients a year. It is cheaper just to stick them on a bus, send them to Darwin and the Stringybark Centre can accept them.

It is testimony to the strength of the TBLs as an alcohol policy. Whilst I understand the Labor Party is critical of it, from the perspective of a long-term Territorian it has singularly been the most impressive organ to deal with public drunkenness I have ever seen.

Even if you reintroduce the Banned Drinker Register should you take government - that is obviously your policy - I would urge you in the strongest possible terms not to think the Banned Drinker Register can cover this field because it cannot. Do them both if you have to.

Ms WALKER: Given you are redirecting \$5m away from Katherine, does that mean TBLs have become PBLs, as in permanent beat locations?

Mr ELFERINK: I have no problem with the idea, and if they need to be PBLs it is something government will consider, as I have said publicly before.

Ms WALKER: I am trying to cull my questions. The 2014-15 referrals for assessment for mandatory treatment orders are almost half that predicted in the last budget. Why is that?

Mr ELFERINK: Without looking any further into it I suspect it is the effect of the TBLs, particularly in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, where they have all had a profound and marked effect.

Ms WALKER: Are we convinced that it is necessary to proceed with the \$7.9m in expanded services in Alice Springs given there are TBLs there?

Mr ELFERINK: There are TBLs there, but we still have presentations of drunkenness, sadly, and when that occurs we respond.

Ms WALKER: I had this discussion with your predecessor, the member for Araluen, when she was minister, but I will put it to you. When will you commit to an independent review of the alcohol mandatory treatment system and release all relevant data so that an evidence-based approach can evaluate the success or otherwise by an independent organisation at arm's length from government?

Mr ELFERINK: I presume that my predecessor will have said something like once a bit of water has passed under the bridge we will look at the performance of it and if we feel that it needs an external assessment we will make sure it is done.

Ms WALKER: When?

Mr ELFERINK: When some water has passed under the bridge. This policy has now been operational for a couple of years. I would wait for three or four years at least before I started to get an independent

assessment because by that stage you would get a sense of success rates. When a person gives up drinking, how long have they stopped drinking before they are no longer drinkers? A month, a week, five minutes, 20 years? If so, the evaluation process has to be structured with that in mind.

As a department we will continue to evaluate the system and the treatment program, and we have a steering group looking at it. If it has to go out externally - I would not suggest that the department is so dishonest that it would misreport the results of its internal evaluations.

Ms WALKER: I am not suggesting that the department would be dishonest by any stretch of the imagination, but these quarterly reports tell us very little about providing any indicators to success. All it provides us with is numbers of who is in, in which location, who is being income managed and who has left the treatment program. That is all we hear. We do not hear how many people have been through the system more than twice. This is why, given that there is millions of taxpayer dollars going into investing in this, it is high time there be an independent at-arm's-length study.

Mr ELFERINK: We will get that costed and tell you how much money you have just spent.

Ms WALKER: It would be worthwhile to provide an evidence-based and open report into the success or otherwise.

Mr ELFERINK: Are you suggesting the department would not produce an open one?

Ms WALKER: You will not commit to any time frame to review other than, I think you said ...

Mr ELFERINK: We have a steering committee looking at it within the department.

Ms WALKER: ... three to four years of its start-up? Is that what you are saying?

Mr ELFERINK: I am saying we have a steering committee inside the department looking at it right now. A call for an independent party to do an assessment somehow suggests that the Department of Health is not capable of doing this research. I disagree.

Ms WALKER: This is why we have organisations like Menzies School of Health Research which has expertise and no conflicts of interest ...

Mr ELFERINK: Are you suggesting that somebody inside the department would be dishonest because they have a conflict of interest?

Ms WALKER: No, I did not say they were being dishonest, but I am suggesting that ...

Mr ELFERINK: So what does a conflict of interest imply?

Ms WALKER: I am suggesting there is not necessarily the expertise and that people may want to be guided by their minister.

Mr ELFERINK: There is an absence of expertise about alcohol and other drugs in the Health department of the Northern Territory - seriously? Is that your argument?

Ms WALKER: Minister, what I am suggesting is that there is a vast array of expertise in these matters. This is why ...

Mr ELFERINK: What is the budget for alcohol and other drugs? Is it \$88m?

Ms WALKER: ... consultants are engaged by governments over the years. The reality is you do not want transparency or accountability. You do not want people to see ...

Mr CONLAN: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chair! Standing Order 62 I think it is. There is a clear breach with regard to this Estimates Committee. The member is ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, it is argumentative ...

Mr ELFERINK: I am feeling very berated, Mr Deputy Chair - badgered, perhaps.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: ... and putting imputations on it. If we could get to a question regarding the budget it would be fantastic.

Ms WALKER: Apologies that I have offended the sensibilities of the comrade member for Greateorex.

Mr ELFERINK: I am very sensitive person, but I turn to the great American philosopher, T-Swift, 'Some players are gonna play, play, play; others are gonna fake, fake, fake; I am just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake it off'.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, minister.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We are all a lot smarter.

Ms WALKER: I have finished on that output. No, there is one more on Alcohol and Other Drugs.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Fire away.

Ms WALKER: Minister, given the significant impacts of alcohol abuse as it pertains to FASD, a 180-page report and a bipartisan committee of the parliament chaired by Speaker Purick what is the government's response to those recommendations which starts with calling on it to prioritise ...

Mr ELFERINK: I refer you to all of the answers I gave during the Family and Community Services section on this which was quite comprehensive. Save yourself some time and go back and read what I said before under DCF.

Ms WALKER: When I have time, I will go back and see the transcript. Similarly, is there an investment into the issues associated with ice, given you raised it this morning as Attorney-General?

Mr ELFERINK: An investment in relation to ice. We have a parliamentary committee, there is a national committee and we have a methamphetamine response. There is an increase, although not a substantial increase, in activity in relation to methamphetamines in the Northern Territory. Once you talk about this sort of thing, short of taking blood tests you are inquiring on more subjective forms of information.

I do not need to give you a lecture about methamphetamines at length. As a government we keep a close eye on it. It is budgeted for within the domain of Alcohol and Other Drugs. We provide mental health services through the Cowdy Ward and presentations there. There are a number of non-government organisations that cover the field. Federally this is an issue; we are aware of it as an issue at the Commonwealth level and there is a Commonwealth task force. Yes, ice is a problem and we are responding to it. But we also look forward to a response of both the federal task force and the Northern Territory parliamentary committee currently looking into it.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, minister. Mr Deputy Chair, I have finished in that output.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Wonderful. That concludes consideration of Output 13.1.

Output 13.2 – Disability Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consider Output 13.2, Disability Services.

Ms WALKER: We have questions. That responsibility in our shadow Cabinet sits with the member for Casuarina so we will swap seats.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much for accommodating the changeover. I will go straight to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which I am sure is no surprise. I understand there are issues with the trial, so I want you to outline what some of those issues are and your position on them please.

Mr ELFERINK: This is an insurance scheme. The National Disability Insurance Scheme is run by the National Disability Insurance Agency. I have raised a number of concerns I have in relation to it, and I continue to raise those concerns now. If we were to sign up to the National Disability Insurance Scheme – and we are trying our hardest to sign up to it – it is a scheme which will cost us \$99m a year in insurance premiums. Like any insurance scheme somebody pays the premiums.

When the idea was postulated originally the states were supposed to be bypassed completely by the scheme or being asked to pay the premiums. Finally, the Commonwealth is in charge and it carries any further liabilities. The problem from my perspective is that the premium in the Northern Territory is \$99m. We currently provide \$88m into disability services, so we are already \$11m on the wrong side of the argument when it comes to the money we would pay as a jurisdiction. I would be happy to sign up to that if I could be convinced the services would cover the field.

I pause here briefly to look at the Barkly trial. I am glad they ran the trial in the Barkly because that is the place where you pour acid on it. We went through our records and discovered 103 individuals who qualified for receiving services from us now. Fifty-six of those individuals were discounted by virtue of the fact that they did not meet the benchmarks for attention by the scheme. As a consequence of that, more than half the people we provide services to in the Barkly would not be captured by the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

That concerns me because our original look said we would expect to pick up about \$20m worth of extra expenditure - people in prison, those sorts of places where the scheme would not go. Unfortunately I now question that number, particularly if we would have to put a parallel service together to capture that half who were not picked up in the bush.

The scheme was the product of the last federal election. Here is the political reality: when somebody holds up a puppy in the federal election the last thing you would do is argue about how cute the puppy is. Labor ran with the idea; the Liberal Party nationally committed itself to it as well. There were many people in the industry who were saying, 'This is a great idea, it is done in other jurisdictions', and everybody expected the puppy to grow into a Labrador. That is fine if you are in Sydney or Melbourne. My concern is what it looks like in the bush in remote communities. There it could well grow up to be a Doberman.

The other component is even if you do run the scheme in the bush and cover the field entirely to deliver the services to everybody we currently deliver services to, you get an evaluation done and that evaluation enables a person to then receive an amount of money in accordance with their disability, which they can spend.

The question I put to the people who run the scheme is: where in Lajamanu would you buy a wheelchair? Who would provide it? If you are in Papunya, and you have an employee on the ground - this is part of their sales pitch; they will tell you this is great for local employment - where does that employee work from? From their home they share with 29 other people? No. Do you build a block for an office there? That will immediately bankrupt the scheme if you do that for all the remote communities across Australia. Do you work out of the local health clinic? That will probably be the response. That is what we do now and we do it for less money and we cover more people. Those are my problems with the scheme.

It would probably work in Darwin. I suspect there will be a certain amount of agitation about Darwin organisations taking advantage of this. But I have to consider all people in the Northern Territory, and how this lands in places like Papunya and Mount Liebig is very difficult.

This, by the way, has been acknowledged by Mitch Fifield, the federal minister. I have raised all these issues with him twice. You will notice in the last communique put out by the minister that I have reserved the Territory's position, subject to bilateral agreements.

We will run another trial based more closely on the My Way model out of Western Australia. To a large extent the sort of stuff we do now we may be able to find our way through it on a bilateral agreement.

Mitch Fifield has said quite publically that elegance of design will not drive how the scheme rolls out. He now appreciates it will have to be different in different places. That is what we are currently having a conversation about.

If it turns out that on balance this is not good for people in the bush then I will continue to express reservations until such time as we have a result. I want to do it on a no detriment basis for the Northern Territory.

Ms MOSS: I am sure you can appreciate there is a range of different views on this and many people are concerned about talk we might pull out of it. There are legitimate concerns about that as well.

Mr ELFERINK: I am trying very hard not to put us into that position.

Ms MOSS: There has been a lot of talk about the potential for another trial. Have there been any locations earmarked for that?

Mr ELFERINK: We are negotiating one now. Bear with me, I do not know if I can announce it yet. We have not announced it yet, it is under discussion. It will be a trial site designed to test the scheme. We need to test it in a Territory context. I hope we come up with a model which works, which will be great. I do not know what the end result looks like yet. That is very hard for me to say. We are genuinely and directly working with the federal government at an officer level at the moment, to make sure we can finally come away with a model that has no detriment to the Territory's position.

Ms MOSS: What is the time frame for the alternative trial?

Mr ELFERINK: As long as it needs to be. I do not know whether the time frames have been nailed down yet.

Ms MOSS: I mean for the alternative trial.

Mr ELFERINK: It will be full scheme operational by 2019. We are working to that time frame. We are genuinely working to get into that space. I will look after the interests of the Territory first. That is my starting and finishing position.

Ms MOSS: Are you in a position to detail how many organisations are delivering disability services in the NDIS trial area?

Mr ELFERINK: Are we talking about the Barkly trial area?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: Not many, I suspect. Under three. That just tells you part of the issue with the scheme.

Ms MOSS: Those are the reasons we have a trial. It is a good thing those issues are being discovered at this point in time.

Mr ELFERINK: Do not get me wrong. I am grateful the trial has been run in place like the Barkly because if you trial a scheme, try to fail. That is the way the car industry makes new cars. They keep working on things until they break, then you know what the parameters and limitations of whatever piece of equipment you are building. The NDIS is no different. It is already abundantly clear that the original proposal of a single universal scheme that runs in Melbourne will not work in Mount Liebig. The federal government is not looking for design elegance, it is looking for a practical outcome.

Ms MOSS: From talking to both consumers and the sector there are concerns about the unknowns of the NDIS which is understandable. Are there any activities that have been undertaken by the office of disability in working with sectors to get ready for the roll out of NDIS, and for consumers as well?

Mr ELFERINK: We keep them advised as to what is going on. I well understand when you said there are people who are concerned about us not signing up to the scheme. There will be people in Darwin who will want NDIS to operate.

Ms MOSS: There are people outside of Darwin as well who want this to operate.

Mr ELFERINK: It throws up those sorts of challenges. Making one size fit all, even within the Territory, will be a challenge. We continue to remain in communication with organisations, and my door remains open to them. I had a number of meetings with various organisations about how the Territory has positioned itself. They understand what I am talking about.

Ultimately this is supposed to be rolled out in such a fashion that the Territory steps away from the delivery of disability services. At the moment we might end up being positioned for the delivery of disability services next to a scheme. There are two schemes. The Territory scheme covers everybody who was not covered under the NDIS. If that is the case that is not a satisfactory outcome and it completely defeats the purpose of the Commonwealth takeover.

The acknowledgement by the NDIA that state jurisdictions might become the providers of last resort is already an admission of difficulty in this area. Moreover in the Territory context, in many instances the Territory will be the provider of only resort.

Ms MOSS: Minister, why are you expecting almost 300 fewer clients accessing community support services in your Disability Services sector?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not know. To add a little more, in relation to the NDIA we know there were 24 - I presume this is the Barkly trial - registered, and four or five are actually providing a service. You get a sense of it that way. In regard to 300 fewer deliveries, I am sure an assessment is done by the department, and the department will be able to tell you.

Ms Walford, would you like to respond to that? Yes. It is based on the funding arrangements and the service we deliver. In Central Australia one of the interesting things is that for person who receives disability funding, particularly in remote areas through a health clinic or whatever, often their disability will not be their major problem in life. You do not try to respond to demand, you deliver services where you can.

Ms MOSS: How many staff members are dedicated to Disability Services within the department?

Mr ELFERINK: That is a hard one to answer. Part of the reason is that in remote areas the health nurse in a remote community will deliver disability services provision as well as acute services and chronic services. We have staff dedicated to the department itself, yes, but it is not broken down by division.

If somebody presents at a health clinic in Mount Liebig, Yuendumu, Nyirripi or somewhere like that, they will present as a person with a disability issue, a chronic issue or an acute issue. We keep statistics, but it does not break down in that fashion in department-for-department level. Yes, we have a core section in Health House that governs the \$88m expenditure.

Ms MOSS: How many staff are in the Office of Disability in Health House?

Mr ELFERINK: Probably about five or six. We will get that number for you.

Ms MOSS: Thank you, I appreciate that. Can you provide some detail about how you currently deliver ...

Mr ELFERINK: I obviously cannot count properly because in Health House there might be only a handful, but across the whole division we have 200 people.

Ms MOSS: Can you please provide some detail about how you currently deliver services to the bush?

Mr ELFERINK: Painfully, I imagine. As I described before, a lot of this stuff is done through the health clinics. I believe teams move around and deliver disability-specific services, but with a health clinic - having worked in the bush in police stations, you become officer in charge of almost bloody everything. We deliver health services through the clinics, and that includes disability services if and when required. The nurse, or occasionally the doctor, on the ground will be the one to provide the service.

Disability services are also provided through non-government health services such as Miwatj which, by the way, knocked my socks off when I visited some of its institutions. What a great organisation that is.

Ms MOSS: With the establishment of a portfolio area for Disability Services last year, can you please outline any new initiatives or directions undertaken by the Office of Disability Services?

Mr ELFERINK: The Office of Disability Services continues to deliver its services. Starting new programs is a bit difficult under the NDIS environment we find ourselves. I confess that a large slice of my attention has been consumed by the NDIS argument.

Nevertheless, I have continued to meet with a number of peak, as well as specific, organisations. We continue to roll out \$88m worth of services across the Territory, and intend to do so this year. For specific extra programs, the focus is on the NDIS.

Ms MOSS: Thank you, minister. Those were all the questions I had on this output.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration on Output 13.2.

Output 13.3 – Mental Health

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 13.3, Mental Health. Are there any questions?

Ms MOSS: I understand this section is also split across the Top End Health Services section and the Central Australian Health Services section. Does this explain all of the reductions in funding relating to this output?

Mr ELFERINK: No, because some of those are part of the Commonwealth area. This is the problem with the spaghetti - here comes the explanation.

Department of Health 2014-15 budget – sorry, I worked with final estimates and I will work with the original budget which was \$11.5m. The final estimates said \$7.5m, which looks on the face of it like a cut of \$4m. For the next budget it is \$9m. Health services have jumped from \$40m to \$45m and then the next year's budget is \$48m.

The effect is there is no real change in health services if you look at the total amount spent across the boards, as well as the department. The original budget for 2014-15 was \$52.2m. The final estimate is \$52.7m, so it has gone up by about \$0.5m. Next year it is \$57.4m.

That extra money \$3m was new money I specifically picked up through the budget process to be able to produce outcomes for the people of the Northern Territory. I said to my Cabinet colleagues at the time that if they created a new specific mental health policy area, they had to throw some goodwill at it in the form of cash. I confess to you publicly that I did a pretty ready, rough and dirty Cabinet submission simply to get into the budget cycle, because I became the minister in late January and I had to be ready to go budget Cabinet by March. We did something pretty rough and ready and we extracted from my fellow Cabinet colleagues an extra \$3m to go across a number of areas.

When I turned my mind to what this should look like, there were three areas that leapt out at me which I was concerned about. The first area was the relationship between the court system and mental health issues in the community.

This was, in a large slice, inspired by my conversation with Jackie Lacey, the District Attorney of the City of Los Angeles with whom I spent a surprising amount of time. She was able to talk to me about her passion of the intersection between mental health issues and the criminal justice system. It resonated with me because of what I had seen through my own experience. I wrote a letter to Ms Lacey recently congratulating her for bringing about policy change halfway around the world, despite the fact she cannot yet manage it in her own jurisdiction.

As a result of that, we have now budgeted for two clinicians, one in Darwin and one in the Alice Springs courthouse. We are discussing with the Chief Magistrate how that can be effectively used. We have complications coming through the Tamarind Centre under the section 77 issues that arise out of the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*.

The second component is primary mental healthcare services in remote and regional areas which needed to be bolstered. I was very quick to bring out the suicide action plan, which was prepared in the department some time ago. I was anxious to bring it forward and make sure was implemented. That is now being implemented. Part of that is we are now able to roll out the suicide action plan with this partial focus on remote and regional primary mental healthcare services, which you would agree would be a positive step forward.

The final component is something I have often been concerned about within the mental health domain in the Northern Territory. If you take something like the Tamarind Centre, for argument's sake, which provides good outpatient services, and you have an inpatient service like Cowdy, they do not sit next to each other like that. They sit apart from each other and there is a large space in between where there is not much in sub-acute assistance. There is Papaya House and a few other institutions.

Whilst I was slow to pick this up - that was not my suggestion; it came from a much sharper mind that mind. Thank you, Ms Gale. It was suggested to me that rather than simply saying we will buy a handful of beds for a few shekels, we should buy a couple of people to advocate through housing - whatever that housing might be; public housing, private housing, etcetera through NGOs whatever - to see if we can start to get those advocates landing people in beds, or solutions in sub-acute accommodation. We need to see if we can do it that way rather than just buying a couple of beds.

It is a novel idea that is untested, but I am increasingly attracted to it because even if that person lands three or four people, they have already paid for themselves. If they then land 20 people, then so much the better. How that goes into the future is up to the people we get to do it. We are working through it with some ambition and expectation that we will get a good result in that area. Whether it works or not, we will assess in due course.

Ms MOSS: When do you expect those advocates to be operational?

Mr ELFERINK: When the budget comes out on 1 July, I think it is. We will be recruiting to those positions shortly thereafter, I imagine.

Ms MOSS: Where are you envisaging they will be based?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine there will be one in Darwin, one in Alice Springs. The sub-acute environment is better in Alice Springs, in my opinion, considering the size of the population, than it is in Darwin.

Ms MOSS: I am interested in how Territorians would know to access or connect with the advocates?

Mr ELFERINK: That is part of their advocacy role. They then meet with many of these organisations that have contact with people who have mental health issues and who can be identified as needing that sub-acute or semi-assisted environment. Then they work with those organisations – whatever those organisations are - to place them. These people will be advocates in every sense of the word.

Ms MOSS: It is new information, so I am thinking about this concept and advocacy ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, that is fine. I realise it is not what we normally do.

Ms MOSS: Advocacy is something that has been raised with me as an issue, so I am wondering whether these funded advocates would be in a position to assist people who are between different housing arrangements, transitional ...

Mr ELFERINK: The answer is I hope so. They will not run around with a cheque book saying, 'Here is a cheque here, there is a cheque there'. They have to make their positions work, so it will largely come down to the sort of person you hire. If we get somebody with nine-to-five attitude, 'I will turn up to work and just do enough to get by and close up the door', I suspect it will struggle. But if we get one of those people who is a genuine livewire who loves what they do - and I suspect that is the sort of person who will be attracted to this job - then we may be unleashing a demon we may not be able to stick back in the box. That would be fine too.

Ms MOSS: In that particular initiative, are there any plans around remote advocacy?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine they will stretch themselves as far as they can. I would love to cover the field in the way you say. That is why we are targeting the primary issues in the remote areas more stridently, because we will be looking for NGOs to pick up that money and roll out primary mental healthcare services as much as they can, as a result of the grant money that comes through the system.

Ms MOSS: I look forward to some more detail around that as it becomes available.

Mr ELFERINK: So am I. I am very curious to see how some of this will go.

Ms MOSS: Yes. I am interested in quite a few priorities outlined - the court system, mental health primary, mental healthcare, inpatient health units. While \$3m is a very welcome investment, it does not seem like it is a lot to cover all of the areas you have outlined. I am interested for you to break down what that \$3m covers in real terms.

Mr ELFERINK: It is probably a question for the next set of estimates because we will see how these people and money are performing by that stage. I am not one of these people who thinks spending more money is a solution. I like to spend smarter if we can. It sounds like a platitude, but one of the things I am saying to the health boards in the Top End and Central Australia is I expect them to operate and be smarter in how they do things. I will give you an example.

Take something like the computer issues I alluded to in my opening statement. That is a \$100m fix. I spluttered into my coffee cup when I was told how much it would be. I should have been alert to it when

the public servant said: 'Sit down, minister, would you like a cup of tea? We want to talk to you about a computer system.'

The problem we have in the Northern Territory is our computer system is written in a computer language equivalent of Sanskrit. If we want to speak to the original programmers half the time we will have to pull out a Ouija board to talk to them. It is a system which is becoming increasingly fragile over time. So rather than just saying let us find \$100m, I am telling the department to do a scoping study, but part of that study should be how we can use the system to recover. We could recover a whole lot more money going forward from effective billing systems for private health insurance and people on Medicare cards, and those type of things.

The guesstimate at this stage is \$20m per year. All of a sudden a \$100m computer system becomes a lot more feasible when you look at a five-year full cost recovery. It is trying to think a bit more commercially about the way we do things, which is why you would use advocates rather than just get a couple of beds.

Ms MOSS: I am trying to understand that \$3m you discussed in your opening statement. What, exactly, is it covering?

Mr ELFERINK: As I said, it is the two clinical positions in the courts, whatever grant money we can put into remote and regional areas. You have four paid positions plus grant money attached to it.

Ms MOSS: What proportion of that \$3m is the grants?

Mr ELFERINK: We have a graph apparently. I love graphs. We will get it for you in a second.

It is new money and we are trying to stretch that \$3m as far as we can. We will be looking to NGOs for service delivery particularly in relation to the remote and regional matters.

Ms MOSS: I understand there is a suicide prevention coordination committee. How many times has that committee met to date?

Mr ELFERINK: A good question. When I read the plan originally and on its launch date, I said the one shortcoming was the quality of reporting. I have insisted we have a quality assurance program stuck into it. The committee has now met four times. It is now getting a reporting system. Against each of the key performance indicators it will be reporting on a regular basis, essentially through a traffic light system. It will be saying, 'Yes, we are on target' or 'Oops, we are not so much on target, there is a problem here', or 'Oh, my goodness gracious, we are way off beam here'. For that process of reporting they are meeting every two months to make sure that the KPIs are being reached.

I am not a great believer in plans when you do not have a reporting system attached to it - otherwise you have a bit of paper.

Ms MOSS: I have other questions that I will put to you in writing and seek a briefing on. I am cognisant of time, so that is all from me on that output. Thank you very much.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes Output Group 13.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 14.0 - CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Output 14.1 - Corporate and Governance

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 14.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 14.1, Corporate and Governance.

Ms WALKER: No. I had indicated that I would ask some questions there, but in the interests of time, no.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consider of Output 14.1.

Output 14.2 - Shared Services Provided

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 14.2, Shared Services Provided. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consider of Output 14.2.

OUTPUT GROUP 15.0 – NATIONAL CRITICAL CARE AND TRAUMA RESPONSE
Output 15.1 – National Critical Care and Trauma Response

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 15.0, National Critical Care and Trauma Response, Output 15.1, National Critical Care and Trauma Response. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No thanks.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: This concludes consideration of Output Group 15.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 16.0 – HEALTH SERVICES
Output 16.1 – Top End and Central Australia Health Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 16.0, Health Services, Output 16.1, Top End and Central Australia Health Services. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: If I was to ask a question about Gove hospital would that come under Output 17?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: There is no 17 in my ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I presume Output Group 17.0.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Ms WALKER: Can I ask my question?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to punch out to 17 or do you want to hold it under 16? It is a Top End one?

Ms WALKER: Yes.

OUTPUT GROUP 17.0 – TOP END HEALTH SERVICES
Top End Hospitals

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will consider Output Group 17.0 Top End Health Services, Top End Hospitals. Okay, fire away.

Ms WALKER: Minister, I need to ask this question as local member for Nhulunbuy. The \$13m attached to Gove District Hospital for the ED upgrade that was committed by the former federal government a few years ago, whilst it appears in the annual report and in Budget Paper No 4, no mention of it has been made anywhere else in budget papers. What is the status of this upgrade?

Mr ELFERINK: The status is that \$7.7m has been allocated to Gove District Hospital to build a stand-alone emergency department. I understand you have been briefed on that. It is based on demand. As I described earlier, demand is what drives these decisions. However, the remaining \$5.3m is not lost to the Northern Territory; it will go to a multipurpose facility on the Alice Springs Hospital campus.

Ms WALKER: You have just confirmed what I was told at my briefing. It was important that I get that on the record.

Mr ELFERINK: That is fine; I understand that.

Ms WALKER: My suspicious mind queried why it has not appeared as revoted works or anywhere else in budget papers.

Mr ELFERINK: It appeared. I noticed in Budget Paper No 4 it is still looks at \$13m. I am not quite sure why that happened. I immediately raised the question when I saw that and I fully expected the question from you. Nevertheless, the \$7.7m is there for a stand-alone ED at Nhulunbuy hospital, which is a splendid-looking hospital. I had a chance to look through it the other day and they do a terrific job there.

Ms WALKER: You would have recognised the ED, compared to Alice Springs ED, probably looks like the sick room I attended at my primary school in the late 1960s.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, and that is why it is being upgraded.

Ms WALKER: Good, it is only a couple of years behind. Thanks, minister. I have no further questions in that output.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any non-output-specific budget-related questions? Mine ends at 16, does yours go further?

Ms WALKER: Yes, I have.

Mr ELFERINK: I have Top End Health Service, Central Australia Health Service.

Ms WALKER: I have 18 and 19. I am waiting for budget Output 19.0.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 17.0 relating to the Department of Health.

OUTPUT GROUP 18.0 – CENTRAL AUSTRALIA HEALTH SERVICE

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 18.0, Central Australia Health Services. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 18.0. Is there a 19?

Ms WALKER: There is.

OUTPUT GROUP 19.0 – HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSIONER

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 19.0, Health and Community Services Commissioner. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: I have questions of the commissioner who has kindly availed herself to be here today, but I have a couple of questions for the minister as well.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I have to read some stuff.

Mr ELFERINK: For the honourable member's attention, I have asked what a fully independent review of the AMT process would be worth. It is estimated to be between \$100 000 and \$200 000.

Ms WALKER: That is a lot less than the cost of AMT treatment to date.

Mr ELFERINK: \$200 000, okay?

Ms WALKER: Given the strain your staff are already under they would probably welcome the opportunity for an independent arm's-length consultancy to be engaged in that process.

Mr ELFERINK: I expect a lot of the people who work in the public service, and I expect a lot of myself.

I introduce Ms Lisa Coffey, the outgoing Health and Community Services Commissioner. She is an independent officeholder; therefore I will leave her in a position to answer questions.

Ms WALKER: Minister, I cannot ask you questions in this session?

Mr ELFERINK: You have asked for her to be here.

Ms WALKER: I know, and I have questions for her but I have a question for you first.

Mr ELFERINK: Ask her the questions you have first.

Ms WALKER: I am not sure that asking Ms Coffey for her view on the minister's very political appointment yesterday of a senior adviser from his office to the position is appropriate.

Mr CONLAN: No, that would be completely out of order, member for Nhulunbuy. Please proceed with questions for the commissioner.

Ms WALKER: Is the commissioner aware of the process that was undertaken to recruit to her replacement? Was there a panel, were there advertisements, were there any criteria against their selection, was there any as semblance of public service process at all and would the commissioner be involved in that process?

Ms COFFEY: I am not aware of any process; I cannot comment on that.

Ms WALKER: Can I ask what your qualifications are, Ms Coffey, in holding that position?

Ms COFFEY: I have been in the role for the last five years. Prior to that I was the Acting Anti-Discrimination Commissioner for a period of 18 months, and the deputy in that office for a period of two years prior to that. I have a legal background, legal qualifications and customer service experience.

Ms WALKER: Legal qualifications as in a law degree?

Ms COFFEY: Yes, and a Masters as well.

Ms WALKER: And a masters as well. Thank you, Ms Coffey. I am sorry I put those questions to you, but given the minister had walked away, it was a bit disappointing. He has made a very political appointment and we are all very aware of that ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Can we lose the argumentative stuff and just ask the questions, member for Nhulunbuy? That would be fabulous.

Ms WALKER: Ms Coffey, I want to ask you some questions in relation to your output and your annual report. Your report clearly demonstrates quite a significant increase in the complaints you are receiving and handling. From your report in 2014, staff of the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission handled 271 complaints, 56 of which were already open at the beginning of the financial year, and 250 new complaints were received in 2013-14. In your words, that is a significant increase on the previous years. Do you have an inkling as to what has generated the increase in complaints? Is it that people become more aware of the service?

Ms COFFEY: It is very difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for the increase. I would like to think that there is more awareness of the commission as a result of the commission being established as a stand-alone office from 2010. We do a lot to promote the work we do and the complaints resolution focus we have. I like to think that has contributed to the increase in the usage of our service.

Ms WALKER: Looking at the appropriation to the output for the health and community services commission, given you have seen an increase of 35% for direct complaints and 66% overall, which is huge, there is a minuscule increase to your budget. Is that appropriation adequate for the service you are trying to provide?

Ms COFFEY: Everyone would say if you had more money you could do more work; that is quite obvious. We are managing with the budget we have in order to handle the number of complaints we have received in the previous financial year. In this financial year, the complaint numbers are looking roughly the same.

We have closed a higher number of complaints. I expect that by the end of this financial year we will have closed more complaints than we did last year. So that is an indicator that we are doing some work in that space. Everyone would say if we had more money we could do more things.

Ms WALKER: I am sure. You are obviously a very efficient agency to do the work you do. How many FTEs do you have within the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission?

Ms COFFEY: Our general rate of FTE is 6.5 when we are fully operational and fully staffed.

Ms WALKER: I make the observation that the impact of not sufficiently funding bodies such as the health services complaints commission you look after, is that the time taken to resolve matters blows out with the potential for decreasing confidence in the commission. From what you are telling me it sounds as if you are working incredibly efficiently to get through the workload you need to.

If I look to other areas, there is a story about what happens when you have cuts in oversight bodies, as Health and Child Protection, which impacts upon the quality of the service. You do not have to comment on that if you do not wish to.

I also want to highlight from your report - and I realise we are just on 4 pm - the increase in prisoner inquiries. You stated on page 6:

There was a significant increase in enquiries from the Correctional Centres in 2013/14, with 146 enquiries (32%) up from 89 the year prior. It appears that this increase may reflect resourcing issues in prison medical services as 39% of these enquiries related to access to services, and 40% related to treatment.

In following through with those issues, where are they going - back to the Health department to raise a red flag for the need for additional funding?

Ms COFFEY: We handle prison complaints rather informally. We have a direct line for the prisoners to call us to raise the concerns. We have something similar to a protocol, I suppose, with the health service delivery within the prison. It allows us to then address those issues directly with the prison health service.

Ms WALKER: Okay.

Ms COFFEY: I am not sure if that answers your question.

Ms WALKER: No, that is fine. One last question. Do you sit on the Health and Community Services Complaints Review Committee?

Ms COFFEY: No, I do not. It is an independent committee.

Ms WALKER: Are you able to tell me how many times that committee has sat in the past year?

Ms COFFEY: It has not sat in the past year.

Ms WALKER: It had not sat in the previous year, either.

Ms COFFEY: That is correct.

Ms WALKER: Do you know why that is?

Ms COFFEY: When the complaints process is finished, we advise both parties - both the complainant and the respondent - that they have the right to seek a review of the handling of the complaint.

Ms WALKER: I see.

Ms COFFEY: It is not a review of my decision, but it is a review of the way in which the complaint was handled.

Ms WALKER: Okay.

Ms COFFEY: Everyone is provided with that information and invited to raise those concerns. They are also invited to raise their concerns directly with me. There is a specific e-mail address they can send those concerns to. I will always review a file and have a look, at the first instance, if people would like to go down that path. But we simply do not get many requests for those reviews.

Ms WALKER: The review committee is only required to sit where there is a review required?

Ms COFFEY: Where there is a review requested.

Ms WALKER: That is probably good news that they have not sat; that you are making the right decisions.

Ms COFFEY: Hopefully people are satisfied that we are reviewing where necessary, as well as internally.

Ms WALKER: Indeed.

Madam CHAIR: I am sorry to interrupt. It is 4.01 pm so we will have to say goodbye, then say hello to some new people.

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, before you do that, I thank the commissioner. I wish her well in the future and thank her for the job she has done. I also thank the Health minister and all of his hard-working people who have been here today answering questions. Thank you very much.

Madam CHAIR: Absolutely. We will now have a 10-minute break. We will resume at 4.10 pm.

That concludes Minister Elferink in all of his portfolios. At 4.10 pm we will resume with minister Price and the Department of Local Government and Community Services.

The committee suspended

MINISTER PRICE'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. We are here with minister Price and the Department of Local Government and Community Services. I welcome you, minister, and invite you to introduce the people accompanying you today.

Mrs PRICE: Madam Chair, I introduce Mr Michael Chiodo, Chief Executive of the Department of Local Government and Community Services, Ms Noelene Swanson, Executive Director Strategy, Community Development and Community Services, and Ms Wati Kerta, the department's Chief Financial Officer.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I will invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal-related questions before moving on to output specific questions and finally non-output specific budget-related questions.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first followed by committee members. Finally other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on the output.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mrs PRICE: Madam Chair, I was very happy to take on responsibility for the portfolio of Local Government on 12 December 2014 when the Department of Local Government and Regions and the Department of Community Services were merged to form the Department of Local Government and Community Services. The combined elements brought into one department complemented one another to focus on building stronger regions and remote communities. We are achieving this through effective local government and the delivery and coordination of critical remote central infrastructure projects and services.

One of the many measures we have put in place to strengthen service delivery in the bush is to prioritise the sustainability of the local government sector. Since coming to government we have increased ongoing direct funding to the sector by \$10m.

Budget 2015-16 provides just under \$79m in local government grant funding for Northern Territory councils. However, sustainability is not just about money, it is also about making sure that councils are making decisions for the good of the people they serve and ensuring accountability and transparency in the use of public money. Where there is strong evidence of any council not acting in the best interest of its people or making irresponsible financial decisions strong action has and will be taken. I make no apologies for holding councils to account.

Local government in the Territory needs to be strong, workable and vibrant, serving the needs of the people it represents. We have improved support to the councils through an agreement with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, LGANT, which commenced on 1 September 2014. The agreement is titled Local Government Excellence in the Northern Territory. The three-year agreement

focuses on capacity building and growing expertise across the local government sector to enhance the long-term sustainability of local government in the Territory.

When we came into government, we promised a greater voice to the bush and I have been delivering that through the 63 local authorities and the realisation of the West Daly Regional Council. There are now approximately 750 local authority members providing important input into local government matters.

An additional ongoing amount of \$5m has been provided to regional councils in the 2014-15 budget. This is for local priority projects determined by the members of each local authority. The projects reflect the needs and priorities identified at the local community level. A recent snapshot of local authorities found that local authorities are delivering on their objectives to deliver a strong local voice and greater accountability for service delivery.

My department has commenced substantial reviews of both the *Local Government Act* and the *Cemeteries Act*. They are both significant pieces of legislation and we are taking time to ensure that the end result of the reviews will put the Territory on a sound footing into the future. I look forward to delivering a progressive *Cemeteries Act* that will allow people the choice they want. For the first time it will provide Aboriginal people with a workable scheme for cemeteries that meets their needs and respects the authority of the land councils. The Northern Territory government is serious about giving Aboriginal people a voice.

The First Circles engagement model recognises that Aboriginal Territorians are First Nations people and will ensure that Aboriginal people can provide advice on the development and implementation of policy directly to government. The government launched the First Circles engagement program on 2 July 2014 in Alice Springs where there was a call for nominations. The department received 103 nominations comprising 49 women and 54 men. Two workshops were held for inaugural members in December 2014. One workshop was held in Darwin for the northern members and another was held in Alice Springs for the Central Australian members. The Chief Minister and I both attended workshops to welcome members and to discuss the importance of the First Circles program. First Circles will ensure Aboriginal people can provide advice on the development and implementation of policy directly to government. This collaborative model of consultation is an Australian first. Never before has a group had direct voice into an Australian Cabinet.

My department contracts Indigenous Essential Services Pty Ltd, a not-for-profit subsidiary of the Power and Water Corporation to provide electricity, water and sewerage services in 72 remote Indigenous communities. A \$73.1m annual grant to Indigenous Essential Services, plus the revenue raised from the sale of electricity, water and sewerage in those communities, funds the delivery of asset replacements, repairs and maintenance and operational services.

This financial year two new water storage tanks were installed at Yirrkala at a cost of \$1.6m, and the Maningrida sewerage system has been upgraded at a cost of \$3m, meeting the 2012 election commitment to fix the overflow under the beach of treated waste water from the Maningrida sewage outfall. We expect this to be completed by the end of June 2015. Upgrade of the Galiwinku sewerage system is also under way in partnership with the Australian government to support future Galiwinku infrastructure development, including the planned new \$6.4m health clinic. We also expect this to be completed by the end of June 2015.

The Northern Territory remote community public building asbestos removal program is currently in the delivery phase and has undertaken inspections at 30 communities. Removal works have been completed at 13 communities and preliminary works are now under way at a further four communities. Accredited asbestos removal training has been successfully delivered in seven communities with 64 participants. A total of 58 local Aboriginal participants have completed the training and 55 successful trainees have been employed in asbestos removal and remediation works in their communities.

The Northern Territory government is developing Ipiye-Ipiye Town Camp through funding of \$10.63m from the Australian government. On completion of the project, Ipiye-Ipiye Town Camp will be transformed into an urban subdivision similar to that of any other suburb in a major town. Upon completion, the Ipiye-Ipiye Aboriginal Corporation will have the option of freehold titles to serviced lots of land which will be available for either private construction or sale. Ipiye-Ipiye residents will benefit from private home ownership opportunities with a range of services common to all Alice Springs residents including postal services, a formal bus stop and community-agreed street names.

The Homelands Program supports approximately 10 000 Aboriginal Territorians living on 351 homelands, 30 communities and 45 town camps across the Northern Territory, providing contribution to the economic,

social and cultural life of the Northern Territory. The Homelands Program includes municipal and essential services and housing maintenance programs. The programs provides a contribution for the provision of repairs and maintenance, minor works for the delivery of municipal and essential services and housing repairs and maintenance on homelands and town camps. Services are delivered through 36 regional service providers, 29 of which are Indigenous organisations.

Applications for the 2014-15 Homelands Extra Allowance program opened on 1 July 2014. This allowance provides a grant of \$5200 for eligible homeland dwellings for repairs and maintenance. The uptake of the program has been pleasing, with the 2014-15 funding allocation of \$4m fully committed for full expenditure by the end of the current financial year, which will benefit 745 eligible applicants. The funding can be used for a range of upgrades or improvements including hot water systems, stoves, laundry, kitchen and bathroom upgrades, new verandas, floor covers, concreting, new roofing, new cupboards, windows and door screens.

In conjunction with the Australian government's Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, a project titled Homelands Assets and Access Review is being rolled out. This review will provide evidence-based knowledge that will underpin future investments.

On the topic of homelands, I clearly state that the Giles government will not close down any homelands. Homelands are private property on Aboriginal land. We own the lands in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory government would not tell anyone they cannot be born or use their land as they wish.

The department supports a multicultural society of the Northern Territory through language services which provide a critical service for the government's clients who do not speak English as their first language. In particular, it has assisted people who require health, justice and welfare services from government agencies. The Aboriginal Interpreter Service has been delivered for 15 years and the level of services continues to expand every year. This year there was an almost 16% increase in the number of Aboriginal interpreting jobs compared to the same time last year.

We have continued our commitment to bringing services to the bush through ABC News bulletins that are broadcast daily in Warlpiri and Yolngu Matha through the Aboriginal Interpreter Service and the ABC so residents in remote communities can now regularly hear news stories from the Territory, Australia and the world in language.

Our Ethnic Language Interpreting and Translating Service of the Northern Territory continues to provide an important service for residents, tourists and migrants to the Northern Territory.

The department's Land Tenure Unit is a central coordination point for all Northern Territory government agencies to secure leases on Aboriginal land and is pivotal to the construction of major projects. The department works closely with the land councils to secure leases. Significant progress has been made to secure leases of 870 lots out of approximately 1400 lots of Aboriginal land that have been identified for government purposes including schools, training centres, health centres, police stations, government employee housing and Indigenous Essential Services assets.

At present there is no common framework to help guide public servants on best-practice methods to engage residents of remote communities. My department is leading an inter-agency working group in the development of a remote engagement and coordinated strategy. The working group are representatives from a range of departments responsible for delivering frontline remote services, elected councillors and staff from two regional councils, as well as an Indigenous engagement specialist from Charles Darwin University. The strategy will influence the way government works to promote residents across the Northern Territory and provide a practical framework and guide for best practice for practitioners. I expect the strategy will be launched in July 2015.

I identified a glaring need for consistent centrally-coordinated and up-to-date information systems relating to remote Aboriginal towns and homelands. The Giles government has invested \$755 000 ongoing from next year to make this system a reality. My department will ensure this system adds value for money by reducing the reliance on external consultants to maintain generic information we have purchased 10 times over. My department's project will not replace any systems currently operating but will draw on information already captured and recorded by various government agencies. When in place, the system will provide the government with information that will inform policy and guide investment in the bush. The department will revamp the well-known and well-used Bushtel website as a portal for information.

The *Policy Framework for Northern Territory Women 2015-2020* was released on 10 April 2015. The framework sets out the policy direction and priorities for the Northern Territory government in relation to advancing the status of women in the Territory. The policy framework was developed through extensive consultation with and submissions from the Northern Territory women, community organisations and Northern Territory government departments. The framework focuses on the contribution women make to the Territory and where improvements or changes need to be made to ensure economic, social and cultural equality between men and women.

International Women's Day grants provided \$20 000 to assist community organisations host International Women's Day events across the Territory in March 2015. Events funded through this grants program were varied and included traditional ceremonies in several East Arnhem communities that acknowledge women's roles and achievements through to breakfasts and activities in the Barkly, Alice Springs and Darwin regions that celebrated women.

The Office of Women's Policy also funded a \$20 000 scholarship program supporting women in research and study. The 2015 recipients of the Minister for Women's Scholarships were Ms Rikki Bruce, for the Higher Education scholarship and Ms Charlotte Balu and Ms Sonia Hunt for the Vocational Educational and Training scholarships.

The department continues to influence the national agenda through representation on the National Implementation Executive Group of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, the Board of Our Watch and the Board of Directors of Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, ANROWS. It is through these efforts that we ensure the work undertaken for the national plan is relevant to the Territory and that the unique Territory perspective is included in discussions nationally.

This government listens to the voices of men and recognises the importance of engaging men across a range of issues while making Men's Policy a ministerial portfolio. The importance of engaging men is paramount in finding solutions to a range of issues including strategies to reduce domestic and family violence. The Men's Policy Unit, in partnership with the Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Aboriginal Corporation, has developed and is now rolling out the nation's first domestic violence reduction strategy in the Arnhem Aboriginal languages of the Yolngu Matha Galiwinku community. The work was undertaken with the Yolngu using Aboriginal methodologies, ensuring the right people were included on the right clan estates at the right times in Yolngu languages. This program highlights our commitment, not just to working appropriately with Aboriginal people across the Territory, but to developing a regionalised approach where programs are developed with the families themselves and tailored accordingly to a particular region's context.

The Men's Policy Unit has been busy and established the Indigenous Male Advisory Council. The IMAC is made up of senior Indigenous men representing all regions of the Territory. The IMAC provides high-level strategic advice to the Northern Territory government on a range of issues that impact on Indigenous men. The IMAC helps to ensure that this important work continues to be heard at the highest levels of government and decision-making.

The Men's Policy Unit is also working closely with the Jimmy Little Foundation to roll out the Wadeye and Mutitjulu Youth Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Program. This program engages young people of both Wadeye and Mutitjulu communities to discuss and share their stories and concerns about domestic and family violence and how it shapes and impacts upon their lives as kids. Activities include written word and song workshops with professional musos' and producers' writing sessions, and art and dance workshops in combination with multimedia and audio recording sessions. The final outputs from the young people include stories, songs, videos and art work that will be disseminated through social media, local television, radio stations and wider mainstream media to promote the positive messages about respectful relationships.

The inaugural Action Against Domestic Violence Award was recently presented to the Nightcliff Tigers Football Club at the 2015 Northern Territory Sports Awards for that club's work to prevent domestic and family violence. This award targets men and their families through their interest in sport and invites them to be agents of social change in challenging instances of domestic and family violence. Approaches such as these reinforce a strong message from the community that violence is unacceptable and represent creative ways of undermining the social and cultural support for domestic and family violence.

Madam Chair, I thank you for the time to highlight a few of the department's achievements against the budget outputs and I welcome questions on my opening statement.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions to the minister's statement?

Mr McCARTHY: You talk about sustainability for local government across the Northern Territory which is very important. Are you aware of the Deloitte report commissioned by the department in relation to financial sustainability of local government?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, in November 2011 Deloitte undertook a review of the financial sustainability of the eight regional and three small shire councils which covered ...

Mr McCARTHY: It is great that you are aware of it. You mentioned in your opening statement that since the CLP government had taken power in the Northern Territory it had provided an increased allocation of \$10m into local government to look at sustainability of which \$5m was obviously for the set-up of the West Daly Regional Council. What was the other \$5m?

Mrs PRICE: An amount of \$5m was the Northern Territory's operational subsidy and the other \$5m went to local authorities.

Mr McCARTHY: So that is \$10m over three years to address sustainability for local government. In regard to the Homelands Extra Allowance you spoke about, you mentioned the allowance for the financial year 2014-15 being acquitted. In parliament you made a statement about Homelands Extra on track for expenditure and Homelands Extra funding to be spent on cyclone-affected houses as a result of Cyclone Lam. I am interested in how much of the appropriation in 2014-15 for Homelands Extra was available to be reappropriated into the refurbishment and reconstruction of houses after Cyclone Lam.

Mrs PRICE: There was nothing that was allocated for Cyclone Lam. Sorry, what was the question?

Mr McCARTHY: In parliament, you talked about Homelands Extra funding being directed to houses that were affected by Cyclone Lam. I am wondering how much of that Homelands Extra funding was available to relocate into Cyclone Lam affected houses?

Mrs PRICE: That question regarding the funding for the cyclone disaster, especially with the homelands and housing would best be asked during questioning of the Chief Minister. Staff of his department are the best people to answer your question.

Mr McCARTHY: I am very interested in this as the last time I explored Homelands Extra the department provided me with some great information. It pointed to there not being a lot of organisations applying for Homelands Extra funding.

In my electorate there were quite a number of glaring stand-out situations where there was no work being done, and there were no applications for the constituents on those outstations. I am interested in the appropriation for Homelands Extra; if it is being fully appropriated where has the appropriation gone? I thank your department officials who got stuck into that for me and started to work with an Aboriginal organisation to try to facilitate the delivery of those services.

Was there any leftover in the funding in 2014-15? I know you only go to 31 March with your analysis. What about 30 June? Does it look like there will be leftover funds?

Mrs PRICE: The 2014-15 funding allocation of the \$4m is committed for full expenditure by the end of the current financial year. Significant effort to increase service providers and residents has resulted in 33 out of 36 service providers now participating in this program.

Mr McCARTHY: How much of Homelands Extra funding in 2015-16 will go to cyclone-affected houses?

Mrs PRICE: That all comes under the Chief Minister's emergency relief funding.

Mr McCARTHY: You have an appropriation for Homelands Extra in 2015-16 of \$7.3m, and Budget Paper No 3 talks about \$6m to improve existing housing in homelands. Will none of that funding go into the houses affected by Cyclone Lam?

Mrs PRICE: That funding will be used as usual. It will go into providing repairs and maintenance to the amenities within the houses in outstations.

Mr McCARTHY: Is that, in the essence of the program, not appropriated to cyclone-affected dwellings?

Mrs PRICE: That is correct.

Mr McCARTHY: It was interesting that you gave a reassurance that the Giles government will not be closing any homelands or outstations, yet in Budget Paper No 3 we see there has been a reduction in funding of 122 sites already representing homelands, outstations and town camps. That equates to a decrease of \$4.013m. It relates to 540 delivery sites in 2014-15 and 418 delivery sites in 2015-16. Essentially, the Giles government is now not funding 122 homelands, outstation or town camp sites. Could you detail which ones they are, and why the Giles government has chosen not to fund homelands, outstations and town camps?

Mrs PRICE: As the minister responsible for homelands and outstations, I will be working with the Chief Minister in discussions on how we look after the homelands and outstations.

Our government is assisting people who want to live on their homelands by contributing to the cost of municipal essential services and housing repairs. There is a set amount of funding available to do this. In order to best support these people, money is redirected where it is most needed, from homelands that do not have anyone living on them permanently for those who do live on homelands.

Mr McCARTHY: Interesting, minister, that you say 'redirected'. Yet we can see a clear decrease of \$4.013m in the appropriation, with 122 sites now not funded. I accept that they could be abandoned places. Could you provide us with a copy of those 122 outstations or homelands or town community areas that have been defunded?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.1

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, please restate the question for the record.

Mr McCARTHY: Will you provide a copy of the 122 homelands, outstations or town community living areas no longer funded by the Giles government, relating to the decrease in appropriation of \$4.013m?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, you accept the question?

Mrs PRICE: I will take that, yes.

Madam CHAIR: That question is number 7.1.

Mr McCARTHY: Do you accept the Chief Minister's position about the \$155m for homelands and outstations?

Mrs PRICE: That is a question for the Chief Minister. He is taking the lead in the negotiations with the federal government in the discussions.

Mr McCARTHY: You have no ...

Mrs PRICE: I will be working closely with him, but he takes the lead on it.

Mr McCARTHY: Absolutely. Regarding all those residents of homelands, outstations and the town community living areas, what do you think about the federal government's offer of \$155m?

Mrs PRICE: We will take this into consideration. But as I said, the Chief Minister is taking the leading role and I will be working very closely with him to make sure we look after the homelands and outstations because it is very important for people to live out on country. That is what they have always made clear to us. Their lives improve when they go back and live on the outstations and homelands. They are very important places because, as we all know, that is our country.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister and Madam Chair.

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill (2015-2016) as they relate to the Department of Local Government and Community Services. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Madam Chair. Minister, will you please provide the details and costs of advertising and communications in 2014-15? Please provide the details and costs of all government advertising that contained either the image or voice of the minister or Chief Minister, or the name of the Chief Minister or minister. Of course, in the interest of time you might like to table that information.

Mrs PRICE: No, I will find the answer for you, member for Barkly. The main contributors to the department's communication expenditure was the First Circles program campaign and the sponsorship of the Action Against Domestic Violence Award as part of the Northern Territory Sports Award. Advertising cost \$34 978, marketing and promotions \$8000, sponsorships \$3815 and media monitoring was \$315.

Mr McCARTHY: Can you provide the details and costs of all consultancies undertaken by the agency and which consultants were not selected through competitive tendering and why? You can table this information if you would like to.

Mrs PRICE: I will answer your question. For tenders and consultancies as of 31 March 2015, the department incurred \$564 918 consultancy expenses of which \$15 000 was for interstate consultants.

Mr McCARTHY: Can you please provide details on all boards and advisory bodies in the agencies where the chair and/or members attract remuneration?

Mrs PRICE: First of all is the Northern Territory Grants Commission, the member of which are Mr Bob Beadman, Chairman, Mr Damien Ryan, Mr Steve Hennessy and Mr David Willing are commissioners, Ms Kylie Bonanni, deputy for Mr Damien Ryan and Mr Ralph Blyth who is a deputy for Steve Hennessy. The commission is supported by an executive officer from the Department of Local Government and Community Services. The commission produces its own annual report which is tabled in the Legislative Assembly as required by the *Local Government Grants Commission Act*.

There are 22 people who have been appointed by the Minister for Local Government and Community Services as people eligible to be members of a Local Government Disciplinary Committee. When the department receives a complaint alleging that an elected member has breached the council's code of conduct, the department forms a disciplinary committee from the pool of eligible members. A committee must be constituted by three members, one from each three classes of appointed eligible members, namely a legal practitioner nominated by the Attorney-General, a person nominated by the Minister for Local Government and Community Services and a person who has been nominated by LGANT. I can go through the names of everybody, if you want me to.

Mr McCARTHY: Do you want to table them, minister?

Mrs PRICE: I can go through the names because I am not tabling any of these.

Mr McCARTHY: Certainly, minister. We will move on then. Could you please detail the cost in 2014-15 of legal services provided by private legal firms to each agency and authority for which you are responsible?

Mrs PRICE: As at 31 March 2015, total cost of legal services provided by private legal firms to the agencies is \$139 384. The law firms were Lonergan Edwards & Associates Ltd, Sonia Brownhill and Janet Whitehead.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, to clarify as we work through the output areas, in national partnership agreements with the federal government, can I assume while DCM is responsible for intergovernment negotiations that you and the agency are responsible for the implementation and intergovernment coordination, for example the implementation of agreements on municipal services?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Mr McCARTHY: That could be a yes or no, minister.

Mrs PRICE: Yes, we deliver the services.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – REGIONAL SERVICES

Output 1.1 – Indigenous Essential Services

Madam CHAIR: I will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Regional Services, Output 1.1, Indigenous Essential Services. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: In last year's estimates mention was made of seeking more innovation in delivering power to remote NT communities. What progress has been made in that regard?

Mrs PRICE: My Department of Local Government and Community Services contracts Indigenous Essential Services, a subsidiary of the Power and Water Corporation, for the provision of electricity, water and sewerage services in 72 remote Indigenous communities. The services are funded by the annual Indigenous Essential Services recurrent grant in the Northern Territory budget and by revenue raised from the sale of electricity, water and sewerage in the 72 communities.

In 2014-15 the total IES grant is \$73.125m. Assets replacement was over \$17m; repairs and maintenance was over \$15m; distillate over \$99m and the operational costs were over \$10m. In 2014-15 there was total revenue of \$41m as forecast from the sale of electricity, water and sewerage – they are programmed. The uniform tariff applies to the sale of electricity, water, power and sewerage services in the 72 remote Indigenous communities.

In 2014-15 two new water storage tanks were installed at Yirrkala at a cost of \$1.6m. The project was funded from the surplus available from the rescoping in 2013-14 of the Wadeye gas-fired power station project. The Maningrida sewerage system is being upgraded at a cost of \$3m in accordance with the 2012 election commitment to fix the overflow onto the beach of treated wastewater from the Maningrida sewage outfall. This project has been funded from the surplus from the rescope Wadeye Power Station.

There is an innovative solar project set up across 34 communities as well. This is where most of the funding has gone. The upgrade of the Galiwinku sewerage system is being undertaken in 2014-15 in partnership with the Australian government to support future Galiwinku infrastructure developments, and the new gravity sewer main and the new sewer rising main were completed in January this year. An upgrade of this sewer pump station for the new infrastructure is expected to be completed by the end of June 2015. The project has been constructed through funding available from the Australian government and the Northern Territory agencies. The planned new \$6.4m health clinic at Galiwinku will now be connected to the sewerage system when it has been completed. So far there are asset replacements, repairs and maintenance. The operation costs are all in there.

Ms MANISON: I will jump in as the shadow for Essential Services. With regard to staff who currently operate within the remote operations section of the Power and Water Corporation, have they moved over to your department or are there plans to move them over to your department?

Mrs PRICE: No.

Ms MANISON: Has there been any movement of that staff, given that they deliver the services you pay for?

Mrs PRICE: No.

Ms MANISON: With regard to revenue collected, you mentioned that you collected \$41m in revenue from charges for power, water and sewerage. Is that correct?

Mrs PRICE: Yes. The details of the revenue sit with Power and Water.

Ms MANISON: You cannot provide any figures to us of how much additional revenue you collected due to the power and water price increases that also affected people in other communities?

Mrs PRICE: No, that is a matter for Power and Water.

Ms MANISON: I cannot get any information about those price increases and how much revenue you generated from that?

Mrs PRICE: Power and Water can provide you with the information on that.

Ms MANISON: Thank you for that, minister.

Mr McCARTHY: What recent studies have been undertaken to identify major Indigenous Essential Services' projects in remote communities over the next three years?

Mrs PRICE: That is an interesting question. It would be great to see more Indigenous people employed in their regions. I encourage Aboriginal people out there to get jobs in these areas, which would be wonderful. This government is interested and very keen to employ our people in all areas.

Ms LEE: Can I just slip in here, Madam Chair?

Madam CHAIR: As long as it is in the same line of questions.

Ms LEE: Yes, it is. You said the CLP government has great interest. Since the ESO positions have been taken off the local Indigenous people in the communities and given to Power and Water, is there any training to employ local Indigenous people to have the qualifications for the ESO positions?

Mrs PRICE: You will have to direct that question to Power and Water.

Mr McCARTHY: It was a good start to the question. Are there any studies we can point to leading to any major projects in the pipeline so we can inform constituents?

Mrs PRICE: Power and Water is the service provider and those questions should have been asked of that minister. As I said, I would love to see more Aboriginal people employed across all the departments.

Mr McCARTHY: I agree, minister; that is probably a good bipartisan view. In innovation, I can point to water quality. How is the Ali Curung water treatment plant project going as a great innovation to improve water quality for the residents of Ali Curung?

Mrs PRICE: It is a pity we live in that part of the country where water quality is not good, even in Yuendumu. Any known community in the central region has a history of bad water quality. I lived in Yuendumu and I drank water that has uranium in it. We still drink that water in these communities, which should not be allowed. Hopefully in the near future we might come up with some technology that might help these communities, not in the Top End part of the Territory, but in the central region where water is scarce, but so important.

There is uranium in all those communities throughout the central region. Hopefully one day we will come up with the technology that will make sure that water quality is up to the standards of any major town centres down south, which will provide potable drinking water. We can provide more details in briefings on this project, and I am happy to do that.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister. I am particularly interested in the innovation and technology around the Ali Curung water treatment plant. Are we getting value for money? It has had problems. It has had a considerable breakdown period. Is it good technology? Is it working? Will your government be rolling it out in more communities?

Mrs PRICE: That question will have to be asked of the Power and Water Corporation minister.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, you mentioned uranium. Are there any sites where the uranium levels in the water are of concern and are being monitored to ensure they do not exceed safe levels?

Mrs PRICE: I will pass this question to my CE, Mike Chiodo.

Mr CHIODO: Mike Chiodo, CE Department of Local Government and Community Services. Member for Barkly, the department and IES Pty Ltd, as you may know, work closely with the Department of Health to

provide the monitoring service in relation to that. The specifics of that question would have to have been asked of the Department of Health earlier today.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, what I am finding in my extensive travels across the Northern Territory is the pressure on available ground water. I will give you a micro example, like the community of Wutunugurra at Epenarra. There is a station and a community, and it is now inhibiting any type of social or economic development. What is being done in this area? Can you point to any specific budget appropriation that will be addressing those issues? I can give you many more examples across the Northern Territory.

Mrs PRICE: I will give you an example of a community. Yirrkala is a community where we are replacing water storage. This project was funded by \$1m of surplus available for rescoping in 2013-14 and ...

Mr McCARTHY: You mentioned that in your opening statement ...

Mrs PRICE: Yes, I did.

Mr McCARTHY: That sounds like a great project. I am interested in the water to go into those tanks. In Central Australia - or I can take you into the gulf savannah as well - we have huge constraints. Is there any work being done in the department in partnership with Power and Water? Is there any budget appropriation that is looking to these communities that are constrained because of their inadequate water supply?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will pass this question to my CE, Mike Chiodo.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, there are two parts to that question. The first response is that there are a number of projects that are being carried within the Remote Infrastructure Coordination Unit as part of the appropriated budget for that unit which is, in fact, currently undertaking a series of bore tests in areas such as Yuendumu. We feel confident we will be able to deal with the issues in that immediate vicinity through those tests in some of the sites we have identified.

To respond to the second part of the question, we are also working closely with the department of Land and Water Resource Management, Power and Water and IES Pty Ltd to identify other sites where that type of testing could be conducted. As far as the appropriation goes it sits within the appropriated budget of the Remote Infrastructure Coordination Unit.

Mr McCARTHY: Thanks, Mr Chiodo and minister. Any good take-home information for Minyerri, Robinson River, Wutunugurra, Canteen Creek or Yuelamu?

Mr CHIODO: The good take-home information is that they are very clearly on the list of sites where we intend to continue those investigations.

Mr McCARTHY: You talk about Indigenous employment on your side of the fence. What instructions or directions have you given Indigenous Essential Services through your contact with them of facilitating and improving local Indigenous employment, including apprenticeships and traineeships, as part of the work undertaken by IES on your behalf?

Mrs PRICE: At the moment we are working with them to strengthen employment opportunities for Aboriginal people to be part of the Indigenous Essential Services. It is very important. It will mean they will be based in their communities as well, helping their communities become self-sufficient. We need more Aboriginal people upskilled in different areas, and that will be a great opportunity. We are working with Indigenous Essential Services in making sure we employ more Aboriginal people in that area.

Mr McCARTHY: Do you have any ideas that you are facilitating?

Mrs PRICE: At the moment we are holding talks. I would be happy to let you know later on down the track where we are, and which communities these Indigenous workers might end up.

Mr McCARTHY: Are you doing any work on the cost of living out bush in remote communities, particularly now with increases in power, water and sewerage, registration, insurance and food prices?

Mrs PRICE: I will get my CE to answer that question.

Mr CHIODO: In conjunction with the whole-of-government approach the agency is consistently monitoring the increase in those prices, in particular when they impact on areas such as homelands and outstations under our current purview. We continue to work with Indigenous Essential Services to identify the subsidy impacts that has on the appropriation and our ability to deliver those services as specified earlier as part of that program. It is also a part of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs which sits under the Chief Minister.

There is work being done in identifying those costs and the impacts. Just as important is the creation of jobs through the Remote Procurement and Contracting Policy and the number of other programs which are either about to be put in place or will be part of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs moving forward that are being supported by our minister, and the synergist nature of local government and community service with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. It is exactly that type of exercise we are conducting including cost-benefit analysis of the creation of those jobs and impacts on communities.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Mr Chiodo and minister for that information. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2- Remote Infrastructure Coordination

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 1.2, Remote Infrastructure Coordination. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Madam Chair. Minister, can you explain briefly the change in budget allocation in this appropriation area? It was \$21.9m in Budget 2014-15. The budget estimate for 2014-15 was \$29.9m yet there is only an allocation of \$7.5m for 2015-16.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will pass it on to my financial officer, Wati.

Ms KERTA: Wati Kerta, Chief Financial Officer of Local Government and Community Services. Member for Barkly, the decrease mainly relates to one-off projects funded in 2014-15 or funding that ceased in 2014-15. A particular project I can quote off the top of my head is the Ipiye-Ipiye project. There is also funding for Commonwealth programs that have ceased during that time.

Mr McCARTHY: What was the Ipiye-Ipiye project total?

Mr CHIODO: Just over \$9m, minister. There is an asbestos program and there are ongoing programs that have existed since 2012-13 and 2013-14, and have created carryovers during those budgets.

Mr McCARTHY: How many leases does the Northern Territory government have on Aboriginal land and what is the annual cost of those leases?

Mrs PRICE: I will comment on the Ipiye-Ipiye project. I do not know if you have been there, member for Barkly, but it is looking great. The Stirling and Golder families are thrilled to be part of the change, watching their town camp become a proper suburb with proper lighting, roads and a bus stop. They are excited about it and it has made a huge difference to that family. They deserve it because they are a family group which has always looked after themselves and made sure the small town camp was – every time I visited - always properly looked after, the gardens were great, the kids went to school. Brian Stirling and his brother who live there moved to Ipiye-Ipiye because of their mum. It is great for a family in a little town camp like that to walk around with their heads held high being able to say they have made a difference for their family and the Ipiye-Ipiye camp.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, I agree. I can give you the story of Tennant Creek, where there were six community living areas with an appropriation of \$35m that achieved the same result – normalising those areas into the new suburbs of Tennant Creek. That is why I do not refer to town camps anymore. I did 30 years ago, but now they are the new suburbs of Tennant Creek. The \$35m was a great project and part of the SIHIP work done under a previous government, minister. However, we are looking for some information that was requested.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will have to take on notice the question you asked earlier.

Question on Notice No 7.2

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, please restate the question for the record.

Mr McCARTHY: How many leases does the Northern Territory government have on Aboriginal land and what is the annual cost of those leases?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, I do.

Madam CHAIR: That will be number 7.2.

Mr McCARTHY: That was in relation to an area I am interested in, in regard to the remote aerodromes, barge landings and other transport-related infrastructure. Is there any work in your department in addressing those liability issues, particularly around possible insurance claims that could come forward through the administration and management of aerodromes, for example, that could make local government liable?

Mrs PRICE: The Department of Transport would have been the appropriate department to ask that question.

Mr McCARTHY: Sorry, minister, I was reading some notes then. I missed the last bit of that.

Mrs PRICE: I said the Department of Transport and the minister responsible for that portfolio would have been the appropriate person to answer that question.

Mr McCARTHY: No discussion on that area between you and me?

Madam CHAIR: The minister is not obliged to chat about it. If she has referred you to the Minister for Transport then that is where the question should sit.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, Budget Paper No 3 said that part of your work in this output area is to lead whole-of-government coordination and negotiation of land tenure arrangements to underpin new infrastructure development, support economic development and home ownership in remote communities, on page 262. Can you elaborate on what work you are doing in those areas?

Mrs PRICE: I will get my Chief Executive to answer that question for you.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, within the department we have a unit known as the Land Tenure Unit which has carried, for a considerable period of time, the responsibility of not only leading the consultation process within communities in conjunction with bodies such as the NLC, CLC and other land councils, but also holding consultative processes with the TOs within those communities for any infrastructure leases, or section 19 leases, that need to be decided with those communities.

As far as whole-of-government coordination goes, it was decided a considerable period of time ago that it was best to have one group leading that consultative process, and in effect arranging those leases on behalf of the agencies that could take those leases up.

Mr McCARTHY: My next question was how often have you met, but I will change that to how often has the department met with each of the land councils to discuss plans for new land tenure arrangements, what plans or suggestions have been put to them, and what has been the response?

Mrs PRICE: We try to meet with the land councils. I am meeting with them at their Barunga meeting which I think is in June. There are discussions to be held with the land councils because we want to make sure we all work together and make life easier for Aboriginal people in the Territory. It involves everybody, whether you are on a land council, are a local authority member or work for the women's centre. These issues are very important to talk about because they have an impact on families and so on.

I will pass the question to my CE. He will be best to give you the right answer because he has met with the land councils.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, in context to the previous question there is a very specific function within our department that our Land Tenure Unit has been carrying out for a considerable period of time. This is to, as I said earlier, discuss, negotiate and hold consultative processes with communities. In keeping with that, the department meets regularly with all land councils.

As to the broader question which is about the context of alternative leasing methodologies or other discussion such as that, that sits within the Department of Chief Minister. There is a group within that department that very clearly deals with that component of it. Our responsibility, as I said earlier, is the section 19 leases dealing directly with infrastructure assets that belong to the Northern Territory government. But we meet with all of the land councils on a regular basis to hold those discussions.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, what is happening in the output to support Indigenous home ownership? How many new Indigenous home ownership arrangements have been entered into as a result of your work in the area over the last 12 months?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, you might have to keep that question until I put my other hat on as the Minister for Housing.

Mr McCARTHY: Very well. We will take that on board then.

Mr CONLAN: A housing question, member for Barkly.

Mr McCARTHY: Housing questions about home ownership.

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Member for Barkly, Indigenous home ownership is a policy of the Department of Housing.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, what is the status of the work to establish cadastral plans for remote communities? How much of the work has been completed? Has federal funding for that work now ended?

Mrs PRICE: My Department of Local Government and Community Services' Remote Services Delivery Unit is managing a \$7m Australian government-funded three-year rolling project to undertake cadastral surveys of 50 remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. My department has engaged the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment to coordinate and commission a survey project for us, which has a planned completion date of 21 June 2015.

The survey project formalises the boundaries of the land and supports the requirements under the NT *Planning Act*, enabling leases to be entered into for a period in excess of 12 years. The cadastral survey is a vital component for establishing property market in remote communities that can help grow prosperity for Indigenous people by transforming remote towns into places that are properly planned and designed. The project also supports home ownership and the land development that is required for a lease longer than 12 years.

The minor community cadastral survey project is now in its third year of operation and significant progress has been made. A whole-of-town development application has been lodged with the department assessment service for six communities. Thirty-five survey plans have been drafted and lodged through the Office of the Surveyor-General that lies with the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment. Of the 35 plans lodged with the Office of the Surveyor-General, stakeholder comment is sought and plans amended where required. A development application is prepared and is pending endorsement by the landowner, Power and Water Corporation and regional councils prior to being lodged with DAS.

Field work has been completed for six communities and the draft plans have been finalised by the surveyors prior to being lodged with the Office of the Surveyor-General. Field work is being carried out for three communities following a surveyor being commissioned.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, what are the current arrangements, including funding available for non-housing capital works at homelands?

Mrs PRICE: Would you be able to repeat that question for me, member for Barkly?

Mr McCARTHY: What are the current arrangements including the funds available for non-housing capital works at homelands?

Mrs PRICE: In 2014-15 \$41m will be spent on delivering services to the homelands, outstations and town camps throughout the Territory. This funding includes \$35m in Commonwealth funding and \$6m from the Northern Territory government. The purpose of the municipal and essential services program is to provide the contribution for the provision of repairs and maintenance, minor works and general operational costs for the delivery of municipal essential services for the homelands and town camps across the Northern Territory.

The purpose of the housing maintenance program is to assist homeland residents with housing repairs and maintenance providing a contribution to dwellings on homelands and town camps. The Municipal and Essential Services Special Purpose Grant is provided under the Stronger Futures initiative and is used to purchase infrastructure and equipment or undertake work to improve municipal and essential services delivery.

My Department of Local Government and Community Services is in the process of releasing half-yearly payments to service providers for the delivery of municipal and essential services and housing maintenance services under the homelands program.

About 36 organisations are contracted under funding agreements to deliver these services to 351 homelands and outstations. These service providers are required to provide financial and performance reports detailing activities undertaken to ensure services are being delivered every six months. Ongoing service providers and key stakeholders will continue to ensure homelands policy and the homelands program are achieving the most effective, transparent, credible service delivery for homeland residents.

Mr McCARTHY: You mentioned a couple of capital works projects in your opening statement. Wherever I travel in homelands, I always get requests. How does a homeland community go about accessing the funds you have just talked about to initiate projects they determine to be essential for their homeland?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, they can do that through the service providers.

Mr McCARTHY: That is an interesting point. There is a lot of conjecture - and I will be very blunt - a lot of dissatisfaction with residents continually asking the local member to translate that information for them. Is there any processes where they can get access to the funds available, or a hearing?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, we also have field staff who regularly travel to the homelands. Service providers should be able to carry out the maintenance and essential services for these homelands because we fund them. The Barkly Regional Council has been awarded \$49 000 to do some work on their outstations. As you know, Julalikari is one service provider that looks after the Barkly region. We are trying to work closely with them to make sure they look after the outstations and the homelands wherever they are located.

Mr McCARTHY: I will give you an example. In the last 18 months I have had quite a number of requests for places of worship. In a number of outstations I have seen the development of community churches, some funded by philanthropic means, other funded by community means. Is that an example of a capital works project where the outstation community could talk to one of the departmental officers? Do you think that could ever come to fruition?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will get my CE to answer that question for you.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, a process known as special purpose grants has existed for homelands and outstations for a considerable period of time. In keeping with that, in the last financial year just over \$4m was allocated specifically for those special purpose grants.

People living in the homelands and outstations have a series of options. The special purpose grant is an application made by the service provider to the department and is considered on the individual merits of that grant. A place of worship would be treated the same as any other special purpose grant application, on its merits.

Mr McCARTHY: The question essentially is you have to be an accredited incorporated body to accept the grant? Is that correct?

Mrs PRICE: That is correct.

Mr McCARTHY: Outside of the nominated service provider, would a community incorporated body be eligible to accept the grant?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, there is an opportunity for that as well. I can say that because Gina Smith and her organisation could apply to be an accredited provider because I know she is very interested. Every time I have been to Tennant Creek she has told me how excited they are to become an organisation that can be a service provider for outstations within the Barkly region. I encourage her organisation to become a service provider because it would be great. She is a local person from the Barkly region and she knows the Barkly, the outstations and the surroundings. I encourage her to become a service provider with her organisation.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, the member for Arnhem had a question on the line of questioning just prior to that question, but I thought I would let you exhaust that one.

Member for Arnhem, what is your question?

Ms LEE: Minister, could you please table the names of the 29 Indigenous service providers you mentioned and in what regions they are situated?

Mrs PRICE: I will not table anything, but I am happy to give you a briefing if you would like one.

Ms LEE: Could you read the list out? This is estimates and it is time to question you as a minister. I am not here to get a briefing from you; I am here to find out who the 29 service providers are.

Mrs PRICE: I will not table it.

Ms LEE: I have asked you to read it out.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, you can answer the question or you can take the question on notice.

Mrs PRICE: I will take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.3

Madam CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record.

Ms LEE: Can you give me the names of the 29 Indigenous service providers and what regions they are from?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: That question will be number 7.3.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, can you provide the details of all infrastructure and development projects being coordinated by the department of Community Services showing location and name of each project, Commonwealth financial contribution to each project, date of original budget commitment for each project, projects completed in 2013-14, and the status of each project yet to be completed including the current stage of projects, for example, predesigned consultation, planning and construction?

Mrs PRICE: That is a good question and I will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.4

Madam CHAIR: That was fairly clear unless you want to repeat it, member for Barkly?

Mr McCARTHY: If you request, Madam Chair.

Can you provide the details of all infrastructure and development projects being coordinated by the department of Community Services showing location and name of each project, Commonwealth financial contribution to each project, date of original budget commitment for each project, projects completed in 2013-14, and the status of each project yet to be completed including the current stage of projects, for example, predesigned consultation, planning and construction?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, if you accept the question that will be number 7.4.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, Budget Paper No 3 notes allocation of \$0.75m for a central remote information management system. What objectives are there for the new system and what will be the type of information maintained in that system?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, the government will improve access to generic community information to reduce efforts of duplication across governments, and provide the tools that will assist government to identify economic opportunities and community issues in one central location. It is envisaged that this system will provide government required information on remote Aboriginal towns and homelands to ensure we are able to direct our attention to the hot spots, and develop policy and service programs that will result in positive change and outcomes in the bush. Development of the information system will begin in 2015-16.

Mr McCARTHY: Will that information be in relation to community residents?

Mrs PRICE: No, just population.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, it will not include information relating to school attendance and family income conditions attached to eligibility for Homelands Extra?

Mrs PRICE: No.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 1.2?

Ms LEE: Just to clarify that, the CLP's previous policy in regard to giving homelands funding was that the kids had to go to school and such. Are you saying now that you have scrapped that?

Mrs PRICE: That is two separate ...

Ms LEE: Can you define the two separate things?

Mrs PRICE: I will get my CE to answer that question for you, member for Arnhem.

Ms LEE: Through the Chair, it is a policy question. I am sure the minister is capable of answering the question.

Madam CHAIR: It is completely up to the minister how, when and what she or her departmental staff answer.

Mr CHIODO: Thank you, Madam Chair. Member for Arnhem, the programs we are referring to are not a policy, but in fact a database, which is the question from the member for Barkly. It is to ensure we have a central database that captures the appropriate information - for example, assets, infrastructure, the appropriate stakeholders within those communities and local authorities - and to establish one central point.

It is more to ensure that we can have this data agencies have collected over a lengthy period of time in one location so we can make it available when it informs policy or delivery within those communities. The specific work I understand you are asking about is what would be a Homelands Extra application process. Service providers - 33 out of the 36 - have been visiting homelands and working with the residents within those homelands to make those applications.

I am not speaking on policy, but on the process. The process was very clearly that the applications would be submitted then processed by the department and the funding is then made available through the service

provider to that individual. They are two separate processes within the delivery of the Homeland Extra program and the other database to ensure we have a centralised form of data.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Homelands Outstations and Town Camps

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 1.3, Homelands Outstations and Town Camps. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Madam Chair. Minister, can you explain the changes in funding in the budget output?

Madam CHAIR: In Output 1.3 you mean, member for Barkly?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Madam Chair.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, that is a financial question, so I will refer that to Wati, who is our Chief Financial Officer.

Ms KERTA: Member for Barkly, was this in relation to Homelands, Outstations and Town Camps?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes.

Ms KERTA: It is the change of budget from 2014-15 budget to 2015-16 budget - the reduction there? Okay. The reduction in budget is for the same reason as previously. It is a drop in the Commonwealth funding for the Northern Territory Jobs Package, and carried forward funding that ceased in 2014. It is partly offset by an increase in Territory funding for Homelands Extra allowance program, so it is a bit of a mix.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you. Minister, I will put it to you straight. I get a lot of humbug in the bush about outstations and Homelands Extra. Last year, only 12 months ago, I discovered that there were hardly any applications in the area I live and beyond for Homelands Extra.

I thank the department for creating the systems that have started to drive this process, hold the service providers to account and get the application forms in. I have to tell you, minister, as I am being straight, in a lot of cases the work still has not begun. We have a lot of work to do yet. But I commend the department for its help. It has made my life a lot easier.

In a budgetary sense, we had a very short list of applications and a budget appropriation last year. Now we have a full list of applications, yet I do not see the corresponding increase in budget appropriation. Can you explain that to me, minister?

Mrs PRICE: Okay, member for Barkly. I understand. I am aware we are humbugged by people out there who want to see action now. They want to see their outstations fixed and supported. It is important.

In 2014-15 we allocated \$4m. We have now, for 2015-16, \$6m. I want to ensure the outstations in your electorate, as well as mine and in Arnhem and Namatjira, are all looked after by these service providers we fund to do the maintenance and essential services to make sure these stations have a reliable service provider they can count on which will make sure they are looked after.

Mr McCARTHY: I will lead into the next question with a little preamble about a great senior Territorian I have known for over 35 years who lives in a homeland who wants a door on her bathroom. She really wants a door on her bathroom, and it is just not appearing. It is not happening and I am trying as best I can. We all have our responsibilities to work through the blocks in the system.

Budget Paper No 3 notes that the development of a long-term strategic framework to improve service delivery in homelands is part of the output. Minister, can you tell me, for this wonderful senior Territorian who wants a door on her bathroom - and I might add she has been waiting about five years - what is the work going on in this area?

Mrs PRICE: I would like to know ...

Mr CONLAN Five years? We have been in for less than three years.

Mr McCARTHY: What the service provider did about that - I will pick up on the interjection. Let us get real, member for Greatorrex.

Mr CONLAN: A point of order, Madam Chair! It was stated that it was five years. This government has been in power for two-and-a-half.

Mr McCARTHY: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: I wonder what happened to the previous two-and-a-half years under the Labor Party. It was a pretty simple question.

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, that is right. We are trying to address the service provider here ...

Madam CHAIR: All right, everyone. The minister has an answer ...

Mr McCARTHY: ... in a bipartisan sense. Do not play your political games.

Madam CHAIR: We would like to hear the answer, member for Barkly.

Mrs PRICE: Yes, member for Barkly. I would like to know who this lady is or which outstation ...

Mr McCARTHY: Mungkarta outstation.

Mrs PRICE: All right. I know where Mungkarta outstation is. I would be able to get my people out there to sit down with her to make sure the service providers are there to help her with her door, and it is done for her. I am happy to do that. We try to look after all these outstations. If that lady has been waiting for that long, I am sure we will be able to get someone from Tennant Creek to drive 50 km down the road to go and speak to her.

Mr McCARTHY: It is 85 km, minister, and thank you. I acknowledge the work the department has been doing. For the benefit of the member for Greatorrex, the previous Minister for Housing, this is a service provider issue. This is something we have to address with sensitivity. It is a bipartisan approach here, Madam Chair. I thank the Estimates Committee for the opportunity to conduct such a bipartisan approach.

Minister, what is happening in this framework development? Who are you consulting with? What is new? Will we get some answers so this will become a systemic change, not just for one senior Territorian at Mungkarta, 85 km south of Tennant Creek?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, yes, an opportunity has been identified to improve future investments into homelands and outstations that will improve both service delivery and living conditions. We will make sure that is done.

On 25 September 2014 the Australian and Northern Territory governments formed a partnership to conduct an assets and access review of all known occupied and unoccupied homelands outstations throughout the Northern Territory.

CAT has been formally engaged as the contractor to undertake this review. It is great that CAT is doing it because everybody knows them throughout the Northern Territory. This review is under way and engagement with key stakeholders and residents is being undertaken. This will be followed by field work and a report will be due later this year.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, is there any opportunity where public comment and input will be allowed?

Mrs PRICE: I will ask my CE to answer that for you, member for Barkly.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, in fact there were a number of forums in the lead-up to the introduction of the asset and access review that were held as public forums. Post the findings of the review, the intent is to go back to the communities and discuss it. It is an opportunity worth taking because the type of information we will manage to gather through the asset and access review is something that has not existed for the last 30 to 40 years. It will better inform our ability to deliver the services and the

infrastructure in those communities. The intent has been that it will be an ongoing consultative process to ensure we deliver the right services.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, this will include water security as well.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you for giving a local member some hope, minister. That is a take-home that I relish.

We spoke about the reduction in the budget to homelands, outstations and town community living areas and the reduction in funding of 122 sites. In Budget Paper No 3 the reduction was in the 122 sites that had been funded, and it also equated to a decrease of \$4.013m in appropriation. How were those decisions made? I had hoped that abandoned outstations would lead to a better opportunity for viable outstations to receive funding. That is the way I thought the system worked. However, in examining Budget Paper No 3 under your government it does not look like it.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will pass this question on to Wati. Sorry, my CE will take it.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, again if I may, two parts to the question. The reduction in numbers was part of a study done in homelands and outstations through service providers over a number of years. The complexity has always been to establish the number and permanency of residents within those homelands and outstations as opposed to intermittent residency.

By that I do not mean a circumstance where an outstation during the Wet Season is inaccessible, therefore members of those communities are spending their time in an alternative location then returning to those communities. In effect, the reduction in the number of outstations is not that those outstations have ceased to be funded, it is a rationalisation of outstations that are not permanently, or during the remainder of the year, attended to.

There appears to be some confusion with the CFO's response earlier, not by the CFO. The \$4m reduction relates to the NT Jobs Package, which is a program that has been running for a period of time now and was for the employment of Aboriginal individuals with service providers for the delivery of services within those homelands and outstations. It was the NT Jobs Package reduction by \$4m, not a reduction in the level of services delivered to those outstations.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Mr Chiodo. That generates a number of other questions. However, I will stick to this line at the moment. If we have abandoned outstations and they are not receiving funding, surely that equates to more funding available for viable outstations? Is that correct?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, and I can talk on abandoned outstations. I have heaps of them in my – Yuendumu outstation - there are only two operating out of 15. The outstations have great houses and rainwater tanks. It is country to my people that they want to visit now and then.

It makes it difficult for the ones who have been occupying their homelands to get the best support. I understand that people want to spend time in their homelands for sorry business and camping trips, but it is not fair on the ones who live on their homelands for the whole year. We want to make sure we look after everybody and that the service providers look after everyone. I have those issues in my home community as well with abandoned homelands.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister. Will you be able to produce a list of those 122 sites that are no longer funded?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.5

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, please restate the question for the record.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, will you provide a list of the 122 outstation homeland or town living areas that are no longer funded in Budget 2015-16?

Madam CHAIR: Do you accept the question?

Mrs PRICE: I accept the question, yes.

Madam CHAIR: That is number 7.5.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, we have a list and we can determine these sites. How does that equate to the service provider funding agreements?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, it does not alter the funding. It is better distribution of available funding to occupied homelands and outstations. I believe they need the support because they are out there.

Mr McCARTHY: Are those lists monitored regularly and their allocation reduced accordingly when a site is identified as not viable and not funded?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Mr McCARTHY: There is a lot of chat in the regions that suggests the service providers are still getting funding for these sites. That is among the Indigenous community as well as the non-Indigenous community, so I would really like to be able to clear that one up.

Mrs PRICE: The information in relation to these homelands and outstations comes from the service providers. They are funded to look after the homelands, whether in the Barkly or Yuendumu regions. It is the service providers that give us the information.

Mr McCARTHY: Is there any work being done in funding decisions around this area and proper financial modelling and evidence of what works? Is the department moving into that space to make these decisions and get better outcomes with limited funds?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, we are. That is part of the assets management that will give us a clear indication of which outstations are occupied and which are not. This assets access review will give us a better picture so we can make sure that the service providers do their job.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you. I would really appreciate any briefing on that in the coming months so I can spread the good word in support of you and little old me. What is the status of the federal Territory Jobs Creation Package, which is part of the municipal and essential services arrangements?

Mrs PRICE: It is under negotiation. That question would be better answered by the Chief Minister.

Mr McCARTHY: Can you tell me how many Territorians benefited from employment under that program last year?

Mrs PRICE: There were 136.

Mr McCARTHY: What can we expect in continuing employment into 2015-16?

Mrs PRICE: You will have to discuss that with the Department of the Chief Minister; it comes under that department.

Mr McCARTHY: In regard to Budget Paper No 3 and the \$6m available next year for supporting repairs and maintenance to housing under this output, what proportion will be available to homelands? What funds are available for R&M of housing in town community living areas? Are any funds available for refurbishment of housing in either homelands or town? Can those funds be used for repairs and maintenance to improvised dwellings on homelands?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, that comes under the Homelands Extra funding.

Mr McCARTHY: So that will be \$7.3m plus \$6m?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, the Homelands Extra allowance is the \$4m, and the 2015-16 allocation is \$6m.

Mr McCARTHY: They will be under the same guidelines, minister? There will not be any variations for improvised dwellings or any other repair and maintenance or requests that homelands may bring forward?

Mrs PRICE: It will fall under the same.

Mr McCARTHY: The same guidelines?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Mr McCARTHY: There has been lots of media comment about the community living areas of Elliott. Commentary has gone beyond housing into children protection, health and education. You gave some supportive comments. Can you give us any more details on what repair and maintenance will be provided for the Elliott community living areas?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, the Barkly Regional Council has raised the issue of the state of housing in Elliott in the town camps of the North Camp, South Camp and Malinja. We are aware of that by their media release of 10 February. We are aware that Barkly Regional Council organised a meeting on 2 February in Elliott to discuss the status of the community housing at North Camp, South Camp and Malinja.

My departmental people were there and the issues raised related to the state of existing housing and the need for new housing. I have met with the Elliott councillors in Tennant Creek. You were at that meeting. I met with the members outside and organised to meet with them this month. I will be visiting Elliott and I am hoping to take Nigel Scullion with me to discuss the housing and town camp issue in Elliott, and hopefully come up with something that will help alleviate the frustration that is within the Elliott community. I have made a commitment to them as well that I will make sure that these issues are addressed. Therefore, that is why I will meet with them this month.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, I appreciate that. What insurance arrangements are in place for dwellings in homelands? For example, replacement of housing destroyed by fire?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, they are private dwellings, and it is usually arranged by the residents. The homelands services provide that.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you. Minister, what proportion of homeland support funds for both essential services and housing support is used by the department for program administration?

Mrs PRICE: There is none, member for Barkly.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, how many homeland organisations have had Homelands Extra and other homelands support funds delayed by more than three months because of inadequate applications for funding?

Mrs PRICE: I would like to take that on notice, member for Barkly.

Mr McCARTHY: Sure, minister.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Please restate the question for the purposes of Hansard.

Question on Notice No 7.6

Mr McCARTHY: How many homeland organisations have had Homelands Extra and other homelands' support funds delayed by more than three months because of inadequate applications for funding?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question will be allocated number 7.6. Continue with your line of questioning, sir.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, can you explain what the agency does to support organisations in the administration of the paperwork?

Mrs PRICE: We have our officers go out and work with the service providers to make sure they have everything in order. They usually help the service providers with the applications, as well.

Mr McCARTHY: In the support you have provided, have the department officers sat down with the residents or the service providers to complete the forms?

Mrs PRICE: Yes. They have done both. The service providers and our officers have sat down with people who then help them apply.

Mr McCARTHY: Do the service providers take an administrative oncost fee?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, and that is standard.

Mr McCARTHY: What is that oncost fee, minister?

Mrs PRICE: That is 2.5%.

Mr McCARTHY: Of their allocation? Thank you, minister. How many homeland organisations have had funding suspended or reduced in the last year because of failure to adequately acquit or otherwise administer government funds?

Mrs PRICE: Just one.

Mr McCARTHY: And they shall remain nameless? Fair enough, minister.

Mrs PRICE: That is fair.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, you talked about the Ilpiye-Ilpiye project. Thank you for that update. Are there federal funds remaining to be spent, and if so what works remain to be done?

Mrs PRICE: The Ilpiye-Ilpiye camp in Alice Springs is being brought up to current urban subdivision standards. The Northern Territory government is developing Ilpiye-Ilpiye town camp through funding of \$10.63m from the Australian government.

On completion of the project, Ilpiye-Ilpiye town camp will be transformed to an urban subdivision. ProBuild are the contractors and electrical, water and sewerage infrastructure works will be completed for handover to the Power and Water Corporation. PWC is the service authority for utilities and infrastructure in Alice Springs. Roads and drainage works for the subdivision are still in progress. Roads and drainage infrastructure will be handed over to the Alice Springs Town Council.

The contract for works at Ilpiye-Ilpiye includes a requirement for Aboriginal involvement to ensure local skilled Aboriginal labour is used on the project. On average, 20% of the workers employed on-site have been Aboriginal.

I will show you some of the work that has been happening at Ilpiye-Ilpiye. It is looking good. This is the road construction progress and the new culvert under the road as well as the new water main. The town water main will supply the new subdivision. This is great for Ilpiye-Ilpiye, as I said previously.

Mr McCARTHY: What is the status of the water supply to the residents of Whitegate in Alice Springs?

Mrs PRICE: Whitegate is not an outstation or a town camp.

Mr McCARTHY: No funding in 2015-16 for that living area?

Mrs PRICE: It is not a recognised town camp and there is no funding under the national partnership agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory for infrastructure repairs or upgrades at Whitegate.

Mr McCARTHY: What contribution from the agency is made to the Darwin town community living areas task force?

Mrs PRICE: We do not look after the ones in Darwin. They come under Lands and Planning.

Mr McCARTHY: No budget implications for your agency, minister?

Mrs PRICE: No.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes Output 1.3.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – LANGUAGE SERVICES
Output 2.1 – Language Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Language Services, Output 2.1, Language Services. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: In the interests of time I will put these questions, minister, in a written format. I have a very tight time frame I am working to as an opposition member.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: So no? That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0, Output 2.1.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – STRATEGY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Output 3.1 – Community Development

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, Strategy and Community Development, Output 3.1, Community Development. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: As a purpose for monitoring Stronger Futures implementation plans, what are the key results of that work in the budget output in the last 12 months?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, the Department of Local Government and Community Services is one of the lead agencies responsible for the coordination of the Stronger Futures national partnership agreement on behalf of the Northern Territory government working with the Department of the Chief Minister. The National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory provides additional support for services to Aboriginal people in regional and remote locations. The investment supplements core funding provided to the Northern Territory through other revenue.

The national partnership agreement is currently being renegotiated between the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments. A revised NPA will be titled the National Partnership Agreement on the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. Under the revised agreement there will be four implementation plans instead of the previous nine. The implementation plans will cover all previous implementation plans apart from Municipal and Essential Services. The four implementation plans will be: children and schooling; community safety; health; and remote Australia strategies. Bilateral discussions between the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments have commenced and are ongoing regarding negotiation of the four revised IPs.

The Department of Local Government and Community Services is the lead agency responsible for negotiating the remote Australia strategic implementation plan. The management of the remaining IPs is the responsibility of other Northern Territory government agencies.

The Department of Local Government and Community Services is currently responsible for the coordination and oversight of reporting on the NPA on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory on behalf of the Northern Territory government. The department will continue to maintain oversight of reporting under the revised NPA.

Progress reports against each IP are required to be provided to the Commonwealth government every six months on 1 September and 1 March each year. The department collates these reports and checks for consistency and quality assurance prior to submitting the reports to the Commonwealth.

Mr McCARTHY: What staff arrangements do you have in place to support that work, including staff located in remote communities?

Mrs PRICE: I will get my Executive Director, Noelene Swanson, to answer that question for you.

Ms SWANSON: Noelene Swanson, Executive Director Strategy. In relation to the coordination reporting aspect of Stronger Futures, we have a reporting team in place that includes policy officers, technical reporting officers and collation officers. Is there anything else you would like to know?

Mr McCARTHY: Any located in regional remote areas?

Ms SWANSON: They are supported. The reports are provided to us for coordination from the agencies which are responsible for delivering the input into those reports. We simply coordinate them and do a quality check to make sure there is consistency in the response that goes back to the Commonwealth government. In relation to the agencies, you would probably have to direct that specific question to how they collate that report.

Mr McCARTHY: My questions will go in written form for the rest of that output group.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Strategy

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 3.2, Strategy. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: I will lodge mine in a written form.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.2 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4 – LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGIONS

Output 4.1 – Policy and Legislation

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Local Government and Regions, Output 4.1, Policy and Legislation. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, Budget Paper No 3 says that around \$1.82m will be collected from landholders as rates under the *Darwin Rates Act*. I note that in at least one previous year those rates have been offered up as a departmental saving for Treasury budget priorities. Can you tell us what happened with those funds in 2014-15?

Mrs PRICE: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.7

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Can you restate that question, member for Barkly?

Mr McCARTHY: Budget Paper No 3 says that around \$1.82m will be collected from landholders as rates under the *Darwin Rates Act*. I note that in at least one previous year those rates have been offered up as a departmental saving for Treasury budget priorities. Can you tell us what happened with those funds in 2014-15?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That question will be number 7.7. Please continue.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, what is the current status of the \$7.9m Indigenous matching jobs package for supporting employment of local people in regional councils?

Mrs PRICE: The Indigenous Jobs Development Program is provided to regional councils - one is the Belyuen Community Government Council - with the intention of supporting the employment of its Aboriginal constituents. The grant provides financial assistance for salaries and approved on-costs for Aboriginal employees delivering council services.

Mr McCARTHY: What is the current uptake by council? How many people employed under this program have been able to migrate to fully-funded positions, not dependent on matching funding?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, there are 400 positions.

Mr McCARTHY: How many people under the program have been able to migrate to fully-funded positions, not depending on the matching funding?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, I will get my CE to answer that for you.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, that is not one of the criteria of the program. The idea of the program is to initiate the process and to maintain that 400. There is no criteria to go on to full-time employment.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Mr Chiodo. Minister, it looks like the funding might end. The federal funding component of the jobs matching program is ending. What is expected of the long-term outcomes of those 400 people?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, it is not ending, and it is not Commonwealth funded; it is Northern Territory funded.

Mr McCARTHY: Not ending, minister?

Mrs PRICE: Not ending.

Mr McCARTHY: That is good news. That was a good initiative from a previous government, minister. We thank you for continuing it.

Has your department done any analysis of the number of jobs and training opportunities lost from local government when the previous Minister for Housing, the member for Grotter, changed arrangements relating to remote housing and tenancy management?

Mrs PRICE: That is a Housing question so you might have to ask that later.

Mr McCARTHY: In relation to employment, minister, our analysis says about 80 jobs have been lost because of that change. Are you aware of those job losses?

Mrs PRICE: We will leave that for the Minister for Housing.

Mr McCARTHY: Leave it for the Minister for Housing?

Mrs PRICE: That is me with my other hat on.

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, minister. Can you provide a detailed breakdown of departmental grant funds allocated in 2014-15 to each of the regional councils, showing details of projects funded, projects completed as a result of that grant funding, and project funding applications rejected in the assessment process, with the reason for that rejection?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, would you be able to repeat that question for us?

Mr McCARTHY: Can you provide a detailed breakdown of departmental grant funds allocated in 2014-15 to each of the regional councils, showing details of projects funded, projects completed as a result of that grant funding, and project funding applications rejected in the assessment process, with the reason for the rejection?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, is that special purpose grants funding?

Mr McCARTHY: We are interested in any grant funding. It would be great to see what is working and what is not.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, these are special purpose grants that have been allocated for Barkly Regional Council. To assist with the upgrade of Purkiss Reserve park there was \$250 000 allocated. The Nhulunbuy Public Cemetery Trust for the beautification project at Nhulunbuy which included removal of damaging plants was given over \$28 000. Blatherskite Park Reserve was allocated \$40 000 towards sewer upgrades which included new pumps, circuit boards, failure relay switches and pumping out the existing pits at the reserve. The Central Desert Regional Council was allocated over \$114 000 to purchase two skid steel loaders with trailers. The MacDonnell Regional Council was given \$266 000 to purchase two side loading 5 m³ used Hino trucks. The Barkly Regional Council was given \$120 000 to purchase and install two-bedroom living facilities for staff housing at Ampilatwatja. The West Arnhem Regional Council was given over \$121 000 towards the purchase of a new dual axle tip truck. Coomalie Community Government Council was allocated over \$23 000 to construct an enclosed kitchen survey at the Bruce Jones Community Centre. The Roper Gulf Regional Council was given \$500 000 towards the costs of constructing a purpose-built facility to accommodate council civil works depot at Lot 1348. The Alice Springs Town Council was given over \$200 000 to purchase a cardboard and a paper waste bailer at the

new shed to house its Regional Waste Management Facility. The MacDonnell Regional Council was given over \$80 000 towards infrastructure upgrades of grandstands and shade structures to six community ovals – Docker River, Haasts Bluff, Imanpa, Kintore, Mount Liebig and Finke. The Barkly Regional Council was given over \$64 000 to purchase a tractor with slashers for a community of Elliott. The Vic Daly Regional Council was given \$160 000 to purchase a new 8 m³ garbage truck. City of Darwin was given \$100 000 towards installation of a 24-hour public amenities facility in Darwin Civic Park. Belyuen Community Government was given over \$20 000 to cover 2014-15 and 2015-16 manager service fees. Miali Community has over \$53 000 to purchase a Hino three tonne truck. West Arnhem Regional Council was given \$185 000 towards the purchase of a caterpillar for the community of Maningrida. The Tiwi Islands Regional Council was given over \$200 000 to purchase a D6R II caterpillar dozer. The council of West Daly was given over \$117 000 to upgrade office equipment and furniture for three service centres in the communities of Wadeye, Palumpa and Peppimenarti. The Central Desert Regional Council was given \$102 000 to purchase a backhoe for the community of Atitjere. Belyuen Community Government Council was given over \$42 000 to cover the costs of tree removal within the community. Litchfield Council was given over \$125 000 to replace the existing roof on the Howard Springs Scout Hall and towards internal refurbishments, with some extra. The Vic-Daly Regional Council was given over \$26 000 to install cattle grids at the main entrance to the Yarralin community. Last, the West Arnhem Regional Council was given \$40 000 towards the purchase of a heavy duty tri-axle tag trailer to transport machinery through the communities.

For the Family Safe Environment Fund, West Arnhem Regional Council was given over \$38 000 to purchase and install solar lighting across parks and barbecue areas in the five communities of West Arnhem, including Maningrida, Gunbalanya, Minjilang, Waruwi and Jabiru. The Vic Daly was given over \$27 000 to purchase and install perimeter fencing totalling 284 m around (inaudible)Community Central Park. The West Daly was given over \$16 000 to upgrade and install new lights in Wadeye and Palumpa. The Barkly Regional Council was given over \$20 000 for the purchase and installation of a CCTV and alarm system for the Tennant Creek swimming pool. The Central Desert Regional Council was given \$18 000 towards the purchase and installation of three solar powered lights in the park at Willowra. The Alice Springs Town Council was given over \$40 000 to purchase and install security lighting. Another was the amount of \$50 000 towards the purchase and installation of eight solar lights that went to East Arnhem. The Roper Gulf Regional Council was given over \$36 000 to purchase and install solar lights in the problem areas around the council community.

Mr McCARTHY: There are some good news stories there. I will be able to take that information out in the field and we will try to double that list next time round.

I have more questions but I am out of time. What time is the dinner break, Mr Deputy Chair?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: It is 7 pm.

Mr McCARTHY: It is 7 pm. All right. I will have to put a lot of these in writing, but we will try our best.

What is the status of work relating to the new regional waste management facility to replace Shoal Bay?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, progress towards a regional waste management facility for the Top End: in March 2013 the Top End Regional Organisation of Councils, a regional grouping of Top End local governments including Palmerston, Darwin, Litchfield, Coomalie, Belyuen and Wagait councils were awarded a special purpose grant of \$120 000 to investigate a governance model for a regional waste management facility.

Members of TOPROC are committed to investigating and evaluating the development of a governance model for a regional waste management facility. TOPROC is keen to emulate the contemporary trend for collaborative and regional waste management projects as there are significant opportunities to reduce and share costs and ensure greater community viability.

TOPROC engaged a consultant, Morrison Low, to undertake an assessment of the governance models for the construction and operation of a regional waste management facility. The project was focused solely on assessment of the most appropriate governance model and did not include the identification of a preferred site or the selection of a particular type of facility.

The City of Darwin recently renewed its lease for the Shoal Bay waste management facility, which has capacity until 2045. The City of Darwin advised TOPROC of its plans to continue to operate the Shoal Bay

Waste Management Facility until 2045 and does not support the establishment of a governance model for a regional waste management facility at this point in time.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister. What is the plan for cost recovery in that model?

Mrs PRICE: It is there until 2045 and it is a user-pay facility.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister. Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: No worries, mate. That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Sustainability and Compliance

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions for Output 4.2, Sustainability and Compliance. Are there any questions?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Mr Deputy Chair. Minister, what work is being done in the review of local government, apart from calling for submissions?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, the Department of Local Government and Community Services is conducting a review of the *Local Government Act*. The *Local Government Act* sets up a legislative framework for local government councils in the Northern Territory. The act has been operating since 2008 which is almost seven years ago. It is time to review the act to ensure the legislation is effective and up to date. I want to ensure that the legislation underpinning local government is working effectively for the benefit of local people and the sector generally.

Information about the review is available on the department's website and submissions may be e-mailed to the address indicated on the website, which is www.dlgcs.nt.gov.au. Submissions were open to 30 April 2015 but late submissions are still being accepted.

A working party has been established to help the review process. The working party has representation from the sector, the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory and the Department of Local Government and Community Services and is to be chaired by a member from Alice Springs.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, how many submissions were received so far?

Mrs PRICE: Apparently there are a lot of applications.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, are there any plans for community consultations?

Mrs PRICE: I will hand that over to my CE, Mike Chiodo, who can answer that question.

Mr CHIODO: Member for Barkly, as the minister has just read, although applications closed at the end of April, we have extended that process to allow for the large number of submissions we have received. They are being broken down into a series of high-level topics for review. Yes, there will be an ongoing consultation process as a part of that.

Mr McCARTHY: That you, Mr Chiodo. What has happened to the boundaries review as in the annual report?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, the councils are required to review their electoral representation at least once during each term of council. This will be undertaken at least 12 months before the next local government general election. In February 2014 all councils were reminded of the requirement to conduct an electoral representation review at least 12 months before the next general election, which at that time was scheduled for March 2016.

In late 2014 the department advised all councils of government's intention to introduce legislation which would defer the next local government general election from March 2016 until August 2017. The deferral was one of several recommendations made by the Northern Territory Electoral Commissioner following the 2012 local government general election, and was based on the potential significant workload and possible voter confusion arising from conducting three general elections in the same year, as both the Australian and Northern Territory government general elections are also scheduled to be conducted in 2016.

As the majority of councils had already committed to review of electoral representation, the deferred local government general election provides more time to fully consider and consult on proposed changes.

To date, the department has received eight formal submissions. City of Darwin proposed no changes. The City of Palmerston proposes an increase in the number of elected members from six to eight, a change in the type of elected members from aldermen to counsellor, and changes to council boundaries. Alice Springs Town Council proposed no changes. Katherine Town Council proposed no changes. It is the same for Litchfield. West Arnhem Regional Council proposed no changes. Vic-Daly Regional Council proposes to pursue changes to council's boundaries. The Roper Gulf Regional Town Council proposes an increase in the number of elected members from 12 to 13 to improve representation for the Numbulwar Numburindi Ward.

The remaining councils were all granted extensions which were requested by councils to conduct further community consultation. It is expected that their reviews will be submitted to the department by mid-2015.

Mr McCARTHY: What are the government's plans about the future of the non-incorporated areas of the Northern Territory?

Mrs PRICE: A local government advisory group has been established to consider local government options in the Cox Peninsula and Coomalie areas. The Belyuen and Coomalie Community Councils held informal discussions during 2014 around possible resource sharing, service delivery arrangements and options for future local government including boundary changes. To assist formalising discussions and providing support, a local government advisory group was established which held its first meeting on 5 December 2014. The group initially comprised of representatives from Belyuen, Coomalie community government councils and the Wagait shire council. The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) also attends meetings, as does the Department of Local Government and Community Services which chairs meetings and provides administrative support.

Neighbouring stakeholders such as the Dundee Progress Association have been provided with background material regarding the role of local government services and funding and have requested representation on the advisory group. The local member for the Daly region, Hon Gary Higgins, has also been involved in early discussions.

The group's agenda and discussions are initiated by the councils themselves with no deadlines or predetermined outcomes other than to progress collaborative, consultative plans and implement consideration of all options for sustainable local government in the area for the future.

The second meeting of the Belyuen Coomalie local government advisory group was held on 2 March 2015 and continued productive discussions between councils and the possible future collaboration on waste management, grants management, IT systems and support. Animal control across the three councils has also been identified for discussion of the advisory group's next meeting.

The department met with representatives of the Dundee Progress Association on 2 April 2015 and discussed a number of initiatives to engage with residents in the region about the benefits of local government and possible future options. In addition to public information being provided in community newsletters about local government options and services, residents' views will be gauged and supported by community meetings to discuss options further.

Mr McCARTHY: In relation to the *Cemeteries Act*, have the lands councils confirmed support for ban of burial at private and public residences in remote towns?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, a review of the *Cemeteries Act* is under way.

Mr McCARTHY: Is that confirmed, minister? Have the lands councils supported that?

Mrs PRICE: They have not given us an indication but we are waiting for their support.

Mr McCARTHY: What funds were available to assist regional councils with the development of cemeteries?

Mrs PRICE: Initially a discussion paper was released to public in December 2012 and submissions closed in March 2013. There were 26 formal submissions received. Interstate legislation has been examined to see how various issues are dealt with. The matters being addressed by the review include types of

cemeteries in the Northern Territory, responsibility for cemeteries across the Territory, responsibility for recording burials, exclusive rights to a burial plot, contemporary burial practices, cremations and burials at sea.

Subsequent to the discussion paper a further two papers have been released for public consultation. One is an outline of the proposed *Cemeteries Act* and the policy behind the proposed act. These papers are both available on the department's website. Submissions were closed on 27 February 2015; however, the date since date was extended to the end of March 2015 and late submissions are still being accepted. To date the department has a very good engagement from Aboriginal land councils, regional councils, municipal councils and industry. There is no money.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, what work has the Local Government department done in the last two years to improved morgue facilities in remote towns?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, that sits with the Department of Health.

Mr McCARTHY: That is an interesting question, minister. In the interests of time I will put the rest in writing. Mr Deputy Chair, I have no more questions in that output area.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes Output 4.2, Sustainability and Compliance.

Output 4.3 – Strategic Projects and Regions

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 4.3, Strategic Projects and Regions.

Mr McCARTHY: I have questions in that output, Mr Deputy Chair.

Mrs PRICE: We have done Output 4.2 and 4.3.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: You are right. I just read that.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – OFFICE OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I note the questions relating to Output Group 5, Office of Aboriginal Affairs, were answered by the Chief Minister and Minister for Indigenous Affairs on Wednesday 27 May.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Output 6.1 – Corporate and Governance

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 6.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 6.1, Corporate and Governance.

Mr McCARTHY: I had questions around local authorities, minister. I do not believe we have dealt with that.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We dealt with that. That was Output Group 4.0, Local Government and Regions, Output 4.1, Policy and Legislation.

Mr McCARTHY: Minister, would you be prepared to have a quick discussion about local authorities?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, we can do that, member for Barkly.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister. It is great to have this opportunity. Regarding the allocations of \$5m for local authorities, I have been finding in the regions the allocation of the money is very much acknowledged and we congratulate the government for that. However, the spending of that money seems to be falling into that social area of football jumpers and supporting sporting teams. I am hearing from regional council managers, constituents and local authority members that they want governance training, education and awareness around expenditure of that money, and the opportunity for partnerships to deliver efficiencies. Minister, I want to make that point and wonder if you have any comments to make.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, the funding will go towards projects in some of these communities where we have local authorities. We encourage local authorities to spend this money well in programs around the community itself.

Mr McCARTHY: Absolutely, minister, and that is the essence of the program. What I hear in the regions is that this social-type spending - which is quite normal when you think about the communities - is happening. You might be able to provide a list of projects that I could take to provide that education and awareness around the electorates I travel in. One of the requests was about governance training, education and awareness. What is happening with that?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Barkly, for your information if people are keen to do governance training, LGANT delivers that as well.

I can read out some of the communities where local authorities have used this funding for community purpose. For example, the Yarralin local authority members recommended that \$30 000 of Yarralin's local authority funding be pooled and allocated to upgrading the multipurpose sports courts at Pigeon Hole. The Victoria Daly Regional Council has approved it. The Department of Education has contributed as well and will project manage the upgrades.

On the Tiwi Islands, Wurrumiyanga local authority members recommended an upgrade to the local swimming pool filtration system. This was a priority from the local authority because the community uses that pool a lot. They want to use this as a way getting kids to school, with the No School, No Pool policy. They came up with that.

There is a range of issues that local authorities are including in their discussions which include planning, budgeting, local employment and the monitoring of service delivery within their respective communities.

A recent snapshot health check of local authorities across all regional councils found that in the first six months of operation local authorities were delivering on objectives to deliver a stronger local voice and greater accountability for service delivery. The snapshot report recommends possible changes to the guidelines to further improve local authorities, including reducing minimum number of meetings per year and projects to assist reaching quorums and support our local authorities as the primary body for Northern Territory government's engagement with the remote communities.

There are local authorities in these regions that know what they want, how to spend that money and on what to spend it.

Mr McCARTHY: They are some good examples, minister. Do you have Alpururulam in front of you, by any chance?

Mrs PRICE: No. I have lots starting with A, but no Alpururulam.

Mr McCARTHY: No Alpururulam. I will go and share that information with Alpururulam to start a journey, minister. Thanks for the opportunity to discuss that. Mr Deputy Chair, I have pages left but I will put them in a written format.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That would be wonderful. Do you have anything else in Output 6.1?

Mr McCARTHY: No, Mr Deputy Chair.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, that concludes consideration of Output Group 6.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

Mr McCARTHY: Just one to finish off before the dinner break. In the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, is there increased appropriation around looking at sacred sites for the proposed gas pipeline and railway corridor?

Mrs PRICE: That is later.

Mr McCARTHY: Later? You do not want to discuss that for two minutes before dinner?

Mrs PRICE: No, we can come back to that.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Local Government and Community Services. On behalf of the committee, I thank departmental officers for their attendance today. The committee will now break for dinner and when we come back we will consider the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, minister, and thank you for the departmental officers for that very valuable session.

The committee suspended

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

Madam CHAIR: It is 7.30 pm and we are again joined by minister Price. We were on Output 6.1, Corporate and Governance?

Mr BARRETT: No, we are finished and starting the next page.

Madam CHAIR: We are in the Department of Housing? Minister, perhaps introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mrs PRICE: Madam Chair, I introduce the officials from the Department of Housing attending the committee and seated with me today. We have Ms Leah Clifford, Chief Executive Officer, Ken Tinkham, Chief Financial Officer. I may also call on the following staff from the Department of Housing: Mr Jim Bamber, who is the Deputy Chief Executive Officer responsible for Housing Services; Mr Andrew Clapham, General Manager Strategic Governance and Supply; Ms Karen Elligett Executive Director Corporate Services; Mr Phillip Luck, the Executive Director of Procurement and Contracts; and Mr David Bernard, Executive Director Housing Supply.

Madam CHAIR: I apologise, I was not here before the break. We have started the Department of Housing. Welcome and thank you for coming this evening. Would you like to make an opening statement, minister?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. The Giles government aims to provide an affordable and accessible housing system by supporting eligible Territorians with housing options appropriate to their individual needs. The Department of Housing's work is complemented by the work of service providers and the non-government sector in delivering programs and services to Territorians. Northern Territory government funding to these service providers assists in supporting some of our most vulnerable in the community. We value strong partnerships that ensure the funding provided is maximised to support this part of our community. I thank the service providers for the continued hard work they do in supporting Territorians with housing needs, and I look forward to continuing working in partnership to provide vital services to Territorians.

Our goal in housing is simple: to develop pathways for Territorians to access the right house in the right place at the right time. We seek to support eligible Territorians with housing options that are appropriate to their housing needs. To do this, the Country Liberals government has focused its strategy on strengthening services across the sector to provide stronger pathways for tenants to transition out of housing assistance into stable accommodation of their choice.

Much has been achieved this year. The Giles Country Liberals government has provided grant funding of \$13m to non-government organisations to provide services, managed and supported accommodation and tenancy support programs.

We achieved sales of 24 houses, eight of which were sold to those living in the houses, achieving revenue of \$8.83m to put back into our Housing budget. We built three new houses in Stuart Park and 80 new houses across remote communities of Yirrkala, (inaudible), Nganmarriyanga and Peppimenarti this year, with more to be built this coming year. A great result for urban and remote areas is we continue to implement the successful Real Housing for Growth plan, which includes head leases and redevelopments of sites such as Kurringal which was recently announced.

We continue to implement initiatives such as the bond assistance scheme and HomeBuild Access loan products to support people moving along the pathway to achieving home ownership, and to assist in

reducing the cost of living for Territorians. We identified funding and commenced discussions with the operators of Apmere Mwerre for the visitor centre to continue in Alice Springs this year. Grant funding is also available for Stuart Lodge and we look forward receiving applications from the non-government sector on the use of this facility for consideration.

Importantly, we have dropped our wait times as a result of our repairs and maintenance works and putting vacant dwellings across the Territory back into stock - a massive achievement. We are participating in a coordinated effort to restore housing in Galiwinku led by the Department of the Chief Minister.

Importantly, my department is focused on the future. We have started work on a longer-term plan for social housing in the Territory which includes, amongst other things, building on providing community housing, such as that which has been achieved at Elliott Street in Alice Springs.

Housing offers a foundation to economic and social independence. Budget 2015-16 builds on the Giles government's achievements. The Country Liberals government has increased the Housing budget by \$19m to a total of \$332m to enable the Department of Housing to continue to progress supporting those in the Territory who require housing assistance.

I am pleased to advise that Budget 2015-16 provides \$10.6m over two years to match the Commonwealth government funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness to continue to provide services for crisis and short-term accommodation, managed and supported accommodation that offers transitional support and tenancy support programs.

The Territory and Commonwealth governments continue to invest in remote housing through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and the national partnership on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory.

This budget provides \$147m for housing works, rebuilds and refurbishments in remote Indigenous communities. We are not only undertaking important upgrades across the Territory remote areas, but we are building 52 new houses in Waruwi, Minjilang, Milikapiti and Umbakumba. To date, 1098 new houses have been constructed and we have exceeded our target with 2929 refurbishments completed under the NPARIH program. Our commitment to remote housing to date has seen 92% of houses in remote areas touched by new works or through upgrades.

We will continue rolling out the \$1.7bn program, delivering for remote Territorians. All houses under the program will be delivered. The construction of new housing in remote communities has helped ease overcrowding and led to better houses. I see the real improvements that the Giles Country Liberals government is having on people's lives in communities, especially when I go to my electorate.

The Stronger Futures Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement provides \$230m from 2013 to June 2018 to complete upgrades to remote public housing. I am pleased to report that at 31 March 2015, a total of 35 upgrades were completed so far this financial year, with additional works planned for delivery next financial year.

The Giles government has listened to the voices of the bush, and we recognise that we can not only support home ownership to those in urban areas, but also provide the same opportunities to the people in the bush. Owning your own home provides for housing independence, so to support home ownership in remote areas of Wurrumiyanga, Milikapiti, Umbakumba, Milyakburra and Angurugu this budget provides \$1.5m of the \$4.5m committed over three years for remote home ownership opportunities. We are committed to working with remote communities to provide people with the opportunity to own a home. Applying to 50% of housing stock, this is an initiative of government that expands home ownership from urban areas into remote areas.

In addition, over \$73m in the budget will go towards property and tenancy management in remote Indigenous communities. I am passionate about creating real opportunities for Indigenous employment. They should be able to access real jobs in their communities. That is why I am so pleased that newly-implemented service delivery models have not only reduced costs and improved response times, but have well exceeded Aboriginal participation employment rates, with 31% Aboriginal employment achieved on capital works delivered in comparison to target of 20%, which is also set to increase. Local community-based Aboriginal employment of 58% has been achieved through the housing maintenance contracts in comparison to the target of 40%, and 62% through the tenancy management service contracts. This means real jobs for local people.

A total of \$9.9m has been allocated for the Real Housing for Growth plan. We are well on track to achieving the 2000 homes, but also realise that we need to progress with caution, given the current state of the market in Darwin. I will be announcing shortly a review of this plan to ensure that it is penetrating the market in the right areas in supporting people along the continual pathway into home ownership.

The Giles government is repairing the houses Labor neglected. Over \$27m has been committed to provide repairs and maintenance to urban housing. A pipeline of repairs and maintenance works has commenced across the Territory. In addition, budget 2015-16 provides over \$10m for minor new works on public housing and a further \$3m on refurbishment of complexes. This will support works such as the replacement of roofs, kitchens, some bathrooms and refurbishments of unit complexes where required across the Northern Territory.

In all, 22 new dwellings will be constructed across the Territory for social housing in Katherine, Stuart Park and in Johnston. Over \$14m has been identified for government employee housing for the provision of new housing and minor new work upgrades throughout remote communities in the Northern Territory. This type of housing support the delivery of important government services in both remote and regional areas. This budget allocation includes over \$11m for new government employee housing in remote and regional areas in Nyirripi, Palumpa, Ti Tree, Milikapiti and Ngukurr, and for the upgrades to housing in Maningrida, Galiwinku, Milikapiti, Ngukurr, as well as servicing works in Yuendumu.

We have seen the impacts of Cyclone Lam and Cyclone Nathan. Budget 2015-16 allocates \$50m to support rebuilding cyclone-affected communities. My Department of Housing is working with the Department of the Chief Minister on continuing the rebuild program, providing the right house at the right time and ensuring we continue to deliver housing choices across the sector into the future, supported by the allocation of \$1m in this budget to review our strategy to further improve the use of our housing stock and review the effectiveness of our programs. A strategy is currently being developed and I look forward to telling you about this work on its completion.

Our commitment to housing does not stop here. The HomeBuild Access home loan program, with a low deposit of subsidised interest rate loan, will continue to provide assistance to Territorians wanting to buy their own newly-constructed home. Budget 2015-16 provides a number of home ownership loan products and services to Territorians who would otherwise be unable to access private-sector finance. The government's home loan products focus on increasing the supply of new housing in the rental market.

Everyone has the right to feel safe and a home and in their neighbourhood. Antisocial behaviour is the scourge that blights the public housing system. We need to remove it. It is not representative of the tenants who do the right thing in public housing. It develops distrust in communities and creates a nuisance to neighbours.

As Minister for Housing I am committed to reducing antisocial behaviour in public housing residents. The Country Liberals public housing safety strategy has led to a dramatic drop in the number of incidents of antisocial behaviour in public housing. This budget continues to support our strategy and program for tenants and the community as we seek to reduce antisocial behaviour even further. I thank the committee for this opportunity to address it and welcome your questions.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions relating to this statement?

Ms MOSS: Yes, please. Thank you very much for this statement, minister. I also thank all of the officers from your department who are here tonight. What has been the uptake on the remote home ownership program to date?

Mrs PRICE: They have been 20 applications and five have been approved for finance. In June 2014 the Northern Territory government introduced a home ownership initiative that allowed the existing public housing tenants living in remote communities the option of buying their home. Since the start of the program 20 applications have been submitted for consideration. Five applicants have been preapproved for finance by IBA. They remain committed to purchasing their home. The Department of Housing, in collaboration with IBA, is working with a further 13 applicants to progress their applications. Once the process of setting up purchase prices is established it is anticipated the first sales will commence.

Ms MOSS: So for those who have not been approved for finance and are not currently working with the department on their applications, what has happened to those applications? There were two applications that were unsuccessful. What is the status of those?

Mrs PRICE: We are working to progress the applications.

Ms MOSS: Is it 13 or 15 applications that the department is working with applicants on?

Mrs PRICE: There are 13 applicants right now and two have not proceeded.

Ms MOSS: What would the reasons be for applications not proceeding through that program?

Mrs PRICE: It could be their personal choice.

Ms MOSS: It is possible those two applicants have opted out of the program? Okay. Thank you, I appreciate that.

You mentioned in your statement the announcement of \$1m to develop a social housing strategy to - I quote from Budget Paper No 3:

... develop a social housing strategy to improve the utilisation of the Territory's existing social housing asset base and review the effectiveness and linkages of the existing housing programs.

I am interested in what is meant by the statement and what the \$1m is expected to deliver.

Mrs PRICE: This government's goal is to provide pathways for Territorians to access the right paths in the right place at the right time. We are focused on assisting eligible Territorians with housing options appropriate to their housing needs. To achieve this we are strengthening services across the continuum which will provide a stronger pathway for tenants to transition out of assisted accommodation into stable accommodation of their choice.

My Department of Housing is currently preparing a housing strategy, including an implementation plan which will set the future direction for the supply of affordable and social housing. The housing strategy will include implementation plans to address homelessness, supported accommodation, social housing, affordable rental, private rental and home ownership. The housing strategy will focus on delivering services that are client-centric, holistic and relevant whilst ensuring housing is fit for purpose, and establish strong strategic partnerships with industry and the non-government sector. This strategy will see this government build capacity and capability across the sector, including growth of the community housing sector and the increased involvement of Indigenous businesses and organisations in the delivery of housing. The strategy will address challenges such as population growth, funding and the ageing public housing stock portfolio, which impacts on the current housing system.

Ms MOSS: Minister, I am glad to hear more information about what will be involved in that plan. It would be good to get a little more detail, specifically what the \$1m is for. Is it for consultancy in order to develop this plan or is it paying for the implementation of the plan and certain actions within the plan?

Mrs PRICE: It is for internal consultancies and external consultancies that are required.

Ms MOSS: The full \$1m is allocated to that plan?

Mrs PRICE: That is where we are trying to achieve efficiencies.

Ms MOSS: A number of figures were provided in relation to budget funding for NPARIH and I am hoping to get some clarification about those numbers. In your budget speech you stated:

Budget 2015-16 provides over \$220m to improve housing for Indigenous people living in remote communities.

You added that this amount included the allocation of \$147m for the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory. These programs for housing works, namely rebuilds and refurbishments, are for remote Indigenous communities. Budget 2015-16 will deliver 52 new houses across five communities and upgrades to existing houses in communities across the Northern Territory. I note you also mentioned the \$147m in your statement. I want to confirm it is \$147m to deliver 52 new houses across five communities and to provide upgrades to existing houses?

Mrs PRICE: The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing is a 10-year joint \$1.7bn Northern Territory and Commonwealth government housing program that commenced in 2008 and is

scheduled to end on 30 June 2018. An agreed implementation plan is currently in place for the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2016. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing aims to deliver 1456 new houses and 2915 rebuilds and refurbishments by June 2018.

Since commencement in 2008 a total of 1098 new builds and 2929 rebuilds and refurbishments have been completed. The current focus under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing is only to replace houses that are deemed beyond economic repair. As a consequence, the program will not be delivering additional dwellings, only new replacement houses. No further rebuild or refurbishment works will be undertaken under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. As all targets have been met this element of the program is complete.

The funding agreement allocation for 2014-15 provided over \$28m to deliver 18 new replacement houses. As at 31 March 2015 all 18 houses have been completed in the communities of Yirrkala, (inaudible), Nganmarriyanga and Peppimenarti ...

Ms MOSS: Thank you, minister. Is it possible to confirm that it is \$147m under that funding to deliver 52 new houses across five communities? I want to confirm that I have the \$147m correct.

Mrs PRICE: That figure is correct.

Ms MOSS: For further clarification around these figures, the Housing budget highlighted on page 278 of Budget Paper No 3 \$77.8m under NPARIH and Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory to construct new houses. Under the Commonwealth revenue section on the following page, it shows a total of just over \$58m from the Commonwealth for Remote Indigenous Housing and Stronger Futures. We have three figures: \$147m; \$77.8m and \$58m. I am seeking clarification about how those three figures fit together.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, some of the \$147m is revoted. I will pass on to Ken, who is our Chief Financial Officer. He will be able to explain a bit more in detail.

Mr TINKHAM: Ken Tinkham, Chief Financial Officer Department of Housing. The \$147m is a program amount so it includes revote from the current financial year. That information is in Budget Paper No 4. The \$77.8m is the actual funding under NPARIH. The \$73.3m, I think you mentioned, is property and tenancy management funding which is also funded by NPARIH.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much, I appreciate that. How much is the Northern Territory contributing to each of those areas?

Mr TINKHAM: That is all Commonwealth funding.

Ms MOSS: What is the total for building houses, upgrades and associated infrastructure?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, the Northern Territory government will invest over \$130m in 2015-16 to provide new and upgraded public and government employee housing across the Northern Territory. The housing capital works 2015-16 new program comprises of three component programs. One is the Indigenous housing and infrastructure new works of \$102m.

Ms MOSS: How does that compare to the proportion for those things last year?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I will get my Chief Financial Officer to answer that question.

Mr TINKHAM: The funding for 2015-16 for Indigenous housing was \$136m in this year's program. Next year it is \$207m for remote housing and includes \$50m for Cyclone Lam repairs.

Ms MOSS: Thank you.

Ms MANISON: I might jump in with regard to NPARIH. Given there is a huge need for housing in remote areas, NPARIH has done an amazing job of getting many new homes and homes repaired and upgraded. However, the need is still great. Minister, you would appreciate that better than most people, being out there a fair bit. NPARIH is fast approaching the end of its 10-year life. What discussions have you had with the Commonwealth about what happens when NPARIH ends?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Wanguri, the department is working with the DCM. The negotiations sit with the Department of Chief Minister.

Ms MANISON: You have not had any discussions with your federal counterparts at all? Even at an agency level?

Mrs PRICE: I have had conversations with minister Scullion previously. We have discussed NPARIH and how long it is in existence. It is ongoing. I know housing is very important and we need to have these discussions with the Commonwealth to make sure we have ongoing funding for housing across the Territory. The Department of Chief Minister is having ongoing discussions with the Commonwealth.

Ms MANISON: Nothing solid at the moment, but discussions are ongoing?

Mrs PRICE: It is just discussions until we come up with a solution.

Ms MANISON: Thank you, minister.

Ms MOSS: It appears that there are modest increases in some areas yet Budget Paper No 3 outlines a \$4.5m cut from remote Indigenous housing in Strong Futures and a \$2.3m cut from asbestos removal. Given that we are all cognisant of the need, \$6.4m is a huge cut to the national partnership agreement. Are you concerned about the decrease in funding in these vital areas?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I will get Ken to answer that question.

Mr TINKHAM: The NPARIH funding and other Commonwealth funding programs basically go up and down in accordance with implementation plans and the way the Commonwealth wants to fund it. There are variations from year to year but it does not affect the total program, which is \$1.7bn.

Ms MOSS: On the same topic but back to the \$147m and the delivery of the 52 houses across five communities, can you detail the number of houses and upgrades by community?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, these are the Indigenous housing and infrastructure new works. The new dwellings total about 52: Milikapiti, 12; Warrawi, there are 20; Minjilang, 14, Umbakumba, six. Upgrade dwellings in various other communities total 301: Belyuen has 23; Ampilatwatja, 10; Tara, 19; Amanbidji, nine; Bulla, 21; Bulman, 24; Kybrook, 13; Peppimenarti, 29; Alpururulam, 45; Atitjere, 21; Finke, six; Wilora, 18; Willowra, 34; and (inaudible), 29.

Ms MOSS: How is that allocation decided?

Mrs PRICE: It involves planning and consultation with communities.

Ms MOSS: What is the average cost per upgrade?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, \$140 000 is the figure.

Ms MOSS: Minister, can you please provide some more detail about the tendering and delivery model for that?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I call Phillip to come to the table.

Ms MOSS: Thank you.

Mrs PRICE: Would you be able to repeat the question again, please?

Ms MOSS: In relation to the delivery of 52 houses across five communities, what is the tendering and delivering model for those particular works?

Mr LUCK: Phillip Luck, Executive Director Contract Implementation, Department of Housing. Currently we are using alliancing for the majority of the 52. We have been using alliancing since 2008. We have also used lump sum tendering through the Department of Infrastructure.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much, I appreciate that. Sorry for making everybody shift around.

Minister, you raised in your statement that wait lists are going down. Could you provide some information on what the current wait lists are by dwelling type and by location?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, the public housing applicants who apply for urban public housing are assessed and confirmed for eligibility and placed on a wait list. Applicants for urban public housing are placed on an integrated wait list in date order from receipt of application. General priority and transfer application are on the same list. Estimated wait time is calculated from the date the application is approved until the date the applicant is housed. The integrated wait list categorises applicants as ready to allocate and deferred applicants meet sufficient eligibility criteria to be placed on the wait list. However, they must resolve the other priority wait list to be allocated.

Wait lists as at 31 March 2015: there were 3721 applicants waiting for urban and public housing across the Territory, 50 less than at 31 March 2014. The urban public housing wait list comprises of 2711 general applicants, 720 priority applicants, 290 transfer applicants and 255 deferred applicants.

The application assessment process confirms whether urban applicants shall be categorised on the wait list as general applicants, applicants other than priority or transfer, priority applicants for applicants with high needs such as people escaping domestic violence or for medical reasons, or transfer applicants who are applicants currently living in public housing but required to transfer to another public housing property.

During the nine months from 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015, dwelling allocations were made to a total of 437 applicants with the breakdown comprising 139 general urban public housing applicants, 148 priority urban public housing applicants and 150 urban public housing transfer applicants. Excluding transfer applicants, the urban public housing wait list as at 31 March 2015 has 3431 applicants and the same number of applicants as the 31 March 2014.

Applicants are advised that wait times can be long and unpredictable and subject to variation based on availability, appropriate dwellings and the demands for public housing in the requested region. Estimated wait times for urban and public housing are published on the external website from time to time. The last time it was updated was in April. That is how the waiting lists sit. I will get my CEO to make other comments.

Ms CLIFFORD: Leah Clifford, Chief Executive. We have recently done a number of audits on our wait list and the number of applicants. We have seen from March to May a drop from 3721 to 3303 which is a decrease of about 433 or 12% across the board.

Ms MOSS: I am asking quite a different question, but since you have raised it, what do you attribute the decrease in applicants to?

Ms MANISON: Is that administratively cleaning your books up to check if people who have previously applied no longer require housing?

Ms CLIFFORD: Our commitment - as the minister mentioned about our strategy at the start - has been to move people from homelessness through the continuum to home ownership which includes moving into private rental. Social housing is part of that and into home ownership. This is attributed to us having a look at those eligible and who is on the wait list. We have had 180 applicants take up the bond assistance program and move into private rental. It could be a combination of factors such as being eligible to be on the list but also the other initiatives we have offered as part of the Real Housing for Growth plan and the continuum, which is what our strategy is based on.

Ms MOSS: Just to clarify, the information I am hoping to get is about public housing wait times by region and by dwelling size.

Mrs PRICE: So it is urban public housing applicants?

Ms MOSS: Not the number of applicants but how long are people actually waiting. What is the average wait time by region and housing type?

Mrs PRICE: In Alice Springs it is 87 months, Casuarina 91 months, Palmerston 84 months, Katherine 67 months, Nhulunbuy 158 months, Tennant Creek 112 months, and that is for one-bedroom housing.

Ms MOSS: Is that one-bedroom non-pensioner?

Mrs PRICE: One-bedroom non-pensioner. For one-bedroom pensioner: Alice Springs is 71 months; Casuarina Darwin, 93 months; Palmerston, 76 months; Katherine 58 months; we do not have a number for Nhulunbuy; and Tennant Creek, 77 months.

For two-bedroom accommodation: in Alice Springs it is 65 months; Darwin, 68 months; Palmerston, 58 months; Katherine, 52 months; Nhulunbuy, 137 months; and Tennant Creek, 100 months.

Three-bedroom in Alice Springs is 70 months; Casuarina/Darwin is 74 months; Palmerston is 36 months; Katherine, 63 months; Nhulunbuy, 141 months; Tennant Creek is 98 months.

We do not know the numbers for four-bedroom housing, but for Alice Springs there is 73 months estimated average wait time; Casuarina there is 85; Palmerston 65; Katherine 60; Nhulunbuy 147; and Tennant Creek, 103. That is the total for urban and public housing applicants waiting.

Ms MOSS: Minister, I appreciate you providing those figures. Obviously wait times are something that is continuing pressure, and has been for some time. It is quite concerning when I look at the figures I have for 2012 compared to the wait times now, there are significant increases. For example, Tennant Creek was 77 months in 2012 for a one-bedroom, non-pensioner and is now 112 months. I am interested in what you are doing to address those increasing wait times.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, our strategy is that we are focusing on the repairs and maintenance program across the Territory. For instance, in Alice Springs there are 25 repairs and maintenance in progress and there are a number of works programs for Darwin and Nhulunbuy.

Ms MOSS: Thank you, minister. I have no further questions.

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill (2015-2016) as they relate to the Department of Housing. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Ms MOSS: Yes, please. Minister, I will start with one of the written questions that was placed on notice. How many staff are within the agency by full-time equivalent, permanent part-time contract and temporary contract?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, as of 31 March 2015, Department of Housing has had 373.9 FTEs, 4.3 FTEs and 60.8 FTEs.

Ms MOSS: Sorry, 373 FTEs and the others were permanent part-time and temporary contract?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, that is correct.

Ms MOSS: I am interested in how many positions are currently vacant across the agency by region and level.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, at 31 March 2015 the Department of Housing had 26 vacancies at different stages of the recruitment process. In Darwin there are two SAO2, one AO7, one AO6, six AO5, seven AO4, two AO3 and one T5. That is 20 in Darwin. In Alice Springs there are none for SAO2, none for AO7, none for AO6, three for AO5, none for AO4, one for AO3. All up, there are four for Alice Springs. In Katherine there is just the AO4 level and there is one in Pirlangimpi as an AO2.

Ms MOSS: I want to talk a little about the staffing figures of the Department of Housing because it does such a vital job for Territorians, as you raised in your statement. We know the importance of providing safe and stable housing to Territorians in varying stages of life. I was looking through the OCPE figures. In 2012 there were 442 full-time equivalents within the Department of Housing. In 2014 for the same December quarter it was 391. There are 371 FTEs noted in the budget, which I note is 373, but there is quite a significant decrease over that term of about 70 FTEs. Where have those positions come from within the Department of Housing?

Mrs PRICE: The recent change from 2014 to now is the result of shifts in corporate staff to the department of Local Government. The large change is a split between Housing and Department of Local Government and Community Services.

Ms MANISON: The number that the member for Casuarina is using from the December quarter of the 2013 OCPE public sector figures. That was after the restructure which saw the Department of Housing

effectively split from the department of Local Government, as well. So it is just housing that that 419 FTE figure is from?

Mrs PRICE: This estimates is about the appropriate departmental budget ...

Ms MOSS: And that is exactly what we are asking the question about.

Mrs PRICE: So what are you looking at?

Ms MANISON: If you were to go to the OCEP staffing figures and look at the December quarter of 2013, then look at the annual report – and that is after the change of government and the agency was restructured to become the Department of Housing ...

Mrs PRICE: That is not in the 2014-15 financial year.

Ms MOSS: Minister, it directly relates to what we are talking about today because we are asking how services can be delivered with significantly fewer staff than we have seen previously. It is directly relevant to the Appropriation Bill.

Mrs PRICE: We have 373 staff funded to that level and we are delivering.

Ms MOSS: Minister, if there were 419 staff previously after a restructure, what has happened to all those positions? Where have they gone? Which areas have lost positions? They are all important questions around service delivery.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I will pass the question to Andrew.

Mr CLAPHAM: Andrew Clapham, General Manager, Strategic Governance and Supply. Over the period of time you have been talking about there has been a change in the composition of the agency. At one point it was known as the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Services. It then changed to the Department of Housing and Local Government, and more recently to the Department of Housing.

Towards the end of last year some 20 staff transferred to the Department of Community Services as the result of the disestablishment of a shared services or hub model. The changing nature of the department so its focus became housing thinned down the number of FTEs, as did the recent transfer as we disestablished the shared services model we operated under.

Ms MOSS: When did the transfer of those positions occur? What was the date around the transition of those positions?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, we do not have the exact date of when that took place.

Ms MOSS: Is that something you might be able to provide us with? It is quite important, just for clarification.

Mr TINKHAM: The split of the corporate staff happened on 1 December 2014, but for budget purposes we back cast it to 1 July. FTE numbers up until then would have reflected the 20 corporate staff that went back to the Department of Local Government and Community Services.

Ms MOSS: Thank you. We might provide some more questions to you around those figures, perhaps in writing, for some clarification.

Can you please advise if any staff members received a payout on their contract in 2014-15, the reason for this, and the total cost to the department of any payouts?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, as of 31 March, nobody.

Ms MOSS: As of 31 March 2015? How many positions are funded by NPARIH funding and how many of these positions are in frontline service delivery?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.8

Madam CHAIR: Please restate the question for the record.

Ms MOSS: How many positions are funded by NPARIH funding and how many of these positions are in frontline service delivery?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: That question will be number 7.8.

Ms MOSS: I will go to another written question that was provided regarding agency travel. Please can you provide the total cost of travel within the agency, broken down into international, interstate and intrastate travel?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, as at 31 March 2015 the department has incurred \$987 342 in travel expenses. The breakdown is as follows: international has no money spent; interstate there was \$68 190; and intrastate there was \$919 134.

As at 31 March 2015, Northern Territory home ownership has incurred \$4136 in travel expenses and the breakdown of travel is: international, none; interstate, none; intrastate, \$4136.

Ms MOSS: Please can you provide details and costs of all travel undertaken by the minister that was paid for by the agency, including travel on charters?

Mrs PRICE: There were nil costs for agency travel undertaken by me. That was paid for by the agency authority, including travel on charters.

Ms MOSS: Please can you provide details and costs of all travel undertaken by ministerial staff that was paid for by the agency, including travel on charters?

Mrs PRICE: No travel was undertaken by ministerial staff. It was paid for by the Department of Housing, including travel on charters.

Ms MOSS: Minister, please detail all travel and costs undertaken through Latitude Travel.

Mrs PRICE: Latitude Travel – that famous one. There is no travel at all through Latitude Travel.

Ms MOSS: Before we move on, can I clarify that I get the output right for some upcoming questions? I want to make sure I do not miss them, that is all. If I can just check which output I can ask questions on the visitor parks under?

Mrs PRICE: Housing Services Delivery.

Ms MOSS: Okay, so Output 10.2? Do the questions relating to repairs and maintenance come under Output 10.2 as well?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Ms MOSS: Are any questions relating to the Kurringal redevelopment also under Output 10.2?

Mrs PRICE: No, it is not within that output.

Ms MOSS: So Output 10.1?

Mrs PRICE: It is in the Housing Strategic Governance and Supply.

Ms MOSS: Output 10.1, perfect. Is dwelling vacancies under Output 10.2?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Ms MOSS: That is great, thank you. I have one more whole-of-agency question I wanted to ask. Is Real Housing for Growth also under Output 10.1?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Ms MOSS: Thank you. I am happy to move on to outputs unless you have any whole-of-agency questions.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies.

OUTPUT GROUP 10.0 - HOUSING SERVICES

Output 10.1 - Housing Strategic Governance and Supply

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 10.0, Housing Services, Output 10.1, Housing and Strategic Governance and Supply. Are there any questions?

Ms MOSS: Minister, last year your predecessor stated in estimates in 2014-15 we had 756 dwellings scheduled for completion: for Venture Housing 116, home buyer initiative 15, the head lease initiative 192, affordability scheme 354, HomeBuild Access 34, and the redevelopment of public housing, 45 dwellings. How many of the 756 dwellings have been delivered?

Mrs PRICE: As at 31 March 2015, 1359 dwellings of the 2000 dwelling target have been committed across the initiatives. As at 31 March 2015, 488 dwellings have been delivered since October 2012, including 188 dwellings between 1 July 2014 and 31 March 2015. A total of 551 dwellings are currently under construction or completed pending national rental affordability compliance checks, and 320 dwellings are pending development approvals or contract negotiations.

Ms MOSS: Oh, that was you last year. I was quoting you. I did not see you down there, sorry.

Minister, this question relates to page 277 of Budget Paper No 3. The 2014-15 budget showed the government planned to spend \$55.1m in housing supply, but only spent \$34m which is a \$21m underspend in what is a critical area. Please can you detail how much of that \$34m was Commonwealth money?

Mrs PRICE: Would you be able to repeat the question, member for Casuarina, please?

Ms MOSS: Sure. The 2014-15 budget shows a plan to spend \$55.1m in housing supply but a spend of \$34m, which is a \$21m underspend. Please can you detail how much of the \$34m was Commonwealth money?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I will ask Ken to answer that question for you.

Mr TINKHAM: None of that money was Commonwealth money.

Ms MOSS: Can you please provide a reason for the \$21m underspend and what housing resources promised to delivered by June 2015 Territorians will miss out on?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, as part of the variation, there is a decrease of \$20.626m. This expenditure has been pushed back to 2015-16 due to delays in the delivery of dwellings by developers. The expenditure relates to the provision of dwellings to affordable rental housing provided. That was the Venture Housing Company.

Ms MOSS: Why were the timings revised? What are the reasons behind the delays? Were you not aware of those problems ahead to adjust those targets?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I do not know if you are aware but Venture Housing is a separate entity so we cannot answer that question.

Ms MOSS: But were you were aware of the issues ahead of time?

Mrs PRICE: There was some development planning delays that we could not foresee.

Ms MOSS: The budget papers reveal the government only delivered 18 out of 95 new social housing dwellings in 2014-15 and only 68 out of the 116 Venture Housing dwellings. It is also projected that you will deliver 37 less dwellings under the head leasing initiative. Why was so much promised and so little delivered in the last financial year?

Mrs PRICE: I will get my CEO to answer that question for you, member for Casuarina.

Ms CLIFFORD: If we start with the first one you raised, which was the budget target of 95 and the delivery of 18. They were the new houses constructed under NPARIH, as the minister mentioned previously, the \$1.7bn rolling program over 10 years to 30 June. The minister mentioned the program sets targets of 1456 new houses and 2915 house rebuilds and refurbishments of existing houses. The program is on track to meet those targets.

The 95 houses was an estimate established in March 2014 by the department ahead of the implementation plan being finalised with the Commonwealth. There were some delays in receiving the sign-off and the final funding approval which came through in December 2014. As a result the number of new social houses delivered was 18. That is not to say people miss out. It is a rolling program and we are on target to achieve what is required in accordance with the agreement.

The second part of your question was in relation to - if I could just get the second part again?

Ms MOSS: Venture Housing dwellings.

Ms CLIFFORD: The Venture Housing dwellings: the estimate was 197 and the actuals to date are 99, and there are a further 98 dwellings nearing completion at Farrar, Coolalinga and Palmerston. We anticipate these will be met by 30 June this year.

In regard to Venture Housing, I think that was your other question ...

Ms MOSS: Yes, Venture Housing and head leasing.

Ms CLIFFORD: I am just trying to find it on the list, I am sorry. For Venture Housing dwellings there was a budget estimate of 68. Those 68 are expected to be completed by the end of this financial year. The balance, which is 48, are under construction with completion expected early in the 2015-16 financial year. In summary, I guess all of the targets are in progress and it is just the timing of delivery of some of those.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much, I appreciate that additional information. It is still quite concerning that we have gone from a target of 95 new social housing dwellings to delivery of 18 because we were waiting on a sign-off on a contract. Have you raised any of those concerns, minister, around the timing and impact of that on service delivery in the NT?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, we are always having ongoing conversations with the Commonwealth on NPARIH and the housing funding situation.

Ms MOSS: Of the figures of the 95 houses budgeted for and the 18 delivered, there is a difference of 77 houses that were planned to be delivered but were not, yet we have only budgeted in 2015-16 for 74. Why is this the case? Why are we not at least trying to bring it back up to 95 if not more? I hope we would be aiming for more than 95 in this second year.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I will get Phil to speak on that.

Mr LUCK: Member for Casuarina, the renegotiation of the NPARIH implementation plan changed some of the parameters which took the number from approximately 95 for the budget allocation of 2014 to 2016 down to 74. That was through negotiation with the Commonwealth.

Ms MOSS: Thank you for that, I appreciate it.

Mr LUCK: I will just add if I can, the total target of 1456 is still the target we are aiming for. Those houses which were allocated up to the 95 will still be delivered to those communities.

Ms MOSS: Minister, what specific program initiatives are in the 2015-16 budget to address homelessness and the needs of disadvantaged groups in the NT?

Mrs PRICE: These programs are funded through a mix of Commonwealth and Northern Territory government funding under the National Affordable Housing Agreement, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures and the Northern Territory government direct investment.

In 2014-15 a total of over \$13m was paid in grants for housing support program up to 31 March 2015 in Barkly, Big Rivers, Central Australia, Arafura, Arnhem, Darwin and the surrounds. Of the total figure over \$1m in grant funding has been provided to organisations delivering services to young people including those experiencing domestic and family violence. Over \$2m in grant funding has been provided for services whose clientele includes those experiencing domestic and family violence. Over \$1m in grant funding has been provided for services targeted towards homeless men. Over \$5m has been provided in grant funding for tenancy support services, drug and alcohol support services, outreach services, no interest loan schemes, Apmere Mwerre Visitor Park and the homelessness peak body.

The Department of Housing has paid over \$4m in grants to nine organisations for 20 crisis and short-term accommodation and support services, over \$5m in grants to 11 organisations for 20 managed and supported government accommodation services, and over \$3m in grants to seven organisations for 14 tenancy support programs.

Ms MOSS: I believe that last year there was a document tabled with a breakdown of which NGOs had received those grants. I was wondering if you would be willing to do that again this year?

Mrs PRICE: I will read this out for you so it is recorded. At Apmere Mwerre, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd provides short-term accommodation for people visiting Alice Springs from remote communities. That comes under the Northern Territory's NAHA funding source. In 2014-15, \$585 368 was allocated.

Ms MOSS: Minister, I imagine it is quite a lengthy list. Is it something that you are willing to table? I am noting it has been tabled in the past.

Mr CONLAN: The previous minister probably struggled with some of the pronunciations, that is why it was tabled last year. I am sure the current minister has no problem pronouncing the names.

Mrs PRICE: No, these are all names where the pronunciation rolls off my tongue.

Mr CONLAN: Exactly. Please proceed, minister.

Mrs PRICE: The Ampwe Kuka Alice Springs Youth Support Service Incorporated is supported accommodation and outreach support for young women who are at risk and is Commonwealth funded. Over \$430 000 was allocated for ASYASS Youth Refuge. There is another Alice Springs Youth Accommodation Support Service Incorporated and is crisis accommodation and case management support for young people aged between 15 and 18 years of age.

Over \$570 000 was allocated to NT NPAH. KFASS, that is Katherine Family Accommodation Support Service, Anglicare NT was the provider of short- to medium-term support accommodation and case management for individuals and families. It also provides outreach support to clients who are in transition from KFASS to promote independence. That is Commonwealth funded under NPAH ...

Ms MOSS: Minister, perhaps in the interests of time, given that I know we have another agency coming up after this, perhaps if it is not something you willing to table, maybe it is something I can come and get a briefing from you from, or a written question to you about that?

Mrs PRICE: Okay. I can settle for a briefing, member for Casuarina.

Ms MOSS: Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: I will hold it there. We have been going for an hour-and-a-half, so why do we not have a five-minute break refreshment stop for the minister. We will come back in five minutes. Thank you.

The committee suspended

Output 10.2 – Housing Services Delivery

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister, for coming back after the break. We will consider Output 10.2, Housing Services Delivery.

Ms MOSS: In your statement you talked about the redevelopments occurring at Runge Street and Kurringal Flats. Kurringal Flats is quite topical at the moment and a number of people have made comment around that redevelopment. You indicated that tenants have been relocated from Kurringal Flats. How many tenants were relocated and how many tenants are expected to go back into the redevelopment on that site?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, 80 tenants were relocated from Kurringal Flats with most moving to preferred locations in Palmerston, Casuarina and the Darwin regions. The department conducted a procurement process for the sale and redevelopment of the site which has now been finalised and an agreement executed with Halikos. The developer has commenced engagement with local residents over the project and will consult with developers of the adjacent Sports House site to manage any impacts associated with the redevelopment on both sites.

Ms MOSS: Thank you, minister, that is good to hear. Of the number of tenants residing in Kurringal Flats how many will go back into the redevelopment?

Mrs PRICE: We have 160 apartments and the agreement with the department includes the head leasing of 80 units.

Ms MANISON: Are any of those for public housing dwellings, or are they for your low- to middle-income affordable housing as opposed to the public housing model? It is different client group.

Ms MOSS: Just to clarify, all the tenants coming out of Kurringal Flats will be relocated elsewhere? None will be going back into the redevelopment on that site?

Mrs PRICE: What I said earlier was 80 were relocated. We have relocated them all over Palmerston, Casuarina and the Darwin regions. None will go back into the new residence.

Ms MOSS: That is the information I was looking for. We have established that wait lists are growing across the Northern Territory. What impact will the relocation of these tenants have in relation to waiting times for those already on the list?

Mrs PRICE: Are you specifically asking about ...

Ms MOSS: Presumably 80 tenants had to be relocated, and I am presuming that has had an impact on the wait list because people will have to wait longer because 80 tenants had to be prioritised in that allocation.

Mrs PRICE: I would like to go back to when Labor was in power ...

Ms MOSS: Minister, I am asking a very specific question on how that impacts on the wait list.

Mrs PRICE: We have allocated the 80-odd people into Darwin, Palmerston and the outer Darwin region. We have not had any feedback of how it has affected others on the wait list.

Ms MANISON: Minister, when you decanted the 80 dwellings at Kurringal, was there an impact on the wait list times?

Mrs PRICE: I will pass this question on to Leah. She will be able to answer that question for you, member for Wanguri.

Ms CLIFFORD: As the minister has mentioned, the 80 people were rehoused quite successfully from Kurringal and we have had no negative feedback from that process. Our strategy of dealing with our public housing wait lists has been to look at our repairs and maintenance program across the Territory. We have been able progress that in the last few months with a pipeline of works rolling out in Alice Springs, Darwin and other centres.

Our strategy focuses on the housing pathways we spoke about from the homelessness grants that we have provided through this supported accommodation, into social housing, affordable rental, private rental and

home ownership. Our strategy has been to work across the continuum of those areas in the provision of grant funding to our partners to deliver some of the important services the minister has read out.

In our supported accommodation, we have transitional accommodation arrangements, such as Percy Court in Alice Springs, to support people moving into social housing. In our social housing program, an additional 22 public houses will be built in 2015-16. Twelve of those dwellings will be in Katherine and the remainder will be in Palmerston and Stuart Park.

In our affordable rental initiative, we have a bonds assistance scheme ...

Ms MOSS: Sorry, I do not mean to interrupt. Did it have an impact on the wait list at that point in time when those tenants were relocated? Did that have an impact on that wait list?

Mrs PRICE: (inaudible)

Ms MOSS: We might move on from that question. Minister, in Budget Paper No 3, page 278 refers to \$15.6m in rent collections. Please can you clarify if this is the total amount collected in rents from remote Indigenous housing or the cost associated with rent collection?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, I will pass that question on to Ken.

Mr TINKHAM: The amount of \$15.6m is in the budget for remote Indigenous housing.

Ms MOSS: That is rent actually collected?

Mr TINKHAM: Yes.

Ms MOSS: Are all rental monies that are collected put back into property and tenancy management as well as repairs and maintenance?

Mr TINKHAM: Yes, they are.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much. I am hoping I can get the total dwelling numbers for public houses broken down into urban and remote.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, while I am waiting for the answer, I have one question ...

Ms MOSS: I already asked the question.

Mrs PRICE: Why did Labor get rid of ...

Ms MOSS: I have asked a question which I am hoping you will answer because this question is very important to Territorians and this process is also very important.

Mrs PRICE: The Department of Housing stock portfolio is by program and region as of 31 March 2015. For Alice Springs and Central Australia, public housing is 2203, government employee housing is 265, industry housing is 152; Casuarina public housing is 1147, government employee housing is three and industry housing just 98; Darwin has 1117 public housing, there is no government employee housing but industry housing is 59; in Palmerston there is 1312 public housing, 29 for government employees, and 31 for industry housing; in Jabiru, Arafura, there is 1048 public housing, 239 for employee housing, and 36 for industry housing; in Katherine, Big Rivers, 1810 public housing, government employee housing is 304, and 47 for industry housing; in Nhulunbuy, Arnhem Land, 946 public housing, 414 government employee housing and 17 industry housing; in Tennant Creek, Barkly there is 517 for public housing, 86 for government employee housing and 43 for industry housing. Total public housing is 10 100, government employee housing is 1340, and industry housing is 483.

Public housing by urban remote breakdown by region as at 31 March 2015: Alice Springs, Central Australia urban public housing is 859, remote Indigenous housing is 1344; Casuarina urban public housing is 1147 and we do not have numbers for remote Indigenous; Darwin urban public housing is 1117 and the same no numbers for remote Indigenous housing; for Palmerston, it is 1312, and the same no numbers for remote Indigenous housing; in Jabiru, Arafura there are no numbers for urban public housing but for remote Indigenous there is 1048; Katherine, Big Rivers 457 urban public housing, 1353 remote Indigenous housing; Nhulunbuy, Arnhem 33 public housing and 913 for Indigenous remote; Tennant Creek, Barkly 132

urban public housing, remote Indigenous is 385. Total urban public housing is 5057, while remote Indigenous is 5043.

I will go through these lists of remote communities and town camps of public housing ...

Ms MOSS: I am happy if you want to provide the total number.

Mr CONLAN: The minister just did - 5000 for remote and 5000-odd urban I think was the answer the minister provided.

Ms MOSS: Minister, can you please provide the current vacancy numbers and turnaround time? If you can break that down by region, it would be appreciated.

Mrs PRICE: For urban public turnaround time, average turnaround time days for the nine months to 31 March 2014-15 in Darwin is 90 days, for Casuarina 69 days, and Palmerston 97. That is for this year. For Central Australia, there is 134 days, Big Rivers, 97, Arnhem 296, Barkly 142.

Ms MANISON: Minister, would you attribute some of that to the fact that over the last few years there seems to be, when you bring indexation into it, a real downward trend in public housing repairs, maintenance and minor new works? For example, public housing minor new works in 2013 was \$12.4m, and in 2013-14 \$12.6m. Then in 2014-15 it was \$12.4m. In the latest budget you are down at \$10.4m for minor new works so that that will affect getting some of those houses up to scratch.

Your repairs and maintenance in 2012-13 it was \$22.7m. Then the following financial year in 2013-14, it was \$22.7m. In 2014-15, you are looking at \$20.5m. This current financial year your budget is \$22.3m, still behind what you were in in 2012-13. Public housing stock is not getting any newer. Would you attribute some of that lack of investment to the reasons why your vacancy times are blowing out?

Mr CONLAN: Madam Chair, can I just speak on a point of order? I could interpret that as asking for an opinion. You are not required under standing orders to give an opinion.

Ms MANISON: I think that is asking about the operation of the department and how the vacancies are going.

Mr CONLAN: Please, member for Wanguri. You can speak to the point of order once I have finished. You are required to only offer up the facts. I believe you are doing that. How it is interpreted by the opposition is a matter for the opposition. I also ask the opposition under Standing Order 112 there are to be no arguments, inferences, imputations, epithets, ironical expressions or hypothetical matter. I ask you, Madam Chair, it could easily be interpreted that such a question falls under a breach of Standing Order 112.

Ms MANISON: I am asking direct questions about expenditure, operations and the functionality of the department.

Mr CONLAN: Either way, minister, I feel that as a member of the PAC, I afford you the opportunity to answer the question any way you like.

Madam CHAIR: I will leave it to the minister to answer the question in the scope that she sees fit.

Mr CONLAN: As a member of the PAC, minister, I am quite comfortable with the information you are providing.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Wanguri, I believe we have answered all of those questions you have asked.

Ms MOSS: Minister, that is an important question about why the turnaround time is so high. That is what the member for Wanguri ...

Mrs PRICE: I will tell you why the turnaround time is so high. It was Labor's housing disaster that got rid of over 1000 houses. That is the reality of it all ...

Ms MOSS: Minister, the member for Wanguri has just pointed out declining investment into repairs and maintenance

Mrs PRICE: ... Labor neglected public housing for 11 years ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Hold up! We will not play this game. I will rule on this.

Mrs PRICE: That is the reason why we are in this state.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Where you are asking her to express an opinion over why waiting time is something, means that opinion is out of ...

Ms MOSS: We are asking for a reason or an explanation.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Deputy Chair, the reason being given by the minister is satisfactory and interesting. The minister is referring to the debt situation and the previous situation that the ...

Ms MANISON: She has not mentioned anything along those lines, member for Greatorex.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Here is what we will do ...

Mr CONLAN: That is a very good reason why the ...

Ms MANISON: I have asked a very logical question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I will stop there. If you have another on the budget, go your hardest.

Ms MOSS: I have another question.

Ms MANISON: A bit of historical data and try to put it into context about what is happening.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Wanguri, the member for Casuarina would like to ask a question now.

Ms MOSS: I would and we will have a look at other ways we can put that question to the minister, maybe in writing. Can we please get the current eviction numbers? If it can be broken down as well it would be appreciated.

Mrs PRICE: Member for Casuarina, the Department of Housing manages public housing premises in accordance with the *Housing Act* 2014 and the *Residential Tenancies Act* 2013. Statistical data in this briefing reflects the number of terminations and possessions of premises undertaken by the department in accordance with these acts.

The department may only let a premise to an eligible person in accordance with the *Housing Act*. An eligible person enters into a tenancy agreement with the department as provided by the *Residential Tenancies Act*.

Where a tenant fails to comply with the condition of the tenancy agreement the department may initiate action under the *Residential Tenancies Act* to terminate the tenancy and take possession of the premises. In this financial year the department has sought the termination of 59 tenancies compared to 53 in the 2013-14 financial year estimates period. There were a total of 16 tenancies where the tenant gave vacant possession of the premises, two terminations related to the three strikes policy and seven tenants were not eligible for public housing. There were 43 tenancies where orders were sought and granted by the Commissioner of Tenancies for possession of premises. Five orders related to the three strikes policy, one tenancy was not eligible for public housing and 14 properties were declared abandoned.

The department provides housing to many people who have complex needs. The department refers tenants to key service providers which provide support and assistance to the tenant to work towards creating sustainable tenancies. Termination and repossession action is a last resort and is only taken when all other reasonable actions have been exhausted.

Termination and repossession statistics from 1 July 2013 to 31 March 2014 and 2014-15 as at 31 March 2015 - I will read out the first line of the section of the *Residential Tenancies Act*. For abandoned premises: 1 July 2013 to 31 March 2014 there were three; from 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015 there were 14. Rent arrears: from 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015 there were 15; there were 19 from 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015. Failed to maintain: was 13 down to eight to 31 March 2015. Antisocial behaviour: from 1 July 2013 to 31 March 2014 were 17; and 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015 there was seven. Health safety: there were none in 1 July 2013 to 31 March 2014; in 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015 there were three. Not

eligible: from 1 July 2013 to 31 March 2014 there were five - so that adds up to 53 in total. From 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015 there were eight - and that adds up to 59. I can go through the descriptions of sections of the *Residential Tenancies Act*.

Ms MOSS: That is fine, minister, and thank you very much for providing that information. I am very aware of time and the fact that the minister's time is very valuable and other people would like to ask you questions on other areas. I have many questions, but I am happy to provide them as written questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Fabulous. That concludes consideration of Output 10.2.

OUTPUT GROUP 11.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE **Output 11.1 – Corporate and Governance**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 11.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 11.1, Corporate and Governance.

Ms MOSS: I will provide written questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 11.0. Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Housing. On behalf of the committee I thank the departmental officers that attended today.

OUTPUT GROUP 12.0 - NT HOME OWNERSHIP

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consider the Northern Territory Home Ownership business line.

Ms MOSS: I will provide written questions in relation to that.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there no questions on that? I thank the officials who accompanied the minister here today.

Ms MOSS: Thank you very much.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider outputs relating to Parks and Wildlife. We might take – how long has the minister been travelling for? We will take five minutes at the minister's request.

The committee suspended

PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory.

Mrs PRICE: Mr Deputy Chair, I am joined tonight by Andrew Bridges, Chief Executive Officer, and Ms Joanna Frankenfeld, the Chief Financial Officer for the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission is responsible for the protection of the natural, cultural, historical and recreational values of the protected areas estate of the Northern Territory. This includes management of 87 parks and reserves, many of which are under joint management arrangement, spanning 473 km² [on June 3 the minister advised that the number stated at the hearing is correct and the correct figure is 473 000 km²] of land across urban, rural and remote areas of the Northern Territory.

The commission manages weeds, fires and feral animals, as well as the maintenance of important infrastructure, the preservation of cultural and natural assets and promoting the visitor experience in parks and reserves. However, as many of my esteemed colleagues and the wider community would be aware, the commission does so much more than this.

The vision of the commission is connecting people with the Territory's unique nature and culture, which means not only protecting the land, but creating opportunities for local Territorians and visitors to truly experience the wonder of the Territory, and creating a better understanding of the value of natural environment for all people.

The commission is also responsible for the management of wildlife programs throughout the Northern Territory, including crocodiles, pests and nuisance wildlife, compliance and enforcement of wildlife crime, and providing assistance to the community to enable us to live sustainably with native wildlife.

In addition to the significant value that Parks and Wildlife provides for tourism and commercial industry in the Northern Territory, there is increasing recognition and research about the significant benefits of green spaces for health and wellbeing. Short periods of activity in a park or reserve can bring enormous benefits for the mental and physical health of all of us. Not only can these have immediate lifestyle benefits, but it can ensure the health and wellbeing of Territorians. This information suggests that more than ever our parks and reserves are vital for sustaining the Territory lifestyle and the tourist economy we have or come to enjoy and value, while promoting the health and wellbeing and social connectivity of Territorians into the future. It is for this reason that this government continues to invest in our parks, reserves and wildlife to ensure the parks ongoing protection, sustainable development and use for the public.

This year this government has committed over \$21m to further develop and upgrade the infrastructure and visitor facilities at Casuarina Coastal Reserve and Litchfield National Park. These parks are iconic in the Territory. Casuarina Coastal Reserve experiences the highest visitation of any park or reserve in the Territory with over 930 000 visitors each year, and provides Territorians with an important space for recreation and social activities. Casuarina Coastal Reserve will see upgrades and improvements to the key visitor sites including Dripstone Cliffs, Dripstone Park, Lee Point and a path and track network across the reserve. Also a new picnic area will be developed at the Rapid Creek end of the reserve.

Litchfield National Park is a tourist highlight in the Northern Territory. The park welcomes visitors from all over the world and provides unique opportunities for swimming, bush walking and camping. Litchfield National Park will see the expansion and upgrade for the Florence Fall two-wheel drive and four-wheel drive campgrounds, the Sandy Creek Falls campground and upgrades to the Termite Mounds site. The Tolmer Falls site will provide a new picnic opportunity and upgrades to the viewing platform.

Over the past 12 months, the commission has made significant achievements across a range of different areas including this government's commitment to provide greater access to national parks and campgrounds.

I take the opportunity to share some of these achievements with you. The establishment of an extensive mountain bike track system in the Alice Springs region has been enthusiastically welcomed by the local community, as well as visiting mountain bikers. These tracks have provided mountain bikers with new opportunities to experience the natural environment, to participate in active recreational activities and explore parks and reserves throughout the region. These tracks are attracting visitors from across Australia. The next stages will likely see further growth and development of mountain biking in this region.

The George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens continues to provide new and exciting experiences for visitors with more and more people enjoying all the site has to offer. This site is a spectacular location close to Darwin city that offers unique opportunities for visitors to enjoy natural spaces, walks, participate in community gardens, meet with friends for a coffee, enjoy music and other cultural events and exercise and socialise.

This year, the garden has held two new events. The Healthy Holiday Fun Program was held from 8 to 10 April in partnership with Life. Be In It which attracted approximately 3000 adults and children, while the first Territory Made Markets on 12 April attracted an additional 3000 visitors to the gardens. I acknowledge the considerable efforts of the staff and look forward to what this group will achieve in the future.

The Territory Wildlife Park has grown visitation by approximately 7% over the past 12 months, which is on the back of a 7% increase for last year as well. This is from offering new, diverse and creative experiences for visitors. Some examples include the Keeper Kids program, Christmas markets and night time events such as the Spooky Glow Party and new displays and exhibits to refresh the animal collection.

The Alice Springs Desert Park is a favourite park for many visitors because of the remarkable wildlife interactions and experiences it provides, as well as a range of animals that are not seen in any other location in the world. This year the park won the very prestigious Brolga Award in the Major Tourist

Attraction category, which is evidence of the high-quality visitor experience it provides and because it is a hallmark destination for visitors to the Territory. Staff at the park have put in an enormous effort to raise the profile, visitation and revenue of the park over the past 12 months. The park has seen increases in all these areas, with visitation up by 5% and revenue increased by 2% since the start of the financial year.

The commission has continued to work closely with recreational hunting groups to identify new opportunities to hunt on parks and reserves throughout the Northern Territory. It is exciting to see a sustainable mix of activities being carried out in parks and reserves.

The commission is costing repairs to the Shoal Bay Creek crossing which will promote longer access and use of the reserve in the hunting season, and costing the installation of a sluice gate at Harrison Dam Conservation Reserve which will allow controlled water release and maintain optimal hunting conditions.

The commission is also opening the Limestone Gorge campground in Judbarra National Park which has not been open for many years and is targeted for public use in June in 2015. The commission has also signed a MOU with the Top End 4WD Club, and is finalising a MOU with the Friends of the Larapinta Trail.

In addition to the Parks and Wildlife Commission's dedication to connecting people with nature through activities and opportunities at parks and reserves, the commission is also committed to growing commercial developments on parks and reserves, further benefitting Territorians through economic growth and improved natural, cultural and recreational experiences in parks and reserves.

In September last year the commission released an expression of interest for tourism and commercial development on parks and reserves. The intent of the process was to grow nature- and cultural-based tourism within parks and reserves through partnerships with investors to create high-quality sustainable tourism products, experiences and activities that offer visitors something unique ...

Ms MANISON: Minister, it has gone a bit beyond the five minutes for the opening statement. Are we almost there?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, I am nearly there.

Ms MANISON: Excellent.

Mrs PRICE: ... and enhance the Territory's reputation as the leading destination for quality nature- and cultural-based experiences, support the economic growth and long-term job creation, particularly in regional and remote areas, and maximise the public benefit. Through this process 57 submissions were received for 76 different proposals. Of these, 11 submissions covering a total of 18 projects are being progressed under the commission's procedures for minor concessions.

A further 24 expressions apply to jointly managed parks, and these proposals are in the process of being presented to relevant joint management committees for decision. A further 21 expressions are being offered the opportunity to submit detailed submissions through Stage two of the process. These submissions are currently in the process of being developed by proponents for assessment by an expert panel.

I am proud to be minister for this important and highly-valuable portfolio which, as I have demonstrated, plays a significant role in promoting the economic, social, health and cultural aspirations of the Northern Territory.

I take this opportunity to thank the dedicated professional staff within the commission, who are enthusiastic, hard-working and extremely committed to ensuring the protection and enjoyment of our parks and reserves and wildlife in the Northern Territory.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair. In conclusion, I welcome questions that relate to the output groups associated with my Parks and Wildlife portfolio.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you for that Styles-esque five-minute speech. Are there any questions on the minister's statement?

Ms MANISON: Thank you Mr Deputy Chair, minister, and a big thank you to all the hard-working staff from the Parks and Wildlife agency in department land who are up very late as we sit through this late night session of estimates. I have many questions for you, minister, about this wonderful area of the Northern

Territory and a very important agency, but I am extremely rushed because we do not have much time and you still have Statehood to get through after this. So I will touch on a few points this evening. I will be putting in a lot of written questions afterwards because I have not been able to get to them all.

Following on from your opening statement, I will ask you a bit about the Casuarina Coastal Reserve, an area of Darwin very close to my heart, around mine and the member for Casuarina's electorate. I want to ask about the development plan you have released and the expenditure surrounding that, as well as the fact that during the budget process you released the development plan and the spending commitments associated with that. However, you are now currently consulting on the Casuarina Coastal Reserve management plan.

I did a bit of reading to see that the development plan finished consultation in February 2012, and three years down the track we have the development plan with commitments made. I want to know a bit of the logic around this. Can the management plan and the broad consultation you are now doing - I have to say, the management plan documents are going like hotcakes from the front of my office; we are constantly replenishing them. If issues arise regarding the management plan that are not covered in that development plan and investment, can you still amend that development and those spending commitments? One of the areas I am interested in hearing about - especially since over the years it is an area I have seen a lot of since I was a kid, which has changed dramatically - is about the front of the Casuarina Surf Life Saving Club and the erosion along that beach. There does not seem to be much in the development plan for tackling erosion.

Minister, will the feedback you get from this management plan consultation potentially mean changes to the development plan, particularly around that area of erosion?

Sorry, it is a very long question; I am trying to put it in context.

Mrs PRICE: Thank you, member for Wanguri. I am always happy to hear people's views on how we can all work together on improving the Casuarina coastal area, because as you said it is important for people who want to experience that part of the coast. I am happy to take on any new fresh ideas that people have.

Ms MANISON: Can the development plan expenditure be amended based on the consultation you are about to get in from the management plan - particularly around that area of erosion?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Wanguri, I am happy – the Darwin Surf Life Saving Club is down there as well. We can work with them in order to make sure that area is well kept and looked after. That is where ...

Ms MANISON: At present, there are no plans to work on the erosion elements in that development plan, or are there any financial commitments around it? Is that something you will be do a bit more work around?

Mrs PRICE: I will get my CE to answer that question.

Ms MANISON: Thank you, minister.

Mr BRIDGES: The development plan was one thing. The issue with erosion and some of the other minor works - we have a rolling minor works program. We have been speaking with the Darwin Surf Life Saving Club. They wrote recently about erosion and their worries; they wrote to the minister and she has written back offering them to come and talk to us about it.

Whatever feedback comes through the plan of management and from the Darwin Surf Life Saving Club - we will have a talk to them. Where it is warranted, we can arrange for things to be done out of either repairs and maintenance or minor works program if that is required

Ms MANISON: Absolutely. That area has changed a lot since I was a kid. You can see there is almost a cliff face you fall off in front of the surf life saving club now.

Staying on the area of the Casuarina Coastal Reserve, have you been in any discussions with Defence Housing Australia about the Lee Point development - I think they call it 2CRU - that they intend to build alongside the Casuarina Coastal Reserve?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Wanguri, that is a question for department of Lands. They have been most of the work – lucky for us.

Ms MANISON: My concern is that you will have a major residential development built alongside the Casuarina Coastal Reserve. As a department, is there work happening now - because you know this is coming - to look at the biodiversity and the environmental protection of the area to ensure that when development does come you are doing your utmost to preserve that environment and the biodiversity?

Mrs PRICE: I will get my CEO to answer that question, member for Wanguri.

Mr BRIDGES: The department of Lands has been doing most of the negotiations and discussions with Defence Housing. I have met with the department of Lands and we have been involved because there is, as you say, a big population close to the park. We want the park to be able to cater for that and the development to be consistent with the park.

We have talked about a number of things such as how you formalise access so you do not end up with too many illegitimate accesses through to the beach and how we cater for increased visitor numbers. Part of that is through the capital development. Yes, I am confident that the way the discussions are going our needs will be well looked after.

Ms MANISON: This is probably a fairly random question for an Estimates Committee; I have not asked a question like this before. The proximity of the free beach to the new suburb of Lee Point - has there been any discussion about that?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Wanguri, that will probably come out in comments from the plan and management in regard to the free beach.

Ms MANISON: I wanted to ask whether there was any thought about that and whether that will be looked at and dealt with. That was probably all I wanted to touch on and ask about the Casuarina Coastal Reserve. I am happy to go into whole-of-agency.

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

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. The committee will now consider the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill (2015-2016) as related to Parks and Wildlife Commissioner of the Northern Territory. Are there any agency related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Ms MANISON: I have a question following on from that horrible accident at Kings Canyon last year where an English tourist tragically lost their life. What investigations took place after that and have there been any changes made as a result?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Wanguri, that is still under police investigation so we cannot make comments. The date set for the coronial inquiry is in October.

Ms MANISON: With regard to mining exploration licences and applications within parks, how many mining exploration licences and gas and petroleum exploration permits apply over our parks and reserves?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Wanguri, I will pass that question on to Andrew Bridges, who is my CEO.

Mr BRIDGES: I do not have the exact numbers. I know there are many applications. I do not know that all that many exploration licences have been granted. Limmen National Park has some. Beyond that, I would have to look.

Ms MANISON: Watarrka?

Mr BRIDGES: That has not been granted.

Ms MANISON: But the application is in?

Mr BRIDGES: There are applications, yes, but most of the Territory's land is covered by exploration licence applications.

Ms MANISON: Would it be possible to get the exact number of applications for mining exploration licences and gas and petroleum exploration permits? Could I get that number and which parks they apply to?

Mrs PRICE: That is for the Minister for Mines and Energy to answer.

Ms MANISON: Okay, but you would not, as the Parks and Wildlife Minister, have any interest in that? Surely you would want to know?

Mrs PRICE: That is a question that needs to be asked of the Minister for Mines and Energy.

Ms MANISON: Okay, we will put that in writing to the Minister for Mines and Energy, minister. I will ask you then about the status of the application by Palatine Energy to explore for oil and gas over Watarrka National Park, because there has been a lot of concern raised by traditional owners there that you are well aware of. But judging by Mr Bridges' last response, that has not been approved and is not being processed at the moment?

Mrs PRICE: That is a decision for the Minister for Mines and Energy.

Ms MANISON: Okay. We will get that question over to him then. With relation to travel within your agency, has any travel been undertaken by you, as the minister, which was paid for by the agency, including travel on charters?

Mrs PRICE: There was a total of \$9822 spent. I travelled this year out to Limmen National Park.

Ms MANISON: So I assume that would be by charter?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Ms MANISON: Can you provide any details of cost for travel undertaken by any of your ministerial staff paid for by the agency, including travel on charters?

Mrs PRICE: That is the only travel undertaken by me and ministerial staff.

Ms MANISON: So ministerial staff were with you?

Mrs PRICE: Yes.

Ms MANISON: How many staff did you take with you?

Mrs PRICE: That was ministerial travel, so you would have to direct that question to the Department of Chief Minister.

Ms MANISON: You cannot remember if you took one staff member or two staff members from your office on a charter to Limmen National Park?

Mr CONLAN: Mr Deputy Chair, the question needs to be put to the Department of the Chief Minister. It was ministerial travel not agency travel. Member for Wanguri, you could put that question to the Chief Minister.

Ms MANISON: It is talking about agency expenditure as opposed to ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: If it was paid for the agency ...

Ms MANISON: ... the Department of the Chief Minister. This is the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Mr CONLAN: The minister has just indicated that it was travel through DCM not through the agency.

Ms MANISON: I thought it was travel paid for by Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Mr CONLAN: I interpreted that last answer as that it was DCM not agency travel.

Mrs PRICE: That was through the agency, yes.

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mrs PRICE: That was through the agency and two staff members travelled with me.

Ms MANISON: Minister, moving forward to another trip that you took overseas that goes to this agency and what you were hoping to achieve in improvements for the Parks and Wildlife area. In September last year you went to Singapore and Sarawak for six days to look at bio-conservation, in particular the protection of endangered animals. How much did that trip cost, who accompanied you on your trip and what did you take away from that trip to benefit the Territory? In particular, you mentioned in your media release looking at exchanges for rangers being organised between the countries. Has that progressed at all?

Mrs PRICE: The total cost of the Chief Executive Officer's overseas travel was approximately \$10 654. In September 2013 a ministerial delegation from Sarawak headed by James Jemut Masing, Minister for Land Development, visited the Northern Territory for one week. The visit strengthened relationships between the two governments and focused on issues such as developing economic ventures on land subject to native title and communal developing of native customary rights lands through large land bank model and joint management of parks and crocodile management.

Between 5 and 11 September 2014 travel was undertaken to Singapore and Sarawak to further those discussions. A number of opportunities eventuated as a result of those meetings. In Singapore, we discussed the management of saltwater crocodiles, the Parks Board and seeking assistance in developing a comprehensive crocodile management program. We invited officers to the Northern Territory to gain a sound understanding of how crocodiles are managed in the Northern Territory. Officers from the Parks Board accepted this offer and visited the Northern Territory in May 2015.

A tour of the Singapore Zoo and river safari was undertaken. The zoo raises 30% of revenue through retail gifts and food and beverages. It was an opportunity to build revenue at the Territory Wildlife Park and the Alice Springs Desert Park by maximising retail and food sales to Sarawak.

We visited the Semenggoh Wildlife Centre and staff expressed interest in a ranger exchange program. We had discussions regarding the Northern Territory saltwater crocodile management program as well. There was a visit to the Sarawak Cultural Village which was a good example of how cultural maintenance can become a financially viable tourism product. We toured the Sarawak museum. Banteng cattle are now extinct in Sarawak. The Northern Territory has the largest population of remaining banteng cattle in the world and probably the most genetically pure population of Garig Gunak Barlu National Park on Cobourgh Peninsula.

The assistant manager for Cultural Heritage expressed an interest in having banteng reintroduced to Sarawak. I wrote to the assistant minister offering two bulls and six cows to re-establish the banteng in Sarawak. We had meeting Ms Allison Prichard, the park manager at Mulu National Park, which is Sarawak's only world heritage site. The park is famous for its limestone formations. Features include cave networks, rock pinnacle cliffs and gorges. Mount Mulu is a sandstone mountain that rises to 2376 m...

Ms MANISON: It sounds like you had a very busy trip, minister. Will you share the cost of that trip and did you take a staffer with you from your ministerial office?

Mrs PRICE: I will just finish this because you asked me a question and I have a few more things here.

The park also has the largest known natural chamber, Sarawak Chamber, which is 700 m long, 396 m wide and at least 700 m high. It has been said that the chamber is so big it could accommodate about 40 Boeing 747s without overlapping their wings. The current park manager is on a three-year contract and previously worked for parks in Western Australia.

It was good going over there because we had all these experiences we shared ...

Ms MANISON: Will you share the cost of the trip with us, minister? And whether or not you took a ministerial staffer with you?

Mr CONLAN: Mr Deputy Chair, I would have thought that the cost of that trip was divulged when the Chief Minister was a witness before the Estimates Committee.

Ms MANISON: He did not divulge much information about the ...

Mr CONLAN: Whatever. That information will be forthcoming, I believe.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: He makes a valid point. The minister is getting to where that was paid from, which will govern the outcome of this.

Mrs PRICE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair. All ministerial travel questions that involve me should have been asked of the Chief Minister.

Ms MANISON: We are eagerly awaiting the two-month time line and we will see what those travel costs were. Minister, time is very short ...

Mrs PRICE: It was not paid out of this output.

Ms MANISON: Yes, okay. For ministerial travel, DCM.

Mrs PRICE: Yes, that is it. You can get the ...

Ms MANISON: Thank you, minister. Asbestos - that is a real concern. What is the status of Parks and Wildlife asbestos removal program?

Mrs PRICE: Material containing asbestos has been found in 31 parks and reserves throughout the Northern Territory. Asbestos identified includes building materials in constructed ranger stations, public facilities, historical buildings, ground surface debris and contaminated soil associated with old maintenance and demolishing practices - the relocation of the debris from Cyclone Tracy and World War II.

The Parks and Wildlife Commission has developed an asbestos management policy to address asbestos found within parks. Asbestos registers and management plans have been developed under the policies. Asbestos material classified as presenting a high risk by asbestos assessors has been removed by licenced asbestos removalists.

The removal of material identified as presenting a medium to low risk will be progressively carried out under the commission's annual repairs and maintenance program. Priority is given to the removal of visible surface debris and removal of asbestos in buildings in association with other program maintenance works.

Surface asbestos debris has been removed from areas within the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens, Rapid Creek Beach foreshore, Charles Darwin National Park, Howard Springs Nature Park, Elsey National Park, Hatches Creek, Finke Gorge Ranger Station, Ormiston Gorge Ranger Station, Bullita, Trepina, Alice Springs Telegraph Station, Barrow Creek, Tennant Creek Telegraph Station and the Serpentine Chalet.

Asbestos contaminated soil has been identified at the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens with more than 530 m³ of contaminated soil excavated during works projects removed to the Shoal Bay waste contaminant site.

The commission spent over \$500 000 for asbestos-related works to 31 March 2015 through the 2014-15 repairs and maintenance program: over \$24 000 for the Davenport Murchison Park; \$32 000 for the Bullita Station in Gregory National Park; over \$7000 for the Rapid Creek foreshore; and over \$400 000 for the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens.

Air monitoring results conducted by independent asbestos assessors during asbestos-related works have all shown no detectable levels of airborne asbestos fibre. The commission will continue to make the removal of asbestos from parks and reserves a priority.

Ms MANISON: Unfortunately time is very short. I will finish my line of questioning for Parks and Wildlife there. I will be submitting a range of written questions to the agency to follow up because I still have Statehood to get to.

Thank you so much, minister, for having your officers here available, and all the public servants who have put in a lot of hard work in preparing estimate's briefs. It is greatly appreciated in this very important area.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies.

OUTPUT GROUP 13.0 - PARKS AND WILDLIFE
Output 13.1 – Parks, Wildlife and Visitor Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 13.0, Parks and Wildlife, Output 13.1, Parks, Wildlife and Visitor Services. Are there any questions? That concludes consideration of Output Group 13.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 14.0 - CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE
Output 14.1 – Corporate and Governance

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now consider Output Group 14.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 14.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions? That concludes our consideration of Output 14.1.

Output 14.2 – Shared Services Received

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I call for questions on 14.2, Shared Services Received. Any questions?

Ms MANISON: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 14.2 and Output Group 14.0. Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

That concludes consideration of Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory. On behalf of the committee I thank the officers who assisted the minister today.

OUTPUT 15.0 - TERRITORY WILDLIFE PARKS

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consider the Output 15.0, Territory Wildlife Park Business Line. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and if you wish to make an opening statement, unless there are no questions.

Mr MANISON: Mr Deputy Chair, we have no questions for that. We have a few moments left.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officials who assisted the minister today and came all the way here to talk about Territory Wildlife Park.

STATEHOOD

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Statehood. I note the responsibility for Statehood sits within the Department of Attorney-General and Justice. However, as the minister responsible, questions relating to Statehood will now be answered.

Minister, I invite you to introduce any officials accompanying you and if you wish to make an opening statement regarding Statehood.

Mrs PRICE: I do not have an opening statement, Mr Deputy Chair.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Are you happy to move straight to questions, minister?

Mrs PRICE: Yes, I have Greg Shanahan here as the Chief Executive.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any questions on Statehood?

Ms WALKER: There are. It is probably a good thing you do not have a statement minister because we would not have time for it. Minister, you assumed responsibility for Statehood in September 2013 when you were newly appointed to Cabinet. Is that correct?

Mrs PRICE: That is correct.

Ms WALKER: Can you describe what your responsibilities are as Minister for Statehood and what is the Giles government position and commitment to statehood?

Mrs PRICE: Yes. I am the minister responsible and I work closely with the Chief Minister because there are complex issues involved. Statehood is – yes, that is where I sit with statehood.

Mr CONLAN: I have a follow-up question which might assist in that. Minister, to follow the line of questioning, would it be fair to say that your role as Minister of Statehood is to firmly advance the agenda of statehood for the Northern Territory, that the government has placed statehood on the COAG agenda and also the position of the Giles Country Liberals government is to fully support the Northern Territory becoming a state of Australia? Would that be a fair assessment of your role as Minister for Statehood?

Ms MANISON: What action have you taken to do that?

Ms WALKER: Good on you, comrade Conlan.

Mr CONLAN: Placing statehood firmly on the COAG agenda is a significant advancement of statehood. Minister, would that be a fair assessment of your role as Minister for Statehood?

Mrs PRICE: That is correct, member for Grotter.

Ms WALKER: Given that, minister, what is the plan? There does not appear to be any budget appropriation. Is there a timetable of activity? How committed is the Giles government and you, as Statehood minister, to achieving statehood and to see us on a constitutional even keel with the rest of country, with the exception of the ACT?

Mrs PRICE: Member for Nhulunbuy, the government is currently considering options for progressing statehood. No decision has been made. Action taken to address this issue: the government is committed to statehood for the Northern Territory, and for the Northern Territory to take its rightful place as an equal member on the Australian Federation. This proposed way of going forward is currently under review. The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice has no specific statehood funding.

Ms WALKER: Given that it is on the COAG agenda, which is good to hear, in the space of two-and-a-half years what has the Giles government physically done to advance statehood? I cannot find any information on DCM or your website, minister, of current activities for statehood. As you are probably aware - or maybe not aware - quite apart from producing this, there was more than \$5m expended between 2004 and 2012 for the bipartisan approach which was abandoned by the CLP. It is difficult to be convinced that the current Giles government ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Is there a question here, member for Nhulunbuy?

Ms WALKER: What exactly are the actions other than putting it on the COAG agenda? Where is the physical activity? What are you doing? What groups are you meeting with?

Mrs PRICE: This has always been there under Labor as well. There is a bipartisan agreement ...

Ms WALKER: No, you walked away from the bipartisanship in 2012 ...

Mrs PRICE: This has always been a bipartisan agreement.

Ms WALKER: In the lead-up to a constitutional convention, your party, before you became a member of parliament, walked away from it. I know you do not know the history of it so ...

Mr CONLAN: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chair! That is potentially misleading the committee. The Country Liberal Party did not walk away from the bipartisan approach ...

Ms WALKER: This is not a question for you; it is a question for the minister.

Mr CONLAN: I know, I am just raising a ...

Ms WALKER: Quite clearly, the Minister for Statehood has no idea what is going on in the area of statehood because there is no activity to advance statehood under the current CLP Giles government.

Mr CONLAN: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chair! This is not a forum for grandstanding and I ask you to call the member for Nhulunbuy to order before we run out of time.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, let us just ...

Ms WALKER: I am trying to ask the minister ...

Mr CONLAN: This is an outrageous abuse of the Estimates Committee and I ask that you call the member for Nhulunbuy to order. This is not an opportunity or an avenue for the member for Nhulunbuy to grandstand.

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Everybody, order! Do you have a specific question?

Ms WALKER: I have asked several questions, none of which have been answered. There is no budget, no activity and the minister does not know about statehood. There is no commitment from the CLP to advance it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: On that note, it has been a lovely night, thank you very much, this meeting is adjourned.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, minister and Mr Shanahan for appearing.

The committee suspended
