

The committee convened at 8.30 am.

Mr CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to today's Estimates Committee hearing.

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

MINISTER WORDEN'S PORTFOLIOS

POLICE, FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF POLICE, FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr CHAIR: Before I ask you to introduce everyone and do your opening statement, minister, I will clarify some points from yesterday before we commence, for those who were not in the room.

In relation to whole-of-government questions, when we get to that segment, it has been clear that whole-of-government questions relate to fiscal strategy across multiple agencies, particularly this agency's component of that. An example would be something related to Langoulant fiscal repair strategy and their part in that.

Before we move to outputs—I appreciate that PFES has one output before we get to Territory Families—if you would like to clarify specifically where something goes, that would make it smoother as we go through.

Minister, I welcome you to introduce your officials and commence your opening statement.

Mrs WORDEN: Mr Chair, I will not be making an opening statement for the Police output. With me today is Acting Commissioner Michael Murphy; Acting Deputy Commissioner Michael White; Acting Deputy Commissioner Martin Dole; Chief Financial Officer, Mr Paul Kelly; as well as Chief of Staff, Ms Lisa Wilson.

I also acknowledge that we are on Larrakia land and pay my respects.

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

Mr CHAIR: In that case, the committee will consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to the specific output questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thank everyone here today and all the people in the department who have spent a lot of time working to prepare all of the information for their minister. I can only hope she will do their hard work justice, but I am not holding my breath on that. I do not know how people in the department are.

Minister, do you know how much Jamie Chalker's payout was?

Mr CHAIR: Before the minister starts, we only have one output where you will get to ask that question. I am clear on whole-of-government questions, so can we move to the output then?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The minister was about to answer the question, Mr Chair. You do not answer the question; she does.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I made a clear ruling on what whole-of-government questions are. I am more than happy if you ask that first question on the first output.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If the minister would answer the question, it is totally up to her.

Mr CHAIR: Let us see. Would the minister like to answer that question?

Mrs WORDEN: I would prefer that we go straight to the outputs.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any whole-of-government questions related to wider whole-of-government fiscal strategy?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much was Jamie Chalker's payout?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Spillett, the minister said that she will not answer it. You can ask it in the first output. We can go straight to the first output if you have no questions on whole of government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What would you like me to ask in whole of government? What meets your strict definition?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I clearly explained what whole of government is. If you have any whole-of-government questions, you can ask them or we can move straight to the output.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to move to the output.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – POLICING SERVICES **Output 1.1 – Community Safety, Crime Prevention and Safer Roads**

Mr CHAIR: We will now move to Output Group 1.0, Policing Services, Output 1.1, Community Safety, Crime Prevention and Safer Roads.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first, followed by committee members and other participating members. The committee has agreed that other members may join in the line of questioning by shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of their questioning in the output.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you know how much Jamie Chalker was paid out?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If you do not know how much he was paid out, you have no idea how it has impacted your budget's bottom line. Is that correct?

Mrs WORDEN: That is incorrect. On this matter, there were several elements of the negotiation and the confidential payout. I will not discuss that any further.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We were told yesterday by the Treasurer that the entire payout came from the Police bottom line. That means that, as minister, you must know what hit your department has taken to pay for that payout.

Mrs WORDEN: The commissioner's remuneration falls under our budget, as does any CE's remuneration within their department budget. It would be inappropriate to know line by line any separations from any agency. I do not know the exact figure.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You have a global separations budget with no oversight?

Mrs WORDEN: I have answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you sought a Treasurer's Advance to top up the Police budget for what has been taken out as part of the payout?

Mrs WORDEN: It is not reflected because we go to 30 March. That would not be reflected in those figures anyway.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it correct that you are the minister responsible for the Police budget?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Police budget has taken, presumably, a seven-figure hit; you do not know what that is, and you have not asked for a Treasurer's Advance to top it up. Is that correct?

Mrs WORDEN: You said 'presumably'. I said that it would be within a broader area within the agency, and it is confidential. I do not know which part of 'confidential' you do not understand.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Confidentiality aside, will you seek a Treasurer's Advance to make up for that money that has been taken from the Police budget?

Mrs WORDEN: The Police budget is a broad global budget that we worked on for the entire financial period. We have worked through it. At this stage, no.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are happy for police to suffer the hit on the payout to Jamie Chalker?

Mrs WORDEN: That is not what I said. Do not put words in my mouth.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am trying to ask why you would not request a Treasurer's Advance so your Police budget is not worse off.

Mrs WORDEN: It is a big global budget with lots of moving pieces, as every agency has. We have worked through it for the entire financial year, which is not yet closed. It does not factor in to this reporting period for Estimates.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, but it comes from the bottom line. In this quarter there will be, whatever the sum is, removed from the Police budget as it has already been paid. That means that other police areas will not be resourced.

Mrs WORDEN: As with every separation for every employee across all government agencies. I do not know why you think that this would be any different.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Because our police force is already under resourced and over worked, so a sizeable sum being removed without replacement will impact their ability to serve and protect our community, which is what they do exceptionally well every day.

My concern is about the fact that, as the minister, you are not championing that portfolio and trying to make sure you have as many resources as possible for police. It seems that you are happy to cop it on the chin regarding Natasha Fyles' bungled exit strategy. It will be something that our men and women in blue have to suffer.

Mr CHAIR: Is there a question in accordance with 109?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why will you not fight for police to top up that budget?

Mrs WORDEN: I am fighting for our police every day. You are just spouting words for things you think should happen. I can assure you that we are working extremely hard on our budget, and it does not come down to one line item to land a Police budget over a 12-month period. I have answered your question. I will not say anything more about it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What services will not be delivered by police because of the cut to the budget?

Mr CHAIR: The minister has said that she has answered your question.

Mrs WORDEN: It is a moot point.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How is it a moot point?

Mrs WORDEN: Because we have a broader budget—a rather large agency budget—of over \$500m, and you are asking about one line item which I have said is confidential. I will not comment further on it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not asking you to comment on the confidential sum; I am asking what will be cut. What services cannot be delivered because you have taken a hit to the Police budget? I understand there is a budget.

Mrs WORDEN: That is a lie because you asked me to comment on the sum.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A point of order, Mr Chair! Accusing someone of lying is never acceptable within parliamentary processes.

Mr CHAIR: I sought clarification yesterday on what occurred.

Mrs LAMBLEY: So it is okay?

Mr CHAIR: No. If the member believes that has occurred they are to raise it on the floor of parliament. That is the advice I have been given.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You can say 'lying' now? That is misleading.

Mrs WORDEN: I withdraw the word, 'lying', but I think the Member for Spillett has contradicted herself by asking me one moment ago to clarify the exact figure; now she is saying that she is not asking me to clarify the exact figure. Those two do not sit well together. It is a confidential matter that has been dealt with by our agency and other agencies. That is the end of it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I understand that you will not tell the figure. I have already asked you if you know how much it is, and you said no. I have to take it on face value that it is the truth. I have moved on in my questioning. That is how questioning works; it starts at one end and continues on.

I am asking you what will not be delivered in the Police budget. What services from Police will be cut because of that hit to the bottom line?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Good question.

Mrs WORDEN: None.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How is that possible? If you have a global budget and a plan to spend it and money is taken away, something has to give. That money would have been spent on something else had it not been paid to Jamie Chalker. What will suffer because of it?

Mrs WORDEN: You do not understand what happens within a global budget in a 12-month period; things move around at different stages. We will be delivering, for the entire 12 months, a full suite of services by Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is simple. If you had \$10 and your mum took \$1 off you because you did not make your bed, you have \$9 to spend on lollies. You cannot buy \$10 worth of lollies with \$9. It is exactly the same on a much bigger scale. Your total budget now has less, which means you have to deliver the same amount of services with less money. What services will be cut?

Mrs WORDEN: I have already answered that question. The answer is none.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not possible.

Mrs WORDEN: Your analogy is childish; you cannot compare \$10 of pocket money to a large budget of over \$500m. It is quite agile over a full 12-month period. Treasurer's Advances are asked for under unforeseen circumstances, and we have not go to a point where we needed to ask for that within our budget. I have a large budget delivering services across a whole range of areas. We will deliver that in full this financial year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You said that Police has a very large budget. Is that correct?

Mrs WORDEN: A \$500m budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: To you, that is a very large budget?

Mrs WORDEN: It is a large budget, compared to other agencies.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you saying that Police has so much money that the payout to Jamie Chalker will not impact any service delivery?

Mrs WORDEN: That is not what I said.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What are you saying?

Mrs WORDEN: We have a total budget of \$526.1m over a full financial year, and we will land that budget as close to expenditure as possible over that period. That is what happens.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The \$526.1m is now smaller, which means you have to deliver the same amount of services with that smaller amount of money. Do you think that Police, Fire and Emergency Services will have

a surplus—it has a large budget, as you quoted—and therefore the payout to Jamie Chalker does not matter? Are you saying that the Police budget is ample and generous, so this is a rounding error?

Mrs WORDEN: Mr Chair, the Member for Spillett keeps putting words in my mouth that I have not said, and I would prefer that did not happen.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am seeking clarification.

Mr CHAIR: I remind all members of two points: Standing Order No 38; tedious repetition. Asking the same question with a slight tweak trying to get the same outcome is tedious. When the minister has answered the question, it has been answered. Secondly, the form and manner in which questions are asked under Standing Order No 109—there should be no argumentative, inference, imputation or insults. We will allow people to ask and answer the question without being interrupted.

Mrs WORDEN: We have numerous separations over one year, and you are highlighting one separation. You are making assumptions about figures that you have been advised are confidential. You are trying to say that, in a broader agency budget where people have come and gone all year, that it will have an impact on the bottom line. I responded that each person leaving an agency across the public sector has an impact on the bottom line. You are highlighting one about a figure you do not know; neither do I. I will not comment further on that issue.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Following on from what you said, was this the largest separation payment of your department?

Mrs WORDEN: I am unaware of that, but there is a difference between operational and personnel budget. The police are adequately resourced, and payments to all staff are accounted for. There is no effect on operations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you anticipating that Police will not spend its whole budget this year?

Mrs WORDEN: No, I did not say that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Would you expect that Police would spend all of its budget this year?

Mrs WORDEN: I anticipate that we will spend as much as we can. It is allocated to different areas. At different times in the year we might find that we were to purchase something that is no longer available and that we have additional personnel, so we can move budgets around. That is what happens in an agency with a budget over \$500m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you agree that if Jamie Chalker was not paid out, you would have more money in your budget?

Mrs WORDEN: Of course that is correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Then the converse is true; because you paid out Jamie Chalker, you have less money in your budget. Is that correct?

Mrs WORDEN: I said earlier that it does not fall within the Estimates reporting period anyway. At the end of the day, the agency will come in as close to budget as we can.

Mr CHAIR: I remind committee members that is 30 March. The minister rightly points out that it does not fall within the reporting period.

I remind the opposition of tedious repetition under Standing Order 38. This is an issue of contention and public interest, but it does not fall within the reporting period. I ask that any questions relating to the figure for Mr Chalker be ceased under Standing Order 39: Matters Not Open to Debate.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I find it interesting, minister, that you need a junior backbencher to defend you so vehemently so early in the morning.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Spillett, we have gotten to this early. I warned you yesterday, and it took me a little longer than I would have liked for you to comply and understand that disorderly conduct will not be tolerated.

I am only following the Standing Orders and keeping within the time frames of the Estimates, which is 30 March.

If you have other questions you would like to ask about the budget in different ways relating up to 30 March, go for it. We do not need the extra commentary that does not relate to asking a question under Standing Order 109.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can take your own advice there.

Minister, did your office write the letter to Jamie Chalker asking him to leave?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As Police minister, you did not ask Jamie Chalker to leave?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Whose office sent the letter?

Mrs WORDEN: You have asked me from my perspective. You will have to ask other people that question. You asked me a direct question about a matter, and I have said what my part was. The answer was no.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you never asked Jamie Chalker to resign?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you been part of any meeting to ask Jamie Chalker to resign?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: During that period in the media you were absent, and the Chief Minister was answering all the questions. Why was that?

Mrs WORDEN: Does this have anything to do with the budget, Mr Chair?

Mr CHAIR: Noting that it does not relate to the payout figure in the ruling that I made earlier, I am happy for the discussion to continue, but I remind everyone of Standing Order 109 in relation to the manner in which the question is asked.

Mrs WORDEN: I was not missing; I was doing my job.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Which was?

Mrs WORDEN: As minister for Police; Minister for Territory Families; and Minister for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, that is what I was doing. That does not mean I have to be in the media every day. Even if it is a small part of the job that we do, there is an awful lot of things we do that are not media focused. I understand that you run your entire life through the media. That is fine. We do not. We are working extremely hard every day for Territorians.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Even though it was about the Police Commissioner and you are the Police minister?

Mrs WORDEN: I do not have to live my life through the media. I have a job to do, and that includes working with people to get things done.

You can live your life through the media, Member for Spillett; some of us choose not to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Keep telling yourself that. That is fine; whatever makes you sleep at night.

The Chief Minister came out on 1 May expressing that a settlement had been achieved with Mr Chalker and the government. You and Natasha Fyles, the Chief Minister, did not want to face the stand in the Supreme Court, so a settlement was reached to avoid at all costs you having to taking the stand.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Spillett, Standing Order 109; I will be clear that imputation and inferences do not fall within the manner of a question, and you just did that. Rephrase the question, please.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On 2 May the Chief Minister was forced to apologise that she had perhaps made a false statement. Can you confirm whether Mr Chalker received his statutory and contractual entitlements only or whether it was a broader settlement?

Mrs WORDEN: It is completely confidential. That is the only comment I will make.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is actually public because the Chief Minister then had to apologise.

Mrs WORDEN: It is confidential. You might be able to ask the Chief Minister that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Spillett, anything relating to financial severance or payout figures after 30 March—I do not care how you structure the question—is not to be discussed. That is anything relating to the financial payment after 30 March. I give you credit; that was a good way of asking it, but I have made a ruling under Standing Order 39 that we will not ask about post 30 March.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A point of order, Mr Chair! It is not unusual within Estimates to give the opposition and Independent members some latitude regarding asking questions not pertaining to the budget that are of great interest to Territorians. Usually ministers are fairly open to that because we get such few occasions or opportunities to scrutinise the government. This is not about government determining what is or is not scrutinised; it is about democracy.

Mr CHAIR: I understand. I am more than happy for the scrutiny to occur, but not when it relates to the confidential payout figure for Mr Chalker. We can have any questions outside of that, but we will not go down the path of a confidential payout to, for intents and purposes, a private citizen.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, you used to be the Police adviser. I am not sure that coming in strong to stop Police questions is ideal on your part.

Mr CHAIR: I am not stopping the questions. I am making it clear that anything related to a confidential payout to, who is now, a private citizen outside of 30 March will not be discussed. Ask any questions of Police that you like in relation to the theme of crime that you have been taking throughout sittings.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The increase in Territory government funding to the Police budget was \$1.8m. Is that because that effectively is Jamie Chalker's payout?

Mr CHAIR: Not even 30 seconds ago I said that is what we will steer clear of. You are now on a warning.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The minister is talking about it. She is allowed to answer the question or say—because she is a big girl, Mr Chair—'I am not answering the question', and I can move on. If she plans to answer the question, she is the minister and you are the Chair of the committee.

Mr CHAIR: There is no need to be condescending. You are on a warning. If the minister decides that she would like to answer the question, that opens the line of questioning going forward. However, the ruling has been that nothing after 30 March related to the payout for Mr Chalker would be discussed because it is confidential.

Mrs WORDEN: To bring it to a close, the matter of the separation of Mr Jamie Chalker is confidential; I cannot make any further comment about it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the total cost to the department in legal fees and expenses associated with the settlement?

Mrs WORDEN: They are covered by SFNT; you can ask the Attorney-General.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Did you receive advice from the Solicitor-General in relation to the separation?

Mrs WORDEN: I will not comment further about the separation of Mr Jamie Chalker.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Did you ever ask the former Police Commissioner to seek Australian Federal Police support to come to the Territory?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Up to this point, have you ever asked the federal government or the AFP to support NT Police in the Territory?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why not?

Mrs WORDEN: Because I have great faith in the Northern Territory Police.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Police is highly under resourced. There are not enough police. We have crime going through the roof across the Territory, especially in towns like Alice Springs. Why not call on additional support to bolster our numbers on the ground and provide important reprieve to NT Police?

Mrs WORDEN: The role of the AFP is incredibly different from the role of the Northern Territory Police Force. We have not got to the point we felt that is necessary.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Even though four or five people have died this year due to public, horrific crime, you do not think there is a need to bolster police numbers?

Mrs WORDEN: Our police do a fantastic job. We continue to invest year on year in police and will keep working together to ensure we have the right investments in police and other community safety mechanisms. We continue to work in areas such as early intervention to have a better and safer Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But 97.6% of police do not believe there are enough police to do what is asked of them. Are you telling me that 97.6% of police are wrong?

Mrs WORDEN: I know that you have put great stock in the NTPA survey. I value the work the NTPA does, and I work as closely as I can with it to ensure that we are all in step. We hear the voices of police members. That is extremely important. The surveys you have continuously quoted for some time are becoming dated. We have been making investments and changes in the Northern Territory Police over the last 12 months.

Talking to police on the ground, at the college and with the executive, there have been changes. We will continue to work hard in every space, like the wellbeing strategy, to ensure that police can deal with what they face on a daily basis. We are moving as quickly as we can to improve the rostering system and work in resourcing.

The police I speak to on the front line understand that. They are pleased with our support. Although the survey was revealing and powerful for frontline officers, I say to them that we have heard them and are working as quickly and diligently as we can to ensure they are supported going forward and that they come to work and thoroughly enjoy their jobs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They do not thoroughly enjoy their jobs, because 80.7% rated morale as low or very low, and 97.6% of police do not believe that there is enough police to do their jobs. This is evidenced by stories across our community of people ringing and not getting through, police being exhausted and having job lists of 20, 30 or 40 jobs ahead of them. They go to serious domestic violence incidents, and the jobs that come after that are piling up behind them. It is a horrific situation for police every day, running into danger and leaving their families to protect ours.

How can you possibly say that this survey is dated when you have never acknowledged this and never made a plan for how to address it? Are you saying that if you did another survey today, the morale rate would be higher?

Mrs WORDEN: I would hope so. We are working at lots of levels, and that is not the only tool we are using. We have heard what officers had to say. For you to say that we have never acknowledged that is incorrect. That is why we invested \$3m this year alone and ongoing for the wellbeing strategy. We were at the launch of that not long ago. We are meeting families, frontline officers and the people working with them. They are working on the wellbeing strategy. People are pleased. If you talk to the chaplains and the peer support people working in Police, Fire and Emergency Services—not just police—we are investing in that. They see

that and know that we understand the issues they are facing. We are working hard to ensure they know they are valued and safe in their jobs.

It is important work. I have never walked away and said that it is not important and I do not worry about it, which is the intonation that you give every time you spurt that stuff.

We listened to the NTPA members and looked at the survey. All the police executive gets what was in that survey. We have never walked away from it. We are working at every level to improve those outcomes. I will be incredibly disappointed if they do another survey, which I hope they will at some point, and those things have not started to turn around, but I think we will see that. I am positive about that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Minister, 96.7% of police felt that they were not supported by your government. What do you say to that?

Mrs WORDEN: We are supporting them at every turn.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you saying that 96.7% of police are wrong?

Mrs WORDEN: I cannot change how an individual feels except by my actions. You will see that, by our actions, we are changing the environment and making sure that Police, Fire and Emergency Services workers know that we are investing in them. The work of police is valued.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why do 96.7% of police not think you support them? How have you gotten to the bottom of that?

Mrs WORDEN: A whole range of factors are in that, including coming to work and feeling fatigued about rosters. We understand that.

We are making sure that we have a strong recruitment strategy. Acting Commissioner Murphy is actively seeking the return of some of the officers who left over that period to bring back experienced police.

We are making sure that there is a deeper connection with community. We are making sure that police feel that enough is happening in all the other agencies that support their work and that early intervention work is being done with young people who are starting to escalate. We are making sure that police can see the work of other agencies. That is how police need to feel supported.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you attributing any of these negative numbers to the leadership of the former Police Commissioner?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What has changed?

Mrs WORDEN: A lot of things have changed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Since when?

Mrs WORDEN: Since those surveys.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Police have never seen something from your government that would shift the figure of nearly 100% of our police feeling that you do not support them. What would you say is the single biggest measure you have taken to turn that around?

Mrs WORDEN: Just to clarify, not every member responded to that survey. That was 97% of the ones who responded.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was about 1,200 police.

Mrs WORDEN: I understand that they did not entirely feel every day at that point in time that government was supporting them enough. Since then we have a range of changes throughout the disciplinary and wellbeing areas to increased investment. We are looking at electronic rostering, and SerPro is coming on. A whole range of things are changing quite rapidly within the police force.

We are tackling the alcohol issues. In Alice Springs police were telling me in January—which is when you saw me in Alice Springs talking to liquor retailers—that they felt that was an issue. They were right. We heard them and took action. That is how we are supporting our frontline members.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many times were police called to the Howard Springs quarantine facility while evacuees were there?

Mrs WORDEN: We had an ongoing police presence.

Mr MURPHY: At the CNR we had the Aboriginal liaison officers throughout the days when all the displaced residents from Pigeon Hole, Daguragu and the communities affected by the floodwaters were in situ. We had some police across evening shift who were present; they calmed the centre. There were people coming back after consuming alcohol, and there were disruptions with domestic violence incidents. They created a safe place for people to sober up before they entered the main CNR.

The police provided pretty full coverage. It was important for the Aboriginal liaison officers to be there with cultural authority and connection to understand and listen to the traditional owners' needs. Some people were trying to come into the centre who were not from community. We had to address those issues.

As time progressed, there were heightened emotions, so we had to manage that carefully with traditional owners and their Aboriginal liaison officers. We had to respond from time to time to address antisocial behaviour. There were some intoxication issues, domestic violence and quarrels between some of the cultural groups.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many police and ALOs were dedicated to that facility?

Mr MURPHY: On top of that, we also had Strike Force Lyra, which is a dedicated domestic violence team attached to the greater Darwin station. They were also positioned there, understanding the complexities of domestic violence. They were embedded in that team so that prevention strategies were employed to make sure there was not any continued violence.

We had three officers from the Community Resilience and Engagement Command there for most days. The work they did was incredible. The prevention, engagement and relationship building over that period of time from when people entered the CNR—they went through a tremendously difficult time being displaced from their community into a foreign environment and needed all the support they could get. That connection from the ALOs was really valued.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That was three community engagement?

Mr MURPHY: Yes. There could have been more from time to time. They were also supported by our recruit squads. Initially our recruit squads went, too. That was good for them as new members of the Northern Territory Police Force to see. We talk about emergency management and displacement across the Northern Territory—whether it is floodwaters, cyclones or bushfires. That was a good introduction to understand the complexities of the Northern Territory, diversity of the cultural groups coming together and what policing is about.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sure. I want a breakdown of the numbers. We had police from the DV teams stationed there permanently, ALOs, community engagement police, police on evening shift and police in the sobering-up shelter. How many police were dedicated or stationed at the Howard Springs quarantine facility while flood evacuees were there?

Mrs WORDEN: The commissioner made that clear. I will also ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, no; he just mentioned three community engagement officers. What about others?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct. You also have to remember that there is an offset. If you are scribbling down and trying to make it up in totals about cost, you have to remember that we have members who are usually stationed in at least Kalkarindji who would have been in ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can tell me that. You can say that the three officers at Kalkarindji were there.

Mrs WORDEN: That is what I am saying to you. They came in as well, so we had an offset of them coming in.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I want the breakdown of all of those.

Mr MURPHY: We still had a police presence in Kalkarindji and Daguragu because there was still asset protection required. Then they moved in and were critical in repatriation as well. It was broader than just the CNR. It was continuing security at community for protection of assets and looking after, to a degree, animals ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am more interested in the resources that went into Howard Springs. If I could get a breakdown of all the police ...

Mrs WORDEN: Specifically police resources?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: Okay. I will answer during the Estimates session, but for clarity if you could put that question on notice that will allow someone to break that down properly for you.

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please provide a detailed breakdown of all of the police who were required to be working at the Howard Springs quarantine facility. That includes people in the DV team, people dealing with sobering up, the ALOs, the community engagement team and any of the police who had to be physically present to maintain law and order at the facility.

Mrs WORDEN: That would have been their sole responsibility?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If they had to do a shift standing at Howard Springs, I want to know about it.

Mrs WORDEN: I am concerned that there may have been police in Palmerston who, as part of their shift, may have been ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There would be callouts, right?

Mrs WORDEN: Sometimes, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If there was a crime, police would be called.

Mrs WORDEN: Police onsite would deal with incidents, but if they had to leave to deal with an incident, that would leave no police there at all. If an incident occurred after that and they were dealing with it, a police officer would come out. That would be the same for anyone in the Palmerston region. It would be a callout.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am asking for people who were there. I will ask a separate question about people who were called in.

Mr CHAIR: All right, let us do that.

Mrs WORDEN: This is about people who are permanently dedicated ...

Mr CHAIR: I will ask her to restate the question, minister.

Question on Notice No 3.1

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please provide a breakdown of all police at all ranks—I do not need levels, but anyone wearing a police uniform—who undertook shifts or part shifts at the Howard Springs quarantine facility.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Just to clarify, ALOs do not wear police uniforms. Yes, we accept the question.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.1.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people were arrested from the Howard Springs quarantine facility?

Mrs WORDEN: Is that at the facility?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Those who were staying at the facility. It can be how many were arrested at the facility, if that is easier?

Mrs WORDEN: It will be difficult to break that figure down. If people were arrested at the facility versus being arrested somewhere else, it will be difficult to marry those up.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you saying that you were not keeping track of how much crime was happening inside Howard Springs? Evidently it was a lot.

Mrs WORDEN: Personally I was not taking note of every single crime.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You told me earlier how hard you were working during this period.

Mrs WORDEN: I do not sit down and bean count. You are extraordinary. No wonder you were only a minister for a few days. Honestly, there is no understanding.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This was the single biggest thing happening in the Territory at the time. Crime was out of control. Police resources were being diverted to the facility, alcohol was free-flowing like we had not seen in a long time and you cannot tell me how many people were arrested inside the Howard Springs quarantine facility.

Mrs WORDEN: That is a different question. That is not the question you asked.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is. I said that, if it is easier for you ...

Mrs WORDEN: We will try to see whether we can find you ...

Mr CHAIR: Just to clarify, the question that is being asked is how many people were arrested at the Howard Springs quarantine facility?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: Inside the fence?

Mrs WORDEN: Inside the facility. We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.2

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people staying at the quarantine facility were arrested inside the facility?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.2.

Mrs WORDEN: Did you ask the same question during COVID when other people were in there?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think I did because there were people escaping and jumping the fence during COVID, if you recall.

Significant damage has happened at Howard Springs, despite your government's best attempts to play that down. How many people have been charged with damage offences?

The Chief Minister said that they will all be held accountable and there will be consequences for all the people who smashed windows, let off fire extinguishers and trashed furniture. The Chief Minister said in parliament that they will all face consequences, be accountable and pay for damage, so how many people have been charged?

Mrs WORDEN: Up until the end of March, none.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Zero. When was the facility vacant?

Mrs WORDEN: It was on 30 April.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the date when the evacuees first arrived?

Mrs WORDEN: After 24 February it scaled up. There was a small number of people to begin with, then the number grew.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Has no-one been charged with offences?

Mrs WORDEN: Not up until 30 March.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How are consequences and accountability being delivered to the people who smashed the windows?

Mrs WORDEN: There needs to be a process which needs someone to complain. I understand that a number of complaints have been made but after the facility had been vacated.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why does it need someone to complain if it is a crime?

Mrs WORDEN: That is the process for a charge.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If it is a crime on the street?

Mrs WORDEN: A crime has to be discovered.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was discovered. There are hundreds of broken windows and fire extinguishers.

Mrs WORDEN: Correct. We need evidence of an individual committing those acts. Do you understand that? We need evidence.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you understand that this is a government facility. The Chief Minister explained that these people would be held to account. I am not seeing a lot of accountability from your government.

Mrs WORDEN: You need to understand that an individual must be found, have a complainant and then be charged.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that work being undertaken?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. In several instances, that has happened.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many instances are the police investigating?

Mrs WORDEN: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.3

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many incidents of crime are the police investigating which happened within the Howard Springs quarantine facility during the period that the flood evacuees were staying there?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.3.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people have been before the courts for criminal damage?

Mrs WORDEN: Within the reporting period, none.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will your government make complaints about criminal damage to this taxpayer facility? You said that there needs to be complaints.

Mrs WORDEN: Where there is evidence, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What do you mean, where there is evidence?

Mrs WORDEN: Evidence of a crime being committed by an individual. The complainant would have to be DIPL.

Mr CHAIR: To clarify minister, yesterday DIPL confirmed they would refer the damages that had occurred to the police. I understand both members were not here yesterday, but it is on yesterday's *Hansard*.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people were apprehended under section 128 of the *Police Administration Act* and held in protective custody?

Mrs WORDEN: Who were staying at the facility?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.4

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people staying at the facility were apprehended under section 128 of the *Police Administration Act* and held in protective custody?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.4.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: To confirm, it was the police running the sobering-up shelter at the facility?

Mrs WORDEN: It was not a formal sobering-up shelter. There was an area set aside at the front where people were requested—I think is the word—to stay and not enter the facility intoxicated.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will get the breakdown of the police resources that were put into that?

Mrs WORDEN: I do not think there were police resources associated with that. There was probably a security guard there. Red Cross and Territory Families were running the area.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When was the sobering-up area established?

Mrs WORDEN: You should ask me later under Territory Families, which was a part of the running of the operations at the centre.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people have been issued fines for damage to the facility?

Mrs WORDEN: That is up to the court.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No-one has been sent to court?

Mrs WORDEN: Not to my knowledge, but I would not be aware of that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There have been no charges for criminal damage?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Were the police performing functions at the entry point of Howard Springs, such as scanning for alcohol, contraband or any of those types of roles?

Mrs WORDEN: There were private security members 24 hours per day doing that role.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Security were removing alcohol?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was the facility alcohol free at all times?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No alcohol would ever go to Howard Springs?

Mrs WORDEN: There was no alcohol from day one.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you confident about that?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, I am confident. You might want to ask me that under Territory Families because it was responsible for the operations. That did not stop alcohol—just as it did during COVID—being passed over a very long fence line.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Alcohol got into the facility?

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely. I am not blind to that but it did during COVID as well. It is an extraordinarily long fence line. It is kilometres long, and there is no capacity to have that fence line monitored 24/7. You would need someone stationed at approximately every two hundred or one hundred metres. That would be ludicrous. The security did their best. The work that they did was amazing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How will I obtain the figures of how many people have been charged with criminal damage after 30 March? It is of great community interest. The budget period goes until the end of this financial year. Am I expected to ask those questions as written questions?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, you could.

Mr CHAIR: If the minister has agreed to take them, would you like to ask them?

Mrs WORDEN: No, these are questions outside of the reporting period.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Your government has repeatedly said that there will be consequences. It does not sound like it up to this point.

Mrs WORDEN: I want to make it clear that you need not just a complainant; you need evidence of an individual causing that damage. That is not as straightforward as we might like.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There would be CCTV at that facility. Is that correct?

Mrs WORDEN: Not in every space.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We had police at that facility.

Mrs WORDEN: We did.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have 800 broken windows, \$11,000 worth of fire extinguishers, \$100,000 worth of destroyed mattresses and god knows what else.

Mrs WORDEN: That is not a question. It is just a statement.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it a commitment of your government to find the people responsible for the damage?

Mrs WORDEN: Where it is possible, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much of the \$3m for mental health and wellbeing will be spent on wages?

Mrs WORDEN: The team is made up of a multidisciplinary group of professionals, including psychologists, social workers, occupational rehabilitation advisers, a peer support coordinator and peer support officers. We already employ two chaplains who will work with the wellbeing team. There are eleven positions within that team to deliver all of those services.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does that \$3m pay for their salaries?

Mr MURPHY: It does for some positions. It is also programs—healthy lifestyles, access to psychologists, other programs and the strategy works across ‘protect, promote, support’. It is from recruitment to transitioning out of the police force to make sure our officers, fire officers, emergency services and volunteers are supported. It is a vast improvement. It also includes examination of separation questionnaires to see why people are leaving the police force to better understand how we can retain people.

Mr KELLY: Employee costs will be approximately \$1.25m. The balance will be for the operational and service delivery costs and wellbeing IT systems that the acting commissioner spoke about.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many police officers are on personal leave?

Ms PURICK: Does that include sick leave?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, all leave.

Mr MURPHY: Is that on recreational leave or all types of leave?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I want a breakdown of all the leave, if that is okay.

Mr MURPHY: The recreational leave varies from week to week. It could vary between 250 and 350 officers in a pay period at any one time who are taking leave. Obviously, we had a deficit across COVID when our officers were working extremely hard for a number of years and could not take leave. You are right; they were fatigued and tired. Now there is an opportunity for them to take leave, travel and spend time with family, so we are investing in that.

We had to reduce our leave threshold, which carried a financial risk, so we are managing that. The CFO's team is looking at that. That varies, but we have caps across the Northern Territory. The maximum is 20% on all rank types, so we can still provide service delivery and functional capability at all ranks and levels.

In addition we have about—it varies—between 80 and 100 people on long-term sick leave, across three to six to 12 months, which is significant. That could be psychological trauma or physical trauma from exposure to traumatic events they have seen whilst being a police officer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned that was between six and 12 months?

Mr MURPHY: We basically plotted out across the team three months, three to six months, six to nine months and nine to 12 months. That is embedded across our wellbeing strategy to make sure adequate resources are given to the officers and through their care. Obviously the priority is return to work.

Some officers, sadly, will not be able to return to work because they just cannot come back to policing. Part of the wellbeing strategy is to transition them to another form of employment. We work closely with Fortem Australia in that regard.

Another cohort of people who have returned to work sits between 70 and 80. They are transitioning out of long-term leave or have been injured at work physically and will go to other duties whilst they rehabilitate and come back.

The 250 to 350 incorporates long service leave, so those leave types.

Ms PURICK: Is it correct that there are officers who have been on sick leave for two, three, four or five years?

Mr MURPHY: Yes, there is a small cohort of officers.

Ms PURICK: Can we find out how many there are?

Mrs WORDEN: Is that workers' compensation, just to clarify?

Ms PURICK: It is not workers' comp, but sick leave. If you have someone on sick leave for three-plus years ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Could we do the breakdown of the three, the three to six, six, 12 ...

Mr CHAIR: To slow everything down a bit, we will finish on that question and then come to you.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I understand, but Kezia can ask in her question for all the breakdowns—three, six, 12-plus.

Ms PURICK: You gave it the three to six, six to 12 and 12 to perhaps two years.

Mr CHAIR: Three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 is what you said.

Mrs WORDEN: We might be able to give you some information.

Mr MURPHY: We can look at some of the numbers. Just in relation to police, there are 18 in the three-to-six-month period. For six to 12 months there are 18 as well. For over 12 months there is 39, so it is 75 in total. Some of the 39—I do not have the exact number—would be engaged with workers' compensation.

Ms PURICK: Are some of those 39 on sick leave for two or four years? Forget workers' comp.

Mrs WORDEN: We would have to find that out for you. I have to take it on notice. We do not have that.

Mr CHAIR: Just to clarify how you will ask the question, it would be around the 39 who are on 12 months-plus. You want a breakdown of how many of the 39 are on greater than two years but not workers comp.

Ms PURICK: Yes. Correct.

Question on Notice No 3.5

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

Ms PURICK: How many officers on sick leave, not workers' compensation, for 12-plus months—which is the 39 people—are on sick leave for two years, three years, four years, five years or more than five years?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Goyder has been allocated the number 3.5.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many police are on workers' compensation leave because they have been injured at work?

Mrs WORDEN: There is 49.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many police officers are still suspended from duty because they refused to be vaccinated?

Mrs WORDEN: None.

Mr MURPHY: We have just reinstated two officers.

Mr CHAIR: For clarification, you said 70 to 80 have transitioned back to work who were on leave. Have you got them back to work?

Mr MURPHY: That is a return to work program. It is a graduated return through hours and different duties to make sure they come back to work and can maintain full operational duties.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many police are on leave due to ongoing disciplinary matters that have not been resolved?

Mrs WORDEN: I can give you only a number of how many during that period. Did you want a point in time?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can give it to me as at 30 March.

Mrs WORDEN: In the reporting period there have been 57 we call section 79s for breach of serious discipline notices, but not all those alleged breaches resulted in a confirmed breach of discipline or outcome. There were three members suspended with pay. One member, in accordance with section 76A, was charged with a criminal offence. Two members, in accordance with section 80(1)(e) of the act, were suspended with pay.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You said that there were three suspended with pay. Is the breakdown that one was charged and two were suspended, or were three suspended with pay, one charged and two additionally suspended with pay?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, they are separate.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is five?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, that is five.

Four members were provided a direction to take accrued leave. One member was dismissed in accordance with section 78. One member was dismissed in accordance with section 16A.

That is a snapshot of the reporting period.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 57, how many resulted in no further action?

Mrs WORDEN: We will take that on notice, although it may be helpful for the acting commissioner to give you a bit more detail.

Mr MURPHY: Working with the review of professional standards and framing towards performance management rather than discipline, the minister said that there were 57 section 79s issued. This is part of a process to allow an officer to explain conduct if there is a breach or suspected breach. Out of the 57 up to 22 May there are only six outstanding. I cannot tell you, out of the 51, how they were resolved. There are a couple before a tribunal and appeals process.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The question I want to ask on notice is out of the 57, where did they all land? We know there is a handful who were suspended or had very serious ...

Mrs WORDEN: There are six ongoing, so they are not landed. It is really 51 you are asking about.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. Of the 51, how many resulted in zero response, a warning from a supervisor or an administrative type of response?

Mrs WORDEN: As many as possible, hopefully.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What would you call that, commissioner, so I can ask the right question?

Mr MURPHY: Usually a written caution.

Question on Notice No 3.6

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 51 disciplinary matters to the end of the reporting period, how many resulted in a written caution?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.6.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How long did that process take for all these cases, not for the individual cases but for the number that ended in a written caution? What was the average wait time to get to the resolution point? It is the same as the ones who were suspended and the ones who were dismissed.

Mrs WORDEN: Just to put some context around that—which comes off the back of what you were indicating earlier about how police feel about their work through those surveys—this is a particular area of interest to make sure that we are addressing all the factors that have made our officers unhappy with some of the disciplinary areas.

Acting Commissioner Murphy has taken a strong lead to take more of a management approach to ensure that the managers are well equipped to deal with performance management, as you would in any other agency. Police is a specialised agency, and I am pleased with the direction taken by the Acting Commissioner Murphy. He is making sure that the managers have the tools to cut the earlier behaviour so that behaviours do not pop up and then you need a bigger stick regarding discipline. To use the acting commissioner's words, this is making sure that if there is a mistake or a misstep, there is an opportunity to learn from it and deal with quickly.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It has not been done well for a long time and has caused huge problems across the force. During every police conference your government stood up and promised a review of the disciplinary system and has not delivered. I had to hear ...

Mrs WORDEN: There has been a review. That is incorrect.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is right, but it has not been implemented. No legislation has come forward ...

Mrs WORDEN: No. Parts of it are being implemented. I will ask the acting commissioner to make comments about that because there has been a report. It is a broad-ranging area. There are some actions the acting commissioner is putting in place that come from the report.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will still ask that question on notice.

Mr MURPHY: Going back to the question about the time lines of the 51 matters that are resolved, one was resolved in eight days and the longest was 12 months. Going back to the performance management discussion, 12 months is far too long to resolve a matter. There are six continuing. Our officers do not come to work to make mistakes; they come to work to work hard and do their best. Sometimes they do err; we are all humans and make mistakes. We are working towards performance management framework.

We had the review from Victoria, and there are three recommendations. Some are short term, medium term and longer term. The medium and longer term will be legislative reform. We can change behaviours now by empowering our sergeants and senior sergeants on the front line to have conversations with their officers. Superintendents and whatever rank above them can have management conversations and put things in

place so if they make a mistake, we can help rectify the decision-making or learning, share those stories and, if it happens again the second time, we may need more tools to support and examine whether it is an organisational issue, not just an officer issue. If the behaviour is repeated a third time, obviously a firm intervention might be required.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is section 79 being used to stop police from transferring interstate?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Once they have a section 79 no-one else will take them.

Mrs WORDEN: That is not the case.

Mr MURPHY: It is definitely a no. Section 79 is not initiated to stop people leaving.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a genuine question that police ask because of the ...

Mrs WORDEN: That is the first time I have heard that, but no.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I raise it every Estimates.

Mr MURPHY: It is up to a jurisdiction to consider whether it accepts an officer into a recruitment program based on the facts of what the section 79 is.

Mrs WORDEN: I have an answer to a question on notice 3.1. It was about staff working at CNR. When the CNR was set up, a recruitment squad went there as part of its training et cetera. There is a broad list of 150 people who had some interface with CNR, whether they had one shift there or whether they were recruits.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They were recruits, so we can take them out. They were helping.

Mrs WORDEN: I would have to calculate how many I would take out of that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They were not policing; they were just helping?

Mrs WORDEN: They are still sworn officers. CNR was set up quickly. There was a number of recruit squads that helped physically set things up. It was a huge operation.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not interested in that.

Mrs WORDEN: Are you not interested in those people?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is wonderful what they did. I heard all their stories at the graduation. It was a great opportunity for them—do not get me wrong—but I am more interested in the police who had to be there to police, not to build beds and stuff like that.

Mr MURPHY: They were there to police. They are under the leadership of the senior sergeant. They were doing community engagement, building rapport, preventing disruption and identifying any behaviours that might be concerning.

Mrs WORDEN: They had a range of activities.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There were 150 recruits.

Mrs WORDEN: No, there were 150 all up.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I want the breakdown.

Mrs WORDEN: I am not comfortable giving out names.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not mean to give us names.

Mrs WORDEN: The list I have has names. I do not want to do that. We will have this list broken down and do a bit more work on it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is fine. We will just keep it on notice. I do not need to know who was on what shift.

Mr CHAIR: For the record, that question has not been answered. It is still on notice.

Mrs WORDEN: It is ongoing work.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned that the wellbeing team has 11 positions. Are they all filled? Are there any vacancies in that wellbeing team?

Mrs WORDEN: We will have to take that on notice. The \$3m funding each year ongoing starts on 1 July, so I anticipate that recruitment is occurring now. We want all those positions filled from 1 July.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask a different question. How many of those 11 positions are existing positions?

Mrs WORDEN: It is full. They got ahead of the game.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: All the positions are full. Do we have a full complement of psychologists across the Territory?

Mrs WORDEN: Just to clarify, we have 11 people working there already. When the funding comes, we will be recruiting more.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many more?

Mrs WORDEN: We have a wellbeing committee looking more globally at the requirements in regions. Different places will require different help.

Mr MURPHY: It is broad-ranging. We might say there are 11 people at the moment, but there are 60 peer supporters attached to the wellbeing team as well, in connection to the 1,650 police officers, emergency services workers and fire officers. It branches out to use other specialists. For example, we have a person who comes in to give respectful workplace training. It is about changing the culture and identifying poor behaviours to make sure it is a safe working environment and people feel safe coming to work. We stamp out the misogyny, sexism, bullying, harassment—those types of things.

We have officers being trained in ASIST, which is the suicide prevention program. They can train the trainer. They can spread the word and see the messaging. They know they are a trusted source they can go to. It is exponential.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask a tight question. How many psychologist positions are there across the force, and how many of those are filled?

Mrs WORDEN: That is a reasonable question to take.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask the same of chaplains. I could make that the one question.

Mrs WORDEN: We can answer the first bit. There are six psychologists, social workers and occupational rehab advisers currently.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are six positions?

Mrs WORDEN: There are six people on staff currently.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many positions are there?

Mrs WORDEN: At this stage there are six, and they are filled. The strategy has only just been launched, and we have a committee guiding that work. Should there be a requirement for an additional position, then that is what we will look at doing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In Alice Springs, for example, there were psychologist positions vacant for an extremely long time.

Mrs WORDEN: That was prior to the wellbeing strategy. I understand we have psychologists. There was not even a chaplain at some point when I became minister. Pat King was retiring, and a number of other chaplains were retiring. It was extremely difficult to recruit. There had been a number of attempts to recruit at that time, we did not get any interest.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many chaplain positions are there, and how many are filled?

Mrs WORDEN: There are two.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are two, and they are both filled?

Mrs WORDEN: They are filled. There is one in Alice and one here. Also, Pat King ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know Warren is up here.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, and Jeff is in Alice Springs. Jeff started before Warren, so we had one in Alice Springs quite quickly, once we started looking carefully for that. Pat King is still back and working with us where we need her. That experience is valued. She gets on really well with the troops.

When you look at the survey results of what officers and members of NTPES valued, chaplains come really high, so there was a strong emphasis to get them on board early. Now we are working through all the other positions to make sure we have those in place.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many youths were fitted with electronic monitoring devices and bailed by police?

Mrs WORDEN: As at 31 March police have issued 132 monitoring devices. Of the 132, 127 of those were issued to bailees under the age of 18 and five to adults.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Why is there an emphasis on kids having electronic monitoring rather than adults?

Mrs WORDEN: It is to do with capacity to meet their bail conditions. Most often, adults are better at it. There is a lot of evidence that young people, particularly at 14 or 15, not—that is why we have bail support as well. That is a Territory Families initiative to help young people meet their bail conditions.

I do not know how many things I have read about particularly ages 13, 14 and 15 where electronic monitoring is just nothing. Bail conditions are inconsequential.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the capacity? What is the maximum number of electronic monitoring bracelets you can issue in the Northern Territory?

Mrs WORDEN: Territory Families has a separate number. I do not have my folder with me for that. Police have capacity for 52, but we share the Buddi system between Territory Families and Police. If Police did not have enough, they can share.

Mrs LAMBLEY: And the communication centre? How are they monitored exactly?

Mr MURPHY: The Buddi through policing will contact the JESCC if there is ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: The JESCC, yes.

Mr MURPHY: They work through a program. If it is a technical malfunction or a battery low they will go through a work sheet to see if it worthy to call police for this. If there is a geographical breach or a curfew breach, and they are not near their house, they will notify us and can follow up. That is part of the tools we use to make sure they are not involved with further offending—or a child in need of care. That is when we work with Territory Families.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is that done through the centre in Darwin? What is it called?

Mr MURPHY: Joint Emergency Services Communication Centre.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are they all monitored through that?

Mr MURPHY: No. The Buddi is the contractor that monitors the electronic devices. They are a separate entity. When they see a breach—whether it is a tamper with the strap, a low battery or a geographical breach—they will work through some governance. If it is worthy and meets certain criteria they will ring the Joint Emergency Services Communication Centre. It goes through our triage process, then we can deploy police to engage them through part of our bail reporting programs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is Buddi a private contractor?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where are they based?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Winnellie.

Mrs WORDEN: They have an office there, yes. I was thinking to when we first contracted them through Territory Families a while back.

Mr MURPHY: They could be anywhere with this technology.

Mrs WORDEN: They have an office here.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You said that there were 127 people under the age of 18 who were bailed with electronic monitoring devices, but how many individuals does that represent?

Mrs WORDEN: I have to take that on notice.

Mrs WORDEN: Within that question can you say police bail?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: There are two different systems of electronic monitoring, and I want to be specific.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. Presumably police are only doing police bail.

Mrs WORDEN: Correct, but obviously there is other electronic monitoring under Territory Families.

Question on Notice No 3.7

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 individuals under the age of 18 who were bailed by police with electronic monitoring devices, how many individuals does that represent?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.7.

Mrs WORDEN: It might be a manual count.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is fine.

This might have to be a separate question on notice. If that was 50 individuals across 127 episodes of being fit with a bracelet, what is the maximum? One individual might have had it 10 times, and one might have had it five times. I want that breakdown of the number of individuals, how many were fitted—less than five, more than five, more than 10.

Mrs WORDEN: Can we add that into the last question?

Mr CHAIR: We will do a separate question for that, minister.

Question on Notice No 3.8

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the individuals under the age of 18 who were bailed by police with electronic monitoring devices, how many were fitted with EMD one time, two times, three times, four times, five times, six times, seven times, eight times, nine times, 10 times and in excess of 15 times?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.8.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many of the 127 who were bailed under the age of 18 years were under the age of 12?

Mrs WORDEN: We know how many young people were apprehended, but we would not know the number of how many of them had monitoring ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many were apprehended in the reporting period?

Mrs WORDEN: Nine.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you record that as being 12 or under, or do you record that as being 11 years and 11 ...

Mrs WORDEN: Ten, 11 and 12.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: And 12?

Mrs WORDEN: We go to 12.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Up to 12? If they turn 12 you do not count that, or if they are just under 12?

Mrs WORDEN: It is their age at the time of arrest.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If it is, does it include 12 or not?

Mrs WORDEN: No, it does not include 12. It is just 10 and 11-year-olds.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Or younger.

Mrs WORDEN: That is consistent across with Territory Families.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I wanted to confirm that. Can I then ask ...

Mr MURPHY: I will clarify that we do not apply any bracelets to under 10-year-olds. The age of criminal responsibility is 10, so that is our power.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I ask that question on notice about how many of the 127 were under 12?

Mrs WORDEN: I think we answered that. It was nine.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, that was how many were apprehended, not how many were fitted with a bracelet.

Mrs WORDEN: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.9

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 people under the age of 18 who police bailed with electronic monitoring devices, how many were under the age of 12?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.9.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127, how many committed a serious breach of bail whilst being electronically monitored?

Mrs WORDEN: We do not have it with us. We will have to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.10

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 people under the age of 18 who police bailed with electronic monitoring devices, how many committed a serious breach of bail whilst being monitored?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.10.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: My question flowing from that is, of whatever that number is of the 127 who committed a serious breach of bail, how many committed a serious breach of bail multiple times? It is similar to the question I asked earlier.

Question on Notice No 3.11

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 people under the age of 18 who were bailed by police, electronically monitored and committed a serious breach of bail while being monitored, how many committed multiple serious breaches of bail?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.11.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 who committed serious breaches of bail, how many had their bail revoked?

Mrs WORDEN: We will take that on notice.

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 under-18-year-olds who were bailed by police with electronic monitoring devices and went on to commit serious breaches of bail whilst being monitored, how many faced court for the serious breach of bail? How many who faced court for the serious breach of bail were bailed again? How

many who faced court for the serious breach of bail were remanded in custody? How many who committed a serious breach of bail did not face court at all?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Spillett, I believe those questions will relate to the Attorney-General because it is the court who determines breach of bail. Are you happy to hold that question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it is not. It is a police charge. The police have to charge it.

Mrs WORDEN: With all respect, we do not have that data. That is AG data.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Police have to do something if a serious breach of bail comes in. They have to refer them back to court.

Mrs WORDEN: That is a different question to what you were asking. You were asking about court decisions. I cannot comment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are saying the bit about whether court bailed them or not.

Mrs WORDEN: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will re-ask the question.

Mrs WORDEN: Keep it to police activities, and we can see if we can answer that for you.

Question on Notice No 3.12

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 under 18-year-olds who were bailed by police with electronic monitoring devices and committed serious breaches of bail, how many were charged by police for a serious breach of bail? How many were referred by police to court for the serious breach of bail? How many serious breaches of bail received no further action by police?

Mrs WORDEN: As in the bail continues? Or the police did not take action?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I should add to that. How many were refitted with a bracelet?

Mrs WORDEN: That would be a court decision, that is not ...

Mr CHAIR: Just one second before we go back and forth. Let the acting commissioner ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It would be referred for a serious breach.

Mr MURPHY: It is not a charge ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is right because breach of bail condition is not an offence, even though you try to pretend it is, minister.

Mr MURPHY: With the serious breach, that is a mechanism to refer back to the court, rather than a charge. We can get the data if the minister accepts the question about, from the 127, how many committed those and were referred back to court?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, referred by police to court.

Mr MURPHY: Yes. And the rest of that data rests with the Attorney-General.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can answer how many were serious breaches, how many of them were referred to court and how many serious breaches had no further action?

Mr MURPHY: Yes. I would suggest that all the serious breaches went to court.

Mr CHAIR: Are you comfortable with that question? Does the minister accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.12.

Mr CHAIR: The other questions, Member for Spillett, will be held for the Attorney-General.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 who were bailed by police with electronic monitoring devices, how many of them are repeat offenders?

Mrs WORDEN: Can I just clarify that when you say repeat offenders you are saying more than once?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: Because it is specific to EM—as not every offence results in an EM—we will have to take that question on notice. We have the data about repeat offenders but not about electronic monitoring specifically.

Question on Notice No 3.13

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 127 people under the age of 18 who were bailed by police with electronic monitoring devices and committed serious breaches of bail, how many of them are repeat offenders, which means more than once?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.13

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you have data about how many times electronic monitoring has been cut off?

Mrs WORDEN: Do you mean tampering?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: I can only talk about electronic monitoring more broadly now, not the under-18s. There were 195 strap alerts.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does that include youths and adults?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I get the breakdown?

Mrs WORDEN: Between youths and adults?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. Tampering with your EM would be a serious breach of bail.

Mrs WORDEN: It involves a very intensive look at the data.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not think it would be. If there are 195 strap alerts ...

Mrs WORDEN: I am being advised that would be quite hard to interrogate because it is data relating to everybody, not just the 127. We crunched the 127 for you to have that data because we thought you might be interested in youth offending. However, to go beyond and start picking out the different types from the 195 ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Every strap alert should result in a serious breach of bail.

Mrs WORDEN: Not necessarily. You would have to look at what has happened.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Strap alert is not the data I want then. I want intentional tampering, not something like jumping a fence and unthreading the elastic.

Mrs WORDEN: We will take the question on notice. They will do a manual count for you.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Just before I ask it, I am not interested in the alerts that are unintentional, like if it slipped off in the shower.

Mrs WORDEN: You are asking about deliberate damage.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Question on Notice No 3.14

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 195 strap alerts, can you please provide a breakdown of youth and adult offenders? For youth offenders, can you please provide a further breakdown to deliberate strap alerts?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.14.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much was spent on damage to electronic monitoring?

Mrs WORDEN: We have a contract figure with Buddi. It would be a global figure including that. It is no extra cost to us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If an offender damages a bracelet, you do not have to pay?

Mr DOLE: For that reporting period, 10 separate wearers damaged devices at a cost to Police of \$6,833.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that a cost to Police?

Mr DOLE: It was a cost attributed to the police-issued devices. That is right. We had to pay it.

Mrs WORDEN: That is not just young people. That is the global.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it the total?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you have the breakdown of youth and adult wearers?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are the people who caused damage then charged with criminal damage?

Mr DOLE: On occasion, yes. I cannot confirm if that is on every occasion. Yes, we charge people with criminal damage.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I get the breakdown of how many of the 10 were charged?

Mr DOLE: Yes, we could get that data. I do not have it available at the moment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I take that on notice, minister?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. Just to clarify, that is adults and youths.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is fine.

Question on Notice No 3.15

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 10 separate wearers who damaged electronic monitoring devices that were fitted by police, how many were charged with criminal damage?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.15.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many youths were given—police have the capability. I believe it is a written warning. There are four steps a police officer can take, if you can refresh my memory.

Mrs WORDEN: Are we talking about diversion?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. There is an oral warning, a written warning, then it is diversion.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. They can have a written warning, a verbal warning, they can be declined diversion, they can be sent to diversion, they can do victim-offending conferencing, family conferencing—there is a range of options for police.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I believe in the act there are four. Would victim-offender conferencing and family conferencing come under diversion?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, we consider that as options for diversion. That is police-family conferencing; that is not the Territory Families court-ordered one with the Jesuits.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is verbal, written, diversion and arrest?

Mrs WORDEN: That sounds about right.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I please get the breakdown of the number of youths for the reporting period given a verbal warning, written warning, police diversion or apprehension?

Mrs WORDEN: There were 158 written warnings, 26 verbal warnings, 30 diversions and—what was the other one?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Arrest or apprehension.

Mrs WORDEN: I could give you a combined figure of declined—a young person may decline, which means they go down the same pathway; they do not go for the other options ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What do you mean by decline? A young person can decline to be dealt with by police?

Mrs WORDEN: They can opt to be dealt with by the courts, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Oh, you mean they can decline diversion? They cannot say, 'No, Mr police officer, I do not want to be arrested today'?

Mrs WORDEN: No, they can decline diversion. A very low number declined.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many declined diversion?

Mrs WORDEN: Fourteen have opted not to go down that path and go before the court. Police have denied 801.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What does that mean?

Mrs WORDEN: That means that they go to court. Is that your full list?

Mr BURGOYNE: How many accepted diversion?

Mrs WORDEN: All of those who ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it 130 minus 14? Or just 130?

Mrs WORDEN: Give us a moment, sorry. There are others here. There were 10 victim-offender conferences and 60 family conferences.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is a family conference?

Mrs WORDEN: Where police bring in the family and the young person and ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have a chat.

Mrs WORDEN: Have a chat.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But not the victim?

Mrs WORDEN: There have been 10 victim-offender conferences ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In the family conference there is no victim?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am confused about what 'denied' represented.

Mrs WORDEN: Police have determined that they are not suitable for diversion.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay, so that proceeds to a charge in court?

Mrs WORDEN: That might be young person who has come in and the offence do not fit the prescribed offences—it is all for prescribed offences, is it not?

Mr MURPHY: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there a different figure for apprehension or arrest, or is denied the same as apprehension?

Mr MURPHY: It gets confusing when we talk about unique offenders and apprehension rates. When we look at unique offenders, 376 youth were considered apprehended. That is the way we record it on our system because an event is created. Out of that event, then there is an outcome which is either declined—the youth or the guardian will choose not to go down the pathway of diversion. Denied is a police decision with respect to antecedents and other factors that would be relevant to any diversion pathway or the type of harm to community.

A total of 1,208 actions occurred, which includes the denied and declined, and 393 are diversions. It is a 50% success in diversion rates. We see youth 50% of the time commit only one offence.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you saying that 376 youths committed 1,208 actions?

Mr MURPHY: It was 1,208 events. An event might have multiple offences attached to it. This is where it gets a bit confusing. Every event usually relates to conduct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it one incident?

Mr MURPHY: It is one incident, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A break-in could have multiple charges but it is one break-in. Would that be one event?

Mr MURPHY: Or it could be if there is a stolen motor vehicle, a break-in and a ram raid ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would be one.

Mr MURPHY: That would be one event.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Jeepers. There would be a lot of those. That would be one event because it is the same people doing the ...

Mr MURPHY: The consideration would be on the whole conduct about what diversion or not would be undertaken.

Mrs WORDEN: That does not mean there is only one charge.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know. I want to work out how many youth are responsible for how much of the trouble. If there are 376 unique youth offenders, does that mean the 376 have been apprehended?

Mr MURPHY: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I want to make sure I have it correct. The 376 were engaged in 1,208 events, which could be multiple crimes and multiple charges. If you then break down the 376 youth, 25 were given a verbal warning, 158 were given a written warning, 130 were sent to diversion, 14 declined diversion, 801 were charged and sent to court—is that what denied means?

Mr MURPHY: The 130 you quoted is current diversion. That could be someone being considered for a pathway as well.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Could it be more than the 376 youths?

Mr MURPHY: It is 376 youth creating 1,208 events. It is about how each youth's conduct is dealt with, which is how the 1,208 number accumulates.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 376 youth across those 1,200-odd events, what happened to them? Twenty-six had a verbal warning, 158 had a written warning, 130 went to diversion ...

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, but it is not unique young people.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is right.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Spillett, noting they are trying to work through numbers, can we do morning tea? In 10 minutes we can come back to the same line of questioning, and it gives them a chance to clarify and give you exactly what you are seeking.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sure.

The committee suspended.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back to Estimates.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.1

Mrs WORDEN: The detailed breakdown of all ranks and levels that had to undertake shifts at the CNR is: senior sergeant, three; sergeant, five; senior constable first class, two; senior constable, 14; constable first class, 12; constable, eight; and graduated auxiliaries, 28. In total there were 72 police members and two Aboriginal liaison officers.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.5

Mrs WORDEN: The number of officers on sick leave, excluding workers' compensation, for 12 months-plus, is: one-plus years, three; two-plus years, one; three-plus years, two; four-plus years, zero; and over five years, one.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Prior to the break, I was trying to get the breakdown of the 376 youths who were apprehended. There were 26 verbal warnings, 158 written warnings by the police, 130 sent to diversion, 14 declined diversion and 801 charged. Is that how I read the 'denied'?

Mr MURPHY: Not necessarily, because they could be denied diversion but there could be a notice to appear or a summons later, like a further assessment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are sent to court but it is not necessarily via a charge?

Mr MURPHY: Administratively, yes, because at some point a charge is laid. It is probably not an arrest all the time as it could be a different pathway to get to court. For denied, there needs to be a redirection through the criminal justice system, but there are different ways to get there. It can be through arrest and then a bail refusal, bail, a summons or another mechanism. Does that make sense?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. Did they end up in court?

Mr MURPHY: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Were there 10 who did victim-offender conferencing and 69 who did family conferencing?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. That is not unique individuals. That is against events.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Those numbers should add up to 1,208?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, they will.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that all shared amongst the 376 youths?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Fantastic. How many of those 376 youths are repeat offenders?

Mrs WORDEN: There are 290. This might help you with future questions. Of those 376, 186 did not reoffend. There were 78 who offended twice, 50 offended three times, 27 offended four times, and 35 were greater than five.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the maximum? For the greater than five, what was the highest number of repeat offending? Was it 10 or 20?

Mrs WORDEN: We will not have that because that is individualised.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can that be taken on notice?

Mrs WORDEN: Are you looking for which individual offended the most number of times?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. Of the 35 who offended greater than five times, what was the greatest number of reoffending?

Mrs WORDEN: Is it only for within that period?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. There were 35 who repeat ...

Mrs WORDEN: We will have to look at the 35 and work out who had the highest number within the reporting period. We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.16

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 35 of 376 youth offenders who repeat offended greater than five times, what was the highest number of offences?

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.16.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you please break down those same statistics—the 186, 78, 50, 27 and 35—into regions?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. For Alice Springs, it is 119; Casuarina, 62; Central—Acting Deputy Commissioner Dole, do you know the table I am talking about? Would you be able to do that, but also give some descriptors about what that region means? I just have 'Central' but I want to give specifics on the area.

Mr DOLE: The 119 includes general Alice Springs, not the Southern Desert Division; Casuarina is 62 individual youths; Central includes a number of bush stations run by a superintendent out of Katherine, which includes the Wadeye district to Borroloola ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does that include Tennant Creek?

Mr DOLE: No, that is Barkly. Darwin is 145 individuals, and Katherine was 42. Northern is the other half of the remote portfolio run out of Katherine, which includes the Tiwi Islands, Nhulunbuy and associated northern stations. That was 24. Palmerston is 81, Southern Desert Division is 19, and Tennant Creek and Barkly is 29. We had an unknown count of 20, which means it was not recorded where the youths were from.

Mrs WORDEN: That adds up to 376.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many times have police—I want just one whole-of-Territory number—apprehended someone and taken them to a watch house, home, sobering-up shelter, rehab facility, hospital or other?

Mrs WORDEN: How many times have they been apprehended?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many times have the police taken someone somewhere, broken down into those summaries?

Mrs WORDEN: Adults and youths?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, as a global figure.

Mrs WORDEN: We will take that on notice. It is expansive, such as hospitals et cetera.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I asked the question last year and appreciate it needs to be on notice. I am patient; I will wait.

Mrs WORDEN: What was the answer last year?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was basically that one third of police time was to take people to the watch house, and the rest is being a taxi service taking people everywhere else. That is a huge waste of police time, energy and resources. This is why I am asking the question again to see if there has been any improvement on that, as the police work hard enough.

Question on Notice No 3.17

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For the whole of the Northern Territory, how many times have the police picked someone up and taken them to a watch house, home, sobering-up shelter or rehabilitation facility, hospital or other?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.17.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When will the police review commence?

Mrs WORDEN: Are you talking about the external review?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: We are waiting for the data to come from the electronic rostering.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why?

Mrs WORDEN: It can show us gaps. At the moment rostering is done across the Northern Territory in different locations. There are over 50 work units with different spreadsheets because of the different operational requirements. We have made a determination to speed up the process and get it done earlier. We are waiting for advice as to when that project can be finished.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who will advise you of that?

Mrs WORDEN: DCDD is doing the project.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you mean you are trying to speed up the electronic rostering, not the review?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, but in partnership with that we have been advised that there are opportunities to gain further information, not just from rostering. We will try to get some expertise in that area. For my mind, the sooner the better.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why do you not just call the review? Police have been rostering on pieces of paper for 150 years.

Mrs WORDEN: Correct, and we are moving away from that, so we need to make sure that we have the right data. Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services is spread across the Northern Territory, so it is a big organisation in lots of places. You have to make sure ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you saying that you do not know where police are at any one time?

Mrs WORDEN: We know where our police are, but we need to understand better what the requirements are. Electronic rostering is part of the puzzle, but we will start to do some more interrogational work before then.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who is doing that?

Mrs WORDEN: At the moment my understanding is DCDD will have capacity to do that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that the interrogation?

Mrs WORDEN: To do more expansive looking at data, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What are you exactly looking at—just where people are?

Mrs WORDEN: No. I will ask the acting commissioner to make some more comments.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it where people are rostered on as opposed to how many tasers and vehicles we need?

Mrs WORDEN: There are obviously leave factors that you need to build into that. During COVID there was a long slide effect on people taking leave. Lots of factors need to be put into it to work out the baseline requirement for people and for financial inputs.

Mr MURPHY: It is just a technology solution that will be off the shelf that will plug in. DCDD is responsible for plugging in the payroll and other training mechanisms. It is a functional deployment model. We will better understand the capability we have across the Territory to deploy resources, which informs the financial side of the house, resourcing and future focus about recruitment and retention. It will be a platform to inform many aspects.

DCDD is procuring it and will make it work through our digital transformation team, led by a commander. Once that is functional it will be up to us and our workforce to understand it and use it to best deploy and understand where our people are. Whilst we use 50 spreadsheets, there might be one officer appearing five times on different spreadsheets, and doing a headcount across rostering is complicated.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Has the system been purchased yet?

Mr MURPHY: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When will it be operational?

Mrs WORDEN: There was a team already working on it, but we have made the decision to escalate it. Maybe you can ask the minister for DCDD when she appears. I am sure she will be comfortable to answer your questions on what work they are doing. We have a police officer already working alongside, providing the frontline operational part of it.

The review is about future resourcing for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and capabilities, as the acting commissioner said. We already have information about additional training, equipment, forensics and a review of the disciplinary process. A number of those components have already happened and are moving forward.

We have already put further investment into remote police resourcing, community engagement and addressing aged building infrastructure and others to be developed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will an independent person come in and look at all this stuff?

Mrs WORDEN: It all just needs to be brought together, which is what we are working on. We need a good solid time line about the electronic rostering piece so that we can ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It will not be this year. There will not be an independent person on the ground this year doing a full review of our police force?

Mrs WORDEN: It is my hope that we will be doing that this year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Last time I asked you about this in parliament, you said that it will not effectively be until after the election.

Mrs WORDEN: No, I never said that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, you said up to 12 months.

Mrs WORDEN: That was a while back.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I asked you a question about it in March.

Mrs WORDEN: My hope is that it will be at least started during this year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who will conduct the review?

Mrs WORDEN: That is a matter to go through. That is not for me to ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will it be a person from the Northern Territory, a former police officer, a former judge ...

Mrs WORDEN: It will be done external to Police. I will let you know when we have decided.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The last independent review into Police was done under the Henderson government. You guys have been in government for seven years. Why have you left it so long, despite numerous calls for an independent review into Police? Why have you dragged the chain on this?

Mrs WORDEN: We have not dragged the chain on it. Getting an external review is a big step to take, and we need to put the right considerations and factors into that. We are in a position now that we need to do it. We have not been backwards in saying that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It has been over 11 years since the last review. Is that reasonable?

Mrs WORDEN: You do not review just for the sake of a review. You need a reason to review.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is your reason now?

Mrs WORDEN: There are enough things happening. We need to make sure that they are all happening in concert and working in the right direction together.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What are those things specifically?

Mrs WORDEN: I just named a few. The disciplinary review has occurred. The wellbeing piece is well and truly under way. The remote policing strategy is happening, and we are resourcing that year on year. We need to check in on all of those components and make sure that they are working in concert and in the right direction.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you undertake that this independent review will be completed by the election in August next year?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, that is my intention. I would expect that, because a lot of things are already happening, it would not take a great deal of time.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I want to unpack police numbers. When Budget Paper 3 says that you have promised 162 new police members trained and deployed by 2023–24, what ranks or types of police do you count as a police member?

Mrs WORDEN: What is defined as police?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When you say you will have 162 new police members, what does that mean? Is it auxiliary, ACPOs, ALOs or constables?

Mrs WORDEN: Sworn officers, not ALOs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does that include auxiliaries?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. They are sworn officers.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who does it not include?

Mrs WORDEN: ALOs and the civilians.

Mr MURPHY: The ALOs are not just a Police asset; they are also used for resilience in emergency management.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is fine. I just want to talk police numbers and to make sure we are not crossing over. How many police do we currently have as at 30 March?

Mrs WORDEN: As at 30 March, we had 1,649.25 full-time equivalent.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you know how many people that is?

Mrs WORDEN: We have an establishment of 1,650 and a total head count of 1,703.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that sworn police, not including ALOs?

Mrs WORDEN: It does not include ALOs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In your budget paper, you said that you will recruit another 162. Last year attrition was nearly at 11%. It has been extremely high over a number of years, which is approximately 171 police leaving every year. Do you agree that you are still not recruiting to meet attrition?

Mrs WORDEN: We are recruiting above attrition. As at 31 March we had 113 separations which is well short of your 170.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If you have 113 separations for this year, up to 31 March, how many recruits graduated for the same period?

Mrs WORDEN: I can give you a breakdown of the numbers during that period. There were 82 constables who have graduated. We have had eight reappointed constables ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What does that mean?

Mr MURPHY: Officers who left and came back.

Mrs WORDEN: There was one reappointed auxiliary, four ACPOs and 41 auxiliaries. On top of that, there were 26 Aboriginal liaison officers, which do not count. There are 136 in total.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 113 separations, how many of those were sergeant or above?

Mrs WORDEN: I have constables and above as a figure.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I would like sergeants and above. With such a high attrition rate, it is scary to lose so much corporate knowledge from our force. At 11%, we have people in senior ranks leaving. They are not able to transfer that knowledge they have accumulated over many years. I want to get a good understanding of how many of those 113 are in senior ranks.

Mrs WORDEN: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.18

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 113 separations for the reporting period, how many are from the rank of sergeant and above?

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.18.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much is being spent on overtime for the reporting period?

Mr KELLY: For this financial year to the end of March, we have spent \$18.4m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Just on overtime?

Mrs WORDEN: Across the services.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many instances of overtime does that represent?

Mr KELLY: We have broken it down by the number of hours and dollars by rank structure and business lines—Police, Fire, Emergency Services and public sector. Do you want me to take you through that as a total?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not want it by rank. You are saying that you can break it down to police, fire and civilian?

Mr KELLY: Police, Fire, Emergency Services and civilians.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay, go for it.

Mr KELLY: Police for the year was 159,000 hours claimed, which was \$12.8m. The fire service was 51,000 hours claimed and \$4.9m. Sorry, clarification—public sector as a whole including NTES ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, that is emergency and civilians?

Mr KELLY: Correct. There were 8,400 hours and \$622,000.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is enormous. How does that compare to last year?

Mr KELLY: I do not have the split by business lines for last year. Last year the total spend was \$24.9m. That is for the full financial year ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you have to March?

Mr KELLY: I would have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.19

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If this year's overtime budget for whole of agency to the end of the reporting period was \$18.4m, how does this compare for the same period last year? What was the total figure?

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.19.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Minister, how many police were assaulted during the reporting period?

Mrs WORDEN: From 1 July 2022 to 30 April 2023, there were 184 offences of assaults.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that how many have been charged for assault?

Mrs WORDEN: No. That is different number. That is the number of offences.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are offences the same as instances? It might not have necessarily led to a charge being laid but it is captured as an instance, or is that number different?

Mrs WORDEN: To date this financial year the number of offences of assault reported—this is from our PROMIS system and not ADG data; there is a caveat on that because they might have different data. For this financial year to date it is 184 offences.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. I want to know if offences is the same as instances or if it is something higher requiring the pressing of charges or action on behalf of the victim?

Mrs WORDEN: The incidents are lower. The incidents are 172.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How is that possible?

Mrs WORDEN: There could be a number of offences.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There were 172 occasions.

Mrs WORDEN: Incidents.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Incidents, yes. How many police were assaulted?

Mrs WORDEN: The incidents of 172 could be that two officers were assaulted at a job which would relate to ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Only one incident?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, for two.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many police have been assaulted?

Mrs WORDEN: It would not be a unique number because somebody may have been assaulted twice on two different jobs, I would think. I do not know that we can give you that number. We have the number of assaults on police as 184 offences.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It does not make sense. There are 172 separate incidents where a police officer was assaulted?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, but 172 would not be a unique number of individuals because one police officer may have been assaulted twice during that period.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Right. What does the 184 offences of assault represent? Is that number of incidents the number of people charged?

Mrs WORDEN: Out of the 184 offences, 298 charges were laid.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: And you do not know how many police have been assaulted?

Mrs WORDEN: I will just double check that I do not. Yes, it is not unique.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How can you not have that data?

Mrs WORDEN: Because I do not have it in front of me. We can give you the data. It will probably be a manual count because these things were put into a system.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is the number of police being assaulted; you should be providing welfare support to them.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. We know how many incidents there are. At the coal face in police stations and their places of work, those services would be wrapped around as a result of incidents. To say that we would not know the number versus the actual response—the response would be there in every case.

We the number of incidents, the number of offences of assault and the number of charges. If you want a unique count on the number of police officers, I can take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.20

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many police officers were assaulted to 30 April? How many unique individuals were assaulted more than once?

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.20.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you have an idea of the level of under-reporting by police of assaults on police? Presumably there would be a number of police who think, 'What is the point?' and do not want to ...

Mrs WORDEN: That is an assumption on your behalf.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is what I am asking. Do ...

Mrs WORDEN: You are assuming that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That happens across the Territory for every other crime. I have spoken to many police who say, 'What is the point?', so I am asking ...

Mrs WORDEN: I have never spoken to a police officer who said that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay, I am just asking; I am not attributing fault to anyone. I am just asking whether you think there is a level of under-reporting of assaults.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Spillett, you are asking for an opinion about a hypothetical.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I am not. The force, in doing wellbeing and all those things, must be attributing a level of abuse received by police and then factoring that in. There must be a percentage figure. Maybe there is not; I am asking the question. You can say no or yes.

Mrs WORDEN: I will ask the acting commissioner to give some context to that assumption.

Mr MURPHY: We take any assaults against our police officers, fire officers or emergency services personnel very seriously. I am not aware of any assault that has gone unreported or not taken action against. Our supervisors are invested in protecting our workforce. If an officer is assaulted in the course and execution of their duty protecting the public, that person is held to account in a court of law.

We know the officers who have been assaulted. There are, unfortunately, numerous officers who have been assaulted a number of times. It is part of our welfare and wellbeing package to look after them and give them everything they need to recover, get back to work and make sure they are fit and okay.

It is news to me that anyone is not pursuing a charge against someone who has assaulted them, especially with the abhorrent assaults we are seeing at the moment with spitting, punching and kicking. I am not aware of any.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 298 charges laid, how many resulted in successful convictions?

Mrs WORDEN: Of the 298, 287 proceeded to court and 82 resulted in a conviction. Some are still pending.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many are pending?

Mrs WORDEN: I am not aware of how many.

Mr MURPHY: That is a matter going through court with a plea of guilt, a hearing or committal. Sometimes even when an offender does not appear, a warrant is issued. Sometimes we do not have tight reporting time lines on that. It is a difficult one.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There were 298 charges laid. Of that, 287 went to court and, of that, 82 have resulted in a conviction?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the range of assaults that police are facing? Of that 298, how do you break down those charges? How many were for spitting? How many were for biting? How many were for weapon offences—that type of thing?

Mrs WORDEN: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.21

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 298 charges laid, please provide a breakdown of all the offences that were charged and the number of times that offence was charged. Of the 298, please list all the different types of charges and how many of each of those different types of charges.

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.21.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the longest period of leave an officer who was assaulted has taken to recover from their injury?

Mr MURPHY: We will take that on notice. Some of our officers have been off for a number of years. We have seen the unfortunate and sad events that have unfolded in WA, and we have had a Northern Territory police officer under similar circumstances who has been away from work for a number of years and is still recovering.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask the question slightly more broadly.

Mrs WORDEN: The only issue I have is that if there is one outlying officer in that situation, they could be identified through that question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would not be my intention. I am thinking of how I could change the question. It is just for the reporting period.

Mrs WORDEN: Do you want to know who has been off longest for that reporting period?

Mr MURPHY: Do you want the average time?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The longest time or the shortest time.

Mrs WORDEN: There will be people who have been off for the whole time if you were talking about the circumstances.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What if it is assaults for this period?

Mr MURPHY: The shortest time would be that some officers come back the next day or they continue with their shift.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For offences that have occurred within this reporting period, how many have gone back to work within the reporting period and how many remain on leave?

Mrs WORDEN: I will take that on notice. That is a bit of number crunching that will probably have to go down to individuals, so we will not be able to answer that today.

Question on Notice No 3.22

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For offences against police that have occurred within this reporting period, how many police have been able to return to work during this period and how many have not been able to return to work?

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.22.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is the Darwin watch house currently open for police to take people who have been arrested?

Mr MURPHY: No, it is not open for policing operations. It is currently on loan to the Attorney-General and Corrections to house prisoners.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many prisoners are in Darwin watch house at the moment?

Mr MURPHY: That question would be for the Attorney-General's department.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is the Attorney-General paying Police rent for the facility?

Mrs WORDEN: No, it is a government facility. That would not occur.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Police is still paying for the cost of the facility while Corrections use it?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do police officers have to man it at all?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How long has Darwin watch house been offline?

Mr MURPHY: I cannot recall the exact date, but it is a number of months. It is totally occupied and controlled by Corrections. We do not have any officers there.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What strain is that having on the Palmerston watch house?

Mr MURPHY: There is no strain on the watch house, but it is an inconvenience for Darwin-based officers to convey prisoners to Palmerston. The Palmerston watch house is fit for purpose and modern. It opened in 2019, and there are no issues.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The capacity, in terms of volume, can handle that?

Mr MURPHY: There are no capacity issues.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A huge part of building the Palmerston Police Station was so that officers from Palmerston did not have to do all that travel. Do you agree that having Darwin watch house closed is impeding on police response times because they are spending so much longer travelling?

Mrs WORDEN: Not necessarily in response times; that is a different question. As the acting commissioner said, there is an impost on officers with those activities. We are working hard to getting the watch houses open.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is Palmerston the only watch house in the Darwin region that can be used by the police?

Mr MURPHY: We have other watch house facilities, but we use Palmerston as the primary location as a custodial facility.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do all arrests from Casuarina and Darwin have to drive to Palmerston?

Mrs WORDEN: At the moment, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much time does it take when someone is put in the back of the paddy wagon, say in Casuarina, to get that police vehicle back on the street?

Mrs WORDEN: It depends on where they are. If they are in the city it is a 19-minute drive to Palmerston.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They have arrested them and put them in the car in Casuarina. They are processing. We have the highest-ever levels of crime. The police are strapped.

Mrs WORDEN: I will be really fair. It is only travel time because if the watch house was open in Darwin for the same purpose you will still have to do the processing. It is no different. It is just the travel time because you have the same processing. I know how long it takes to drive to Palmerston under the speed limit. It is approximately 19 minutes from the city. There would be various places that would take those people into custody. If they took someone into custody in Karama, that is less than coming from the city. It would depend.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you not think it has any impact on police?

Mrs WORDEN: You heard us both say ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are trivialising the distance.

Mrs WORDEN: I am not trivialising the distance at all. It depends on where the offence occurred as to where the person was picked up. You and I both know how long it takes. Also, different times of the day will have different traffic conditions. It would be unreasonable ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You cannot deny that being forced to travel to Palmerston is impacting on police operations.

Mrs WORDEN: You just heard both of say that it is. The acting commissioner's words described it as 'an impost' on those officers.

Mr MURPHY: I will also highlight that not every person that gets apprehended goes to the Palmerston watch house.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know that. That is my question.

Mr MURPHY: A lot of them go to the hospital or sobering-up shelter.

Mrs WORDEN: Are you intimating that nobody should go to a sobering-up shelter?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am asking if the police have to do that when they are particularly under-resourced.

Mrs WORDEN: They need to make a decision at the time where a person is best placed and what offences they may or may not have ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, but when someone has not offended and just needs a lift, someone else could give it to them.

Mrs WORDEN: There are other resources that can do those things. It depends on whether they are available as well.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We will see. I have asked the question, and the proof will be in the pudding.

When are you envisaging that Darwin watch house will reopen for police to be able to use it, meaning our police can get back on the street faster?

Mrs WORDEN: That is an operational decision.

Mr MURPHY: As soon as possible. There are conversations frequently held with the Corrections Commissioner regarding strategies and resolutions to ensure that we get our facilities back. It is imperative that we support him with his duties as well for the safe detention of prisoners. We have that facility. It is a short-term arrangement. We will get that watch house open and operational as soon as we can. It was planned for July. I do not have any updates.

Mr WHITE: We are working closely with Corrections. We talk every week about its current situation. Clearly, the apprehension rate and the number of people in custody are at the highest levels we have ever experienced in the Northern Territory. As recent as last week, it was the highest ever. We could keep continuing to see that increase. The risk for NT Police and Corrections is significant. We are working closely.

The advice from Corrections is that it has a number of plans in place to expand capacity within both the Darwin and Alice Springs correctional facilities. Whilst we are continuing to work through that process, we have to manage business as usual. That is the challenge for us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are there any other Police facilities being used by Corrections?

Mr MURPHY: We have another one Corrections can utilise at the Peter McAulay Centre. It is used from time to time to support any overflow.

Mr WHITE: It is not currently in use by Corrections. There is a small capacity there. It is a watch house within the training college that is used for training as well as overflow for when we need it as well.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is Alice Springs watch house still being used by Corrections?

Mr WHITE: On a daily basis, potentially, there would be a remand prisoner in the Alice Springs watch house. Most of the time that is just the ebb and flow of court remands and the time to transfer to the prison when they are available to accept. At this stage there are no prisoners in there on a long-term basis.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has responses to a couple of questions on notice.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.6

Mrs WORDEN: Of the 51 disciplinary matters during the reporting period, 34 resulted in a written caution.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.18

Mrs WORDEN: Question 3.18 was also by the Member for Spillett regarding separations. Of the 113 separations for the reporting period from a rank of sergeant or above, there were 19.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On the 34 cautions issued, what was the shortest period of time a written caution was issued, and what was the longest period of time someone had to wait for their written caution to be issued?

Mrs WORDEN: Is that off the back of the question on notice?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: Are we going back to the question on notice, because I thought we were talking about watch houses?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: That is a separate question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. If you do not know you can take it on notice.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, we will have to take it on notice. It would have been good if you had asked it at the same time back then.

Question on Notice No 3.23

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 34 officers under disciplinary action who received a written caution, what was the shortest period of time they waited to receive their caution, and what was the longest period of time they waited to receive to receive their caution?

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.23.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you expecting in July for the Darwin watch house to re-open for police?

Mrs WORDEN: If we can, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What will happen if Corrections continues to occupy it?

Mrs WORDEN: That is an operational response.

Mr MURPHY: They are ongoing discussions. That is the time line we are looking at. If Corrections still need it they can still occupy the space, and we will work around it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, do you mind repeating that?

Mr MURPHY: That is the time line we are working towards. Obviously there are ongoing discussions with the Commissioner of Corrections. If they still require it we will still offer it to them, but work towards a resolution so we can look at our premises being available to our officers in Darwin.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does Nightcliff Police Station have a watch house?

Mr MURPHY: No, it does not.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are there operational police at Nightcliff Police Station.

Mr MURPHY: Absolutely.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What types of policing occurs there?

Mr MURPHY: We have the school based, youth diversion, youth engagement and other operational police that platform themselves there from time to time to look at any antisocial behaviour activities.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If someone rings 000 and a callout is needed, are there any police deployed from Nightcliff Police Station?

Mr MURPHY: They can be. That is a matter for the dispatcher. Going back to the foundation of the Joint Emergency Services Communication Centre, police officers log on so you can see where the officers can be deployed from. If a 000 call comes in and a person requires police assistance, then any assets available for deployment. They can be deployed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are there general duties at Nightcliff Police Station?

Mr MURPHY: Not per se classified as general duties, but there are operation police who do operational policing duties.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is a school-based auxiliary able to be deployed to a crime scene?

Mr MURPHY: Yes, they can go to a crime scene, depending on what resources are available that could undertake that task. They are auxiliaries; they are not constables, so they have specific duties but are still a police officer that can undertake crime scene duties.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the total number of police based at Nightcliff Police Station?

Mr MURPHY: I would have to take that notice. I would say it is between 20 and 30 at any one time. It can be used as an emergency management platform for EOCs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I take that on notice?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the total number of police based at Nightcliff Police Station?

Mrs WORDEN: Before I agree to that, we may have an answer. I want to double check.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask another question while Mr Kelly looks at that.

What hours are the Nightcliff Police Station open to the public?

Mr MURPHY: The front counter is open Monday to Friday, 8 am to 4 pm.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can people go there to report a crime?

Mr MURPHY: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many full-time positions are there at Katherine station? How many are meant to be there, and how many are there?

Mrs WORDEN: At one point Katherine was well and truly over establishment. The nature of Katherine is quite an interesting platform for the region and our remote policing model. At one point it had a large number of younger new recruits heading to Katherine, which was an incredible experience for them. A number of them were then deployed on shorter-term relief into regions as well as being based out of Katherine. It was over establishment for quite some time last year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am just after the number.

Mrs WORDEN: I think a number of them have taken up full-time positions in the remote areas where they had the deployment from. I will ask Acting Deputy Commissioner Martin Dole to give you that figure at a point in time. That would be the 30 March figure.

Mr DOLE: It is broken down into several work units that are based out of Katherine. For the Katherine Police Station itself, establishment is 58 positions. People occupying actual positions there is 77. Point of sale Katherine, which are our PALI officers, has 24 established positions. Currently 14 people are occupying those. Northern Traffic Operations, which is based out of Katherine, has five established positions and five actual people.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you have that for Tennant Creek?

Mr DOLE: We should be able to get those figures, yes.

Mrs WORDEN: Whilst we are getting those figures for you, the acting commissioner has indicated that an additional 12 have gone to Katherine out of the latest lot of recruits.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If I just do the reporting period, I am covering it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Were you able to find the Nightcliff one, Mr Kelly, or should we put that on notice?

Mrs WORDEN: We will have to put that on notice. We will come back to that.

Question on Notice No 3.24

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Spillett, can you please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the total number of police based at Nightcliff Police Station?

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.24.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask that same question for Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, like I did for Katherine, if that is okay.

Mr DOLE: I have the numbers for Tennant Creek. Tennant Creek has various work units. There are 35 established positions, and the actual number is 48. Point of sale Tennant Creek has 10 established positions. The actual people present is seven. Prosecutions has one and one present.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is it for Alice?

Mr DOLE: The Alice Springs total—it makes up a number of divisions—established positions is 384. The headcount currently in Alice Springs is 337, which includes the vacancies in our PALI auxiliaries of 19 and 11 other auxiliaries across the footprint in Alice Springs and six ACPO vacancies.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was 384 with an actual of 337. Is it PALIs next, or do you have auxiliaries for the others you gave me?

Mr DOLE: It is 304 for the total positions in Southern Command, sorry. That is not specifically in Alice Springs; it is the total Southern Command.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you have just Alice Springs?

Mr DOLE: I have Alice Springs Police Station as established 149 and actual 144.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: PALIs for Alice Springs?

Mr DOLE: We have 41 PALIs and are currently carrying 19 vacancies in PALIs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you guys have traffic there?

Mr DOLE: We do, but it might take me a few minutes to get some of those other units that work out of Alice Springs. We also have prime command, community safety and social order teams in Alice Springs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I take that on notice, or do you want to ...

Mr DOLE: It may be easier to break those numbers down because there are a number of units that work out of Alice Springs Police Station. The figure I gave you is frontline general duties policing attached to the Alice Springs division.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I might ask that on notice so we can move on, minister. Is that okay?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For Alice Springs Police Station, please provide the full breakdown of all the—do you want me to call it divisions?

Mr DOLE: Division and work units.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please provide a breakdown of all of the divisions and work units based at Alice Springs Police Station and provide any estimates and actuals for the reporting period. How many remote police do

you have in remote stations at the moment? Sorry. How many are you meant to have, and how many do you have?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Was that all one question? Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: We will take that on notice because it comes across a range of divisions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask, for each station, the established and the actual.

Mrs WORDEN: We may have them.

Mrs WORDEN: In the remote areas we have 40 permanent police stations and 17 temporary. Some of that relates to Operation Themis.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many positions do you have attached to each of them, and how many do you actually have?

Mrs WORDEN: Over the last two years, we have increased the establishment at 11 of those 40 permanent police stations from two to three members. I am seeing if we have overall figures.

I add that some of the issues in remote that we are still grappling with are about suitable housing. I do not just mean housing, but suitable housing for families to be able to go. One of our biggest challenges is trying to move from two to three members in some of those stations. That is why we have not achieved that in all those places.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I ask it on notice so I can get the established and the actual.

Mrs WORDEN: I am double checking that I do not have that, because I have the list of different communities. Yes, we will take it on notice.

We might provide you with data about where there are facilities that are suitable for police. There are a number of those facilities that are no longer suitable for police to be in because the former federal government, under NTRAI, does not fund us adequately and has left us with poor-state ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Your answer might be that there are zero police in that spot?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, I will exclude those ones because there was a footprint done under the intervention. Post that, there has not been enough funding from the federal government over many years.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is this what you would call police posts, like Alpurrurulam?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, that is sort of what I was starting to give you a picture of.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask my question separately so it is captured. I do not want it deleted, but it can at least be separated.

Mrs WORDEN: Some of them are temporary because there is no housing, or there are others we cannot station because they are not ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What do you want to call that? Because I can call that something—unfit for living?

Mr MURPHY: You would probably class them as police posts. Out of the 2007 intervention, 18 were established.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can ask about posts, temporary and stations?

Mr MURPHY: If I can give you more of a picture, in 2010 there was another seven. We service Peppimenarti and Milingimbi, but there are 14 out of the 17 that are no longer fit for purpose or have safe custodial facilities that we do not police. They are serviced by neighbouring stations.

Mrs WORDEN: It is like a hub-and-spoke model in some areas. Part of that is the Peppimenarti station plan ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But you will build a new one?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct, but that is currently being serviced in a different model because there is nothing there; whereas, building a new station will hopefully include some housing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is fine.

Mrs WORDEN: I want to be specific. We will give you specifics about ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can write whatever you want in the answer, minister.

Mrs WORDEN: We will only give you the ones that are fit for policing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will get it broken down so we know.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Let us do the question again.

Question on Notice No 3.25

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please provide:

- the breakdown for all police stations across the Territory, including remote, the established number and the actual number
- the temporary stations across the Territory with the established number and actual number
- the police posts established number, actual number or if they have been disbanded.

Mrs WORDEN: There might be a duplication in your question, sorry.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Temporary and post is the same? Hansard, please call it temporary/post. Then we cover everything.

Mrs WORDEN: By its nature, it means you will not have permanent police there, so there will be no established. It will come from a hub-and-spoke model.

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

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.25.

Mr BURGOYNE: Over the December, January and February period, due to an increased level of crime in Alice Springs, there were operations that ran. Are you able to evaluate the cost to the department in overtime, travel allowance and money spent on accommodating additional officers who were sent to Alice Springs?

Mrs WORDEN: We are talking about Operation Drina?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: That ran from 23 November 2022 and has been extended to 28 July at this stage. However, there will be some supplementation through the new federal government agreement.

Mr BURGOYNE: Just to confirm, Operation Drina is still running in Alice Springs?

Mrs WORDEN: It is still running at an increased number of police officers in Alice Springs, yes. In fact, I was there on the weekend, and there were police everywhere. It was interesting to see them all throughout town, driving through the mall in a highly visible way. It was outstanding.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is the biggest weekend of the year. Finke weekend, you are talking about?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is the biggest weekend of the year.

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely. They were highly visible and active over the weekend.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is great.

Mrs WORDEN: It was good to see.

Mr BURGOYNE: Costs for the reporting period?

Mrs WORDEN: As at 31 March, \$736,000.

Mr BURGOYNE: The number of police attached to Operation Drina was initially spoken about ...

Mrs WORDEN: It was 40 initially.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many additional police remain in Alice Springs?

Mr DOLE: That is a difficult question. The number of police in Alice Springs fluctuates on a weekly basis, with transfers in and out and recruits coming in. This week we are due to see upwards of 20 officers who have graduated coming to Alice Springs.

There are no external resources from Darwin continuing to be committed to Alice Springs for Operation Drina. It is being managed with the additional police officers that we continue to get in Alice Springs under business as usual operations.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is the number of additional police in Alice Springs from outside of Alice Springs currently zero?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct. We have been able to ensure that we had enough people deployed there and not taking from other spaces.

Mr BURGOYNE: Over that period there were many reports that alcohol was a huge cause of a lot of the antisocial behaviour. Were police providing information to you as minister that alcohol needed to be controlled to deal with the levels of offending?

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely. You would have seen that in late January I headed to Alice Springs deliberately and had the first meeting with all the licensees. I brought them together with the Member for Gwoja, and we held what was to be the first of a number of meetings about how they might assist to address those issues.

Police raised with me, and rightly so, the factors, particularly in the area of domestic, family and sexual violence. Alcohol does not cause it, but it makes it worse. The point was not lost on me that a police van and members might be called out to a domestic, family and sexual violence matter and might be there for four hours managing that incident and making sure that everything was done right. That is four hours that they are not able to do the high-visibility policing that we were talking about. Yes, police were, and I acted on that information.

Mr BURGOYNE: When did that meeting take place?

Mrs WORDEN: Which one?

Mr BURGOYNE: The one with licensees that you just spoke about.

Mrs WORDEN: It was at the end of January. I go through my diary if you like.

Mr BURGOYNE: That is okay.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Was that before or after the Prime Minister of Australia ...

Mrs WORDEN: It was before. That was the first meeting.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Why did it take for the Prime Minister to have to come to Alice Springs before you really stepped up and addressed the crime crisis in Alice Springs?

Mrs WORDEN: I do not agree with the premise of your question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Everyone else in Alice Springs would have the same view.

Mrs WORDEN: Can I finish? I work across a whole range of other areas, obviously with Territory Families. There was a big push for things like safe sleeping to occur. There was a big push around antisocial behaviour. We had the Social Order Response Team, which continues to do the work, so there were a number of other responses.

With the response to alcohol, I believe me heading there and having that initial discussion with licensees started to kick off the conversation. I do not believe that everybody was waiting and sitting on their hands; I completely reject that notion. A whole range of things were already happening Alice Springs. In the area of child protection there was an unprecedented number of removals of children out of families over that period. A high amount of activity was happening.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was not working, was it? The only thing that appeared to work was what was put in place after the Prime Minister of Australia came to Alice Springs. Is that not so? That was the catalyst for change.

Mrs WORDEN: The alcohol restrictions, which we had already discussed and I had already started talking about, have made a difference in Alice Springs—100% it has made a huge impact on Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Why did you as a government not implement better and stronger measures yourselves without having to be pressured and directed by the Prime Minister of Australia?

Mrs WORDEN: I do not accept that is correct. You can see by my actions well before then that I was taking a range of steps across my portfolios. We have ministers who work across a range of portfolios to make sure that we are addressing issues in Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Nothing changed until after the Prime Minister came to Alice Springs.

Mrs WORDEN: You cannot just have one approach. In fact, one of our senior police officers is on the record saying that we cannot arrest our way out of these issues. You have to try at every level to do a range of different things, and I believe we did that. The alcohol measures have been the most apparent thing that have worked.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Which your government rejected.

Mrs WORDEN: We stepped up in January and put them in place.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You were forced to put them in place, were you not, minister?

Mrs WORDEN: I do not agree with that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You were directed by the Prime Minister to reinstate the Stronger Futures alcohol restrictions in all those communities, which turned the whole boat around. Thank god for Anthony Albanese.

Mrs WORDEN: Member for Araluen, I can categorically tell you 100% that I was in Alice Springs well before that talking about changes to alcohol and alcohol reform.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I can categorically assure you that it made no difference whatsoever until the ship was turned around by the Prime Minister.

Mrs WORDEN: That is incorrect because on that day ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You need to talk to people in Alice Springs a bit more, because that is exactly how it is perceived.

Mrs WORDEN: Perception might be one thing, and I accept that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is reality.

Mrs WORDEN: No, perception is not reality. That is a saying that people get sucked into.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You can fly in and out of Darwin to Alice Springs all you like and think you know what is going on, but you do not.

Mrs WORDEN: With respect, Member for Araluen ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Respect or no respect—I could not care less.

Mrs WORDEN: I was in Alice Springs for over a month last year. It is not just a matter of flying in and flying out.

Mrs LAMBLEY: One month, fabulous.

Mrs WORDEN: I am based in Darwin.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is a highly emotional topic.

Mr CHAIR: Just one second ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have been embattled for years. You can try to shut me down, Mr Chair.

Mr CHAIR: No. I will not shut you down, Minister for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like some honesty and frankness about what we have been subjected to by your government for years. It has been unacceptable ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, is there a question in this?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It has been unrelenting. I want some honesty from the minister and accountability because it is why are here. Budget Estimates is about transparency and openness of government. We are sick to death of being fed nonsense and being neglected by this government.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, I remind you of disorderly conduct. All I am asking ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is not being disorderly; it is being emotional and frank. The minister can respond, and I will shut up now.

Mr CHAIR: All I am asking, Member for Araluen, is once you have asked the question, you let the minister answer and then you can go back and forth.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I know the rules ...

Mr CHAIR: Well, let us abide by them please.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have been around the block a few times.

Mr CHAIR: I know that. I am just asking you to abide by those rules.

Mrs WORDEN: I totally accept that it is emotional. Our homes are emotional. I accept that. Operation Drina began in November. We did not break all the way through. As a result of my first meeting with alcohol outlets, they immediately moved to take one-litre bottles off the shelves. To say that I did not do anything is not correct. I worked across ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Not enough.

Mrs WORDEN: That is a matter for you to assume. You can rate me on my performance and tick the boxes. In my space with police we worked as hard as we could. Alcohol made a big impact. I accept that. Restrictions in alcohol continue to have a big impact, which is a good thing. We have to be careful where we step through those spaces, and I took that step in January. I am also not the Minister for Alcohol Policy.

Mrs LAMBLEY: But you are a part of the Cabinet that made across-government decisions.

Mrs WORDEN: Correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: All those decisions were made and cut across many portfolios. We have you in front of us today, and I know you have enormous responsibilities when it comes to places like Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine. These are regional centres that miss out time and again on real attention from government. Although I am listening to you—I realise that you have a line to keep to; I know that you work hard, but it just did not cut it. It has not been enough. We can only celebrate the fact that Anthony Albanese came to Alice Springs, turned the boat around and there have been some improvements. I acknowledge the hard work of the police force, despite the bad policy of your government.

Mrs WORDEN: Operation Drina had a huge effect, and they stood up from November. There were additional officers in Alice Springs well before that time. There was also context concerning Alice Springs. At that time they had that severe weather event, and an unprecedented 11 communities were cut off for extended periods of time. There were operations out of Territory Families and outreach services to try to pick people up and get them home as soon as communities were open. There was a whole range of things that happened over November, December and January. I am never stepping away from that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, the big event was the fact that Stronger Future alcohol restrictions were lifted ...

Mrs WORDEN: By the federal government, and they walked away from the Northern Territory in that respect.

Mrs LAMBLEY: With your support because you said it was a race-based policy.

Mrs WORDEN: It is and it was.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You would not subscribe to having those restrictions in place. As minister responsible for crime, law and order and domestic violence, you sat back and watched the whole thing unfold into chaos, mayhem and disaster like we have never seen.

Mrs WORDEN: I disagree.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You can disagree all you like, but I was there. I live there, and so does the Member for Braitling.

Mrs WORDEN: The police saw an escalation of figures around November. All the advice we were getting was that those numbers had not surged post that period.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you talk to your domestic violence services that you fund?

Mrs WORDEN: I speak to them.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You need to listen closer because they can tell you that it was an immediate trigger.

Mrs WORDEN: I am talking about the figures that we were getting ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Women and children were victimised by alcohol through your bad policy.

Mr BURGOYNE: The important point I am trying to make is that since the cessation of the Stronger Futures measures last year, when was the first time that the police raised with you that they were seeing an increase in alcohol-related harm in Central Australia? We were hearing that loud and clear a lot earlier than January of this year.

Mrs WORDEN: The advice I had from the police was not immediately as we were tracking that carefully. It was later in the year. We will look at the crime trends for you and come back to you.

Mr BURGOYNE: To point that out, we heard that the police responded to 179 domestic-related incidents over one week. That was seen at the time and reported on the radio as extremely high.

Mrs WORDEN: That was when I went down ...

Mr BURGOYNE: That was in July. That was the week after the cessation of the Stronger Futures.

Ms PURICK: That is 25 per day.

Mrs WORDEN: That is not correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Absolute carnage.

Mr BURGOYNE: They were the numbers we were given.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is why your police are complaining about being unsupported and overworked. That is why morale is at an all-time low; you took your eye off the ball.

Mrs WORDEN: I will give you some data. In June offences against the person was 223, July was 260 and August was 244. The figures went down after the cessation of Stronger Futures. It was 252, then in October, before we put in Operation Drina, the figure jumped to 304 which was when we acted. The numbers went to 322 in November and jumped up in December with the influx of people coming to Alice Springs. There was a whole range of factors ...

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you have the ...

Mrs WORDEN: I am giving you some data. I have been accused repeatedly that I did not do something immediately. If people think we were sitting there and not talking with the police, that is incorrect. Based on the data, the numbers after the cessation of Stronger Futures did not go through the roof. That is a wrong assumption which has been made in the public. We have the data for Alice Springs. Once Drina kicked in, the numbers fell to 297 in January and 194 in February.

There was a hell of a lot of work going in, and there were unprecedented conditions in December and January. I am not in any way dismissing the issues in Alice Springs. I want to bring some facts because I have been accused of that repeatedly, and it is false.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you want to table that or is it publicly accessible?

Mrs WORDEN: There is a lot of other data there, but if you would like me to repeat for *Hansard* I can.

Mr CHAIR: That would be worth doing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You do not need to repeat it, Minister. It is on *Hansard*.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If everything was fine, in hand and nothing to see, according to what we are being told today, why did the Prime Minister detour from what he was doing to come to Alice Springs? He had big meetings with you, your Cabinet colleagues and other leaders in the community and then instructed your Chief Minister to put those alcohol restrictions back in place. Why?

Mrs WORDEN: For the record, there was no instruction to put those measures in place. That was reported by the media and is false.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was a backflip, was it not?

Mrs WORDEN: Let me finish my answer. Anthony Albanese, our new Prime Minister, came to Alice Springs because there were a number of stories reported nationally and he wanted to talk with us on the ground.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Then the Chief Minister backflipped and reinstated alcohol restrictions in lieu of the fact that the town was falling apart, people were under siege, there was no safety and it was a shambles, thanks to you and your hopeless policies.

Mrs WORDEN: There were alcohol restrictions ...

Mr CHAIR: I remind everyone that 109 is the standing order that talks about the proper manner for asking a question. I appreciate it is a very emotive topic, Member for Araluen, and rightly so. You should be asking these questions for your constituents, but it needs to be in a manner where there is a question. I would hate to get to a point where we are grandstanding back and forth.

Minister, I will let you answer the question, then we will go to the Member for Goyder.

Mrs WORDEN: The best thing would be to ask the Minister for Alcohol Policy the questions you have put. The Prime Minister took an interest in a number of things in the national arena.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What were they?

Mrs WORDEN: There was lots of stuff on social media. It was all swirling around.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was all about the crime in Alice Springs, was it not?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, but ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, it was!

Mrs WORDEN: Can I please comment? Some of that social media was untrue. I was getting media reports through social media that people were flagging with me. Then I would fact check them with police, and they were rubbish. There were things reported online that were not true. That was the problem. It was a culmination, and there were difficulties in Alice Springs at the time.

Police also instigated breaches on licensed premises in January. There was a range of things going ahead in Alice Springs. When we brought in changes to the policy after the Albanese visit, we brought them in for the whole of Central Australia. We did not bring them in as a race-based policy. They affect everybody; they are alcohol restrictions for everybody.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You effectively reinstated all the Stronger Futures ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen!

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a question.

Mr CHAIR: That will cease that line of questioning. The Member for Goyder had a question, then the Member for Braitling.

Mrs WORDEN: These questions should go to the Minister for Alcohol Policy.

Ms PURICK: My favourite subject: what was the actual funding ...

Mr CHAIR: Are you on the same line of questioning?

Mr BURGOYNE: We want to continue the same line of questioning, sorry. It is just so we can get the numbers. Do you have the figures of the domestic violence incidents that police responded to in July, August, September and October?

Mrs WORDEN: For Alice Springs?

Mr BURGOYNE: For Alice Springs. They are different to the numbers provided.

Mrs WORDEN: I am just seeing if we have a breakdown of that. I have some of the AGD stuff. No, we do not have that, if you want to put it on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.26

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

Mr BURGOYNE: Minister, can we please have the domestic violence incidents police responded to for July, August, September, October, November and December 2022 for Alice Springs?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Braiting has been allocated the number 3.26.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have one last question on this.

Mr CHAIR: Please remember Standing Order 109.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, I understand you have threatened to take legal action against the Action for Alice Facebook page administrator. Is the government paying for that legal action?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Ms PURICK: Yesterday we were told by the Education minister that the Department of Education provides \$3m to NT Police for the school-based auxiliaries. What was the actual funding received by NT Police from the Education department for the 2022–23 year for school-based policing?

Mrs WORDEN: It is a global figure of \$3m, but it is not ...

Ms PURICK: But did you get \$3m? How much have you received, I should ask?

Mrs WORDEN: I will let CFO Paul Kelly answer that question. We have the answer because we knew you would ask for it.

Ms PURICK: I will not give up.

Mr KELLY: The agreement with Education is for \$3m a year. We are paid on a reimbursement basis after expenses are incurred. We incurred \$2.4m ...

Ms PURICK: For the 2022–23 year?

Mr KELLY: That is where we are trending, yes.

Ms PURICK: What does that money cover? We have auxiliaries and constables in the remote areas, so what does it cover?

Mr KELLY: It covers the five police constables, 10 auxiliaries and their related logistical costs and operating costs for vehicles and the like to do their business.

Ms PURICK: Are you able to give the cost of a police sworn constable to a school versus a police auxiliary to a school? What is the different costs of those, say in annual salary or annual cost?

Mr KELLY: We do global figures across the whole of the police service. We have an average cost of employment for a police officer, an auxiliary and an ACPO. The costs in each area varies depending on what their business activity is. For school-based it is slightly lower than what the average cost across the ...

Ms PURICK: On the street.

Mr KELLY: Yes. Our average for a senior constable police officer, employment, operational and capital costs for vehicles and the like is \$244,000 a year. For an auxiliary it is in the order of about \$184,000 a year, about \$60,000 less.

Ms PURICK: That is for an auxiliary?

Mr KELLY: Yes.

Ms PURICK: The next question is not about numbers. Last week the federal minister, Linda Burney, suggested that working with local police to get them involved in school programs could assist with reducing incarceration of youths. That is one part.

The second part is that witnesses in the coronial court on 10 March 2023 confirmed it is critical for police—I am being specific about police, not auxiliaries—to have early interactions with kids and important for police to establish positive engagements early in kids' lives.

Do you support—I think you do, but I would like to hear it—working towards getting school-based police constables back into the policing system? I do not care what the Education department thinks because clearly they do not think much of it, in my view. Do you and your government support the concept of reintroducing school-based constables into our school system?

Mrs WORDEN: We have, at the moment, a system with auxiliaries and a coordinated system ...

Ms PURICK: Hang on. I should rephrase that. Remove the auxiliaries and put constables back into the schools.

Mrs WORDEN: If that is possible within resources. At the moment, it is a great program. In the past it was a great program. It was a shame that it was cut many years ago.

Ms PURICK: I agree.

Mrs WORDEN: It was not under our government. I believe the premise about early engagement with young people has been proven to work. In our remote areas it is not auxiliaries doing that engagement. We have police officers stationed in remote areas doing good community policing.

Within that model they go to schools in Katherine. Whilst we have the auxiliary model at the moment based in schools; that is not the only interaction that young people have. In Katherine the police are often at the youth centre doing engagement work. In Tennant Creek it is similar. In regional areas we have a much more community-based focus.

In smaller communities that is much easier to achieve because everybody knows everybody. For example, Erica has headed to Wadeye. She has a very community-based approach there.

In that space outside the urban areas of Darwin and Alice Springs, it is a model that is well and truly entrenched in the way that policing is done with young people in school. It is not just young people in school; we need to get them to the young kids who are not in school. That is just as critical as those within schools. It is an area that we are continuing to look at.

Ms PURICK: I will keep writing to you. I have some new stuff I want to put before you and the commissioner.

Mrs WORDEN: I look forward to your letter.

Ms PURICK: I have a bit more of a tricky question. Are you able to give—you might have to take it on notice—the total cost of the Gwynne investigation, including salaries of the four-plus senior investigators, overtime, surveillance, hours of listening to phone calls ...

Mrs WORDEN: Can I stop you for a moment?

Ms PURICK: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: You will need to talk to the Attorney-General. I have a publicly declared and written declaration of conflict of interest with the matter.

Ms PURICK: I am aware of that.

Mrs WORDEN: Colleen is a very close personal friend.

Ms PURICK: Is this a police matter? Did the funding for that matter come out of the Police budget?

Mrs WORDEN: You will need to ask the Attorney-General because the contract is with the Attorney-General.

Ms PURICK: But if it is the Police budget, he will not be able to answer that.

Mrs WORDEN: I have declared a conflict ...

Mr CHAIR: Just one second. You know the minister has a declared conflict of interest. We are putting it on *Hansard*. We could take the question on notice and ensure that the Attorney-General's department has that data to provide when it comes to Estimates.

Mrs WORDEN: If we will discuss that matter, I would like to leave the room. It is appropriate in my role.

Ms PURICK: I can put it on notice.

Mrs WORDEN: That would be my preference, if you are happy to take the question on notice. I do not want to have any part of it.

Mr CHAIR: Let us rule on that. Minister, if you can vacate the room while the question is put.

Ms PURICK: That is fine, minister; I accept that.

Question on Notice No 3.27

Mr CHAIR: Member for Goyder, please state the question for the record.

Ms PURICK: What is the total cost of the Gwynne investigation, including salaries of the four-plus senior investigators, overtime, surveillance costs, hours of listening to the phone calls that were taped, interstate flights for people to come to and from the Northern Territory, hotel and hire car costs and any legal advice?

Mr CHAIR: Do you want to answer any of that now, Acting Commissioner Murphy, or do you want to take it on notice?

Mr MURPHY: I will take it on notice. It might be hard to break down some of the tasks associated with listening and those types of things, but we can give you our best effort.

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Mr MURPHY: I note the conflict declared, and I accept the question.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Goyder has been allocated the number 3.27.

Mr MURPHY: Just confirming your earlier question, yes, it comes out of the Police budget.

Ms PURICK: Okay.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any follow-on questions related to that?

Ms PURICK: There is to that matter, but I am not sure whether the acting commissioner can answer it.

How did police get a surveillance warrant for an HR matter when they did what they did? How did police get a warrant or legal access to Ms Gwynne's bank accounts and why?

Mr MURPHY: We will take that on notice, please.

Mr CHAIR: Can the Member for Goyder restate the question for the record?

Ms PURICK: How did NT Police get a surveillance warrant for a HR matter in regard to accessing phones in office and home? How and why did NT Police seek and gain access to Ms Gwynne's bank accounts for an HR matter?

Mr CHAIR: Acting commissioner, if the matter is still proceeding as a civil matter, you do not have to take all that question if you believe it may impact that proceeding. If you believe you can answer parts of that question, you can take it on notice.

Mr MURPHY: I am not sure whether it is appropriate in the Estimates Committee. I note that it is a judicial decision as well. That is my consideration.

Mr CHAIR: I am comfortable with that response. Would you like to raise that question with the Attorney-General and do it that way?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It can be done *in camera*.

Mr CHAIR: That is the other alternative.

Ms PURICK: Can we do it *in camera*?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I ask a different question on a different topic while we work that out?

Do we have a cost of victim-offender conferencing?

Mr CHAIR: Sorry ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: While you work that out, I have a different, easy question.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, but I cannot preside over it if I am talking.

I will put it to you, acting commissioner, that we can go *in camera* if you think you can provide advice. If you do not believe that you can provide advice at all, then there is no point in us going *in camera*. It is over to you if you can actually answer any of that. When I say *in camera*, everything will be turned off, and it will be just the committee and you.

Ms PURICK: It is still transcribed. It just means ...

Mr CHAIR: I understand that, but the camera is not on.

Mr MURPHY: I am not in a position to answer that question right now.

Mr CHAIR: I am comfortable about not going *in camera* then.

Ms PURICK: Can you take it on notice? There were just two questions. How did NT Police get a surveillance warrant for a HR matter? How and why did it get access to Ms Gwynne's bank accounts?

Mr CHAIR: I understand that, but if the acting commissioner does not want to take it on notice, like any minister, they do not have to take the question on notice.

Ms PURICK: Okay.

Mr MURPHY: I understand the budget question. The other question is operational policing methodology outside of Estimates.

Mr CHAIR: We will not be taking that question on notice. Any other questions?

Ms PURICK: I have one question, but it probably needs the minister. It has nothing to do with Ms Gwynne's case.

Mr CHAIR: We will bring the minister back in. Member for Spillett, you can ask your question because it short and sharp. Then we will go back to the Member for Goyder.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I just wanted to know the cost of victim-offender conferencing for this period.

Mrs WORDEN: Are you talking about the Jesuits? That will be Territory Families.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There were only 10. I want to know how much 10 cost. Should I ask Territory Families?

Mrs WORDEN: Police-family conferencing is done by Police.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, the 10 victim-offender conferences that you told me have been done.

Mr MURPHY: That is an outcome of the diversion process and is outsourced through Territory Families to the Jesuits.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can ask you that.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, later in Territory Families. We will have an answer for that.

Ms PURICK: I have been told that Mr Murphy, who is acting as commissioner, is not receiving higher duties. Is this correct or not?

Mrs WORDEN: I have no idea because that is a HR matter.

Mr MURPHY: I can answer that, Minister. I am receiving higher duties.

Ms PURICK: Excellent. I was concerned. That was why I asked.

Mrs WORDEN: Good. If not, we would sort it out. Lots of people say ridiculous things.

Ms PURICK: You should get paid fair dues for fair work.

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES
Output 2.1 – Fire Prevention and Response Management

Mr CHAIR: We will go straight into Output 2.1. Are there any questions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you outline all the fire stations that are vacant, do not have any full-time members and are being filled by FIFO out of Darwin?

Mrs WORDEN: I believe no fire stations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What about Tennant Creek?

Mrs WORDEN: I will ask Mr Spain to respond.

Mr SPAIN: We currently have one station, Tennant Creek Fire Station, where I have no reliefs. The former officer in charge has relocated to Alice Springs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In Tennant Creek there are no full-time staff on the ground; it is fully serviced by Darwin?

Mrs WORDEN: They are being recruited to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What are the full-time vacancies in other stations?

Mr SPAIN: The stations you are referring to are the five track stations—Jabiru, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Yulara. Yulara has one vacancy; Tennant Creek has two vacancies of career firefighters; Katherine has one vacancy of a career firefighter; Jabiru has one vacancy; and Nhulunbuy has a full complement of career firefighters.

Mrs WORDEN: They are called track stations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You would have to be blind not to see the fire trucks completely covered in slogans about your government. This must be a great embarrassment to you as the Fire minister.

Mrs WORDEN: What you are referring to is about an EBA. Our firies have protected action, things they can and cannot do. They have chosen to do that. I totally respect anyone's ability or want to take action. During EBA negotiations they have chosen to do that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why has an EBA not been achieved with the firies?

Mrs WORDEN: You will have to ask that of the minister with OCPE.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As the minister, are you not fighting for firies to get a fair deal?

Mrs WORDEN: I am. There is a process that is undertaken, but not with the line minister. I meet with unions, speak to firies and meet regularly with the executive to discuss these matters and where we are headed. The action to resolve the EBA is done with Minister Kirby through his office and OCPE.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When do you expect that the EBA process with the firies will be complete?

Mrs WORDEN: As soon as possible. It is my highest priority at the moment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are some pretty angry people, as you can understand.

Mrs WORDEN: I understand that people would like to see the issues resolved.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What are the holdups in that process? What is outstanding?

Mrs WORDEN: There is a large number of issues that we have not come to the same place on. They are being negotiated through the unions in goodwill.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you say what they are?

Mrs WORDEN: Probably not entirely, as I would be stepping into the shoes of Minister Kirby. It would be appropriate you asked him those questions. They are moving and ongoing discussions, so I might think that something is an issue but it may have been resolved a number of days ago. I do not want to comment and put any of that in jeopardy.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On 4 May you issued a press release saying that there was an \$11.5m commitment to the fire service, but the budget papers show an increase of \$4.5m. Who is telling the truth?

Mrs WORDEN: We made a commitment to increase firefighter numbers by 28 positions to make sure we have enough as demand increases. That is stage one of the fire service reform, to increase by 13% or 28 positions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is clearly not \$11.5m this year; is that correct?

Mrs WORDEN: There are two additional new Brontos that we will, after July, be able to purchase. We also have the refurbishment, which is \$2.3m to refurbish the old Palmerston fire station for a dedicated training space. There are three different areas that we are putting that funding into.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no new \$11.5m in the budget?

Mrs WORDEN: That is all new money.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How come the budget only reflects \$4.5m extra?

Mr KELLY: What you are looking at in the budget paper is solely for people and operational costs. The refurbishment of the old fire station building is capital works-related costs in Budget Paper 4.

The Bronto purchases, whilst it is in the Police, Fire and Emergency Services budget, is not an operational cost, so it sits in our capital equipment account, where we buy all our vehicle assets, forensic equipment and the like.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That full \$11.5m will be expended this financial year?

Mrs WORDEN: That is our intention, yes. I will put a caveat on that. It might be difficult to recruit that number of firefighters within the period of time.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was it—28?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. Is it 12 each recruitment round?

Mr SPAIN: A normal round is 12. Previously the fire service was not funded for recruitment programs, so we waited until after attrition. Now we do the normal 12 per year, then we will produce another couple of recruit courses to catch up on those numbers.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Normally you would only do one recruit squad a year?

Mr SPAIN: Generally it depended on demand, as in, if attrition was higher than normal, then we would progress.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you looking at then doing three squads over the next financial year?

Mr SPAIN: There are a number of processes we can take. We can look for an accelerated recruit squad so we can go nationally. That will help our services as well, bring experienced firefighters in should they take up the offer. The other way is through the recruiting program which takes 19 weeks for a course.

Mrs WORDEN: One of the reasons for this investment in additional firefighters is that, for each recruitment round in the past, you would have to bring experienced fire officers offline to deliver that. We need to increase the number so we are not drawing people off and have dedicated firefighters in training. That is where we are headed. This is stage one of building up capacity.

If we do not take them out of circulation for that, then we can keep building and are not paying extraordinary overtime either. This commitment was driven by the recognition that we need more firefighters on the ground to fill areas of need. We also need to make sure that we are not constantly taking firefighters out to deliver the training. That will give us an opportunity to deliver more consistent training because you are not waiting for them to be available or being on leave and come off to do that training. They are the issues we are addressing through this.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I notice that when I asked about the vacancies at each track station, I did not get Alice Springs—because it is not a track station?

Mrs WORDEN: It is not a track station, no.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I get the number for Alice Springs?

Mr SPAIN: We will have to take that on notice. We are down probably three or four firefighters in Alice Springs for operational positions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many are main stations? There is Alice Springs, Darwin—do you have one or two?

Mr SPAIN: No, we have four in the Darwin greater region. We have Darwin; Palmerston; Berrimah; Marrara; and Humpty Doo, which is open Monday to Friday. Be aware that each station is in an emergency response area, so they are responsible for that area and to assist other emergency responses.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to take that on notice.

Mrs WORDEN: For Alice Springs?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you call it Darwin as well or is it Alice Springs, Palmerston, Berrimah, Marrara and Humpty Doo?

Mrs WORDEN: Greater Darwin, probably.

Mr SPAIN: Yes, I would like to refer to them as they are assigned to each emergency response area.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Stations assigned to emergency response areas?

Mr SPAIN: Yes. Berrimah has its own emergency response area boundaries, but they will cross those boundaries to assist other stations if required when there is an incident.

Question on Notice No 3.28

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please provide the vacancies at each of the stations assigned to emergency response areas?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.28.

Mr CHAIR: If the Member for Mulka missed out on some questions during Output 1.0 and comes back in, are you happy to take it?

Mrs WORDEN: Sure.

Mr CHAIR: If you cannot answer it, we can do it on notice. We agreed that it will not lead to re-opening of the portfolio for everyone else; it is just for him to get through. Noting we have five minutes before lunch, you have no more questions and he is not here yet, I might break us for lunch now and get us back in at one o'clock.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think he is on his way down. I was going to leave that time for him.

Mr CHAIR: We will suspend until he comes back in. If he is back before 12.30 I will bring us back on.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the agreement?

Mr CHAIR: He can ask his couple of questions in relation to Output 1.0, then that is it.

Mrs WORDEN: Now or later, I am not worried.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: I thank the Member for Mulka for coming. You can ask questions relating to Output Group 1.0, Police Services.

Mr GUYULA: How many hours of language training is provided to police officers based in Aboriginal communities?

Mrs WORDEN: Language versus cultural?

Mr GUYULA: Both.

Mrs WORDEN: The formal training is undertaken at the training centre; it is not done on country. We do not know the actual hours at this moment, but if you would like me to take that on notice, I can get it back to you.

Question on Notice No 3.29

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

Mr GUYULA: How many hours of language and cultural training is provided to police officers based in remote Aboriginal communities?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Mulka has been allocated the number 3.29.

Mr GUYULA: Are there any protocols or guidelines for police officers that directs them to work with elders and leaders in remote communities as a matter of practice for every incident?

Mrs WORDEN: That is a great question. It is a big body of work on remote policing policy that has come to the fore over the last couple of years. I will ask the acting commissioner to give you some more context in regard to what community interaction is required from our remote police officers.

Mr MURPHY: It is integral that our police officers stationed at remote locations across the Northern Territory engage with traditional owners and all First Nations people. We are there to service the community; we are part of the community and must understand the cultural authority to help us manage the community. It is about prevention and engagement, not enforcement.

We have a lot of work to do in the cultural space to understand and have trusted relationships. When people go to remote service for two years they build a trusted relationship. We have induction packages, but there is important work across government is in local decision-making, leadership and treaty to understand the needs of the community and cultural respect. We have made mistakes in the past and try to learn from them. The geographical area we serve is unique across the Territory, from Arrente to Warlpiri, right up to Yolngu.

We still have a bit of work to do. Our Aboriginal liaison program, through our Community Resilience and Engagement Command, is doing significant work. We have come a long way in three years, and we still have a long way to go.

Mrs WORDEN: I think we have about 40 Aboriginal liaison officers.

Mr MURPHY: We have 49 Aboriginal liaison officers across 28 communities, and we have just had \$4.1m invested from government. We will double that figure and make sure the community we serve is represented throughout our agency.

Mr GUYULA: In 2007 an agreement between families in Galiwinku and police was reached. This agreement was the outcome of mediation that hundreds of people attended. It was called the Meshach agreement. One of the terms of the agreement was that the police agreed to work with a group of local senior elders, leaders and community members. Is this agreement still being honoured in Galiwinku?

Mrs WORDEN: I have just asked the acting commissioner, and he is not aware of that agreement, nor am I aware of it. I am happy to look at that. From what you have just outlined, the premise of that agreement is what underpins our remote policing policy. One of the big things I touched on before, which is an outcome of that remote policy, is to have Aboriginal liaison officers on the ground. That number is 40 and growing.

They are at every station I have been to; they have an ALO or two working with them in some circumstances. They are highly productive in the areas you have just outlined. They are almost embedded into our remote policing policy. They are doing outstanding work in remote areas, being effective in making sure that proper consultation and engagement is done on the ground. That is the whole premise of those positions.

Some of them are moving on to becoming ACPOs at some point. Would that be right?

Mr MURPHY: Not yet, but there is a transition pathway we are working on.

Mrs WORDEN: It is the early pathway for them to come in as Aboriginal community police officers and then go on to being constables. We are already seeing the ACPOs move forward. A good career pathway is our hope. It allows people from communities to stay in communities.

Mr MURPHY: I will give you an undertaking to understand that agreement. We are lucky—as the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services—to have Bettina Danganbarr at Galiwinku, who is a strong advocate for her people and understanding culture.

Mr GUYULA: I want to make it clear that Aboriginal liaison officers not only work with, but also need to consult with, senior elders and leaders of the community because they have the experience of how a community runs. They need to work with ALOs and police. The community leaders need to be part of this as well.

The previous commissioner stated that he was committed to police officers living in remote communities and building strong relationships rather than having a high rotation of police officers for short periods who do not know elders and leaders or understand the culture or language of communities. Does this commitment still exist? What are the specific policies that underpin this?

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely that still exists. The remote policing strategy underpins that. We are a little stymied. I do not think you were here before when I was outlining some of the issues we have with remote policing.

Some of it is about infrastructure that was put in by the federal government at a point in time. That infrastructure has eroded over time and is not fit for purpose, so we have to work around that. That is why we have made the commitment in this coming budget for Peppimenarti and a new station there.

When you commit to that, you also have to commit to housing. Housing is our biggest issue, not just for police but for all service providers. With Territory Families, in order to get people to live in communities, our biggest is housing. That is why we need more people based in communities joining our ranks, quite frankly, and being recruited into policing to be full-time officers.

There is a balance of everything happening at the moment—Aboriginal liaison officers and people living in community. Every effort is made for police to be living in communities. An example where it is tricky would be somewhere like Maningrida. We are committed to and have budget for Maningrida for a brand-new police station, but there are water issues that we are grappling with at the moment. There were also site issues.

We are investing in everything we can. NTRAI is the Commonwealth investment post-intervention for those police stations. We saw initial investment, but that investment has stayed static. Where it previously was enough to maintain that number of police officers, there is a vast difference between what it was worth in 2007 and what it is worth today. It does not fund enough police officers or the ongoing maintenance costs of the now ageing infrastructure that was, clearly, just shipping containers put there.

We are grappling with all that for a strategy to address it. It is our vision that in the future you will have more remote police stations with permanent police staff members. Housing underpins all of that.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Mulka, any other questions need to be in writing. Noting that we have gone 10 minutes over the lunch period and we have the 10 pm finish tonight, or later now, can you please state any questions you want to put on notice?

Mrs WORDEN: That was his last question.

Mr CHAIR: That was it? That is done?

Mr GUYULA: I have one more.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Mulka, please state the question for the record.

Mr GUYULA: There are remote Aboriginal communities that do not want police officers to carry weapons around the community every time they leave the station. They want the community police officers who are working with the leaders and elders and building relationships. This is not an unusual thing. Many of the police in England do not carry guns when they are in the community. Will this issue be reviewed properly with community consultations?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: I can answer it quickly. The answer at this point in time is no; we are not reviewing that. Police officers will continue to carry all their accoutrements when they are in the community.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of all outputs relating to Police, Fire and Emergency Services. I thank all who attended. The Estimates Committee will adjourn for lunch for 30 minutes. We will reconvene at 1.10 pm.

The committee suspended.

TERRITORY FAMILIES

PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

SPORT

DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Mr CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. We now move onto the minister's portfolios, Territory Families; Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; and Sport.

Minister, I invite you to introduce your officials.

Mrs WORDEN: Mr Chair, I acknowledge the Larrakia people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we are gathered today. I pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging and recognise First Nations people with us today.

I will now introduce the members of the Territory Families, Housing and Communities executive team who appear with me today and will assist me to respond to your questions. They are Mr Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer; Ms Jeanette Kerr, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Families; Ms Karen Broadfoot, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Regional Services and Communities; and Ms Kim Charles, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. It gives me great pleasure to speak on my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Sport; and Territory Families. The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities is an agency as diverse as the geographical and social context in which we operate. It has the responsibility to deliver programs and services which create long-lasting generational change in the lives of Territorians.

As an agency, Territory Families deliver some of the Northern Territory's most important and impactful programs. These programs empower and engage communities to improve life outcomes by providing services to Territorians through our six regions and 73 service centres. Indeed, the breadth of these services follow Territorians through every stage of life and society, from early family support; youth arts and culture; recreation and sports; seniors; gender equality; prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence; supporting people who experience vulnerability; as well as statutory child protection services.

The department has an operating budget of \$1.2bn to achieve outcomes for our clients and achieve the vision of connected communities, thriving places and empowered Territorians. The budget relating to my own responsibilities of Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Sport; and Territory Families, for 2022–23 is \$457.9m and \$103.8m in infrastructure funding.

We are investing \$324.1m in supports for children, young people and families, including family support; child protection; out-of-home care; youth justice; and domestic, family and sexual violence reduction services. I am pleased to broadly speak on each of these critical areas of work.

It is extremely important and heartbreaking to hear of the senseless deaths of predominantly women and children due to domestic, family and sexual violence. Along with my colleagues, we are committed to standing side by side with the sector and victim-survivors to listen and do more. It takes a lot of courage and resilience to flee a violent environment, and that is why we need to ensure we have the right supports ready and available for those who need it.

As the Minister for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, I lead a coordinated effort to respond to and prevent the Northern Territory's unacceptable levels of violence. Together with the non-government sector, our partner agencies across the Northern Territory Government, the community and the Commonwealth, our department is working towards our vision where all Territorians are safe, respected and free from violence at home, work, school and in our community.

More than \$38m has been invested this financial year, up from \$32m in 2021–22, to prevent and respond to domestic family and sexual violence. Budget 2023–24 commits a record \$55.1m. I continue to advocate for needs based funding in the Northern Territory under the new national plan. This has resulted in an additional \$10.7m to date in funding to the Territory under the national partnership agreement, resulting in a total of \$15.5m over 2022–23 for frontline services.

Sport and active recreation is an integral part of life in the Northern Territory. Sport benefits our economy, improves our physical and mental health and strengthens our sense of Territory pride. Sport has the power

to inspire and unite us, which is why, in 2023–24, we are investing \$36m to provide Territorians with opportunities to lead more active and healthy lifestyles. We work with peak sporting bodies, sport service providers and active recreation organisations, regional councils, Aboriginal corporations and other key stakeholders to improve opportunities for community participation in organised sport and active recreation.

I will detail the critical work we are doing in the areas of family support. The Northern Territory Government has committed \$29.9m in the 2023–24 budget to provide early intervention and support to help families build stronger relationships, reunify children with family where it is safe to do so and work with families to put safety planning in place before a crisis arises. The 2023–24 budget includes an additional \$5m to accelerate family support through specialised staff and programs that are directed at children below the age of 12 to divert them from future offending.

More than \$84m is committed over five years, from 2021 to 2026, through the Northern Territory Government's \$40m family support services program and the Australian Government's \$44m Children and Family Intensive Support services grants program, which provides tailored and streamlined services for Territory families.

We are working with the Australian Government to support broader accessibility for families, reduce the duplication of services and recognise that efficiencies are achieved through place-based and community-led service delivery. Services are tailored to local need and closest to the people who need them.

It gives me great pleasure to announce the Care system. Earlier this year the agency launched Care, the new integrated child protection case management system. This \$50m investment is one of the most significant advances in improved child protection information-sharing practice over the last two decades. Care is used for viewing, updating, recording and sharing information by our care and protection, youth justice and adoption staff. Care is improving outcomes for vulnerable children by equipping users with a contemporary case management solution and relevant timely data to inform decision-making.

Children in the Northern Territory have the right to grow up feeling safe in the family home and community. Budget 2023–24 continues to invest over \$22m which funds skilled professional staff in the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities who work with families and children to investigate notifications that allege a child or young person is experiencing or has experienced harm or neglect. Contact with the department continues to increase in line with national trends of professionals making notifications and the community sharing their concern about children. This has resulted in an increase in phone calls and online reports received not just in the Northern Territory but nationally.

On 28 March 2023 we passed the Care and Protection of Children Amendment Bill 2023. These amendments improved the holistic and coordinated responses to the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and ensure children, their families and communities are empowered in matters that impact their lives. The bill amends the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* principles as they relate to Aboriginal children, including strengthening the Aboriginal child placement principle. Parents, families and communities have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of their children and young people. We are committed to supporting them to carry out this vitally important role.

I will move to out-of-home care for which the 2023–24 Budget provides a record \$133.9m. This is an increase of approximately \$15m compared to the last year. Additionally, funding is required due to the rising costs of care for children appropriate to their needs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain overrepresented in the out-of-home care system. The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities is committed to engaging with families earlier and, where appropriate, keeping children safe at home. In the Northern Territory, the number of children in out-of-home care has been steadily reducing for the past four years. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia that has achieved this.

Increased family support, embedding the Signs of Safety practice framework, enhanced child protection responses with families and an uptake in permanent care orders are all contributing to the decline in numbers of children in care. We prioritise the placement of children in family and kinship care. We have invested in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to recruit, retain and support kinship carers.

Since 2016 this government has significantly reformed the Territory's youth justice system, building on our vision of a system that contributes to community safety and reduces reoffending by young people. Budget 2023–24 commits \$82.9m, greater than any year before, and includes \$3.6m for the implementation of a new model of care for youth detention.

This government has implemented significant reform to support children, young people and families through early intervention and prevention, reducing the need for statutory intervention. In the complex area of youth detention, a number of key changes have taken place, including amendments to relevant legislation to improve detention centre operations, the introduction of a specialised youth justice workforce, improvements to staff training, increased access for young people to programs and services in-centre and the commencement of the construction of a new fit-for-purpose youth detention centre in Darwin and the redevelopment of the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre.

Our government has finalised the model of care for youth justice operations, which was publicly released by our government in September last year. The Territory government knows that intervening early and supporting young people is the best way to prevent and break the cycle of youth crime.

We have made significant investments in establishing youth justice programs to address offending and reoffending behaviours. Youth justice funding has increased from \$22m in 2016–17 to \$82.9m in 2023–24, inclusive of detention operations and youth justice programs. These programs are designed to divert young people away from future offending and to reintegrate them into education, training, work opportunities and the broader community.

Budget 2023–24 is an investment in all Territorians. Like any government, the Northern Territory Government has its challenges. However, the outcomes that have been achieved in this period are confirmation that our investments are well placed and within budget. The growing confidence of Territorians in our services is a testament that we are on the right track to achieve significant generational changes.

I welcome questions.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you for your opening statement. Are there any questions on the opening statement from the shadow minister?

Mr BURGOYNE: You spoke a lot about the family support that Territory Families provides. Part of that support was when the Centre for National Resilience was set up. We have heard a lot today about the support that Territory Families provided. When was the sobering-up shelter set up with regard to the Centre for National Resilience? Was Territory Families involved in its establishment?

Mrs WORDEN: I did not speak about that in my opening statement. We can probably do that under the welfare response output.

Mr BURGOYNE: To be fair, we have spoken a lot about support for Territory families. I will ask the question again if the minister is happy to respond. That would be good.

Mr CHAIR: Ask the minister, and the minister may defer it to the output.

Mrs WORDEN: I did not talk about the welfare response in my opening statement. I prefer that we get to that in the output because we have some structure in the responses that we have for you today.

The centre was dry from the moment it stood up, and the sobering-up shelter was put up within seven days.

Mr BURGOYNE: I appreciate that. You spoke a lot about the domestic violence space. How much domestic violence was occurring in that centre prior to that sobering-up shelter being established?

Mrs WORDEN: This is the difficulty. I have a staff member behind me for that output. We did not talk about it in our opening statement. I talked about domestic violence, but now you are talking directly to the operations.

Mr BURGOYNE: I am more than happy for you to bring the staffer on board.

Mrs WORDEN: Perhaps if your intention is to talk about Howard Springs for a bit, can I ask for an additional staff member to join us?

Mr BURGOYNE: Certainly.

Mrs WORDEN: We are trying to have some structure in our responses for you. It was something for later, but if you want to go to it now that is fine.

The question is about when we first saw domestic and family violence at the centre?

Mrs WORDEN: We are joined by Gabby Brown, Executive Director, Families Programs. I invite her to make some commentary around what has been asked.

Ms BROWN: I hold the responsibilities of the Welfare Group leader under the Territory Emergency Plan, therefore I am answering these questions under the Welfare Group moniker, as they relate to emergency operations of the evacuation centre at the Centre for National Resilience.

Member for Braitling, if could have your questions again so I can get them in order and make sure I can answer them fully?

Mr BURGOYNE: We have just been told that within seven days of the establishment of the centre, the sobering-up shelter was set up. How much domestic violence occurred before that was established? How much domestic violence was occurring before Territory Families had a response is a more formal question.

Ms BROWN: I would refer you to the Northern Territory Police in terms of the quantification of violence. Obviously the mandatory reporting requirements exist in the Northern Territory of which those reports would have gone to the Northern Territory Police. The response of the evacuation centre is fairly normal in operations to make plans for various vulnerable groups in operations. The establishment of the visitor centre outside the centre for alcohol use and dryings up was as part of the standard operation process rather than something in response to domestic and family violence. Also, the evacuation centre, like our evacuation centres we stood up in other events across the Territory, were made dry places under the alcohol management act.

Mr BURGOYNE: I believe there was a domestic violence safe house put in place. When was that established?

Ms BROWN: That was fairly early in the operations. It is also usual in evacuation centre operation management for areas in the evacuation centre to be established for various purposes. The Centre for National Resilience is an unusual place to establish an evacuation centre. We quarantined some accommodation areas on the site to become places of safety if women wanted not to be in the usual accommodation for a period of time, whatever that may be. In that, women and children went there. Wilson Security monitored it, along with the police, ourselves as Welfare Group members and the Australian Red Cross.

Mr BURGOYNE: You mentioned that it was an unusual place for that sort of centre to be set up as a part of an emergency response. Can you expand on that?

Ms BROWN: Without going into particulars and details, the Northern Territory had the availability of the Centre for National Resilience, having operated a quarantine centre there throughout COVID-19. It is usual—and I speak generally and not specific to the Northern Territory operations; I will go into an emergency management explanation. Evacuation centres are usually large spaces where people stay for a short amount of time. Members of the committee may be aware that we had previously stood up the Foskey Pavilion for other evacuation events. Those kind of large spaces are fairly usual for evacuation centres across Australia and how we respond to emergency events.

The Centre for National Resilience was operated and stood up as an evacuation centre, so it was an unusual place for us to stand up that type of service delivery.

Because of the length of the operation and the disaster impacts upon the communities that were affected, it became a viable and positive outcome for the length of operations we were stood up for.

Mr BURGOYNE: Did Territory Families record the number of people they referred to DV services?

Ms BROWN: No, I would not be able to account for the numbers referred. I respond with that because referrals could occur through multiple agencies working on site. It may be from the NT Police responding, a Welfare Group member, allied agencies such as Salvation Army or Australian Red Cross or our staffing group. There was not a central place we recorded all those referrals.

Mr BURGOYNE: Were any numbers done on the people who were taken to hospital from the Centre for National Resilience?

Ms BROWN: I refer you to NT Health for that question. The health clinic was run on site, very ably, by the Katherine West Health Board in conjunction with NT Health, and those people were transported to hospital. It would be NT Health, Royal Darwin Hospital or Palmerston hospital that kept those records, if they did so.

Mr BURGOYNE: Just for the record, we do not know how many people experienced DV while in there from a Territory Families scope or how many were taken to hospital?

Ms BROWN: Agreed.

Mr BURGOYNE: You spoke about private security that was utilised there. Do we have a cost of the private security brought in by Territory Families?

Mrs WORDEN: That figure is \$1,021,974.

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to payments received by people who stayed in the centre, was that through the Territory Families budget?

Mrs WORDEN: There are federal payments under disaster relief, and there are payments for when people first come in. Some of the people who came in had nothing other than the clothes on their back. People travelling with young children required nappies—all those things. Some payments were made straight up for people to purchase those items, and then other payments were going forward.

Remember, people at the centre had everything other than clothes provided for them. There were a number of different payments that occurred. There was a personal hardship and distress payment activated when people first came in, and there were two types of relief payments distributed to eligible residents. Not everybody was eligible.

For example, when people were going home, there was some disaster funding for families that had lost everything. Some of those houses were completely under water—we saw the pictures—and they lost everything, so there was a payment for that. If you had a house in Kalkarindji that was not damaged by flood waters but you were affected by the electricity that went and there was no working sewerage, there was a different—none of that payment was made.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are you able to quantify the payments made by the Territory government?

Mrs WORDEN: There is a process regarding this that is not as straightforward. In the first instance, Territory Families—or the Northern Territory Government—pays those, but there is a process of claiming back from the federal government following a disaster episode.

Personal hardship payments were \$340,913. The HPIP grant, which is different, was \$254,629. Other personal hardship payments were \$524,629. That totals \$1.1m of payments split up into three areas.

Mr BURGOYNE: What were those payment set out to do? Was it to provide, as you said, clothing? Was Salvation Army there to assist with that?

Mrs WORDEN: Initially. Payments are literally about getting clothes on peoples' backs and the ability to buy nappies and those sorts of things. That is an immediate need. There was quite a high number of people who came with nothing.

The secondary ones were about people being able to go back into community and have food and those sorts of things immediately.

The other one I touched on before is where you have lost everything—you need to buy beds. There was a range of ways that was constructed to ensure that people had access to a table, chairs and beds when they returned home if they had lost everything.

To put it into context, that is normal payments around Australia if you have lost your house by bushfire and those types of things. That is quite the normal process.

Mr BURGOYNE: Were there any plans put into place to support people so that this money was not used for alcohol, gambling or other things?

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely. There was a lot of rigour. I cannot remember the name of the group. There is a control group that sets up in any disaster. There was lots of discussion about making sure that payments were used for the purpose they were set out for. That was achieved through cards that were able to be used in a restricted manner.

Mr DAVIES: As has been described, we have used the payment system previously in evacuations. It is paid on a card. The card can be used to purchase goods. It has a restriction on alcohol in particular. It can be used only for the purchase of goods and consumables—definitely not alcohol. Those cards were used in that way.

In relation to the lead tenants who received the household payments when they returned for the replacement of goods, we worked—by the way, the Pigeon Hole community still has not returned; they are at Yarralin. For the Kalkarindji and Daguragu tenants the payments were acquired through the ALPA store there. They were used to book beds, refrigerators and those things. It was \$8,153 per household.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you know how many people received that payment?

Mr DAVIES: They would be the lead tenants. To give you an example, 50 houses at the moment are undergoing refurbishment and replacement. At Kalkarindji we could go to the net figure on that and give that to you.

We made sure that the relief payments were distributed in town, conditional on the card and its limitations. The payments for the returning people in the households were restricted to when people got home and were done through the stores there to make sure the goods were purchased on site.

Kim, do you want to elaborate on where we draw the payments from and how we will offset the cost of those payments through the Australian Government and Treasury?

Ms CHARLES: In response to your initial question about the number of household cards, it was 183 cards that have been issued. They are cards for the household goods replacement. As the Chief Executive has said, that works with us purchasing all the essential items like beds and fridges through the stores and a residual balance, if there was any, was provided on the card. Not all people—in fact, quite a number did not—got \$8,000 on the card; they got the residual difference of what the goods cost for their homes.

All of our expenditure we acquit back through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, and they acquit to the Commonwealth. There is a tiered process for the amount of funds that the Territory gets back. This is up to a certain amount. I do not have the exact amounts today; I would have to take that on notice. Up to a certain amount, we get the first 25% and over a certain amount we get full 50% reimbursement of costs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Minister, you said that the money paid on the card was limited and could not include alcohol, but we heard reports on a daily basis from bottle shops in Palmerston that busloads of people were coming through every hour. If you walked outside the front of the facility, there were bottles piling up. How do you attribute all the alcohol consumption if it was not spent on using payments?

Mrs WORDEN: People still got their normal income payments whilst they were there. I understand there were some royalty payments which may have come through whilst people were at Centre for National Resilience, so there were other alternative sources of income other than what we were providing.

Mr BURGOYNE: Did the NT Government facilitate the issuing of the cards?

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely. It was done on site at CNR.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Were they government buses taking people through bottle shops?

Mrs WORDEN: No. There were private taxis and buses et cetera. We had buses which would go on a schedule to allow people to go shopping. People were not getting on government-funded buses and taken through bottle shops.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But they were getting on government-funded buses to be dropped at Palmerston bus depot and walking straight to Cazalys bottle shop?

Mrs WORDEN: They were going to purchase essential items such as underwear, nappies and children's clothing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You cannot say what people spent their money on?

Mrs WORDEN: We can. We restricted the money they were provided by us for essential goods, which was the whole purpose of the program. It would not have mattered if the people were from Kalkarindji, Katherine, Alice Springs, Lajamanu, Nhulunbuy or Darwin; they would receive exactly the same as we provided under these circumstances. There was nothing extra.

Mr BURGOYNE: There was \$1.1m in payments that went on those cards; how much did it cost to issue the cards?

Mrs WORDEN: I will take that on notice. I do not think we costed it as it is a normal response. I will pass to Gabby. I will add that Gabby has extensive experience throughout COVID of two years running CNR and is highly qualified in this area.

Ms BROWN: I have nothing in particular to add other than to note it is normal business under emergency management arrangements. The operations distributing the disaster recovery financial payments on the cards occurred when we evacuated Nauiyu and when Cyclone Marcus went through. As the minister has referenced, there is nothing unusual in this process. We would consider it a usual agency use of resource through that distribution. When the Welfare Group stands up, our staff amend their business-as-usual operations and step into the Welfare Group operations. There is nothing different in this. The wages of the people on the day-to-day business of the Territory Families were utilised for that work.

Mrs WORDEN: I recall during Marcus that the teams from Territory Families were going to places like caravan parks where people had lost everything they had to facilitate the same payments.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was there any consultation with people on what they wanted? Some perhaps would not have a refrigerator because they might like to go to the shop every day, for example. Was the agency forcing on people what they would have as part of their payment, or was there flexibility for flood victims?

Mrs WORDEN: It is a like-for-like basis. If someone did not have a fridge before then they are not replacing one. It is about ensuring people have the essentials back in their homes that they had before the floods.

Mr BURGOYNE: Did the Northern Territory Government provide any tobacco products to evacuees?

Mrs WORDEN: I recall having that discussion, and the answer was no.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I asked you during Police about whether the facility was dry, but I recall from the media at the time that at the start there was alcohol coming through the facility.

Mrs WORDEN: From day one the facility was dry, as it was during COVID. The issue about people bringing in grog over fences was an issue for us, with a massive perimeter.

Mr BURGOYNE: We spoke about the safe house earlier. Who ran it? Was it Territory Families personnel?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many women and children took refuge at that safe house?

Ms BROWN: It varied from night to night because there was an operation where we tried to make sure that accessing the space on the site for—as many people know, the CNR has individual rooms. When you talk about a safe house, I talk about a fairly large block of rooms that we just turned over in cleaning. We made it incredibly easy for women and children to come and stay there for the rest of the night. People would make various decisions over a day and night period.

Do I know exactly how many? No, I do not because we made sure that people who were monitoring the site had a number of cards or keys to the rooms. When people would come and say, 'I want to spend the rest of the night', we would say, 'Absolutely, here is the key. Here you go.' and people would leave at various times, as well.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There must be a record, though. There must a number.

Mrs WORDEN: In my experience with remote safe houses, women and children are not necessarily there because they are experiencing domestic and family violence. It is by, its nature, a safe house. This is what was being provided at CNR as well. Women will often say, 'I do not feel safe. I do not like the circumstances we are in.' and get out early. That is what we encourage. It is not a place where everybody who is fleeing comes to.

Alternatively, safe houses in our centres—Dawn House, for example—would house predominantly women fleeing longer-term domestic, family and sexual violence circumstances. Whereas, in remote locations, it is about women's safety first. If a woman says that she does not feel safe and does not want to be there, it is a slightly different approach to what you see in urban centres.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you not recording how many women said that they do not feel safe? Would that not be a terrifying proposition for you, running a facility where, night after night, women are coming forward saying, 'I do not feel safe', and you are not recording those numbers?

Mrs WORDEN: It is not necessarily night after night. You are making a presumption again in this space.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We asking for the data, and you are not giving it. Do you not know across the whole of the time that people were there, how many people accessed the safe house?

Mrs WORDEN: You just heard that is not necessarily a safe house. It is a number of rooms.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Safe accommodation then.

Mrs WORDEN: In safe accommodation, women would ask for that and would be accommodated.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there any data on that?

Mrs WORDEN: No, it is not something that we collected vigilantly. It was normal operations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it normal for people to feel unsafe and need refuge somewhere else and not keep the data on that?

Mrs WORDEN: There are different levels of women feeling unsafe.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For any reason to feel unsafe—if you feel so unsafe that you had to sleep somewhere else, that is a concern.

Mrs WORDEN: We have professionals on site that would manage that area of the site and make sure that women were feeling safe. That is the priority in that space—getting in to make sure that the violence does not happen is another space. Giving women safety in an alternate space is business as usual.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Except that if you are not tracking the numbers and do not know how prevalent that feeling of unsafety is, then you do not know how to match the response to it or whether it requires additional police resourcing or a different setup.

Mrs WORDEN: I disagree. There are daily onsite meetings, sometimes twice a day.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Someone must have been recording how many slept in different beds. The cleaner would have to go in there and clean it the next day, for example. You would know.

Mrs WORDEN: Not necessarily. Some of this would be fluid. You would have meetings of people managing different spaces on a daily basis. There were management teams coming together every day, operationalising and understanding what the need is. If there had been a spike in women feeling unsafe, for example, then that would come into the meeting.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How would you know if it was not recorded?

Mrs WORDEN: It is everyday management of a facility.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Would the person rock up to the meeting and be like, 'Oh yeah, we had heaps today'? Surely they would have the number.

Mrs WORDEN: They would come in and say, 'Look, we have seen an issue last night and need to address the issue'.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. 'We had 20 women last night. We had five women. We had 100 women.' It does not pass any test in logic.

Mrs WORDEN: We did not keep daily records of how many women were accessing that service.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sure that professional people on the ground would have because when they rock up to this meeting, they would have something to say.

Mrs WORDEN: You could say at that meeting, 'We had an escalated number last night. We need to do something about X, Y and Z.'

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: An escalated number based off what?

Mrs WORDEN: Their observations overnight. They do not necessarily put pen to paper and count them.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You might have two in one night and 30 the next night. As the Minister for Territory Families and for domestic and family violence, how can you not have captured data on that or the reasons why women did not feel safe? Was it because of alcohol getting into the facility? Was it because of domestic violence? Was it because of all of the damage that was being caused? Was it having the window to their room broken? All of those things.

Mrs WORDEN: That information would come forward at the daily meeting. I will ask Gabby if she would like to explain a bit more about how those governance and daily management models occurred.

Ms BROWN: The minister is correct. We had daily meetings between the agencies working across the site, which includes non-government partners, Welfare Group members, police, education and our leadership. At our cross-agency meeting we would review and talk about the last 24 hours and move into what was to occur in the following day, critical matters, routine matters, food and all those kind of logistics of an operation of a site that size.

A second meeting occurred within the Welfare Group, which we call an instant management meeting. This was in regard to the functionality and logistics of the site. The Australian Red Cross, for the first four weeks—it then moved over to the Welfare Group—hosted and facilitated a community leaders' meeting between the three communities that provided feedback on the services provided with suggestions of improvement. These are the usual things we do when we run evacuation centres using the community leadership of the people that we have evacuated.

They are just some of the governance mechanisms, meetings and structures that occurred on site. The Leader of the Opposition is correct. We would often talk about popular themes occurring over the time, and that was also a feedback from Police; Wilson security are also part of the interagency. As the emergency operations are quite fluid, you can scale up and move from very small to very large numbers. There was a great deal of activity on the site on a day-to-day basis with things moving quite quickly which is usual.

Responses occurred and tasking within the cross-agency meeting would occur in the incident management team. Our site directors and evacuation centre directors who ran the operational evacuee front-facing services would have conversations throughout the day, with residents providing feedback. We would then respond and make changes or adjustments as needed.

It is a fluid operation. We know from our processes that women who reported feeling unsafe for whatever reason—and not all of it related to the operations on the site, to be very clear—were followed up by the appropriate services. We would talk with the police who are based on the site or have Red Cross follow up if it was within their area. We also have Salvation ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There must be data of that. You are not just asking Constable John to go and see Mary in block five because she needed a different room. Things can be fluid, and I appreciate your response.

Minister, it does not make any sense that it could not have been captured. Even to the extent that you then have follow-up services going to speak to the women. If the women were happy with their arrangement the

next day and went back to their original room, you would presumably schedule cleaning staff to prepare that room for the following night if a different woman and child could be staying there.

There are so many mechanisms and levers. There would be different meal deliveries, then the meal delivery would be cancelled that day because the person would be having their meal back in their room. All of these functions would intersect with how many women were where at any one time. To say that there is no data cannot be true.

Mrs WORDEN: You are making quite a lot of assumptions. There would have been referrals, and that is something that we could go back and look through how many referrals there were for that period of time. That would be where there would be follow-up action taken if that would satisfy what you are looking for.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It feels like you do not want to know the number.

Mrs WORDEN: No. I am confident that we had a very large group of hardworking public servants there. Many of them are professionals and highly experienced who are connected with the community and with our service providers. They were, on a daily basis, dealing with up to 700 people in an emergency circumstance which was stood up very quickly and professionally. Through that process there would have been actions taken. I am saying that they did not necessarily sit there and say, 'There is one DV, and there is another room that has gone'. It is absurd to think that in an emergency situation that happens.

What is not absurd is that there were referrals, where appropriate, to other services. I am quite happy that we will get a team together to have a look back and see where there were referrals for further support beyond the professionals we had there.

Retrospective looking is great, but when you are in an emergency, you get the right things done first; that is, making sure people have a bed to sleep in and that their children are well cared for. They were the priorities. As we went on and established we would have had processes ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: At the start, but are you telling me that keys were just given out to people randomly and there was no keeping track of that? How many beds are at Howard Springs? There are thousands.

Mrs WORDEN: You are making an assumption that there were truckloads of DV and everybody there were criminals. People who were there were not criminals.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You would have to be able to keep track of it. It does not make any sense. You could not just say ...

Mrs WORDEN: Not necessarily is what I am responding to you. I am saying that it was business as usual to deal with the situations on a daily basis. From my ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How would the person on the next shift know?

Mrs WORDEN: Can I finish?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Say a woman went into room 375. When the next shift comes on in the morning, how will they do a welfare check on room 375 if they do not know whether anyone is in it?

Mrs WORDEN: Because they are entirely professional and understand what they are doing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The poor staff Territory Families staff had to walk around thousands of rooms going, 'Knock, knock, is anybody home?' It is ridiculous. It had to have been written down somewhere.

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely not. I am saying that we can go through and have a look at what we can get you in this space. I reiterate that Territory Families staff were dealing with about 700 people on a daily basis in an emergency situation and doing an amazing job.

We will go back and data mine for you because you want to know how many criminal offences were there. This assertion of everybody who has been at Estimates so far is that people at Howard Springs were criminals. I refute this ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is about women being safe; it is not about criminals.

Mrs WORDEN: You did not ask the same questions for two years when that place was used for COVID for people who were non-Indigenous ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We asked so many questions.

Mrs WORDEN: I do not understand ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is about women feeling safe; it is not about the criminals. That is not what we are asking. We are asking about safety. You have already said to us that it could have been none of that; it could just have been the situation, which we respect.

Mrs WORDEN: There is a tone and a series of questions that you are threading together.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no tone. You do not want to give the answer, or you can take it on notice, but you cannot make inferences about our motives.

Mr CHAIR: Maybe I will bring this to a close. She said she would dig the data for you.

Mrs WORDEN: I have already said that we will data mine for you the data so that you can see how many rooms were used at different times and how many services were used ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many women needed to access safe refuge?

Mrs WORDEN: ... just for you so that you can string a story together that makes out that everybody who went to Howard Springs is a criminal. That is the story you are painting, and it is so disappointing. People out there will be listening ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can be disappointed. I have a question to ask on notice.

Mrs WORDEN: The services that were provided over that time were outstanding. You just want to unpick it. I can tell you that people out there are listening.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, she will ask the question and see whether you would like to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.30

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: During the period that the Centre for National Resilience was used to house flood evacuees, how many nights were safe refuge required for women and children?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.30.

Mr BURGOYNE: I will follow on, minister, because it is important. If we had people coming from areas of the Territory where services are not readily available and were coming into a space where there was, by the sounds of it, an amazing amount of support, then we would hope that if there were issues raised in regard to domestic violence, those people were not sent home with possibly abusive partners.

That is something we are focusing on here—the ability for people to acknowledge there was an issue. If, as you say, there were referrals to services, how many were there and what eventuated out of that? Otherwise, we are essentially sending people home to what could be a terrible environment.

Mrs WORDEN: There is a lack of understanding about how the system works. Number one is that victim-survivors have autonomy to choose where they are headed. It may be that you tie the victim-survivor up with a service and they then do not continue with that service.

I will not map out the pathway of every woman who came through that centre that was subject to DV for the indulgence of the CLP. As I have committed to, it was an issue we took seriously while people were there.

We have an incredible sector, and we have incredible people within Territory Families and the broader government working on domestic, family and sexual violence. I would hazard a guess that we have some of the best in Australia, given the experiences they have.

We also have mandatory reporting provisions that we use through our structures, which would have been done by service staff as well. There would have been referral pathways for women, children and men, should they have found themselves in that circumstance. Whether they were remote or not, those same referral pathways exist.

That is why we have invested in safe houses in remote areas. It is an incredibly important space, and I am glad we are talking about it. The intonation that we did not do enough or did not write down enough numbers is ludicrous.

Mr BURGOYNE: Picking up on your point, how many mandatory reports were made by Territory Families staff when they were at ...

Mrs WORDEN: We might have to take that on notice. I might have to go back to Police and ask them how many mandatory reports came out through a location. They would be the collectors of that data.

Question on Notice No 3.31

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

Mr BURGOYNE: How many mandatory reports were made by Territory Families staff and other staff at the Centre for National Resilience during the flood evacuees' stay?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 3.31.

Mr BURGOYNE: Getting back to the cost of the services provided, you gave us the cost for security; do you have the cost for catering?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, I do. It was \$1,864,836.

Mr BURGOYNE: Was entertainment provided while people were there?

Mrs WORDEN: Not entertainment per se. The pool was open from time to time. I do not consider that entertainment; I consider it keeping kids active and healthy. I witnessed the impact that had on them. We had a creche for mums with young children, so some there were some programs that would normally have run in community. There was a women's sewing group and those types of activities. It was not a creche for the young kids, but a playgroup. Kids were also taken to school.

Mr BURGOYNE: I am trying to understand the expenses incurred by Territory Families.

Mrs WORDEN: Activities-wise, in a broad brush with some of the stuff I just outlined—\$324,970. That might have included bringing some program providers in to run those activities.

Mr BURGOYNE: Where were the children sent to school when they were in the centre?

Mrs WORDEN: The Pigeon Hole kids went to Wulagi, in my electorate, and the school at Wulagi did not want them to leave. The experience they had there—a teacher approached me and asked if the Pigeon Hole kids could stay for the rest of the term. It was phenomenal. In fact, she said that the kids did not just turn up and stay by themselves as a discrete group; they broke off and made friends throughout the school and became a huge part of the school.

Different groups went to different schools. Wulagi was one, but the northern suburbs were easy because we were taking the kids back and forth, but also the teachers from remote were going to the school as well. Nightcliff Middle was for the older kids.

Mr BURGOYNE: In your opening statement, you spoke about the death of women and children, which is a terrible thing that occurs in our community. While I do not want to focus on specific issues, I want to ask whether Territory Families is undertaking any investigations into the recent death of a young child in Alice Springs due to a house fire. I just want to know if Territory Families is undertaking an investigation.

Mrs WORDEN: I invite Jeanette Kerr to join us at the table, but it is subject to a coronial investigation.

Ms KERR: Every time there is a child death, Territory Families undertakes a review. If that child has contact with the system, the review becomes much more complex and is referred to the Child Deaths Review and Prevention Committee that also reviews the death.

Mr BURGOYNE: Was that child known to Territory Families?

Mrs WORDEN: That is not a question to ask now.

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to youth bail and breaches of bail, how many young people have breached their bail that has then been brought to the attention of Territory Families staff?

Mrs WORDEN: Do you understand there is two ...

Mr BURGOYNE: Two different types of bail—police ...

Mrs WORDEN: There is police bail and court bail. Breaches of bail are a police matter. If it involves an electronic monitor that has been statutorily applied and it sits with Territory Families, we would be aware of it.

Mr BURGOYNE: I am just getting to that.

Mrs WORDEN: You will have to narrow it down because all the other stuff we would not know about is courts and police.

Mr BURGOYNE: Who is responsible for the electronic monitoring devices that are organised through Territory Families?

Mrs WORDEN: Who is responsible?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, who monitors them? Is it the same organisation we spoke about earlier?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, Buddi. We all have the one system. We moved to the one system a while back.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are breaches of bail that are basically people going outside those zones, are they automatically then referred to police by Territory Families?

Mrs WORDEN: If they are a Territory Families statutory. I will ask Jeanette to give you some specific programmatic response.

Ms KERR: Member for Braitling, can you repeat the question?

Mr BURGOYNE: Territory Families is alerted through the electronic monitoring devices that a youth has gone outside of where they are meant to be. Does Territory Families then alert police?

Ms KERR: Yes, on every occasion they are notified virtually immediately 24/7, then the responsible community youth justice officer prepares a breach file and provides that to police.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is it mandatory for staff to report that to police?

Ms KERR: Yes.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many youth are under electronic monitoring by Territory Families?

Ms KERR: In terms of unique young people year to date, it is 63.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are you able to clarify that from children who are under 12, break that down, or do you just have it for the one ...

Ms KERR: There are no children under 12 who have been subject to electronic monitoring.

Mr BURGOYNE: All are between 18 and ...

Ms KERR: They are between 12 and 17.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For the youth who are electronically monitored by Territory Families, who determines whether there was a breach?

Mrs WORDEN: It would be a court ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, because Territory Families has to refer it to police.

Mrs WORDEN: It is police.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. Territory Families is getting the alert. Say they are outside the geo-fence, they are outside curfew or they have tampered with their bracelet or whatever; who determines whether that amounts to a breach—someone in Territory Families?

Ms KERR: Every time there is a breach notification from Buddi, there is an on-call community youth justice officer who notifies police immediately and then prepares a breach file that is delivered to police. There is no discretion.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Territory Families does not then decide that child X was just 10 minutes late for the bus—that automatically goes to police?

Ms KERR: That is correct.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many times have you prepared breach files?

Ms KERR: There were 137 strap tamper breaches up until 30 April.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many individual uses does that relate to?

Ms KERR: I can give you breach of bail, which was 281 bail orders completed, and 85 of those were successfully completed.

Mr BURGOYNE: I want to make sure we are getting the right numbers—281 bail orders. Was that through Territory Families or court ordered?

Ms KERR: We do not bail, so it is court ordered.

Mr BURGOYNE: Territory Families are ensuring that the young people are undertaking that?

Ms KERR: We cannot ensure young people undertake it, but it is closely monitored.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 281 youths who had an electronic monitoring bracelet, which were monitored by Territory Families, only 85 successfully complied with their bail?

Ms KERR: Sixty-three young people had electronic monitoring, and there were 281 bail orders completed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Eighty-five out of the 281 successfully completed their bail. Of the 63 who had electronic monitoring, how many individuals does that represent?

Ms KERR: Sixty three unique individuals.

Mr BURGOYNE: Sixty three unique individuals had 281 bail orders?

Ms KERR: No. There were 281 bail orders in total inclusive of electronic monitoring devices.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 281, how many were a serious breach of bail?

Mrs WORDEN: That would be a court determination, not Territory Families. You need to ask the Attorney-General.

Mr BURGOYNE: You have spoken in your opening statement about the funding provided to Territory Families, which goes to different areas. How much of the \$250m announced by Prime Minister Albanese will be received by Territory Families?

Mrs WORDEN: That is an ongoing conversation, and the funding is being negotiated by Dorrelle Anderson. There is nothing at this stage. Nothing is final, done and dusted.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has Territory Families put in a submission for the funding?

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have one last bail question. When you did the bail reform a couple of years ago, it was legislated that there would be a bail review November last year. Attorney-General and Justice completed that review and provided it to Territory Families. What is the outcome of the bail review?

Mrs WORDEN: Cabinet has considered it for advice, and it will inform us with our future policy positions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The bail review will not be made public?

Mrs WORDEN: Not at this stage.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Did the law not require that the review be done and people should have access to it?

Mrs WORDEN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What do you have to hide?

Mrs WORDEN: There is nothing to hide. Government commissions reviews and does different activities from time to time that it needs advice on. That is how we are looking at that body of work.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If the review came back and said that it was a total failure and that crime has skyrocketed because of your weakening of bail laws and young people not being held to account, no-one will ever find out and you are under no obligation to respond to it?

Mrs WORDEN: No, I am bound by Cabinet confidence, and that document is being considered by Cabinet. That is where it is at. You asked me for a status, and I am telling you what it is.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is shrouded in secrecy; it will never see the light of day?

Mrs WORDEN: If you are saying that Cabinet equals shrouded in secrecy, good luck to you if you ever form a government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a review, so you could have made it public.

Mrs WORDEN: Allow me to finish my response, please. The workings of government is that Cabinet, from time to time, needs to make sure it receives advice. Not all of that goes out of Cabinet and into the public foray. I know you would love to see everything that was ever written so you could use it for your own purposes, but you have asked me for the status of that review. It was undertaken to advise Cabinet, and that is where it is at this moment in time.

I cannot tell you anything more than that because the oath I took as a Cabinet minister is in regard to confidentiality. I take that seriously, so there is no point you asking me any more questions about that area, because at this moment it is a Cabinet document.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will it be made public in the future?

Mrs WORDEN: There is no intention to do that at this time.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I remind you of Standing Order 109: Manner and Form of Questions. One of the things you cannot ask a minister is to announce a new policy of government or thereabouts.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I did not.

Mr CHAIR: I understand that, but as the minister has rightly said—that is why I am reminding you. I am not saying that you have breached it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You just enjoy the sound of your own voice; I am sure of it.

Mr CHAIR: Listen, Leader of the Opposition ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is this interjection for? I have asked my question, and she answered. I am done. Over to you, Member for Braitling; I do not need to listen to the Chair listening to his own voice.

Mr CHAIR: No, we are not continuing, Member for Braitling. You do not need to listen to the Chair? I think you do. If you keep going down the path you are going, Leader of the Opposition, I will remove you for an hour. You are on a formal warning from earlier this morning for grandstanding and all the good things you have been doing as we have gone alone. I remind you of the manner and form of questions, where you cannot ask for new policy.

The minister has rightly pointed out it is Cabinet-in-confidence. You may have checked out, but we are not finished. This is where the line of questioning will end.

Member for Braitling, would you like to ask a new question?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have further questions relating to that \$250m. We have just been told that none of that funding has been received by Territory Families yet, and you have put in a submission. What are the priorities for Territory Families when applying for that funding?

Mrs WORDEN: Family support programs and working with young people in remote regions to keep them from offending or provide alternatives when they start to offend.

Mr BURGOYNE: No additional programs for Alice Springs?

Mrs WORDEN: The whole thing is focused on Central Australia. That is where our efforts are.

Mr BURGOYNE: My understanding of that announcement was that it was emergency funding. We are months on from that announcement being made, and you are still yet to receive any funding?

Mrs WORDEN: There is the \$48m outside of that. That was landed quickly. Out of that there is some money for Police. The intention of the \$250m—I have been in lots of rooms where there has been discussion because people do not want to rush through this process and get it wrong. We need to make sure it lands in the right spaces.

I have been in rooms with traditional owners where they have made it clear—people with cultural authority—that they do not want this as a rushed process. It needs to go to the right spaces. Those leadership groups are being listened to, and there has been extensive community consultations. I know that Dorrelle has been on the ground in almost every community in Central Australia to hear what they are saying. There is a process being worked through in regard to the \$250m.

There have been some announcements since then in regard to where that money will land, but at this stage we are continuing to work in that space to see what is good. They have ideas and proposals.

Mr BURGOYNE: The announcement of that money came after a terrible summer for Alice Springs. We had crime statistics out of control. This was emergency funding and, months on, we are still yet to see any of it hit the ground. You spoke about the \$48m; how much of that has been spent?

Mrs WORDEN: The \$250m comes through the Australian Government budget, and I believe that money will land after 1 July, just like everybody else's budget. It will not all come from one central bucket; it will come

from the budgets of different federal agencies. To be fair, the money that is coming forward is reflective of a lack of Commonwealth investment for the last 10 years.

Mr BURGOYNE: That \$48m ...

Mrs WORDEN: My understanding is it is moved forward and has landed. I think the money comes through on 1 July like everything else. For the bigger \$250m there is still a lot of work happening in that space.

Mr BURGOYNE: The Prime Minister of Australia came to Alice Springs and imposed—by the Chief Minister's own words—emergency restrictions that are put in place for the sale of alcohol. We had a range of announcements, being the \$250m—of which we will see only \$150m—and \$48m. To date none of that money has hit the ground because we have been waiting for the feds to release it.

Mrs WORDEN: It came through in their budget, so when they announce their budget, it is there. That money will flow through on 1 July.

Mr BURGOYNE: At the time that was put forward as emergency funding to provide immediate support.

Mrs WORDEN: For example, in the space of Police, Tangentyere is getting funding for some of its programs. Everybody in that space—whether the finances have landed in their bank account or not—has already started. We know we are getting extra police. The deals are done, so we are going straight ahead to get that work done with the \$48m.

Mr BURGOYNE: That response in January ...

Mrs WORDEN: You will need to ask the federal government.

Mr BURGOYNE: The thing is the money has been given to the Territory government to fix the issues that have occurred under your watch.

Mrs WORDEN: It has not come to the Territory government, sorry. You are misinformed. The money has not come to the Territory government.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has it not come to the Territory government?

Mrs WORDEN: No, it has not.

Mr BURGOYNE: All that money that has been announced?

Mrs WORDEN: I do not believe it will be paid directly to the Territory government. It is not like they will pick up \$250m and give us \$250m. With respect, when you go back to Alice Springs, have a briefing with Dorrelle Anderson about how this is because we are all stepping through this space as well.

The Commonwealth does not operate the same as the Northern Territory Government. We would have loved it if it had landed \$250m, but that is not the way it is done. It is actually coming from different organisations across the federal government. You might end up with \$30m from one agency and \$20m from another. That is the way it is being pipelined through.

My understanding at this stage, from being in Alice Springs for the last four or five days, is that money will come through directly from those agencies and paid to Tangentyere from NIAA.

Mr BURGOYNE: This is not how it was sold to the people of Alice Springs. When the Prime Minister of Australia flew in, he said that this was emergency funding to deal with the issues we faced. Now months on, none of that money has supposedly hit the ground. When I asked about the priorities that you have put in for that funding, you talked about family support in remote regions.

After having gone through all of this, we are still no closer to fixing all the issues we face in Alice Springs. If I was to ask about new programs for our region ...

Mrs WORDEN: There is the \$250m and the \$48m. The \$48m was the immediately on-the-ground money going through. That is where we have additional police officers. We are well and truly down the track, and that is all rolling out.

Mr EDGINGTON: You said that \$48m comes on 1 July. What do you mean it is in place?

Mrs WORDEN: We are not waiting for the money to land in our account to go forward with that. There are ...

Mr EDGINGTON: What money are you using?

Mrs WORDEN: In terms of the \$250m, programs will be funded and it will be direct. If Tangentyere is successful in a proposal, it will be directly funded from NIAA. If Territory Families is successful in the proposal it puts forward, the money will come directly to us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When are you expecting this money?

Mrs WORDEN: The money will come through on 1 July.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You just said to the Member for Braiting that we needed to speak to the federal government. You are the Territory minister; these are your federal Labor mates ...

Mrs WORDEN: It is not my money.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The town is literally in crisis. It is your Prime Minister; he is your mate. You are the one who called him there to, essentially, manage the media and defuse an explosive situation in that community. Now, six months on, not a single dollar has been spent. The feds are wiping their hands of it. They have flown off, spent time at the tennis and have totally moved on from Alice Springs. You have people sitting there still waiting for the money to be spent ...

Mr CHAIR: Is there a question under Standing Order 109, Member for Spillett?

Mrs WORDEN: There is no question there, but I ...

Mr CHAIR: Thanks, minister, for your commentary.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you spoken to the Prime Minister since that announcement about where that money is?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, can you succinctly ask a question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is my question.

Mrs WORDEN: The NIAA has staff members in Alice Springs ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you spoken to the Prime Minister?

Mr CHAIR: Let the minister answer your question, Member for Spillett.

Mrs WORDEN: The process that has happened since those announcements was that the federal government and the Northern Territory Government have staff based in Alice Springs working together day-in and day-out to make sure that money makes the biggest impact that it can when it lands. They have been doing the work, going to all of the communities as well as talking to Congress and all of our youth services. You name it, they are doing that consultation to make sure—too many times, money comes in and does nothing. People in Alice Springs, our service providers and our agency know that this is an opportunity. We are getting back some of that lack of investment by the Commonwealth Government.

It has to be done properly and in a way that gets an outcome for Central Australia. I say Central Australia and not Alice Springs because the issues caused in communities outside of Alice Springs are coming into Alice Springs. We have to make sure that the money hits the ground properly in remote areas to stop that flow-on effect into Alice Springs. That work is being done on the ground by NIAA and Territory representatives, Dorrelle Anderson and her team.

In that process, we and others have put in a submission. They are announced as they go along. With respect to this, the federal government, with the Territory government, is making sure that we do this right.

Mr DAVIES: The process has been that the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet is coordinating this particular interaction with the Australian Government. Dorrelle has been a part of that. We have put in

a submission for some programs for Territory Families through that process. It has gone into the DCMC area. It is sitting with NIAA and Dorrelle Anderson, the Regional Controller, to get submissions on the table to see what will be funded into the future. That is where it is up to.

In relation to the approach of NIAA and the Australian Government, they will be direct-funding Aboriginal organisations. They have already funded Congress to do some work which has been announced already. The Gap Youth Centre has been involved. There have been additional resources thrown in. The Territory government will receive funding for some of its programs, but it will also be in Alice Springs and in the region funding programs directly.

This is a great outcome because, in the past, the Australian Government has gone in and funded and then left the field.

This is a bit like the remote housing program. How do you get the Australian Government into the space and keep it there? The co-funding arrangement will be really important. Like the remote housing program, you start to get a five to 10-year line of work.

There is a sense of urgency, but it is important that the Australian Government does this properly and that local Aboriginal people, particularly in communities that are being impacted, are engaged and own the programs as well.

That is where it is at. Everybody is keen to see it all play out but, at the end of the day, the decision regarding where that funding goes sits with the Australian Government. It is not our funding.

Mr BURGOYNE: How much funding has Territory Families applied for in your submission?

Mr DAVIES: I will have to check that. I can take that on notice. I will try to get that before we finish today.

Question on Notice No 3.32

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

Mr BURGOYNE: As part of the \$250m put forward by the federal government, how much is in Territory Families' submission?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 3.32.

Mr DAVIES: It literally is a submission. There is no guarantee. All I will be declaring is what we have applied for in that space. There is no guarantee in this space that we will be funded in that way. At the end of the day, it will be the Australian Government's decision regarding where it allocates funds.

Mr BURGOYNE: That goes to the heart of what we are talking about here. There have been some terrible things happening in our community. People have been crying out for help. The Prime Minister of Australia came to our community and promised a solution. We are months on. We are yet to see a dollar of that money.

I understand that there have been some organisations that have basically been provided additional funding so that they can roll over their programs, but the understanding from everyone I have spoken to in the community is that this would be additional funding to assist us with the issues we face. Going forward, we are still facing many of those issues. The question is, where will that money be spent? Today we have no idea exactly where that money will be spent.

Mrs WORDEN: You have just heard that it is Commonwealth Government money. Whilst we are working with it to get the best outcome we can for Central Australia, ultimately, it is not our money or our call. That work is done in earnest.

I met with a staff member last week to talk about it; they are still finishing some consultations. Often people will go to a community and meet with the service provider, but they are not doing that. They are meeting with

traditional owners and trying to get the base of the problems and the issues to see if current services are working and delivering. They are doing that analysis and working incredibly hard. I understand they are close to the end of those consultations and, as best as we can, we are trying to ensure we can deliver the services that Central Australia needs.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has this process occurred in a timely manner? We have been promised \$250m and are still yet to see a cent. Supposedly it will be available in July. Who knows how long it will be until we receive it?

Mrs WORDEN: I do not know that Alice Springs has not received a cent. I do not know whether the \$48m has landed yet, but DCMC are best placed to answer all the questions as they are the lead. There may have been some budget that has come through. There was a \$2m to Tangentyere ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That was from the \$48m, not from the \$250m.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, from the \$48m which was the immediate response and \$250m was coming through the budget and through those agencies. They are being treated differently, and the \$48m may have landed with people. You could call Tangentyere and ask if they received their money. The Commonwealth is controlling this money through direct funding organisations.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is this occurring in a timely manner?

Mrs WORDEN: You need to ask the Commonwealth that question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are the responsible minister.

Mrs WORDEN: I am not the responsible minister. I am responsible for the police—you could have asked that question under the Police output. In our area, would we want money tomorrow for our proposal, but I know there are accountabilities for the federal government. There is a process occurring which is being done from the grass roots up. It is not a matter of wandering in and saying, 'Congress or Tangentyere, what would you like?' That is not the process; it is a fully consultative process where they are talking to Aboriginal people living in those communities to understand what the deficit is.

To be frank, the deficit is from a long time of a Liberal-National government which completely walked away from the homelands, withdrew their services and stopped funding. We have a long history in the Northern Territory of the federal government coming in and funding programs and then walking away.

Mr BURGOYNE: It sounds like they have already walked away from their responsibility.

Mrs WORDEN: They have not walked away; people are doing due diligence, which is the difference. Yes, we want those services stood up tomorrow; our proposals are great, and that is what we would like to see fulfilled. On 1 July, if we are successful, we want the money rolled out quickly.

Mr BURGOYNE: I look forward to you calling out the federal government if they do not come to the table.

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely. We need that money here for Central Australia. You would not have me say anything else.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Where is the community consultation? You talked about consultation with organisations and Aboriginal communities. Where is the town hall meeting for people in Alice Springs to be asked where they want the money spent?

Mrs WORDEN: I have been to at least one of those; there are meetings which occur in Alice Springs with the right people.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You have been to the town hall in Alice Springs for a full community meeting?

Mrs WORDEN: I am unsure it was a full community meeting.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is what I am saying. Why not?

Mrs WORDEN: You would need to ask the Commonwealth.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You have not asked?

Mrs WORDEN: You should ask the DCMC about their processes. The process they have landed on is going from community to community and talking to cultural leaders and organisations. They have done lots in Alice Springs. They would be speaking to business and other groups. It is a lot of consultation which has happened. You could ask NIAA about the design of what they are doing; it is a co-design process they are going through with the community.

Mr EDGINGTON: What communities are you talking about in Central Australia, and what is the boundary?

Mrs WORDEN: The Barkly is considered separately. The decision was made at the time about the Barkly Regional Deal, and Central Australia was Alice Springs to the Barkly boundary.

Mr EDGINGTON: Tell us some of these communities. Where are they? Does it go as far north as Wilora? Where is the other boundary?

Mrs WORDEN: You would need to ask the lead agency.

Mr EDGINGTON: You do not know where the money is going at all, then. You are talking about Central Australia, but can you tell us what communities are in Central Australia? Where is the boundary for Central Australia?

Mrs WORDEN: Outside of the Barkly, below the Barkly boundary. Why are you asking me? Do you know the answer?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think so. I am asking the questions.

Mrs WORDEN: I am not answering a question you already know the answer to.

Mr EDGINGTON: What communities are you talking about, and what communities form part of your submission?

Mrs WORDEN: You are just show-ponying. You should understand your boundaries.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Barkly, she has put it on record that you can ask the lead agency, being the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Let us not get you on a warning like the Leader of the Opposition. When DCMC come in, you are more than welcome to ask them that. I am sure they are listening now. If they do not already have those answers, they will have them on Monday.

The minister has made it clear she will not answer that because she is not the responsible agency.

Mrs WORDEN: He knows the answer. It is just ridiculous.

Mr CHAIR: He may or may not, minister, but the questioning will be held for DCMC.

Mr EDGINGTON: I have another question, minister.

Mrs WORDEN: You were the coordinator of the Chief Minister's department for many years, Member for Barkly. You know those boundaries. You are trying to show-pony. It is a disgraceful waste of time for the committee.

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not need all the commentary from you. How about answering the questions? What do you have to hide?

Mr CHAIR: If members cannot show some decorum and let people ask and answer questions, we will have a break. That only chews into the opposition's time.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am asking a simple question.

Mr CHAIR: I am talking; you listen. You cannot listen when your mouth is moving. You will get a chance to ask a question after the Member for Braitling, as the lead shadow minister. If he has no other questions, you get to jump in. That is how it works. You have done it many times; let us follow it.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is the money for town camp community centres in Alice Springs under Minister Moss' purview?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct.

Mr BURGOYNE: How much money does Territory Families provide in regard to the Tangentyere youth bus that operates in Alice Springs?

Mrs WORDEN: It may not be us; it may be Minister Moss. I know she will be listening, so she will have that figure for you later.

Mr BURGOYNE: I just want to confirm, the original money—\$5m—set aside for this youth bus, or for one of them, came out of the revitalising Alice Springs CBD project. There was \$20m put aside, and it put \$5m across to provide an additional bus service and fund it for a period. Are you now telling me the funding arrangements run through the Minister for Youth?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr BURGOYNE: Does Territory Families hold any of the data in regard to how many children are picked up, whether they are referred to further services in Territory Families or anything like that?

Mrs WORDEN: I am happy to take that on notice, because we work intensively with the bus service providers. We recently asked them to change their hours so that they are not out so late. We brought forward the finishing hours for them.

Mr BURGOYNE: That was another question I had.

Question on Notice No 3.33

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

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the Tangentyere youth bus that operates in Alice Springs, how many children were picked up in the past year and how many were referred on to further services through Territory Families?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, on the proviso that if it is not us who collects or holds that data, Minister Moss will let you know and perhaps you could ask that question of her. We will let you know either way.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Brainting has been allocated the number 3.33.

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the reduction in hours?

Ms KERR: I would not say there is a reduction in hours, just a reduction in the amount of time until closure, or last bus. Having a bus for children running around at 2 am or 3 am to take them home, particularly on school nights, is not appropriate and usurping the role of family and parents. The last bus is a lot earlier than that now. I cannot confirm the exact time because it may have changed recently, but I can get that information for you.

Mr BURGOYNE: What was it previously?

Ms KERR: I believe it was 3 am, with the final bus trying to be gone by about 2.15 am.

Mr BURGOYNE: I guess that funding does not come from Territory Families. It comes through Territory Families through Youth, just to confirm?

Ms KERR: Yes.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you have any KPIs from a Territory Families point of view that you look after in regard to that funding, or is it all through the Minister for Youth?

Mrs WORDEN: Minister Moss.

Mr BURGOYNE: The Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre facility has been undergoing upgrades, as spoken about in your opening statement. What was the original budget for those upgrades? We heard some talk yesterday through Infrastructure, but I just want to know from a Territory Families point of view.

Mrs WORDEN: I believe Minister Lawler answered that question yesterday.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many additional beds will the new facility enable? We heard yesterday it was between 18 and 24.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, 24.

Mr BURGOYNE: What is the current capacity?

Mrs WORDEN: For Don Dale, is that what you are asking?

Mr BURGOYNE: For Alice Springs.

Mr DAVIES: Depending on the incidents the police are dealing with, we have up to 23 or 24 young people in there. Because we do not want the young people in the watch house, we make an arrangement and run a system between the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre and the one in Darwin and move young people around depending on capacity. As soon as we are able, we accommodate the children overnight and then we move the youth to stay within the numbers we need to, so we make sure we are running a safe operation.

Mr BURGOYNE: How long do young people stay in the Alice Springs watch house before they are transferred?

Mr DAVIES: As soon as they have been processed. They do not actually go in to the watch house. As soon as there is a court order, they are out and with us.

Mrs WORDEN: Going back to your previous question, I have some advice that perhaps the Tang bus is directly funded by NIAA, and CMC is the right output to ask, not Minister Moss. I just had clarification.

Mr BURGOYNE: Right now as it stands, Territory Families no longer provides funding for the Tangentyere youth bus?

Mrs WORDEN: My understanding from memory is that it has always been NIAA. It was part of a deal made, and that is where their input would be.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But there is a requirement for the Tang bus to provide Territory Families with the report in the morning? I have asked that before in Estimates. What happens? I have sat on that bus myself in the wee hours in the morning. They collect all the names and addresses of the kids, and my question has always been, what happens to that information? If Tang are picking up the same children two, three, four or five times a week, that then requires a Territory Families response.

Mrs WORDEN: Tang are part of a broader network that meets every evening—what we call the patrollers' network. They have one in the morning and one later in the evening. Those reports are shared at that point between everyone in the room, including our Lhere Artepe patrols, police, housing and youth justice patrols. They are fully coordinated.

For example, I have been there when there was a young person from interstate—post COVID—who police needed to identify and find to unite him with his family. The family left during COVID, and during that night the patrollers found him and were able to have a conversation, he got in the car and away he went. That is the sort of intel they share right the way across. If there are young people the police are looking for or there are young people with welfare concerns—those two meetings are structured every day. Everybody has their little books and are sharing information fluidly.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have been told in the past that Territory Families gets the list and then follows up all of those families the next day.

Mrs WORDEN: Just because you are on the bus does not mean you are offending. I am trying to understand what you are ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I never said offending. It is the care and protection of children.

Mrs WORDEN: If a child is on the bus at 8 pm they are not doing anything wrong; they are going home.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I was not on the 8 pm bus. I was on the middle-of-the-night bus, and there were maybe 100 kids that night. If that bus is picking up the same kids multiple times a week, that is a care and protection issue because it is not safe for young people to be on the street at midnight or one or two o'clock in the morning.

Mrs WORDEN: That is why there is the sharing of information across all of us ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there no investigation into each of those kids? There is no collating or it is not input into some system that says, 'We picked up Mary 57 nights out of 60'? Is there nothing like that? Is it just verbal?

Mrs WORDEN: It is an operational question, so I will ask Jeanette to provide a response.

Ms KERR: Every day all those patrollers—including Lhere Artepe now—and, at times, the council rangers, security and CCTV operations meet. They share information about the young people who may be on the streets involved in antisocial behaviour, may be missing or have concerns.

That information is shared constantly. There is also a joint—for want of a better word—contract relationship management about the services being flexible and to support each other. I am sure if they have concerns that there is a risk of harm, they would do a mandatory report. It does not get to the point of a young person being out 57 out of 60 nights because they are working together every day and having meetings. Even the YORET has radios it shares with all those service providers, including police, the CCTV operators and both buses. There is a constant flow of information.

We are aiming to get in and intervene early when there are first signs of concern. Increasingly, the YORET collects family to come and pick up children if there are any concerns and deal with it immediately.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That all sounds great, but I just cannot believe it to be true. I will tell you why ...

Mrs WORDEN: You just called a public servant a liar!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, no. I believe that is the system. I am saying that I do not believe it is robust enough to identify that multiplication. I have asked this in Estimates before—I will go back and check *Hansard*—because every time I am in Alice Springs I am exasperated by this.

You have that bus going around, with all the money and resources that go into it. I understand that group meets every night. I am not saying it is not sharing data. I am not taking away from what it is doing. I find it astonishing that a government-funded NGO can be funded to drop children home in the middle of the night, in the wee hours of the morning, and there is no requirement for follow-up of that.

For example, I was told when I was on the bus that sometimes the child will hop out of the bus and go in, and then think, 'I do not feel like this is a safe place', or there is a party or God knows what other thing is going on. In that case, they hop on the bus and somewhere else is found.

I cannot understand why that data is not being harvested for those kids. It seems to me that the people operating the bus are very familiar with the kids.

Mrs WORDEN: They are, as is our youth patrol. You have been out with our youth patrol. There is a lot of linking up post those patrols. They know which young people are on an order and their circumstances. You are right; if they go to a house and it is unsafe for a young person, they make sure they find a safe place.

We have had this back and forth quite a number of times about what constitutes a safe place ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, and that is true. I am not trying to interrupt you, but I want to follow the same train of thought. I believe that is happening with the bus because I have seen it with my own eyes. I have been on the bus, so I totally get that.

What happens to that information? There is no guarantee that the next night at that meeting, that information about that child will be passed on.

Mrs WORDEN: The people involved in those services would pass that on. There are lots of triggers for different things ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How do you know?

Mrs WORDEN: Let us say it is a youth justice patrol. The YORET is out, and they come across a child with different circumstances. They have reporting responsibilities themselves, and that gets through. If the child is being case managed, they will know and will talk with the case manager about that. That will trigger a response. If there is no safe sleeping space, there is now a safe sleeping mechanism in Alice Springs where a Territory Families staff member can triage with police 24 hours a day.

There are lots of different mechanisms whereby young people are picked up. There are high-risk families within the framework, not just in Alice Springs but throughout the Northern Territory. There are groups that meet and discuss intensively, sometimes every day, high-risk young people.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not understand how there can be such little data.

Mrs WORDEN: There is not little data; there is extensive data, and it is all connected up often through that ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But it is verbal note-sharing data. I would have thought Tang should give that whole list to Territory Families every day.

Mrs WORDEN: No. If Tang knows there is a child at risk, it would give that data.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How would they know? Most kids get on the bus and then just hop off and run home.

Mrs WORDEN: That is not doing justice to the work those people are doing. As you said, they know every child's circumstances. If taking a young child to Aunt Molly's is normal for them within the family structure, that is not necessarily a child at risk. That is an appropriate way to deal with that circumstance.

If we go to Aunt Molly's and she is not available, and if that is not normal, there is an escalation point to Territory Families where they link in. There is mandatory reporting, and they ring the phone numbers.

The people working in this space in Alice Springs particularly—I have been with them when they have said, 'That kid is not from here. I have never seen that kid.' They make a beeline for that child and speak to them to work out exactly where they fit.

It is a constant thing in Alice Springs. The number of young people on the street has significantly reduced, in some part due to the alcohol restrictions, the changing of the bus timetable and that sort of thing. There has been a lot of work in that space. We stood up the safe sleeping places. There has not been a great deal of take-up for young children coming through the service. We have the staff 24 hours a day in the field. The response is multifaceted, and those kids are being picked up all over the place. They all know how to escalate.

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the safe sleeping arrangements, how many young people have utilised that in the last reporting period?

Mrs WORDEN: It is still only about five. That is only five young people who have not been able to find a safe place to sleep.

Mr BURGOYNE: Who has taken those people, the Tangentyere youth bus?

Mrs WORDEN: I think it has been police.

Mr BURGOYNE: And that is the facility run by Saltbush?

Mrs WORDEN: It is at the Saltbush site, just a different response. It has a dedicated space and an on-call Territory Families person 24 hours a day.

Mr BURGOYNE: How much do you pay to have that 24/7 service?

Mrs WORDEN: It is already embedded within the Saltbush service. We have worked it through. There would be a cost—to be transparent—for a Territory Families person to be there 24 hours. Before that, Territory Families was not 24 hours in the field, so we stood up that mechanism.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is there now a Territory Families employee based at Saltbush 24/7?

Mrs WORDEN: They would be on call.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many Territory Families people are on call in Alice Springs overnight?

Mrs WORDEN: We might take that on notice.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is a lot of feedback we received from police because they then have to sit with a child or find something to do with them.

Mrs WORDEN: Very rarely. In my whole time of three years, I think I have had one instance where a child was not able to be assisted and has stayed a prolonged period with police.

Question on Notice No 3.34

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many Territory Families workers are on call in Alice Springs each night?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 3.34.

Mrs LAMBLEY: These five children who were taken to that safe house, were they taken into care and placed there, or was it a voluntary arrangement?

Mrs WORDEN: It is a voluntary service. They are the five young people who have stayed. I understand other young people have accessed for a meal and a shower and have then found a safe place. Over that time, these are five young people we have not been able to find a safe place for, or they wanted a place of safety.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is this all on a voluntary basis?

Mrs WORDEN: It is because there is no law that says we can detain them if they have not committed an offence. That triggers a broader response for those children. If they have no safe place to sleep, that triggers a strong response from Territory Families, immediately the next morning.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are they not technically taken into the care and protection of the minister?

Mrs WORDEN: Not at that point. That does not mean it will not happen, but it does not happen at that point. It triggers a child protection response immediately.

Mrs LAMBLEY: These children have been identified as being potentially at risk and have been encouraged to go to this safe space.

Mrs WORDEN: They are given a safe space, a meal, a shower and somewhere to sleep. The next day, Territory Families springs up in the morning and knocks on doors to find out what is going on. There are referral processes that trigger. There is a child protection notification from that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you think it is widely known amongst these kids that there is this safe place to go to now in Alice Springs?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. Our service providers, most importantly, know that it is there as well.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is good that it is there. It is a great thing. I have been advocating for this for a long time.

Mrs WORDEN: You advocated for a long time. It took us a while to work through what we could do legally without huge legislative changes or doing things that were not the right thing. We needed to make sure we could provide the service and see how we could do it. Originally, we were to do something separate and needed to look at what was available.

You can pat yourself on the back, Robyn. I understand you took it very seriously.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will not get carried away with myself there, minister. I will leave the back slapping to other people.

How many children are on the streets of Alice Springs on the average night these days?

Mrs WORDEN: It is very reduced, comparatively. I will answer that anecdotally as from police there is more of an adult issue than young people. I just spent the last four days down there. I accept the fact that I was there during Finke and there is a displacement when the town is full of people, but I saw very few.

We still have issues with young people going through shopping centres. I acknowledge that there is work we need to continue, but, after speaking with some of the businesses, the issues are more around adults than children.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I was presented a scenario earlier today from a shopkeeper in town. This is probably a better question for the police, but it is about youth justice. There was a young boy, 16, who went into a shop with an electronic monitor on and attempted to steal something behind the counter. The police said that they could not do anything.

Mrs WORDEN: That is incorrect. In the shop, I have heard that a number of times, but it is incorrect.

Mrs LAMBLEY: He was contacted today by the police and they said that they could not, despite there being cameras.

Mrs WORDEN: I say, and I know the acting commissioner would say the same thing, that we would need to understand which officer said that because it is incorrect.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is good to know, and I am sure he is listening.

Mrs WORDEN: Also, to answer your question about how many young people, there were around 30 high-risk youth, meaning their family situations required support to improve, but we are down to around nine in Alice Springs now. That is a result of heavy-duty case coordination.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What about the kids who have been harassing the Alice Springs mosque?

Mrs WORDEN: There was a range of activities, and I had a great brief for you last sittings. We spoke about this. I would be more than happy to give you some more information about that outside of this.

It was handled in multiple ways. The police went to the school because we knew where those young people were at school. They have also done activities with the community so that there is more cross-cultural understanding about it. We also put in the high-visibility mobile light. My understanding is that the issue has stopped.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There was an issue regarding broadband access. They wanted to put in cameras, but it was a black spot. That has probably been resolved.

Mrs WORDEN: I am not aware of that, but we have worked that through intensively. The young people came to understand the impact they were having. If you like, it was restorative justice on foot, led by the police.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are the mosque people happy?

Mrs WORDEN: I understand at the moment they are, yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: With the refurbishment of the rooms at the current Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre, which is happening soon, what happens to the young people during stage two? Will it be empty during that time?

Mrs WORDEN: We have been through a number of scenarios. It would operationally be a lot easier to take everyone out and get it finished quickly, but we had representations about the difficulties that may present for some young people—their court is there, there would be separation from family and service providers with whom they have good rapport. We wanted to make sure we could have minimal interruption. I will ask Jeanette Kerr to provide information on where we have landed and changes were made.

Ms KERR: While we undergo refurbishments we will be able to maintain eight beds at the centre. In the interim, any additional young people, according to their needs and when their next appearances are et cetera, will be transitioned in and out of Darwin.

Mrs WORDEN: Obviously, with family permission.

Mr EDGINGTON: Keeping on the same line of questioning about safe places for young people, what do you do with young people in Katherine?

Mr DAVIES: I have just met with the mayor about some of the issues. We have an intensive residential care provider called CASPA. If there is a need for a safe place, we are in the process of organising for them to provide that safe care. We work closely with Kalano and Jawoyn as well. There is a good network of providers which we can interact with, if we need to find a safe place for an individual child, and we do it quickly.

The issue of establishing a safe place arrangement, as we have done with Saltbush, in a formal sense, we will be working through that in the next three to four months. This was a commitment I made to the mayor, and it will be part of a contract we have. We will ensure there is a room and space set aside for a child to be referred overnight if needed.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many beds would you be anticipating in Katherine?

Mr DAVIES: If we go along the same line as Alice Springs, we just need a space. The space in Alice Springs is a unit which has two or three beds. It has to have a TV, kitchen, sink and toilet for the staff member to sit. The residences in Katherine will have that sort of capacity.

Mr EDGINGTON: Safe places for young people in Tennant Creek was one of the initiatives under the Barkly Regional Deal signed on 13 April 2019, over four years ago. Are there any safe places in place for young people in Tennant Creek?

Mrs WORDEN: When the Barkly youth work camp comes online—it is moving ahead at the moment—it will provide some of that. Overall, one thing I have discovered is that within the sector and department they are extremely resourceful and in general are able to find a safe place for a young person. We are fortunate that in Territory Families and in the sector we have people who know the dynamics of family. I have only come across one instance in the last three years where a young person has not been able to find a safe space and we have had them with a slightly extended—when I say extended they have had to sit with police officers for four or five hours. It is not the norm. People find spaces that are safe for young people day-in and day-out.

Mr EDGINGTON: Where are you up to with that initiative under the Barkly Regional Deal, given it is over four years old now?

Mrs WORDEN: I will just find some time lines for you regarding the Barkly Work Camp.

Mr EDGINGTON: No, we are not talking about the work camp. That is a separate initiative under the Barkly Regional Deal. Finding safe places for young people is an initiative on its own under the Barkly Regional Deal. I want to know where that is up to.

Mrs WORDEN: At the moment we have not got a driving need for safe places for young people in the Barkly. We do not have reports of safe spaces not being able to be found. We had that in Alice Springs. We had anecdotally young people telling people that they had no safe place to go, and that is the response that we stood up.

Mr EDGINGTON: I think we are seeing that anecdotally in Tennant Creek as well.

Mrs WORDEN: We are not hearing that. If you are hearing something different and know there is a young person ...

Mr EDGINGTON: I have been hearing it for the last four years.

Mrs WORDEN: .That is not the information I have. My understanding is that safe places are being found for young people in the Barkly.

Mr EDGINGTON: With the numbers of kids on the street at night in Tenant Creek, what is happening with those young people, given that there is an initiative under the deal to find safe places for young people? That initiative is four years old. Can you tell me where it is up to?

Mrs WORDEN: The Barkly Regional Deal—is that what you are talking about, the work camp?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, it is not the work camp. It is a separate initiative under the Barkly Regional Deal.

Mrs WORDEN: I will ask the Chief Executive to outline where it sits within government as an initiative, but I will ...

Mr EDGINGTON: I would have thought safe places for young people would probably involve your department.

Mrs WORDEN: Not necessarily, because it is under the Barkly Regional Deal. If it is coming through there that is coordinated outside of our agency. We deliver on portions of it that we are required to, and the Barkly Work Camp is what we are delivering.

Mr DAVIES: The Barkly Regional Deal is coordinated through DCMC and the Australian Government. The initiative that we have been focused on—there are two things. One is working with the shire to make sure that the new youth centre is open and operational as quickly as possible, and hopefully that will be in July. The Barkly Work Camp is another area that we are working closely on. In relation to the safe places issue, I need to take that on notice and can get some advice. As you know, the team there are a capable group of people, including the YOREOs and the public housing safety officers who work closely with police. I am happy to seek some advice about that particular element of the Barkly Regional Deal and where that is up to, but I just need to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.35

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Minister, can you please advise where the initiative under the Barkly Regional Deal relating to finding safe places for young people is up to and whether it has been implemented yet?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 3.35.

Mr BURGOYNE: There has been a lot of talk over the last year about service mapping, especially in Central Australia. Where is the current service mapping at with regard to mapping the relevant services that are provided in Alice Springs and Central Australia, and have there been any areas noted where we are lacking?

Mrs WORDEN: That is question you will need to ask DCMC.

Mr BURGOYNE: Just to confirm, Territory Families are not undergoing service mapping of youth services? It is CMC?

Mrs WORDEN: It is CMC.

Mr EDGINGTON: Just following on from that, under the Barkly Regional Deal, one of the key initiatives relates to service system reform and review of government investment. Is your department involved in the implementation of that initiative regarding a review of services in Tennant Creek?

Mrs WORDEN: DCMC would have the lead on that.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is your department not involved?

Mrs WORDEN: We would be in partnership.

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you tell me what your involvement is in that initiative?

Mrs WORDEN: Do you want us to take that on notice? I do not think we prepared for that.

Question on Notice No 3.36

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Under the Barkly Regional Deal one of the key initiatives relates to government investment and service system reform. Can you please advise what involvement your department has in the review of services in Tennant Creek?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 3.36.

Mr BURGOYNE: In your opening statement you mentioned that the care system was up and running. What is occurring, and how much money has been spent to date to bring this online? You mentioned, I think, \$50m.

Mrs WORDEN: We have had \$54m allocated to the program, yes. The spend to date within that reporting period was \$44.4m—under budget.

Mr BURGOYNE: For the 2021–22 financial year, it was reported that \$14.7m had been spent. I am trying to reconcile \$44m and \$14m. You are saying it cost \$54m.

Mrs WORDEN: No, that \$44.4m is the spend to date figure, so that would include the number I told you last week.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is \$44.4m to date.

Mrs WORDEN: Out of the \$54m that was allocated to the project, that is the number that had been spent by that date.

Mr BURGOYNE: How is the system running currently? It is something that has been spoken about for a long time. How is it currently operating, and who is providing data into this system now?

Mrs WORDEN: Care and protection, adoptions, finances and youth justice are the areas that are currently operating within the system. They are the organisations putting in. Are external agencies putting in?

Mr DAVIES: At the moment all the housing and CP information on families is in there—anything we are directly responsible for we are receiving. We are also accessing information through DCDD. I have approval from Michael Murphy for data sharing that is in train with Police. We are in a similar discussion and are close to reaching agreement with Education and with the Attorney-General.

The important thing about this issue is that the Information Commissioner is operating on strict guidelines. It is quite sensitive data, and we have to manage it carefully.

The people who are interacting with this will have the right authorisation. It will not be a model where we will have individuals who can share information in and out of the system with other agencies. The other agencies will not be able to go directly into the system and look at the whole family context. It is quite sensitive.

Mr BURGOYNE: That is what I am getting at. When this was initially sold to us—I think it was two Estimates ago when we spoke in detail about it—it was the ability to see whether the young person has been attending school and then link that up with anything that might be happening with their parents and police to act on. We are not quite at that stage yet, but we are working towards it. Is that right?

Mrs WORDEN: It has brought all the agency information together. Now you do not have different areas of the agencies with different data. You have the youth justice data in there with the child protection data, so it is all done. This is a staged approach. There has been a huge amount of investment into staff and training over this time. We now have staff up and running and able to use the system. As the CEO said, all that data has gone in, and now we are in the last bit where we will get that data from others which will give us that 360-degree view of the child.

Beyond that, there are other areas such as how it works with NGOs and others. At the moment, because of the type of data, only Territory Families can look at the data. It is an evolving space, and we need to make sure we get the legalities right.

Mr BURGOYNE: Will you continue to fund Liquidlogic, or whoever won that contract, to develop it so it can interact with all the other agencies?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr DAVIES: When we roll out a system like this, there are always issues in regard to making it go live. Liquidlogic is still working with us. At some point that contract and the support being provided will cease, and we will manage it with DCDD. If we need support with technical issues in the longer term, we will work through that.

In regard to data-sharing agreements, the aim is to have all those agencies inputting data by the end of the year. We are dependent on the Acacia system in Health, and the new system in Police going live. The Acacia system is operating, and we are working with Health on sharing their data. The intent is to have all those agreements in place and data being shared to give us the 360-degree view by the end of the year.

Mr CHAIR: We will take a short break and come back in 10 minutes.

The committee suspended.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.33

Mrs WORDEN: The Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the National Indigenous Australians Agency fund the Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation to provide that bus service.

Mr CHAIR: Are you comfortable with that response, Member for Braitling?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

When it comes to income management, how many families or individuals has your department referred to the federal government for income management?

Mrs WORDEN: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.37

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

Mr BURGOYNE: How many families or individuals has your department referred to the federal government for income management?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 3.37.

Mr BURGOYNE: When it comes to foster carers, why did you abolish the assessment team who assesses the suitability for foster carers?

Mrs WORDEN: We still have an assessment team for foster carers. We are taking applications.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has that process changed in the last 12 months?

Mrs WORDEN: It has not changed.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has it not changed the way in which you assess foster carers?

Mr DAVIES: Member for Braitling, while Karen is going through the papers, I can say that the foster care and kinship care assessments, to make them more efficient and to get a quicker resolution around whether people are eligible, are referred to regions. It was all managed centrally from Darwin, but running the world from Darwin is not the way we do it now. There is still a professional coordinating group but, at the end of the day, the assessments are done regionally.

I want to make the point that when the assessments are made, not only are people assessed for suitability, but the house and amenities are also assessed, such as whether it has a swimming pool with a fence. It is a thorough process that is followed through. We used to try to run it in Darwin.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is this work now falling back on caseworkers? Do you have caseworkers doing the foster care assessments?

Ms BROADFOOT: There is a centralised phone number which makes it easier for people to connect and go through the initial assessment process, which is essentially documentation. That then goes to the regions, and in some regions there are what we call generic staff which means they do multiple types of work. They do case work and also care assessment.

Mr BURGOYNE: To be clear, there was an assessment team based in Darwin which assessed all foster carers, and now that work is done regionally by individual case workers?

Ms BROADFOOT: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there a backlog of applications to work through?

Ms BROADFOOT: At the moment we have 64 applications and 35 applications which have proceeded to assessment. We have had 39 carer applications approved this year and 113 carer applications under assessment. There are 113 in the process of assessment at the moment. There has been a significant drop in how long it is taking to assess carers. For example, in 2021–22 it took approximately 76 days to complete an assessment, and in 2022–23 the average is 30 days.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the rejection rate?

Ms BROADFOOT: I do not have that figure.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the 64 figure? I do not need all of them, just the 64 as I did not catch what it was.

Ms BROADFOOT: That is carer applications received.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is it the same process for foster carers and kinship carers?

Ms BROADFOOT: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: What qualifications do the assessors have?

Ms BROADFOOT: Professional staff are doing that. However, we have also started to fund Aboriginal organisations to locate and assist with the assessment.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much of that assessment is now being done by the non-government sector in the regions?

Mrs WORDEN: We have seven Aboriginal organisations that provide that support to find families, gather information for assessments and provide ongoing support and training to Aboriginal carers.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do they do the assessment?

Mrs WORDEN: No, they gather the information for the assessment. The agency does the assessment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You said that the test of eligibility is the same for kinship care and foster care?

Mrs WORDEN: Correct. The organisations which support us are Kalano Community, NT Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council, Tangentyere Council, Yalu Aboriginal Corporation and Julalikari Council.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people applied to become foster carers for this reporting period? Was it 113?

Mrs WORDEN: Sixty four.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the 113?

Ms BROADFOOT: They are still under assessment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is more than 64 applications?

Mrs WORDEN: No. This reporting period for the applications—there may be some before or after. This is actual year to date.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the longest time it takes to assess a foster carer for eligibility?

Mrs WORDEN: The average time is 30 days. It depends on the complexity and investigations which may be needed. It might be a large household where everyone needs to go through an assessment. If it is a small household that would be quite quick.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How does 64 compare to last year?

Mrs WORDEN: Applications last year for the full financial year was 192.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is tracking lower this year.

Mrs WORDEN: Yes. It is one of the challenges we have.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many children have been removed from foster parents and placed in kinship care?

Mrs WORDEN: We might take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.38

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

Mr BURGOYNE: How many children have been removed from foster parents and placed in kinship care?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 3.38.

Mr BURGOYNE: If the child does not want to leave the foster parents, is this taken into account by the department when placing them in kinship care?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, but there would be a much more holistic approach to that. I am not a professional. Karen Broadfoot is, so I will ask her to give a bit more context in regard to the things taken into account for a decision to be made.

Ms BROADFOOT: Can you repeat the question for me?

Mr BURGOPYNE: We have been told that the child's wishes are not always taken into consideration. If a child does not want to leave their long-term foster parents, is this taken into account by the department?

Ms BROADFOOT: The views of the child are always taken into consideration when we are making a decision about where a child will live. It is not the overall final decision; obviously, children of different ages and developmental stages will be a factor in how much influence they have over the decisions.

There is a focus on, where it is appropriate and safe to do so, returning children to their families. That is part of the legislative principles under which we work. If we cannot return a child to family, we work very hard to keep them connected to family.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who determines what is appropriate? If the child does not want to go, why should some overarching ideology determine what is appropriate?

Mrs WORDEN: It is actually best practice being performed, not just in the Northern Territory but across Australia and the world.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you think it is funny that children are being removed from safe family homes and taken somewhere else against their will?

Mrs WORDEN: I am not laughing about it. I am just saying that it is professional best practice. The last time I looked, you and I are not professionals in the child protection space. The staff we have do a difficult task in a complex environment where decisions are made always with the child's best interests in mind.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there always a transition period?

Mrs WORDEN: There is always a transition period, absolutely.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will I find no example of a child who has been taken off their foster parent and put into kinship care?

Mrs WORDEN: In every circumstance that I have come across, there has always been a transition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Not that you have come across—I want to know ...

Mrs WORDEN: In the ones that have come to my attention where people have said there was no transition and complained about it, there has always been ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does your department always provide a transition from foster to kinship?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, it is part of the process.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How long is that process of transition?

Mrs WORDEN: It would depend on the circumstances in each case.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It could be one day?

Ms BROADFOOT: There is a process that we go through. For example, children in care have a care team around them. It is not just the worker themselves; the school will be involved, as will other key family, the carers, professionals such as psychologists and speech pathologists.

When a decision is being made about whether a reunification is occurring or a child is potentially transitioning to kinship care, there will be a holistic assessment that will include a best-interests mapping, which is part of the Signs of Safety framework we operate under. The mapping will work through the child's views, parents' views, any worries there are, the various professionals' views who are involved in the case, then there will be a decision on the best way to go about transitioning a child.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it the court that ultimately makes that decision, not Territory Families?

Ms BROADFOOT: Not once they are in care. If they are on a long-term order or a decision is made to reunify or transition to a kinship carer during the course of that order, that can occur and be done by Territory Families.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Without going back to court?

Ms BROADFOOT: That is correct.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are there sufficient professionals in the regions to help with that assessment?

Mrs WORDEN: Absolutely.

Mr EDGINGTON: Psychologists and those type of people are in the regions to help with that?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes, there are. We are a very big agency. From time to time ...

Mr EDGINGTON: How many psychologists in Tennant ...

Mrs WORDEN: Can I finish? From time to time we see fluctuations in staffing numbers, as has every government agency. Everybody has staff shortages everywhere at the moment. We are always looking at how we can make the regions more attractive. Yes, we have practitioners in the region.

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you tell me which regions those professionals are in?

Mrs WORDEN: Every region.

Ms BROADFOOT: In relation to sourcing specialists—we recognise that there is and has been difficulty at various times because of shortage of specific professionals—Territory Families created a contract which is an allied health service contract where we are able to get psychologists, speech pathologists and other sorts of specialists and contract them to go out. Even if there is not one in a particular region, we can contract and have those people attend that region. They will contribute to those sorts of services.

Mr EDGINGTON: They are not necessarily in regions; they can be contacted as part of the contract to come in and provide that professional advice?

Ms BROADFOOT: If they are not available there, yes. We have a specific panel contract that allows us to source that expertise.

Mr EDGINGTON: They are not necessarily in the regions, but they can be used through that contract panel. Is that right? They have a contract.

Ms BROADFOOT: Largely they are, as I understand it. Where there is any difficulty in sourcing it, we have our specialist panel we can source.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the longest period of time a child has been in continuous care with one family, and then been removed into kinship care?

Mrs WORDEN: That may identify a child. I will take a moment. I do not want there to be an ability for a child to be identified.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I understand.

Mrs WORDEN: I am prepared to take a question on that on notice, with the caveat that should that child be readily identified, we will then come back with a nil answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not want to get a nil answer, so can we work through what I can ask? Why do I not ask in brackets? How many children have been in foster care for two years and then been sent to kinship care? How many have been in for three years and then—I could do it that way which means it will be, presumably, multiple children. At least if there is one you will not answer, there might be others you will answer because there are multiple kids.

The point is we hear these stories from foster carers who have had children from birth for years. That child has only really known that foster family as their home. They go back to community for visits and all of those things as appropriate. For all intents and purposes, that child is an Alice Springs kid, Palmerston kid or northern suburbs child. Against their will they have to go wherever it might be across the Territory.

That length of time is important. Surely, there is a threshold in the minds of Territory Families of when? Is there? That is a good question. Is there a number of years a child could be with a foster family where, from that point, they will not be removed and put into kinship care?

Mrs WORDEN: The whole premise of the child protection system is if the family situation is safe, then that should be a priority for that young person to be. I think there has been a lot of literature written and a whole range of case studies done where young—particularly Aboriginal—children have been removed from their families and then over time there are instances of self-harm and all of those other things. There have been many studies about what is important about the child. That is why we have the Aboriginal placement principal in legislation.

That has to be one of the priorities regarding consideration. Whilst we could focus on length of time, the priority is child safety, and another priority is about being with family so that child has a sense of identity because we know what can happen when a young person does not have a sense of who they are, culture and identity. There is plenty of evidence of that. There have been coronials that have talked about it so we have to balance all of those things. Strictly speaking you cannot just pinpoint and say X amount of time is too long.

If I was a person who had lost their child and I was working for however many years to get reunified with my child, you cannot have a dead stop threshold that says, 'I am sorry, the child has been with that family for five years, and you are no longer able to have him.'

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is not what I am asking.

Mrs WORDEN: That is actually the sort of dead stop that you are asking for.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I am asking, is there one? Also what I am more interested in is when a child wants to stay with a foster family. I can appreciate all of those other issues, but where there is maintained connection with family, visits, everything is going really well and that child wants to stay in their urban environment—perhaps they just enjoy the amenities more, whatever it might be—what emphasis is then placed on the right of that child to determine where they grow up?

That is why my question is, does Territory Families have a length of time? Maybe the answer is no.

Mrs WORDEN: I think the answer is no. There is no dead stop about that; it is ongoing. Mum or dad might be in and out of gaol or have substance abuse problems and they finally get themselves dry, which happens a lot—more than we think—and all of a sudden they get their life together and get a job and a home for the child, then Territory Families will do that unification and will do a transition if that person is found. I think it is really important that dead stop is not in place because then you will always have an opportunity to find your way back for your child.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What support is provided to kinship families following that transition from foster care? Or is it once you are back with a parent that is it?

Mrs WORDEN: I have looked at a number of issues that have come across my desk where people have complained that children have been taken off, and on every occasion when we have unpacked it that transitional care has happened and the process and all of that stuff has happened but people get attached to children. I understand that—they love those children—but at the end of day the agency has to make a professional decision about where is the best place for that child, not even just for that moment but going forward into their lives for the rest of their lives.

It is a difficult job. I am not a child protection professional—Karen is. I think we could unpack these decisions, but it will never be one circumstance for every single child as circumstances are different. I have also heard of situations where children were with a person who had manipulated them into thinking that was the best place that they should be and then actually done a whole range of things that were completely out of step with what you would expect with a carer.

To be honest, there is that saying, there is always one side of the story, then there is the other and there is the truth in the middle. I have found in all cases that have come to my attention in the last three years that is always the case.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many children have died whilst in the care of Territory Families?

Mrs WORDEN: In the reporting period? In the last twelve months, three through medical reasons, not misadventure.

Mr BURGOYNE: Did you want to elaborate on any of those circumstances?

Mrs WORDEN: I would rather not because those three children would be able to be identified. It is not because they were harmed.

Mr BURGOYNE: Not because they were harmed?

Mrs WORDEN: Not because they were harmed, no.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If a child goes back to family and problems arise again—mum and dad go back to their addiction, or whatever the case might be—and there are notifications, does the clock start from zero? Is the slate clean and that is taken as one notification? Or is all of that preceding life situation taken into account?

Ms BROADFOOT: Whenever any family has contact with the child protection system, that record is kept and accumulates. Even where there is a situation with a reunification, if there are issues that arise, new notifications and assessments are always conducted in a holistic way and will take into consideration the entire history.

Mrs WORDEN: Going back to your earlier question, Member for Spillett, about foster carers and the support they get, we heavily fund the Foster and Kinship Carers Association, and they provide that support to foster and kinship carers and all stages.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many investigations have Territory Families started in regard to foster and kinship carers?

Mrs WORDEN: I only have a year-to-date figure for substantiations rather than investigations. Are you happy to accept that?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Mrs WORDEN: In this current financial year to 25 March, there were 15 foster parents with substantiations relating to a child in care.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is that child abuse? Is there a classification, or is it just an investigation that was substantiated?

Mrs WORDEN: It is a substantiation of an investigation into an allegation of breach of care, which is harm.

Mr BURGOYNE: And what about kinship carers?

Mrs WORDEN: One.

Mr EDINGTON: Minister, have there been allegations of abuse against staff members in Territory Families? If so, how many?

Mrs WORDEN: Abuse against a child?

Mr BURGOYNE: Breach of care.

Mrs WORDEN: Within the reporting period? At the moment we think it is none.

Mr EDINGTON: Are there children in care of staff?

Mrs WORDEN: If a staff member is a foster carer, then yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me clarify. Are there some children in the care of an organisation? Do the statistics capture allegations against a staff member in a non-government organisation?

Mrs WORDEN: There is a classification of other person with duty of care or responsibility. In that, there were three that were substantiated.

Mr EDGINGTON: Where would they be from?

Mrs WORDEN: You would have to dig down to find those particular matters, but there is also residential-based care as a separate figure. In that, there was one. Then, there are other matters that we do not have data for.

Mr EDGINGTON: When you say residential-based care, what does that mean?

Mrs WORDEN: A resi-care, which is CASPA or Life Without Barriers.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is what I am getting at. There was just one case against a staff member that was substantiated?

Mrs WORDEN: Yes.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many children have been sent to Seven Emu in the last six months?

Mrs WORDEN: I will provide some context around the camp. It is run by the Jarrdimba Bayamuku Aboriginal Corporation and is based in the Big Rivers region at Seven Emu Station. It provides two types of camps, being short and long-term. The camps are for young people who are at risk of entering the youth justice system. The long camps are for ages 14 to 17 and are for a three-month period. The short camps are for ages 10 to 17.

During the Wet Season we are unable to have people at the station. That program is funded until 30 April 2025. Since it commenced in July 2020 there have been 52 camp participants, 13 of whom attended a long camp and 41 attended a short camp. We are just about to have another cohort of young people go there.

Ms KERR: Year to date, 13 young people were there, and we have another cohort about to start on 28 June with four more young people.

Mr BURGOYNE: The 13 year to date, when did they arrive at the facility?

Mr EDGINGTON: When you say 'year to date', is that up until March?

Mrs WORDEN: It is up until 25 March.

I have new advice. There are 16 there now. That does not include the 13. Three went yesterday.

Mr BURGOYNE: Three went yesterday, and they are the first who have been there for this, not financial year, calendar year.

Mrs WORDEN: Since the Wet Season ended, yes. You have to do a heap of preparatory work. You cannot just drive them and dump them. There is a lot of work with the young people. Now that the Wet Season has ended, we will escalate up.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you assess any children over the Wet so that when it breaks, they can be sent as soon as the roads are open?

Mrs WORDEN: Not every young person is suitable for that camp. There are alternatives. It is also voluntary; parents may say their young people cannot go and young people say they will not go. Then you find alternatives for them within the youth justice system.

Mr BURGOYNE: I think our whole point in this is that we have been out recently to view the facility. It is fantastic—there is no argument there—but it is about the underutilisation of it. When we hear there are three kids sent out this year and it has been open since April when everything dried up after the Wet Season,

there have been months when no-one has been there when they could have been. We have seen a lot of young people interact with Territory Families.

Mrs WORDEN: Not necessarily. We have had 52 young people through there on short camps and long camps, and it made a difference in their lives. You cannot conjure up, just because you have been out there, who is going and who is not.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, noting we have less than 30 seconds, would you like to thank your staff?

Mrs WORDEN: And it opened in May.

I thank all of the staff with me today throughout Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Territory Families. I am grateful for not only today—as it takes a lot of work, there were people in the agency pulling together the data for quite some time. I know because I have been one of them. It is an intense process that takes hours and hours. I am grateful for the amazing support I have from both agencies—not only the support, but how passionate everyone is. There is nobody in this agency or Police that is not 100% committed to their job, so I am grateful.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, thank you for appearing before the committee. Thank you, Mr Davies, for you, your team and the hard work they have put in late into the afternoon to answer some tough questions.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER MOSS' PORTFOLIOS

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND WATER SECURITY

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, PARKS AND WATER SECURITY

Mr CHAIR: Welcome, Minister Moss, to today's hearings. I invite you to introduce your officials.

Ms MOSS: It is a pleasure to highlight the important work of the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security. I am accompanied by Joanne Townsend, Chief Executive Officer; Rikki Lee Goldfinch, Chief Financial Officer; Dr Alaric Fisher, Executive Director of Flora and Fauna; Amy Dysart, Executive Director of Water Resources; Jacqui Forrest, Acting Executive Director Bushfires NT; Maria Wauchope, Executive Director Rangelands; Dr Sandra Griffin, Acting Executive Director of Environment Regulations; and Paul Purdon, Executive Director Environmental Assessment and Policy.

Mr CHAIR: I will ask you to make a brief opening statement, and I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions. I will then invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first followed by committee members, and finally other members can join in the line of questioning.

We have some new members on the committee this afternoon. I want to clarify that when we talk about whole-of-government questions, an example would be the Langouant fiscal repair strategy; you could ask questions of the department in relation to that. It is not an opportunity to ask questions outside of the whole-of-government strategy and the fiscal measures they are taking inside that strategy. If questions are asked that do not relate to the opening statement and the minister chooses to answer, that opens that line of questioning. If the minister refers to the output, I will rule on that being held to output.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms MOSS: The Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security continues to provide highly respected authoritative advice on land, water and biodiversity and to regulate environmental and natural resource matters across the Northern Territory. The department plays a key role in facilitating government's objective to deliver a balance between development, which we know is critical to support a growing population, and responsible environmental management which will protect our Territory's beautiful landscapes and waterways for future generations.

One of the key election platforms when we came to government in 2016 was delivering on environmental reform. This is a remit that has been central to our work over the last seven years. The new *Environment*

Protection Act 2019 replaced the former *Environmental Assessment Act 1982* upon commencement in June 2020. This legislation has underpinned our contemporary, best-practice environmental protection framework and served as a foundation for the ongoing agenda of modernising our policy and legislation that continues today.

It is through this framework that the Middle Arm sustainable development precinct is being assessed through a strategic assessment at the level of an environmental impact statement which is the most intensive method of assessment available. I am proud that this is the first strategic assessment of its kind offering benefits over project-based assessment by taking a landscape scale approach to assessing and managing cumulative impacts.

This year an additional \$1.8m has been allocated to support the environmental impact assessment and approvals functions of the department. The department has played a significant role in the delivery of the recommendations of the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory, being solely responsible for the implementation of 35 of the 135 recommendations and a further 13 in conjunction with other agencies.

Undoubtedly the most significant body of work undertaken by the department was the completion of the Strategic Regional and Environmental Baseline Assessment—SREBA—which is an unprecedented body of work in the Northern Territory in its scope and volume of data which completed implementation of 33 of the hydraulic fracturing inquiry recommendations.

The SREBA represented more than two years of intensive field work and data collection, research and synthesis and community engagement and data management over an area of 86,353 square kilometres of the Northern Territory, which is an area bigger than Tasmania.

It includes regional baseline studies in the domains of water quality and quantity; aquatic ecosystems; terrestrial ecosystems; greenhouse gases; environmental health; and social, cultural and economic study. Each study has been documented through technical reports and a regional report summarises and synthesises the outputs from the SREBA.

The Beetaloo region is the most comprehensively investigated and scientifically documented area of the Northern Territory. The completion of the SREBA provides a strong baseline and an evidence-based foundation for the regulation of future development in the Beetaloo region, as well as ongoing monitoring. It reflects our continuing commitment to science and data-informed decision-making.

Another area of significant work undertaken by the department in delivering on the recommendations has been the development of a policy to manage and offset the impacts of emissions from onshore gas activities such as the greenhouse gas emissions management for new and expanding large emitters policy, the greenhouse gas emissions offset policy and policy statement management of greenhouse gas emissions from the onshore gas industry.

This policy statement applies specifically to the petroleum industry and clarifies NT Government's expectations for the management of greenhouse gas emissions from the industry. Under the policy statement, all petroleum interest holders must develop a greenhouse gas management plan that, at a minimum, commits to net zero emissions by 2050 as part of the approval processes. It complements the Australian Government's reforms to the safeguard mechanism as they apply to gas activities in the Beetaloo Sub-basin.

The two large bodies of work, combined with work including an ambitious regulatory reform program to strengthen and modernise the regulation of the onshore gas industry undertaken by the department in collaboration with other agencies, will allow the onshore gas industry to transition from exploration and appraisal to production activities.

Government has recognised that the community expectations are that the onshore gas industry be closely monitored and regulated and has allocated an additional \$2m per annum ongoing to resource the petroleum operations unit to undertake this role.

Water continues to be a highly emotive issue across the community. Today I released the Territory water plan that has been developed by the Office of Water Security. The plan underwent broad consultation and sets the long-term foundations for how water is protected; supplied to our communities; and managed to meet our social, economic and cultural needs.

It includes the design and delivery of new legislative regimes for both drinking water quality and water resource management, an investment in infrastructure and innovation to increase and improve drinking water supply, as well as a strong focus on efficiency and resilience to climate change impacts and science and community participation in decision-making.

The implementation of the actions under the plan will be coordinated by the Office of Water Security. Government has committed \$13.5m over the next three years to resource this implementation.

With the release of the circular economy strategy last year, with the goal of keeping waste inside the economy and out of landfill, two discussion papers were recently released to gain stakeholder feedback on proposed changes to the container deposit scheme and approaches to the reduction of single-use plastics. This work will continue to be progressed throughout the year with waste reduction being a focus of all Environment ministers across Australia.

The community continues to voice its concerns on climate change, which is why we developed our Climate Change Response: Towards 2050. Our three-year action plan implementation on those actions is progressing well.

In addition to the development of the emissions offset policies, the NT is committed to 50% renewable energy for grid-connected electricity by 2030, which is being implemented through the Darwin–Katherine electricity system plan and an Alice Springs future grid road map to 2030 that is being developed. Additionally, the NT Government's remote power system strategy aims to deliver over 70% renewable energy penetration to 72 remote communities. Obviously those areas sit with Minister Uibo, but there are important connected policies to the work of my department.

Other foundational measures to reduce emissions include the NT Government's development and implementation of the hydrogen strategy, a master plan and the NT electric vehicle strategy and five-year implementation plan.

We are developing a comprehensive emissions reduction strategy that will outline further steps the Territory needs to take to achieve our net zero emissions by 2050 target, and a draft is expected to be released in the second half of this year.

A climate change adaptation strategy is also being developed for the Territory to strengthen the NT's resilience and capacity to respond to future climate risks and climate change impacts.

Throughout the year, the department commenced work to support the new regional ecosystem and landscape mapping program—also known as REALM—to which the government has committed \$1.75m per annum. This program will see uniform mapping of natural resources across the Territory at a suitable scale to inform regional planning, development, environmental assessment and conservation.

Over the next few months, the Mapping the Future program will be finalised, which has seen the NT Government invest almost \$10m to map and integrate land capability, water availability and significant environmental assets in strategic locations with immediate development potential. Completion of this work was delayed because of the impacts of COVID on fieldwork and resourcing allocated to the completion of the SREBA; however, it is expected to be finalised shortly.

We are seeing progress on priority actions supporting the Darwin Harbour strategy. Progress on the dredge management strategy and the mangrove retention plan is ongoing. In this year's budget, the government committed \$1.5m over the next two years for the development of the Darwin Harbour wastewater framework.

Following the release of the first Darwin Harbour integrated report card in 2021, the collation of the next report card is now under way, and the government has committed \$200,000 over the next two years to support the refinement and production of future report cards.

The department also bears responsibility for weed management, which is a fundamental part of protecting biodiversity, managing fire risk and, ultimately, protecting properties and lives. The department has continued to work more broadly across the Territory in reducing the impacts of weeds throughout the year. Our government continues to invest in the prevention and eradication of gamba across the Top End, including the overarching gamba management framework and a range of management responses.

More recently, there has been an increasing focus on buffel grass in Central Australia, and in response I have established a buffel grass technical working group that will consider the best management strategy going forward and will report back in coming months.

Bushfires NT continues to actively work with landholders to prepare their property fire management plans to manage emerging fire risk. In the 2022 Top End fire season, Bushfires NT responded to 227 wildfire incidents and a further 87 incidents in Central Australia over the 2022–23 season.

It is disappointing to note that there has been an increase in incidents of deliberately lit fires, which has placed a focus on the importance of investigations and referrals to NT Police.

I acknowledge and thank our volunteer bushfire brigades, which play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of our rural communities. Aerial firefighting has become an integral component of bushfire mitigation and response in Australia, and there is an increase in community expectation that this resource will be available in the Northern Territory.

There is a commitment of \$2.5m ongoing to enable government, through Bushfires NT, to commit to a new five-year agreement with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, providing certainty to Bushfires NT that it will have the aerial firefighting capacity to support bushfire response.

This government remains committed to restoring trust, which is being delivered through a comprehensive environmental regulatory reform program. The department continues with its legislative reform process with the passage of two bills in the last 12 months. This includes amendments to the *Environment Protection Act 2019* to incorporate chain of responsibility laws into the NT's environmental regulatory framework for onshore petroleum activities and the *Water Act 1992* and associated legislation to provide a pathway for subdivision development across the Territory and streamlined water extraction licence decision-making for those transitioning into a licensing framework, such as groundwater users in the Darwin rural area and mining activities.

There is further legislative reform to come, including managing environmental impacts of mining, improvements to the container deposit scheme and the introduction of landmark safe drinking water legislation, which will be another first for the Territory.

It should be noted that progression of these key initiatives has been undertaken alongside the department's regular advisory and regulatory functions, including compliance and enforcement, extensive services and monitoring and assessment activities.

I thank the incredible team at DEPWS for the fact that this huge volume of work has unfortunately been achieved in the face of sometimes considerable opposition and, in some cases, fearmongering in the community. We know the department is often working when there is misleading information being provided to the public as well. It demonstrates great professionalism and capability each and every day.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to acknowledge the staff members here and the broader department's resilience and their tireless commitment to ensuring that the Territory's resources are sustainably managed for the benefit of all.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the highlights of my portfolio in more detail.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the opening statement, shadow minister?

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you, minister, and thank you to all the department staff who are here this afternoon.

Given that the water plan was just released this morning, is the timing of your appearance at Estimates today a coincidence with this water plan announcement?

Ms MOSS: You would be well aware that we have been talking about the Territory water plan for quite some time. We had a draft plan that was released for consultation. We released that plan finalised to the public as soon as practicable, and it is great that we have the opportunity to talk about it today.

Mrs HERSEY: How long has the department been working on this document—weeks, months?

Ms MOSS: The work that has gone into the Territory water plan has been occurring over years. This is the Territory's first strategic long-term plan around a direction for water.

It is unprecedented in the way that it brings together the work of different departments into one plan. We obviously have the work that the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security does around water allocation and water resource management. We have major projects on the horizon like AROWS and Manton Dam return to service, which I am sure you have spoken to the minister for Infrastructure about, and then things like safe drinking water that sit under the Department of Health and the work of Power and Water. This brings it all together and represents a couple of years, at least, of work.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you know specifically how many years?

Ms MOSS: I might just hand over to Jo Townsend to talk in a bit more detail about the process, but I will acknowledge that I know the water directions paper went out for consultation with the community before I became the minister for the Environment again. That was over 12 months ago, and there was consultation on this report throughout COVID as well.

Ms TOWNSEND: The commitment to have a holistic plan for water in the Northern Territory was an election commitment. We went out with a directions paper in September 2021, which was really to try to canvass the full breadth of use and issues that would be encompassed in a holistic plan. As the minister said, the Northern Territory has never had a holistic plan for water before.

The directions paper went out, and we sought views on things like the principles in the plan, the scope and some of the ideas that had been talked about in various community discussions and political fora. We released a draft plan in October 2022 and consulted on that plan. Today's announcement is the release of that final plan.

Mrs HERSEY: Did you say October 2022?

Ms TOWNSEND: October 2022 was when we released the draft for consultation. That document was preceded by a document that was a series of issues papers captured in a directions paper.

Mrs HERSEY: You mentioned in your opening statement \$13.6m for the water plan. What will that be spent on?

Ms MOSS: It is \$13.5m. It is \$4.5m over three years. That provides for the ability for immediate rollout of recommendations and actions in the plan.

Some of the things that will be covered under that include:

- improving water security for remote communities, noting that this investment does not just sit with activities delivered by this department. This is acknowledging that Power and Water, Territory Families, Housing, Health, our agency and other agencies have a role in this as well.
- improving water outcomes on homelands
- government leadership on water efficiency, documenting the cultural value of waters
- an accelerated water science program, which is incredibly important. That goes to what I was saying in the opening statement about making sure we continue to invest in water science. We are making informed decisions about development and other things.
- supporting the Office of Water Security
- enhancing Aboriginal participation and decisions on water
- improving water planning.

There are 16 actions within that Territory water plan. Many of those actions are already in progress. For example, there is a number of Aboriginal reference groups being set up around the Northern Territory. We were clear in our intent. The feedback from the draft was pretty strong about the Territory water plan. There are a number of actions that we implemented immediately.

Some of those things I just outlined, but it also includes the appointment of the independent water controller, which was a process that has been in train for quite some time. The commitment for overhauling the *Water Act*, for example, were all things that we committed to immediately.

Mrs HERSEY: How much of this document does DEPWS have responsibility for; for example, what is DEPWS' role in Manton Dam and the AROWS project?

Ms MOSS: I will get Jo to talk to the specific role of the department in the AROWS and Manton Dam return to service project, acknowledging that it is a large project that is being driven, has involvement of the Infrastructure Commissioner and is being led by Minister Lawler. The department obviously has lots to do with that project.

I would have to run through each of the actions to tell you exactly where and how that interacts with our department. Obviously, safe drinking legislation, for example, sits with the Department of Health. We see the Office of Water Security having that important coordinating role over the strategy as well.

I will hand over to Jo Townsend to talk about the particular involvement in Manton Dam return to service and AROWS.

Ms TOWNSEND: Those significant projects will be led through the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade and Power and Water. Our role in the AROWS project, apart from being part of an overall governance group at a CEO level, will be to lead the work on the water allocation plan for the Adelaide River region.

We have received a significant amount of funding through the federal government National Water Grid Authority to run that project. That will be ...

Mrs HERSEY: What is the significant amount, please?

Ms TOWNSEND: It is \$7m.

We will not have a direct role in Manton Dam, except with my parks and wildlife hat. We will continue to manage the land around the area and keep it free of crocodiles.

Mrs HERSEY: The water plan acknowledges that water is an enabler of a \$40bn economy by 2030. Do you agree with that?

Ms MOSS: Yes, I agree with that. I have made a number of statements. Most times when I have talked about water, it is not only about its critical role in our environment and the cultural needs of the Northern Territory, but as an economic enabler. That is why it is so important that we have a strategy that pulls together and acknowledges all of the different priorities.

Mrs HERSEY: What role does the economic development considerations play in the decision-making process for water approvals from DEPWS?

Ms MOSS: It probably goes to water allocation plans and water approval process. I am not sure that is something I spoke to in the opening statement, and we can discuss that in the water outputs with the relevant supporting staff members.

Mr CHAIR: We will discuss that in the outputs.

Mrs HERSEY: Would that be Output 1.3?

Mr CHAIR: Do you want to clarify any other questions which are in outputs. We will do that next, unless you want to go back to the opening statement?

Mrs HERSEY: On page 29 of the water plan, it refers to a water charging framework in consultation with key industry sectors and stakeholders. Who have you consulted with so far regarding charging for water and what concerns have they raised with you?

Ms MOSS: In terms of the water charging framework, when I released the draft water plan in October 2022, I was clear about the water charging framework. Industry bodies—for example, NTCA and NT Farmers—are well aware of it. It is an issue I have spoken to both stakeholders, and there is a consultation meeting being

held next week with stakeholders which includes both bodies. We will be working with stakeholders on the water charging framework.

I want to be clear that the intention of the water charging framework is that most other jurisdictions have a charge on water. There is a growing expectation, and I agree that we have to put a value on our water resource and that it is an important part of its sustainable management and the valuing of it across our community and water security into the future. So far there has been, from the department and my perspective, broad acceptance that this is the direction we are moving in and that this is the expectation of those types of licence users in other jurisdictions.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that you have just announced this Territory Water Plan today and will have consultation with stakeholders next week, would you not be consulting them beforehand to see what they thought about it.

Ms MOSS: We consulted on the draft water plan, and the intention of the water charging framework was well and truly canvassed in that document. Industry representatives have had opportunities through that process to have their say on the broader plan and they have. I understand those bodies have, and I have had ongoing conversations with them about the broader plan. In terms of a specific methodology and what the charging framework itself looks like, there is a stakeholder meeting next week in relation to that.

Stakeholders such as NT Farmers have already been canvassing their members about this. They want to be a productive part of the conversation. It is fair to say there has been respectful and productive conversations so far, but in terms of specific consultations or the methodology and what the charge actually looks like, that will happen next week at the meeting.

Mrs HERSEY: The water plan speaks of both a uniform volumetric charge and a flat licence fee. Do all stakeholders support that framework? I am assuming you will find that out next week, or have you spoken about that prior?

Ms MOSS: The draft plan went out. When I released that in October, I was clear about the fact that government would be developing a water charging framework. The department has had ongoing conversations more broadly about that with different stakeholders and the community.

In terms of finalising a methodology, that is yet to happen. We expect that will be done by the end of the year.

I will hand over to Jo to talk about that in greater detail. Member for Katherine, if you have a range of questions around this, I might bring Amy Dysart to the table as well.

Ms TOWNSEND: That is an interesting question, and you are correct that there are diverse views about the amount that a charging framework might have and the application of it. This has been something that has been discussed not just as part of the announcement of the draft plan back in October, but prior to that. We are one of the last jurisdictions to consider having a price on water, for good reasons.

The idea of a flat fee is really an administrative fee that we would charge, like is charged with other permits for pastoral use or land clearing. That is not in dispute, as most applicants would consider that they would need to pay an administrative charge. It is not a significant amount of money and may be pegged to the other permits we grant.

The other consideration, beyond the amount, is about what is a reasonable method. The discussions we have had with licence holders—because we are talking to licence holders and their representatives as those impacted—is about how to balance what a charge should do to build a valuing of water and efficiency, because we value things that are priced, without having it priced in a way that may have unintended consequences, such as making it uneconomic to do business in the Territory.

There will be others in the community who will talk about volumes of licences, but that is not what we are considering. We are keen to try to make sure we balance the principle of some level of cost recovery with how we build a value of water to encourage people to look after it and become efficient in their use. It will drive efficiencies.

Also, we want to make sure that we do not make it uneconomic to do business. In some areas, these are the only water users, and they are doing other work with other costs to get that water out of the ground.

Mrs HERSEY: How do you ascertain a reasonable method?

Ms TOWNSEND: Firstly, we had a look at what other jurisdictions are doing and how they are pricing their water. Some amounts of water discussed in the public domain are the free market price of water. We can see that some jurisdictions are charging a management fee that is paid annually, and others are charging a volumetric charge, which is per megalitre.

My preference is a megalitre charge. It is something that is administratively simple. The megalitre charges across other jurisdictions range from \$5 to \$15 per megalitre.

Mrs HERSEY: I would have asked whether further consultation is taking place, but you said yes.

Is the licence fee set already?

Ms MOSS: I clarify that we are not talking about stock and domestic uses as well. I know there has been some conjecture and commentary about that. I have put it on the record a number of times, and I will do it again today. We are not talking about stock and domestic uses.

Ms TOWNSEND: I am sorry; I do not have the exact figure, but it would be comparable to the fees we charge for other permits through the pastoral land regime. There is a prescribed way to do that.

A WITNESS: About \$463 for a pastoral land application as a benchmark.

Mrs HERSEY: Who are the stakeholders that you have engaged with already?

Ms MOSS: In terms of the specific consultation around the charging framework, there is a specific consultation meeting about that next week, and the department will do that.

Mrs HERSEY: But had you not already consulted before?

Ms MOSS: The Territory water plan went out as a draft back in October; that was a broad consultation. I would have to probably take it on notice. Amy might know off the top of her head who actually put in submissions, because I know a number of our stakeholders made submissions to the draft water plan. I did not run the consultation process; the department did, but I have regular meetings with different stakeholders and talk with the community regularly. I have heard from NTCA and NT Farmers, for example. I meet with them regularly and talk to them about issues. You can imagine that water comes up quite often. We have had conversations about these issues in terms of the formal consultation that has occurred through the water plan consultation process, and there is a specific consultation process that is happening around the charging framework.

Mrs HERSEY: Just stepping back to the question before, will those charges be for all water, bore and extraction from rivers—those fees?

Ms MOSS: This is excluding stock and domestic, just to be clear, but it is for all of our licence users.

Mr YAN: You just said that if extracted from river or bore it will attract a licence fee and will fit within the water charging framework. Have you taken into account the beds and banks decisions that are currently under way with the Northern Land Council? It is possible that some of those people with an extraction licence may get slugged twice for a fee to access water under those changes.

Ms MOSS: There is a body of work still occurring around the water charging framework. Those issues will be discussed through that process.

Mr YAN: You were speaking of making sure that there would be no one disadvantaged as far as doing business. Would it be safe to say it would be possible for some of those users that they may end up getting charged twice to access water to do business?

Ms MOSS: This is the importance of us doing consultation on the water charging framework. We are committed to that. We have had ongoing conversations about the direction towards water charging for quite some time. We are now having specific conversations about what that framework will look like and are engaging in specific consultation with stakeholder groups we know will be impacted by this, will have views on it and will be able to put forward and canvass some of these issues.

It is not our intention to have a system that means investment and business in the Territory; it is an impediment to that, but it is not the intention of this at all. Other jurisdictions do this as a matter of course.

We will continue to learn from what other jurisdictions are doing, noting that we have significant differences between the way water is managed in the Northern Territory—for example, the right to allocate water is vested in the Crown here, whereas it is not in other jurisdictions. We will take all our specific contexts into consideration through that process and listen to those concerns.

We do not want this to be an inhibitor, but we need to put that value on water. It is well and truly time we do that.

Mr YAN: Has the department had any specific discussions with NLC on this issue?

Ms MOSS: I am not sure the NLC has raised that issue with us specifically. Again, consultations are happening over the next week and beyond where these issues can be canvassed.

I think it is fair to say that the department is talking to the Northern and Central Land Councils regularly about a raft of water issues.

Mrs HERSEY: Will there also be a fee for transferring a licence, renewing a licence or obtaining a driller's licence?

Ms DYSART: I like the focus on water. As part of that charging framework, as Jo alluded to, we will be looking at all components across transactions that are undertaken by the department to see what of those would make sense in the charging framework.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you have any idea what those fees would be?

Ms DYSART: That is still to be determined, but a couple to a few-hundred-dollar transaction charges are what we typically see in other parts of the business, like we already talked about. We would keep it consistent.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you have any idea what the fees will be, for example charging per megalitre?

Ms MOSS: Jo Townsend spoke to that some time ago in regard to what we have looked at in other jurisdictions and what seems potentially reasonable in the Northern Territory. I think that answer has been provided. I note that a body of consultation needs to be done, and that has not been finalised. We are having genuine consultation with stakeholders on this.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Will anyone get free water?

Ms MOSS: It excludes stock and domestic users.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What about agriculture?

Ms TOWNSEND: There is any number of permutations that we could look at. That is what the user group discussions are about trying to understand. The take of water for stock and domestic is a right under the *Water Act*, and when we refer to stock and domestic take we are talking about people in the Darwin rural area who are reliant on it for their household use as well as pastoralists who are using water for pastoral property—not horticulture, but for pasture and stock. That is exempted from licensing and considered a right.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Fortune Agribusiness will not be charged for the enormous amount of water they intend to use at Singleton Station?

Ms TOWNSEND: They will be charged. They would be seeking a water extraction licence, not a pastoral.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is different?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: So they will be charged. At what rate?

Ms MOSS: Again, Member for Araluen, we have not reached that. There is consultation occurring on the water charging framework.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Miners will be charged?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: To confirm, pastoralists will not need to pay for a drilling licence unless it is for horticulture?

Ms TOWNSEND: The minister has tried to be clear in communications early that the pricing regime would not apply to people taking water for stock and domestic purposes. That is to reassure people largely in the Darwin rural area and people outside of your electorate who would be relying on that take for their household use, but also for pastoralists who are running cattle, not growing ...

Mrs HERSEY: What if they are growing hay?

Ms TOWNSEND: If they want to seek a water extraction licence there would be some sort of pricing regime. If they want to get a driller's licence, there would be some sort of administrative fee. Driller's licences are valuable and transferrable across Australia. They are charged in other jurisdictions.

A bore work permit is the drilling of a bore to extract water. There may be an admin fee for that, yes.

Mrs HERSEY: How will the fees collected from water charges and licence fees be used? For instance, will that go into general revenue for government? Where will that go?

Ms MOSS: I imagine it will go back into supporting the functions of the department. For example, we have an admin management charge in the petroleum industry which is based on a cost recovery model for the cost of administration. We would probably be looking at something along those lines. It is under development at the moment.

Mrs HERSEY: Will water or licence fees, or a portion thereof, be paid to traditional owners?

Ms MOSS: We would almost be looking at that as cost recovery for the administration.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Mulka, do you have a question on this line?

Mr GUYULA: Why did the legislation passed early in the year not require that all water licence applications should be subject to public comment? Why will existing mines and mining management plans issued before 2019 not be subject to the same standards as all other water users?

Ms MOSS: I believe I probably answered this at the time. There are a number of mining operations that already had their activities approved through other legislation. In 2019 there were amendments that brought the mining and petroleum users into our *Water Act*. That is why we have that delineation around 2019.

It is a transitional arrangement. There have already been processes to approve those activities. There have already been opportunities for comment on those processes previously. It is recognising that. Importantly, we are bringing users into our water licence system, which means there is greater transparency with any increases to water or new water licence decision so they will be within our water licensing system.

It is important to reiterate that. It is about bringing them into a system that is more transparent. People will be able to see those decisions through the water portal like the rest of our water licence decisions. It is in recognition that they have already gone through processes where that comment has been afforded and those decisions have already been made.

Mr GUYULA: Will mining management plans be legally required to be made public so that appropriate public scrutiny of all mines' water extraction can occur?

Ms MOSS: Mining management plans sit with Minister Manison and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. Decisions made on water licences are public and are available on the water licensing portal. There is a specific website where people can look at water licence decisions and the factors that were considered in those decisions, water allocation plans and a range of other information.

Mrs HERSEY: Will water or licence fees be paid to the land councils?

Ms MOSS: I answered that question.

Mrs HERSEY: I do not recall you saying that. It was a different question.

Ms MOSS: No. The answer I gave previously was that it is a cost-recovery model; it is about covering the cost of the administration.

Mrs HERSEY: There will be none to traditional owners or land councils.

Page 30 of the water plan describes an adviser council supported by the Office of Water Security. Who will be included on the adviser council—for example, farmers, cattlemen and mining representatives?

Ms MOSS: There are a couple of actions, and those two actions are not the same. There is the water charging framework and a distinct action with the strategic Aboriginal advisory group on water. We have not gone out for the membership of that group just yet. I would imagine it would be a diverse group from around the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: The advisory council has not been decided?

Ms MOSS: No. We are also looking at a broader strategic Territory voices in water group that would involve other uses of water. It is important to note that a lot of the groups you speak of, or their representatives, are already represented on water allocation committees and in other forums and mechanisms across the department in water policy decisions and legislation that the department might be undertaking.

Mrs HERSEY: On page 32 of the water plan, it cites thousands of sacred water sites. Do you know exactly how many sacred water sites there are and their location? Is that available publicly?

Ms MOSS: There is an action within the water plan that is about the cultural values mapping of water. That body of work needs to be undertaken, and it gets talked about a lot. It is an exciting opportunity for the Northern Territory and for us to work with traditional owners to get that body of work right to lead—not only nationally, but potentially internationally—about how we do that.

No, we do not, but that is why there is specific work to be done on the cultural values mapping.

Mrs HERSEY: Do any land councils have that information? How will they come up with the information of where the sacred water sites are?

Ms MOSS: We envisage that we would be working with the land councils on that and with others who hold knowledge of that work. It is not a body of work that government can do without working hand in hand with traditional owners who actually hold the knowledge.

Mrs HERSEY: Will the existence of those sacred sites—obviously that will have an impact on whether licence will be granted?

Ms MOSS: It is important to understand that there are mechanisms to consider cultural values and impacts in regard to water allocation plans.

Ms DYSART: In relation to discussion and work with the land councils on cultural values and perspectives, we have started with a number of projects. We have been working with the NLC in the flora area, which has a number of high-biodiversity-value assets, and we have been proactively working with the TOs through the NLC, identifying sites and water requirements. That is a good example where we expect to do more work in that area.

We also work closely with AAPA and sacred sites identified through that process. A number of registered sites occur through that process, and we understand that about a third of those are associated with water. There is a good understanding of the Territory already through those other processes, so we are looking to work across all those different partners to pick up the picture of cultural values.

When it comes to licence decision-making, the Controller of Water Resources under the *Water Act* needs to consider a number of things in that process, which is set out in the act under section 90. Those are things he must consider in the process. That is where those considerations about licence decisions are made.

Mrs HERSEY: The water plan states that by 2025 the NT Government will deliver an improved water planning program. Is that the rewrite of the *Water Act*? Will an exposure draft of the *Water Act* rewrite be released prior?

Ms MOSS: It is not, but in regard to the overhaul of the *Water Act*, it is well overdue. That is largely acknowledged. I am looking forward to that work.

We know there are a lot of views in relation to water, so I expect there will be a comprehensive consultation process on changes to the *Water Act*. All our stakeholders would expect that, and the department has always done that on any major legislative change it has undertaken.

I will pass to Jo to talk in further detail about water allocation planning, which is probably the guts of what you are talking about.

Ms TOWNSEND: There is a specific commitment to a new *Water Act*. That is to deal with the criticisms the department was receiving about the series of legislative amendments to make the *Water Act* a modern act.

It is now time to get a clean piece of paper and start again. That will not be an easy process by any means. The commitment you are referring to in the water plan—I do not have mine in front of me—is in relation to the water allocation planning framework that applies in the Northern Territory, which has been in effect since the 1990s and has been protective for the Territory but essentially says we will maintain 80% of river flows in the Top End and allow for some storage depletion in the arid zone.

The fact is, when we develop water allocation plans we are careful not to provide for storage depletion, so it is timely for us to look at the water allocation framework to come up with something that is contemporary and protective of the arid zone. That is what is being raised consistently as a significant concern.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there work being done on the recharge rates into these aquifers? How is that worked out?

Ms MOSS: Absolutely. There is a lot of science that goes into the water allocation plans, which includes the recharge rates and acknowledges the different characteristics of different aquifers. That is why our water science program and work like the SREBA is so important because holding the knowledge about the aquifers helps to inform the water planning processes.

Ms DYSART: There is a lot of science that goes into making an assessment of a water resource. We talk about it in terms of the natural water balance, which considers all inputs and outputs of a system. As we know, the system—like reality—is changing every day, so we look at what the scientific tools and assessment processes we can put in place to try to replicate the understanding of the natural environment in numbers we can use to manage the system.

There is work across all of those different inputs and outputs. In the Territory we have very high evapotranspiration rates, and that is a key consideration for us that would not need to be considered so much in other jurisdictions. Our systems are quite variable with 95% of our water coming during the Wet Season. That is significantly different, and we have to grapple with it across 30 different catchment systems in the north.

It is all extremely interesting but, rest assured, we are looking at all of those different components and how we can best balance it. It is good to understand that we need to focus our attention on monitoring and ongoing management of the resource because everything is continually changing. We continue to monitor it to understand what impact the change is having.

Ms MOSS: Member for Katherine, that science is included in the water allocation plans and will continue to be included. We do those plans in greater demand, or competition for water, so that we can make sure we are making informed decisions about the resource.

It was not something we took on notice, but I have an overview of the consultation if you would like that?

In terms of the consultation on the draft of the Territory water plan, there were 26 survey responses, a number of pro forma submissions—which we often get on our environmental discussion papers—and 21 written submissions that were mostly from stakeholder organisations. Those are publicly available.

Mrs HERSEY: Just finishing off the water plan item—having grown up on a property in South Australia and being aware of the water allocation and the discussion of people owning water that do not necessarily own a parcel of land, I am thinking that will definitely be taken into consideration in the Territory and that we do not want to go down that path as it has been detrimental to farmers and landholders in other states.

Ms MOSS: Comparisons are often drawn with other water systems. The one I think of instantly is the Murray-Darling, for example. We have different regulatory regimes in the Northern Territory than a system like the Murray-Darling. The power to allocate water is vested in the Crown. You do not have perpetual rights to water being traded on the free market. If water is not being used for its intended purpose or at the level which it was requested, we still have that policy in place within the department where water can be reclaimed. We have a hierarchy of beneficial uses to make sure that if water is reclaimed it goes back into whatever the priority is within that system. We agree. We do not want to see over-allocated stressed systems as a result of bad planning or people sitting on water. It is not something that we support, and it is something that we actively prevent.

Mrs HERSEY: In the opening statement you mentioned AROWS. How much water from the AROWS project will be available for industry specifically at Middle Arm?

Ms MOSS: I think that question should have been directed to Minister Lawler. She is the lead on that project.

Mrs HERSEY: Not PwC—Power and Water?

Ms MOSS: It is an infrastructure project.

Mrs HERSEY: Will the water provided by the AROWS project be made available for agriculture and horticulture uses? If so, what amount will be set aside for those uses?

Ms MOSS: They would be questions for the Infrastructure minister, but it is an important project for water security for the greater Darwin region. It is about making sure we have water security for a range of uses. I would suggest it should be put to Minister Lawler for a more in-depth analysis of AROWS.

Mrs HERSEY: What about if I want to ask how many jobs? Can I ask Minister Kirby?

Ms MOSS: You could, but I think he would probably tell you to ask Minister Lawler.

Mr YAN: We are talking about the economy and water being crucial to part of that. We are talking about AROWS and Middle Arm now. Has the department done any scoping on possible water uses for Middle Arm?

Ms MOSS: No, not at this point. It is not something we would be doing. Middle Arm is going through an assessment process where the terms of reference have been out for public consultation through the NT EPA as a range of bodies of work that need to be completed as that goes through the environmental impact assessment process. That would be their responsibility.

Mr YAN: The department has not actually considered possible water use into Middle Arm or done any work on what that may look like if we are considering AROWS and water security for Darwin? We are talking about major industries going into that region requiring water, and if we are talking about a hydrogen project, water security forms part of that. I would expect the department to have done or be looking at doing some form of scoping work for what Middle Arm may look like as for water use and security for Greater Darwin.

Ms MOSS: Regarding Middle Arm, what that looks like, the mix of activities and what is required, the project does not sit with my department. The assessment of that project sits with my department, so there will be a range of scoping work with relevant agencies. We might provide advice for some of those different processes but in terms of the Middle Arm project, with the regulator and the assessors, NT EPA will assess that. There will be a requirement for the proponent to make sure they are doing all the scoping work required for their assessment.

Mrs HERSEY: In your opening statement you mentioned rangelands. In November 2022 a land-clearing application was approved by the Pastoral Land Board for Auvergne Station. At what time were you advised of that application, and are you aware of the details of it? For example, how big is the area that was sought to be cleared?

Ms MOSS: I do not believe I talked about that issue in my opening statement. I refer you to the outputs for that.

Mrs HERSEY: You did not talk about rangelands? Was it homelands?

Ms MOSS: Yes, I mentioned homelands. I would be happy to talk about those issues when we get there. Then we can get the relevant departmental staff at the table.

Mrs HERSEY: No worries. I might talk about Singleton Station.

Mr YAN: The Member for Katherine mentioned homelands. You talked about a safe drinking water strategy in your opening statement. Will that include outstations and homelands or only Power and Water managed communities?

Ms MOSS: Yes, it will. There has been a fantastic program rolling out across government. It is not one the department is responsible for, but it comes under the Territory water plan, which covers remote water infrastructure. We have a \$28m program over four years. The Laramba treatment plant was part of that project. We will continue to work with the National Water Grid Authority to increase the investigation into Northern Territory remote water infrastructure. That is an active conversation being had between me, the federal minister for the Environment and at officer level.

The answer is yes. The safe drinking water legislation and other components of that not isolated to infrastructure will have a positive benefit for Territorians outside of urban areas and in remote areas and homelands.

Mrs HERSEY: The Singleton Station horticultural development, which is owned by Fortune Agribusiness, is the first ever to be required by the EPA to undergo the full tier 3 environmental impact assessment process. Has any time line been put on the conclusion of this process?

Ms MOSS: I did not raise that in the opening statement. I ask that we talk about that in the relevant outputs, please.

Mrs HERSEY: Okay. I will ask some gamba questions before we go to outputs. Gamba is a significant risk to Litchfield National Park, and a number of rangers have been raising the alarm that almost 20% of the park has been invaded by the grass. However, funding has been cut this year for the resourcing of the Gamba Army—\$200,000. Will this not have a significant effect on the environment?

Ms MOSS: I acknowledge that Minister Manison answered this question earlier in the week in regard to Litchfield. There has been significant work there, and we understand how much people love and treasure the park. The rangers out there have done a really great job.

In regard to the gamba project as a whole, it is an investment of over \$1m, and the Gamba Army is a component of that. The department has been working with ...

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry, \$1m for gamba?

Ms MOSS: There is over \$1m worth of investment in managing gamba. The Gamba Army is one component of the suite of measures to address gamba in the Northern Territory, acknowledging that it is a significant issue.

It is not just the Gamba Army; there is also the herbicide program, significant education and a range of other activities that occur in regard to gamba that sit outside the Gamba Army. The investment in the Gamba Army this financial year and next provides them with a greater level of certainty about that funding and planning their activities, which is incredibly important. It is complemented by \$9.8m from the Australian Government, of which \$540,000 flowed to Territory NRM late last year. That will continue to flow out.

We are advocating to the federal government as well. We know they have a particular focus on Kakadu National Park and keeping gamba out of Kakadu, so we are encouraging them to be part of the working groups and structures we have established in the Northern Territory. We have clear investment priorities in the Northern Territory regarding dealing with gamba and where we think we can manage and eradicate it. We will be encouraging them to ensure that \$9.8m reaches where it is required.

Mrs HERSEY: Does the government have a separate budget for controlling gamba on Crown land in addition to the \$300,000 for the Gamba Army?

Ms MOSS: Are you asking whether there is a greater overall line for gamba?

Mrs HERSEY: Does the government have a separate budget for it?

Ms MOSS: I understand that DIPL does.

Mrs HERSEY: So anything to do with roadsides is DIPL?

Ms MOSS: Yes. We will continue to work with DIPL and other land managers on their rights and responsibilities. There is investment across government on this.

Mrs HERSEY: If you were to rate biodiversity risks in the Territory, where would gamba be sitting on that list?

Ms MOSS: That is a challenging question because while it might be gamba in the Top End, there are other contributors in other parts of the Northern Territory, such as feral pests, weeds and fire.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that gamba is mostly in the Top End, would that be number one?

Ms MOSS: I may ask Jo to elaborate on that. As I said, it is feral animals, weeds and fire that are the top threats to biodiversity and would suggest that gamba is a significant issue in terms of weeds as a threat to our biodiversity. That is why attracts so much attention and investment. There are other threats to biodiversity, which is why we do things like the Aboriginal ranger grants as well, to assist them to undertake conservation management activities. That might be something focused on feral pigs as an issue in a particular area or a range of other weeds.

Mrs HERSEY: Do they do anything with gamba?

Ms MOSS: Yes, there would be Aboriginal ranger groups who have a focus on gamba. I could not tell you exactly which ones, as that is a question for the Minister for Parks and Rangers, but I am aware there are Aboriginal ranger and government ranger groups that have a focus on managing gamba.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that one gamba plant produces 244,000 seeds, do you think a decrease in the budget should be happening? There is \$200,000 from previous years.

Ms MOSS: It is important to note that there has been about \$1.5m worth of investment in the establishment of the Gamba Army. The establishment of a new initiative, which we are proud to be a part of, is resource-intensive. We are now providing multi-year certainty for the Gamba Army. This is one part of our gamba response in the Northern Territory, and there is also \$9.8m worth of federal funding going to addressing this issues. That is unprecedented.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that you have the \$9.8m going toward getting on top of gamba, how much do you expect to reduce gamba by on a yearly basis?

Ms MOSS: That is information that I would need to get from Territory Natural Resource Management which is managing that program. We work with them, obviously. Our weeds branch works hand in hand with Territory Natural Resource Management mapping where the needs are and where the work needs to occur.

It is fair to say that the work has been effective so far. The Casuarina Coastal Reserve is one area I can think of. It is one of the Northern Territory Government's reserves. I am trying to mention all the ones that Minister Manison mentioned on Tuesday. Charles Darwin National Park and Litchfield were some of those priorities. There are high hopes that in this season Casuarina Coastal Reserve, for example, there will be fantastic work. I do not want to say the word 'eradicated'—and I do not think anyone wants to say them. It will be pretty close to it.

That also involves good work from volunteers as well. There are good examples in the Darwin community, whether it is the weed walkers in Litchfield who do bush walking and help with gamba in Litchfield or the Landcare group doing 'adopt a spot' for gamba in Casuarina Coastal Reserve. There are some good examples of that community collaboration.

We will continue to look at those innovative ways in which we can partner with community and different landholders to manage the impacts of gamba and other weeds.

Mrs HERSEY: You talk about Casuarina Coastal Reserve, which is probably a lot easier to get to than Litchfield, for example. You spoke about the Litchfield weed walkers, but they are volunteers. It is interesting to know how many hours those people put into their volunteering. That is incredible that those people are volunteering because, obviously, they see the importance of reducing gamba.

You just said that there was \$9.8m for gamba. Was that on top of the other \$1m for gamba? That is a considerable amount of money when there is still 20%—a lot of gamba—in the park and on the roadsides, which I pass constantly coming up and back, which I will take up with the minister for Infrastructure. There is a lot of gamba around that seems, in all the years I have been travelling up to Darwin and down, not to be reduced.

Ms MOSS: It is challenging. You are right; this is a significant challenge, and there are areas that are easier to get to than others. There are areas where you can probably enlist more help and there are more available partners, if you like, to do that work. We are committed to doing it. The work in Litchfield has been ongoing for some time, and the rangers do an incredible job. They have a deep focus on Litchfield as well.

The money from the federal government is separate, obviously. That is something that will go through to Territory Natural Resource Management.

Dr FISHER: To clarify the money, the \$9.8m is an investment by the Commonwealth Government under their national threatened species plan. It has made its own decision that the money, in the first instance, should focus on what is known as the eradication zone.

The Top End has been divided into two zones for gamba grass for the management of gamba grass. There is a zone essentially around Darwin, the northwest Top End, which is the containment zone where it is believed eradication is not feasible, and there is the rest of the Territory, including Kakadu, Arnhem Land and south of Katherine, which is the eradication zone where it is believed it is still possible to keep gamba out—and where gamba plants crop up, they can actually be successfully eradicated.

The Commonwealth's approach has been to direct that the money should be spent in making sure that the eradication zone remains secure and that is partly motivated by the fact that Kakadu is at the edge of the eradication zone. We have been engaged in discussions with them that, from a biodiversity management perspective, it is sensible to spend money in the containment zone targeting areas of high biodiversity value where management of gamba grass, even if you cannot eradicate it, would still be highly beneficial. That discussion is ongoing.

Mrs HERSEY: That would be in Litchfield?

Dr FISHER: Litchfield would be one example. The Commonwealth has already invested some funding into Litchfield to support the work that Parks has been doing there. There are other areas of high biodiversity value. For example, in the greater Darwin area you would target—and that is partly what the Gamba Army is doing—and identify areas where focused gamba grass management will have the best outcomes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the time frame for the funding of \$9.8m?

Ms DYSART: Four years.

Ms MOSS: They have \$540,000 of that already at Territory National Resource Management. It was released last year.

Mrs HERSEY: What are the penalties for land owners who fail to adequately manage gamba on their properties in accordance with the weed management plan?

Ms MOSS: We talked on this last year. There is a high level of compliance from land owners. They recognise their obligations on weed management. Our herbicide program is well utilised, and there are provisions for people who might be experiencing hardship. The department will assist them and are willing to help those who might need extra assistance to remove gamba on their property. It is not a hard line; we want to be educative and work with people first. There are times when we have to give notice, check and then give another notice before we reach the point of having to take further action. That is rare in the grand scheme of things.

Mrs HERSEY: How many notices have been given out?

Ms WAUCHOPE: We have had 1,400 roadside inspections this year. Of that, there have been 300 orders issued, and it is likely that there will be up to 30 penalty infringement notices handed out this year. It is an increase from last year, and each year we are increasing slightly. At the same time a lot of properties are doing the right thing. This year we also sent 136 recognition letters to people who are doing the right thing and have improved from previous years. We also sent out 360 advice letters.

Mrs HERSEY: Has anyone in the last year been prosecuted?

Ms WAUCHOPE: To date, we have only issued fines. We have not gone to court.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is there any government funding, federal or NT, for the management and eradication of buffel grass?

Ms MOSS: Buffel is not presently classified as a weed. I am aware of community concerns and sentiments in Central Australia about buffel and fire and fuel load. There is a range of buffel management activities that currently occur, which I will get Maria to speak on because it is important. We are also establishing the technical working group to look at the classification of buffel as a weed.

We talked about it—not all about buffel but a range of cross-jurisdictional issues—at the Environment ministers' meeting last week. Buffel was raised there. South Australia has a shared issue.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is just as big a problem as gamba, I think.

Ms MOSS: I appreciate your views and the feedback from your community about that. We understand the views and thoughts of a number of stakeholders in Central Australia, and that is why we have stepped forward with the technical working group. I am hopeful that work can be done as quickly and thoroughly as possible. That being said, there are management activities happening.

Ms WAUCHOPE: There are a number of activities that the department already does through different divisions. Bushfires works closely with Police, Fire and Emergency Services to ensure good breaks are in place. There are programs around the Todd and Charles rivers to protect the river red gums. There are also programs in parks where they are specifically identifying key biodiversity assets and protecting those.

With the GAP program you could get free herbicide. That program is not in place yet, but it might be something for the minister to look at as part of the consideration of the findings from the technical working group.

Mrs HERSEY: Every year we hear reports of the government running out of herbicide for residents to use to combat gamba with the Gamba Army on their land. What is the department doing to ensure there is not a repeat of that this year, given that herbicides are going up in cost?

Ms MOSS: We are well aware of the demand for that program. It is always well taken up and just one way we support the community and landholders in their obligations to manage weeds on their land. We have talked about it on a number of occasions.

I will hand over to Maria to talk about that in the context of this reporting period, what we are seeing and what changes we have made to make sure landholders still have the opportunity to get hold of free herbicide.

Ms WAUCHOPE: This year, through the GAP herbicide program, there were 2,152 participants, which is only 11 less than last year. Even though the herbicide cost a lot more, this year the program ran with five-litre containers, as opposed to 10-litre containers. That worked out to be a positive way to issue the herbicide and is something we will introduce next year as well.

We have already looked into herbicide prices for the following GAP season. Fortunately, it looks like the prices have gone down. That was a COVID effect, I suppose. We also still issue spray equipment to people and help out in that regard.

Mrs HERSEY: How much area does five litres of herbicide cover, for the uninitiated?

Ms WAUCHOPE: There is not a specific area, because it depends on what you are treating with it. If it is a fence line, you can cover a lot of fence line; if it is a solid, thick patch of gamba, you may not get as much. We cannot quantify and say that you would be able to spray so many hectares, but we have found that through the GAP program running for many years, we can map and keep an eye on how things are travelling.

We also did a gamba aerial survey this year, which is the first time it has been done since 2016. That was of the Darwin rural area to look at the extent of gamba spread and the density of gamba.

Mrs HERSEY: Was that the survey done in the park that showed that the gamba had spread by 9,463 hectares?

Ms WAUCHOPE: This was an aerial survey carried out in May this year, and it was only the Darwin rural area.

Mrs HERSEY: A survey of gamba in Litchfield National Park showed gamba spread by 9,463 hectares in the park between 2014 and 2021–22. In Litchfield National Park gamba has increased by 53% in the eradication zone over seven years. What additional controls are you putting in place to stop that spread? We have spoken about the Gamba Army, but what else is happening? That is a significant increase in the park.

Ms MOSS: It is, and I understand that survey was paid for and undertaken by the department. It is important that we understand the current state of play around weeds so that we can target our measures accordingly to address those issues.

Obviously Litchfield National Park falls within Parks and Wildlife. I think that questions were asked of Minister Manison specifically about gamba in Litchfield National Park, which is probably most appropriate. There are rangers through Parks and Wildlife and a range of other measures are in place, but it falls within Parks and Wildlife's estate. I will hand to Maria who may be able to add some content, but it is probably more in Minister Manison's portfolio.

Ms WAUCHOPE: I would just add that it has some Commonwealth funding it received through an external program. That is \$492,000 over two-and-a-half years and is specifically for gamba in Litchfield.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that the survey over that time has seen an increase of 53%, do you have an estimate of how much will potentially be invaded by gamba by 2031–32 with the current strategy?

Ms MOSS: The current strategy is something you would need to direct to Minister Manison as the Minister for Parks and Rangers because it goes into areas that are about management of the park.

Obviously we would not want it getting worse by 2033. We want it to get better, and that is what we are all working towards and why we are investing so heavily.

Mrs HERSEY: The grassfires from gamba are up to eight times the intensity of native grassfires and move fast and create fire ladders into upper tree canopies. What additional fire management strategies are in place to mitigate these gamba fires?

Ms MOSS: You are articulating well the reasons that we have probably the most coordinated response to gamba across government that I think we have ever had. We work well across different agencies. I have held this portfolio before, and I remember that then it was definitely nowhere near as coordinated an approach as it is now. We have much more investment in gamba than we did at that time. We have initiatives like the Gamba Army. We have some fantastic partnerships with some community groups—Landcare groups across the Northern Territory—to help manage what is a really big issue in the Top End.

I spoke in the opening statement about the aerial firefighting agreement and the funding we have in that five-year agreement to ensure we have the tools on hand that our bushfire teams need to address fire activity across the Northern Territory. That is not just in response to gamba fires. It is a really important continued investment that we put into our bushfire teams.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that there is a whole lot of money federally, the \$300,000 from the NT Government and a lot more strategy around it, hopefully this time next year when I ask you we will see a decrease in gamba.

You mentioned in your opening statement \$2.5m for Bushfires NT. What will this funding be spent on? Is that additional fire management equipment on standby for gamba grass fires, or what other things will be bought with that funding?

Ms MOSS: That \$2.5m is specifically for a cooperative national arrangement we have with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, which is about providing aerial resources to combat bushfires across Australia. Jo Townsend, as the Chief Executive, will go away with her team to make sure we have that five-year agreement in place for assistance and the cooperative relationship to address fires as we need in the Northern Territory. I will ask Jo to speak in more detail about this partnership. It is support that we need in the Northern Territory, as do other jurisdictions.

Ms TOWNSEND: It is a national cooperative agreement that has been in place for a long time. It allows for jurisdictions to plan in advance the aerial assets they want to have on standby for the coming year. We enter into an agreement for a five-year period. We are about to enter into a new five-year agreement; that is what this money is for. It allows us to say that we need, for example, four fixed wing and three aerial assets to be on standby this year so we are not ringing around when there is a fire. It means they are ready and waiting for when they need them for the fire season.

We still have to pay flying hours, but it is largely standby costs. We provide aerial response to wildfire, not just in the areas that Bushfires NT looks after, but also the area that NTFRS looks after. We maintain both the specialised skill in our Bushfires NT staffing and the equipment that is needed to access aerial assets.

It is an important firefighting response for the Northern Territory. Increasingly, there is an expectation that there will be an aerial response. Having the new Bushfires headquarters next to the airstrip is also helpful for us to deploy those assets.

Mr GUYULA: Ranger groups in my area have reported that obtaining insurance for fire management work on country has become expensive and is getting more and more difficult to access. Given that this work is essential in protecting country and communities from dangerous bushfires and reducing the NT's carbon emissions, how does the NT Government support Aboriginal ranger groups to access this insurance? Do the ranger groups have access to any subsidies to minimise the cost?

Ms MOSS: I understand that we do not manage their insurance arrangements or accept their liability. I would be happy to have a further conversation with you so we can understand some of those challenges in more detail and make sure we look at where in government might be able to provide some assistance in that regard. It is not something that currently the department takes on for Aboriginal ranger groups.

We know they undertake a range of important projects in fire management. I am happy to work with you to understand that better and see if there is a way we can assist with that issue.

Mr GUYULA: For TOs who want to do fire management across their country, what support does government provide?

Ms MOSS: There is a range of Aboriginal ranger grants that are administered through Minister Manison's portfolio. It is through our department, but it is the responsibility of Minister Manison. I spoke earlier about the use of those for weed management, but they can also support fire management and fire projects, as they have done.

I encourage ranger groups to look at grants that are available for distinct projects as they can support a lot of programs. The next round of grants is at the end of July.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES Output 1.1 – Flora and Fauna

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 1.0, Natural Resources, Output 1.1, Flora and Fauna. Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: Has the 2022–23 waterfowl annual aerial survey been completed, and has a decision on bag limits been arrived at for the upcoming season?

Ms MOSS: I am smiling because I remember this question from last year. In terms of the timing, we have fallen into the same timing as last year. The aerial surveys are complete. They were undertaken throughout April and May. I do not have the decision in front of me, but there is a management plan in place that talks about the population threshold and sets the seasonal bag limits.

I envisage that I will have that soon and that it will be announced soon.

Mrs HERSEY: Can I take that on notice?

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

Mrs HERSEY: Has the 2022–23 waterfowl annual aerial survey been completed, and has a decision on bag limits been arrived at for the upcoming season?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Respectfully, I will not because I have answered the question. A decision has not been made and the aerial surveys have been completed.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there no decision on bag limits yet?

Ms MOSS: There is no decision on bag limits yet because the aerial survey data has to be analysed. That will then be provided with advice for the final decision. That has not yet been made.

Although the surveys are complete, they need to be analysed in conjunction with the management plan so that we can set the bag limits.

Mrs HERSEY: When will that be available?

Ms MOSS: It will be done as soon as possible.

Mrs HERSEY: Will that be in a couple of weeks or a month?

Ms MOSS: We are talking weeks, not months. You can put in a call to the office, but as soon as we can we will make that decision. We know that those who enjoy hunting are keen to find out. Generally, this happens around the same time each year, but we have to analyse the data.

There were promising population numbers last year. We saw the low number in 2017, but it is on the rise since then, which is positive for magpie geese and those who want to hunt, but the decision has not yet been made.

Mr CHAIR: The minister has answered the question. She cannot provide the data, so she will not take it on notice. I am sure Bart is watching and intently got that answer.

Mrs HERSEY: Maybe this will go into the previous answer, but last year the department observed an 89% increase in population. Has that continued throughout this year? But you have not done it yet.

Ms MOSS: The surveys have been done, but obviously the analysis is still occurring.

I am happy to hand over to Alaric to talk about what that is looking like at this point, which I think is probably the conversation that we had last year.

Dr FISHER: The surveys have been done. There is a slight delay compared with last year simply because it was unusually windy over parts of the last month and a half. Some of the scheduling was disrupted. It is quite hard to reorganise flying transects across a large amount of the Top End at short notice. We have done the work and collected the data. It is close to being finalised.

The informal observation from the people doing the surveys was that there are fewer birds this year than last year. That is as predicted because the Wet Season before last was poor. There is always a lag of a year. The population in any one year reflects what has happened, particularly in breeding, in the season before that.

There are still healthy numbers of geese and particularly encouraging, because this year's Wet Season was good, there is a lot of nesting this year. That will be reflected in an increase in the future. The bag limit last year was already at the maximum that the management plan allows for, so it will not go up.

Mrs HERSEY: The SREBA has been completed; is that correct?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: What ongoing information will be collected, and how will that be managed?

Ms MOSS: The SREBA is completed. It is a mammoth body of work, and you have the right public servants at the table. Alaric Fisher was an instrumental part of SREBA in collating and summarising that data.

It went across six study domains: water quality and quantity; aquatic ecosystems; terrestrial ecosystems; greenhouse gas emissions; environmental health; and social, cultural and economic. It provides that important baseline data. There are many technical reports in this SREBA, and each one is online. People can find that information publicly.

It is important that this is not seen as the end of that data program. I will hand over to Alaric in a moment to talk about the potential continued monitoring and data collection program, but also the other potential uses for that data. It is data that will inform development activity in the region, but also a body of work that we can learn from in terms of other decisions made in other regions.

Dr FISHER: It is important to recognise that the SREBA was a baseline assessment. That baseline has been established, so the SREBA as an entity is finished.

It has built up, collected and collated large datasets. They are all stored in a data management system that the SREBA established, as well as in some of the interesting databases that the department has anyway.

Assuming that the industry goes ahead in that area, there will be a whole lot more information that accumulates over time. It is important that we capture it and add it to the existing data because it will all be of value. For example, it is incredibly expensive to drill holes kilometres deep into the ground. It is really only through the gas companies doing that and reporting the information that they get from those in terms of the geology and the hydrogeology that you get additional understanding of, for example, the deep aquifers in that system.

The data management systems exist and continue to capture that data, and there are obligations which are established under the regulatory regime, for example for the industry to provide data back to the department or regulator. For that data to be made publicly available, there will also be obligations on companies to monitor various things as part of their approval condition. It is important that the information continues to be captured and organised in a way that everyone can access it.

The final report from SREBA also foreshadows the need to consider what additional monitoring should go on in the region. That is a future decision for government in terms of the ongoing management of the industry. The information and understanding collected through the SREBA will inform the sorts of monitoring that needs to be done. That information will be captured into those data management systems and will be available for the regulator to use in terms of their decision-making processes and also reporting back and publicly accessible reporting of any future impacts from that industry.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Has that work been fully completed? The SREBA is finished?

Dr FISHER: It is finished.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You suggested there is a need for ongoing monitoring. Is anyone engaged to do that?

Ms MOSS: There have been a short number of recommendations that were made through the SREBA about the ongoing monitoring which will be considered by government. As the minister for this department I am committed to the ways in which we continue that program, noting that in the Territory water plan we have a commitment to continue our water science program. Within the agency we will do what we can to continue to collate that data.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Who paid for the SREBA work?

Dr FISHER: When government was considering how the inquiry recommendation should be implemented, the Pepper inquiry recommended that the industry should pay for the SREBA and a lot of other things associated with regulating the industry. Government accepted that regulation and came to a decision that industry should cover the costs of the SREBA but that should be done through a cost-recovery basis if the industry developed into production.

Treasury subsequently worked on how that cost recovery should work, and it is essentially a levy on wells. As wells develop there will be a levy that will gradually pay for the cost of the SREBA.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much did it cost?

Dr FISHER: It cost \$11.13m.

Ms MOSS: It is important to note that there were other bodies of research happening in the Beetaloo at the same time. There was a Commonwealth Geological and Bioregional Assessment Program, and the Gas Industry Social & Environmental Research Alliance also did some work.

Mrs HERSEY: Are there currently any emergency weed management plans under Part 3, Division 4 of the *Weeds Management Act* that have been approved and gazetted to date?

Ms MOSS: I will have to take that on notice. I am sure that we can get that information quickly.

Question on Notice No 4.1

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

Mrs HERSEY: Are there currently any emergency weed management plans under Part 3, Division 4 of the *Weeds Management Act* that have been approved and gazetted to date? Are any currently being planned?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.1.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you know how many weed control notices have been issued in the past year to individual parties?

Ms MOSS: I think we are going into Output 1.2, Rangelands. I am just clarifying whether you had more for Flora and Fauna.

Mrs HERSEY: Soy and wheat?

Ms MOSS: Also Rangelands. Weeds will be under Rangelands, 1.2.

Mrs HERSEY: How many people are employed in the weeds management branch, and can you break that down by Darwin, Katherine, Tennant and Alice?

Ms MOSS: Member for Katherine, weeds is in 1.2.

Mr CHAIR: Anything related to weeds is the next output.

Mrs HERSEY: What about feral animals?

Ms MOSS: Yes, we can do feral animals here.

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry about that. In the past few years, the control and management of feral animals has become an issue for pastoralists and other residents in the remote and rural areas of the Territory. Have there been any changes to the guidelines for the use of 1080 poison or any other methods of controlling feral animals? It is definitely around Adelaide River.

Ms MOSS: I am aware of Adelaide River. There is a range of agencies, and local government needs to be involved in that response. It does not fall within the remit of my department.

Dr FISHER: There have not been any changes in relation to regulation of 1080. It is a highly regulated poison, and we have to meet very stringent requirements to use it. There is clearly growing public—well, not public. Sectors of the community are agitating against the use of 1080. That will become an increasing problem in the future use of that effective feral animal control mechanism. There is no change to the regulation.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the process for residents to request help with feral animals on Crown land in areas like Howard Springs?

Ms MOSS: I would suggest that is something they would need to raise with DIPL. Crown land is Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. It is their land and responsibility as land managers.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Rangelands

Mr CHAIR: We now move to Output 1.2, Rangelands. I reckon we will have some questions on weeds.

Mrs HERSEY: How much land is being cleared for the Sun Cable project?

Ms WAUCHOPE: The footprint itself where the panels will be is 12,000 hectares. I cannot tell you how much land is in the pipeline corridor because some of it will be in land that is already cleared, such as the railway corridor or other infrastructure corridors. We have not received an application for that at this moment.

Mrs HERSEY: What will be cleared? Will it be all flora and fauna—everything cleared?

Ms MOSS: I will get Maria to talk about the process for that. I hope it is not—it needs to be well managed.

Ms WAUCHOPE: My understanding is the whole footprint will be cleared as part of that project.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that 12,000 hectares will be cleared, is anything endangered in there?

Ms MOSS: They would have to identify and do that work as part of their environmental impact assessment process.

Mrs HERSEY: None that you are aware of?

Ms MOSS: Off the top of my head—I do not have the document in front of me—if there were threatened species or habitat that is particularly important, they would have to note that, survey it and have a management plan to minimise impact. That is standard.

Mrs HERSEY: How many solar panels will be made in the Territory for this project?

Ms MOSS: That is not a question for this agency.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Katherine, it might be worth holding that for the Major Projects Commissioner and the Chief Minister. Anything related that is not environmental, I suggest you ask the Chief Minister.

Mrs HERSEY: In November 2022 a land-clearing application was approved by the Pastoral Land Board for Auvergne Station. At what time were you advised of that application, and are you aware of the details of it? For example, how big is the area that was sought to be cleared?

Ms MOSS: Maria has the detail on what was sought to be cleared. I am well aware of Auvergne Station and the circumstances around it, but I will hand to Maria to speak to the specifics—actually, Jo, if you would not mind.

Ms TOWNSEND: That was an application made under our simplified pastoral land-clearing application. Those applications are delegated from the Pastoral Land Board to me or Maria as the Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Director. The application was for 924 hectares of native vegetation for pastoral purposes, which also included a trial cotton crop of around 249 hectares. That was amended ...

Mrs HERSEY: Two hundred and forty-nine of that 924?

Ms TOWNSEND: That was the original application. The applicant agreed to amend the application to reduce that footprint, so the granted permit was actually for 923 hectares. That resulted in legal action against the permit from the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory and the Northern Land Council.

Mrs HERSEY: The land-clearing permit was later challenged in the Supreme Court by the Environment Centre and the Northern Land Council. You are aware of those actions. What is your understanding of the claims in the NLC action against the board?

Ms MOSS: I am aware that there has been action taken. One of those has been withdrawn. I will ask Jo to talk on the substance of the other existing action, noting there are matters still before the court.

Mr CHAIR: Before you hand over, I remind members of Standing Order 109, specifically subparagraph three about legal opinions. I know you did not specifically ask for their legal opinion, but any commentary on a proceeding that is potentially still ongoing may be interpreted as an opinion of a legal nature. If the minister and the CE believe they can respond to that without breaching the manner and form of questions, they can.

Ms WAUCHOPE: The Northern Land Council has been public in its view that the application was, in its opinion, a breach of native title rights and not affording procedural rights to native title holders.

Mrs HERSEY: What was your role in the legal proceedings? Did you or your office take an active role in the planning of the defence of the Pastoral Land Board?

Ms MOSS: I do not have a role in those proceedings.

Mrs HERSEY: Did you or your office seek Solicitor-General's advice on behalf of the Pastoral Land Board to assist with their defence in the Auvergne action?

Ms MOSS: I do not have a role in the proceedings, so, no, I have not. This is a matter that is happening at a departmental level, and there are elements of this that are still active.

Mrs HERSEY: Did you have any contact with the federal Environment minister regarding Auvergne Station and the land-clearing permit after it was granted by the Pastoral Land Board?

Ms MOSS: From memory there was a piece of correspondence that outlined existing legislation in the Northern Territory that I sent to the federal Minister for the Environment and Water. Obviously when there are different matters that involve different levels of government, we share information about our regulatory settings and the legislation that exists in the Northern Territory, such as the sacred sites legislation and other legislation that might have an overlay. Yes, I have corresponded and it was a flat factual about our existing legislation in the Northern Territory that governs these matters.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that you are obviously aware by what you just said, that there is consultation ongoing regarding a rewrite of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989*, has the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security had any input into that consultation?

Ms MOSS: In terms of the review of the sacred sites act, it is really a conversation that needs to be had with the Attorney-General as the relevant minister. We have conversations with AAPA about matters like sacred sites.

Jo as the CEO of the department has had a briefing on that. We will seek to ensure that we are part of that process, and any concerns raised with us are part of that process as well.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that you know the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* is being reviewed and you knew what was going on with Auvergne, is there a conflict that you would mention that to the federal Environment minister?

Ms MOSS: Mention what, Member for Katherine? Can you clarify what I mentioned that would be a conflict?

Mrs HERSEY: You said that you had been in contact with the federal Environment minister regarding Auvergne Station and the land-clearing permit that it was granted by the Pastoral Land Board, but you also know about the review of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*.

Ms MOSS: I am not particularly clear on why being aware of the review of the sacred sites act and communicating with a federal minister on what legislation exists in the Northern Territory would be problematic.

Mrs HERSEY: There is an advisory committee. Does DEPWS have a place on that committee?

Ms MOSS: On what committee? Is this in terms of the review of the sacred sites act?

Mrs HERSEY: Correct.

Ms MOSS: I am not aware of the membership of the working group. I know that Jo, as the CEO of the department, has had a briefing on that. We communicate often with AAPA on a range of different matters and will continue to do that.

Questions on the review process would be best directed to Minister Paech who is responsible for the review of that act.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you explain or go into more detail about what you communicated to the federal minister in regard to that matter?

Ms MOSS: As I already stated, advice was sought from the Northern Territory about our existing legislative frameworks on this issue. There was an injunction sought, and we provided advice in relation to that.

Ms WAUCHOPE: The Commonwealth minister wrote to the Territory government. They had a request in it for an application under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act*, which is Commonwealth legislation. The NLC lodged two applications under that legislation and then sought advice from the Northern Territory Government as to what our acts were and what the situation was. This is why the minister responded.

Ms MOSS: I understand it is a part of her legislative responsibility as well to be seeking advice from the relevant jurisdictional minister.

Mrs HERSEY: It is probably natural that DEPWS would have input, given that the *Pastoral Land Act 1992* includes to recognise the right of the Aboriginal person to follow traditional pursuits on pastoral land. Is it part of the DEPWS mandate to work with sacred site custodians?

Ms MOSS: We work with traditional owners on matters across the department. Are you asking us in what way we are working? That would probably be easier for us to answer. We work with traditional owners on a range of different matters and with land councils to seek the views of traditional owners on a range of matters.

Mr YAN: I need to backtrack a little. What was the name of the permit that Auvergne Station applied for? You said that it was a general pastoralist clearing ...

Ms TOWNSEND: It was a simplified pastoral land-clearing application.

Mr YAN: What sort of permit would Sun Cable be applying for to do the clearing on 12,000 hectares?

Ms MOSS: The Sun Cable project would not go through the simplified process. It depends on the land and whether it is zoned or unzoned. Sorry, I will start again.

For the permits and land clearing, decisions are made under both the *Planning Act* and the *Pastoral Land Act*. Obviously, the *Pastoral Land Act* is for clearing that is happening on pastoral land and under the *Planning Act* on unzoned and zoned land.

Ms WAUCHOPE: The footprints where the solar panels will reside, I suppose, is pastoral land, so it would go through a standard pastoral land-clearing application. It is a process that takes six months, whereas the pipeline corridor or the power corridor, because that goes across different land tenure types, would have a different application. There might still be some pastoral land, and that would still be a standard application, but unzoned land would fall under the standard development application process under the *Planning Act*.

Mr YAN: What is the difference then—pardon my ignorance—between a standard and a simplified pastoral land clearing permit?

Ms MOSS: The simplified process is a shorter process for some to go through. There has been a small number of those. Between 1 July 2022 and 31 March 2023, there were two of those that came under the simplified land-clearing process. That is a six-week process for those that meet a number of different criteria:

- the extent of the clearing not being over 1,000 hectares
- a single clearing area not exceeding 500 hectares
- proposed use to be non-irrigated

- Proposed use must be for pastoral purposes.
- Land must be unconstrained.
- The application must meet Schedule 1 of the NT Pastoral Land Clearing Guidelines.

There are still some that will have to go through the standard process, and some will meet the criteria and be able to go through the simplified process.

Mr YAN: Even under the standard pastoral land-clearing permit, Sun Cable could still be challenged by the Environment Centre of the NT or either of the land councils, correct?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Water Resources

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Water Resources.

Mrs HERSEY: The Singleton Station horticultural development, which is owned by Fortune Agribusiness, is the first ever to be required by the EPA to undergo the full tier 3 environmental impact assessment process. Has any time line been put on the conclusion of this process?

Ms MOSS: I understand the referral was accepted, and the public exhibition closed on 13 February. It is going through the EIS process. There will be a high level of opportunity for community engagement throughout that process. That all still needs to happen. I am double checking if I have the time line, but essentially we have time lines for the assessment of different projects. It is currently sitting with the NT EPA. There is no advice to me at this time.

Mr PURDON: It is actually in the environment output, but I will answer now that I am here. The EPA is preparing a terms of reference for that environment impact statement. The timing of the process from here is not one I can put an exact number of days or months on; it depends on a number of factors. The process is a number of steps, and the steps in the process that sit with the EPA all have statutory time frames. When the process is with a proponent, you prepare documentation and gather information that is for the proponent to do as quickly as they feel like.

That is an unknown for me or anyone. The proponent probably does not know how long that will take until they get the terms of reference from the EPA.

I am happy to talk through the process and give you the statutory time frames for each step where there are, but I cannot give you a timing on when that process will complete.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Katherine, may I suggest that, knowing that will be fairly detailed, we hold off until after the break when we get to Output Group 2.0, Environment.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Katherine, do you have any more questions related to 1.2? If so, the minister is happy to do them as weeds.

Mrs HERSEY: I have a lot that are all pertaining to Singleton Station, so is that 1.3?

Ms MOSS: If we are talking about water, it is 1.3. You indicated you had some questions about weeds, that was all.

Mr CHAIR: The minister is giving you the option to have those discussions if you want to or to move on. It is up to you.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.1

Ms MOSS: I understand that there are no emergency declarations in place regarding weeds.

Mrs HERSEY: Undergoing an EIS is the highest level of environmental assessment. Does this set a precedent for future agricultural developments? In other words, can we expect other agricultural projects to be subjected to the same processes and delays?

Ms MOSS: There is a threshold question on projects. Not every project will be required to go through an EIS process. There is a clear process for that regarding self-referral and projects that people identify which may have significant impacts on the environment. The answer is the same as it always has been: if you have a project that may need to be referred for an EIS, that is what proponents should do. That is irrespective of whether it is an agribusiness or anything else.

Mrs HERSEY: Does requiring this level of assessment and potential duplication of work conflict with the goal of the NT agribusiness and aquaculture strategy 2030 to grow the sector to \$2bn by 2030?

Ms MOSS: Mr Chair, I seek clarification. If the questions pertain to water resources and the water element, they are under 1.3. If we are talking specifically to the process under the NT EPA, that is under 2.1. I want to make sure that I have the relevant people at the table to answer the questions.

Mrs HERSEY: This all about Singleton Station.

Mr CHAIR: The question relates to output 2.1. She wants to defer it to that. Was there anything in water resources and bushfires? If not, we can get straight to the output you are seeking.

Ms MOSS: I think there are two parts to this if you are interested in this particular issue. There is the water licence and the EIS. If you have one for water resources, that is what we are in.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the status of the legal challenge to Singleton's water licence? What has the department's role been in that action?

Ms MOSS: That is still before the court, so there is a judgement to be made. The department is a party to that.

Mrs HERSEY: Does the Western Davenport draft water plan support the grant of a stage licence like that provided to Singleton Station? In other words, under the draft plan, is there sufficient water to support the project?

Ms MOSS: I will ask Jo Townsend to talk on this in a moment. Obviously the Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan has been out for community consultation. I believe that closed not that long ago. I cannot remember the date. It is not currently before me for a decision. It will not be too far away. That has not been finalised. In terms of the draft plan and consumptive pool, yes is the short answer on if there is enough water for that type of allocation. The draft plan, as it stands, has a lower estimated sustainable yield than the previous plan. At present, there is no plan in place. We are waiting to finalise it so that there is a plan in place in the Western Davenport region.

Mr BURGOYNE: What will this new sustainable yield be as part of this new plan?

Ms MOSS: I will preface it by saying the plan has not yet been finalised. We are talking about the estimated sustainable yield identified in the draft plan.

Ms TOWNSEND: The public consultation on the draft water allocation plan for Western Davenport closed on 15 May. We are considering the feedback we have received through that process. There needs to be one final meeting with the water advisory committee. That is expected in July, then we will be in a position to put a decision to the minister.

The draft plan that went out estimated a sustainable yield of 87.7 megalitres per annum, which is less than the previous declared plan. The estimated sustainable yield of 87.5 megalitres is from a stored volume of 135 million megalitres estimated to be in that system. It seems like a large volume, but in the context of the stored water, it is not. Nonetheless, it is a region and plan that has attracted a lot of commentary and concern, so we need to take careful consideration of feedback.

Mr BURGOYNE: What is traditionally the allocation for agricultural and other use and the environment when talking about a water resource in percentage terms?

Ms MOSS: It will be different depending on different resources. The consumptive pool for different areas will look different. We have a hierarchy of beneficial uses. There are environmental and cultural flows, Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves and other uses. It can look different depending on how much water is available.

Ms TOWNSEND: As the minister said, it will depend on the region and resource. Overwhelmingly, the declaration of plans is based on maintaining environmental and cultural values in a region first and foremost and at significant levels. In the Top End, most plans would aim to have maintenance of river flows at 80%. In the arid zone—I mentioned this earlier—the planning framework or general rules we have allow for storage depletion. Where there is a plan, it is generally small levels of storage depletion or based on recharge only. The only exception to that is in Alice Springs, where there is an allowance for storage depletion because there are limited options there. It is the desert. The development of a plan will prioritise environmental benefits.

Mr BURGOYNE: Traditionally it is 80% for the environment and 20% for other use. In the Western Davenport Ranges what percentage of the resource is being allocated in the new draft plan?

Ms TOWNSEND: That system is based on the management of stored water. There is an estimation of 135 million megalitres, and the allocation estimate set in the draft is 87.7 which is across two resources. Our view is that if 100% of people were using that 87.7 megalitres consistently, over 100 years 6% of that resource would be depleted. That is not taking into account any recharge; we take recharge out of the equation. We know there is recharge there, but it is not a reliable annual or even every five years, but over a 50 year period there will be definitely have recharge of significant volumes.

Mr BURGOYNE: We could use 87.7 megalitres for 100 years and only deplete the aquifer by 6% with no recharge?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: At the end of April it was announced the Territory would hire an independent Controller of Water Resources, Andrew Johnson. Has he started, and is he full time or on contract?

Ms MOSS: The announcement of the independent Controller of Water Resources is a process which started some time ago. There was a national recruitment for the role, and it is indicative of the expectations of the community and the growing interest of our water resources. Andrew Johnson was announced as the independent Controller of Water Resources in April and has been effective in that role since 1 May when he took over the functions and operations of the water controller. He is not a full-time employee of the department but is 0.2 FTE. He will be performing an important function for water resource management across the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: Is he located in the Northern Territory?

Ms MOSS: No. He is located in South Australia, but he has significant understanding of our circumstances. He has done work in the Northern Territory, including chairing the Western Davenport Allocation Plan advisory group. He has significant national and international experience in water management, and the added benefit is we have to consider potential conflicts. We want him to act independently, and he will be able to prove that in the role.

Mrs HERSEY: Last year we spoke about applications for water licences and variations. You said that approximately one quarter were processed within 90 days and half within 200 business days. Could you give me the figures for this year?

Ms MOSS: There continues to be a steady demand for water extraction licences, and there are approximately 70 to 80 transactions per year. Sixty-five licence transfers, amendments and renewals were processed within an average of 52 business days, and 75% were completed within the target of 80 business days.

Mrs HERSEY: The 80 business days, was that the longest amount of time that the department took to process a water licence or variation to an existing licence?

Ms MOSS: The target is 80 business days. There were 35 that were still in progress; 75% were completed within the 80 business days, and the other 25% were not.

Mrs HERSEY: Were any of them challenged either through internal review or in the courts?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: How many were challenged?

Ms MOSS: Can we take that on notice? I imagine we will get that information quite quickly.

Question on Notice No 4.2

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

Mrs HERSEY: How many of those ended up being challenged, either through internal review or in the courts? Of those challenged, how many of those decisions were reversed?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.2.

Mrs HERSEY: How much did the department spend defending decisions on water licences in the past year?

Ms MOSS: I need to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.3

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

Mrs HERSEY: How much did the department spend defending decisions on water licences in the past year?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.3.

Mrs HERSEY: Last year, you said that eight water licences were declined in 2021, so how many were declined in 2022?

Ms MOSS: I understand that for the period to 31 March 2023, there was one application for a declined renewal out of 79 water extraction licence applications.

Mrs HERSEY: Was there one declined?

Ms MOSS: There was one declined renewal.

Mrs HERSEY: Was that out of 73?

Ms MOSS: It was out of 79 water extraction licence applications.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.2

Ms MOSS: We had three requests for review under the *Water Act* and no decision reversals.

Mrs HERSEY: Were there none challenged?

Ms MOSS: There were three requests for review under the *Water Act* and none reversed.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.3

Ms MOSS: There was \$41,000 for legal advice, and the rest was internal advice from SFNT.

Mrs HERSEY: Also last year you said that there were 45 administrative variations of water licences. The answer to questions on notice stated there were no decreases in water allocations for 2021–22. Do you know the figures for variations over the last year?

Ms MOSS: I understand that, out of the 79 water extraction licence applications, 39 were for administrative variations.

Mrs HERSEY: Of that declined one that you got back to me on, why was that declined?

Ms MOSS: I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.4

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

Mrs HERSEY: Why was the one water licence declined?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.4.

Mrs HERSEY: Have there been any expressions of interest or applications to access the Aboriginal strategic water reserves in the past year? Last year there were none to date. If so, what is the status of those expressions of interest or applications, please?

Ms MOSS: Obviously we established the policy framework for those Aboriginal strategic water reserves in 2017. We put it into legislation in 2020. We are still finalising consent provisions with the land councils. We are hoping that will be resolved soon and over the course of this year to ensure that Aboriginal people are seeing the benefits of that Aboriginal water reserve.

It is incredibly important to note that there are no other jurisdictions in Australia that have been able to apply this concept to the same extent that we have in the Northern Territory because of our low levels of water allocation and because the Crown is able to allocate water across our regions.

We will continue with that. It is a priority of mine to make sure we are seeing Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory see the economic benefit of the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve.

Mrs HERSEY: You mentioned consent provisions. Can you explain a bit more about that, please?

Ms MOSS: I might ask Amy Dysart to talk more about that process, the conversation we are currently having and what that looks like regarding the consent provisions.

Ms DYSART: The consent provisions talk about the role that the land councils will have in giving consent for the utilisation of water under the Aboriginal water reserve and eligible landholders. We have been in discussions actively with the land councils at the moment about this and resolving how that consent process will work effectively within their responsibilities of the *Water Act*.

Mrs HERSEY: We were talking about water in the plan before. Water trading has been in place for some time. Can you tell me how many water trading applications there have been in the last year and how many were approved and denied? Last year there were 12 and zero denied.

Ms MOSS: There were no applications for trading licence water in that period.

Mr BURGOYNE: To go back to the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves, are there currently applications before you that have not been able to progress because of those consent provisions?

Ms MOSS: No, there are no applications before us. We are working through the consent provisions.

Mr BURGOYNE: What are the biggest issues you are running into currently?

Ms MOSS: In the conversation about the consent provisions?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Ms MOSS: Again, I will hand over to Amy to talk about the status of those conversations. It is something we are continuing to work through.

Ms DYSART: The considerations that are occurring is as I alluded to before. It is about the interaction between what has been set out already in the legislative changes that occurred to the Aboriginal water reserve in 2019.

The policy was developed a number of years before then, then it has come into the legislation. As time passes, it can get trickier when you are then trying to apply today things that had come through a process that is taking longer than that. Sitting alongside that are the land councils' responsibility under the Aboriginal lands act. It is getting those two things to sit together.

Mrs HERSEY: When the now Chief Minister cancelled the water licence for the proposed farm at the 12,000-acre Larrimah Agricultural Precinct, she said that NT Land Corporation would be free to reapply in December 2022 and 5,700 hectares was leased by the Land Corporation to Larrimah Farms. Can you please tell me have Larrimah Farms applied for a water licence again?

Ms MOSS: We would have to take that on notice and double check. I am not aware of that.

Question on Notice No 4.5

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

Mrs HERSEY: When the now Chief Minister cancelled the water licence for the proposed farm at the 12,000-acre Larrimah Agricultural Precinct, she said that the NT Land Corporation would be free to reapply in December 2022 and about 5,700 hectares was leased by the Land Corporation to Larrimah Farms. Has Larrimah Farms applied for a water licence?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.5.

Mrs HERSEY: There is an extra \$3.8m in the budget for the Darwin Regional Water Supply Infrastructure Program. Does this relate to the Manton Dam works?

Ms MOSS: No, that relates to the remote water infrastructure program. Can you clarify the figure for us?

Mrs HERSEY: What I just read out?

Ms MOSS: Yes, please.

Mrs HERSEY: There is an extra \$3.8m on BP3, page 88 for the Darwin Regional Water Supply Infrastructure Program. Does this relate to the Manton Dam works?

Ms MOSS: Yes, you will recall that Jo spoke earlier about the water allocation plan and what the department is doing in that regard, which is what that funding is for.

Mrs HERSEY: The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 was assented to on 6 June 2023. When do you expect those changes to come into force?

Ms MOSS: I answered those questions when we put through the legislation, and that is not within the time before us today. We answered them debating the legislation.

Mr CHAIR: It is on *Hansard*.

Ms MOSS: To clarify, 1.3 is water resources. If there is more on water, that is the output we are currently on.

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the Western Davenport draft plan, how many people are awaiting that plan to be completed so they can then apply for water licences?

Ms MOSS: I do not know that is a question I can answer. People can apply for water licences now, and the independent water controller would make those decisions within the current framework. There might not be a plan in place, but there is an NT water allocation framework that can still guide decisions.

Mr BURGOYNE: They could apply for water but, because the plan has not been finalised, will those licences be awarded?

Ms MOSS: I could not make a call on whether or not they would be awarded. What I can say is that they would be considered by the independent water controller based on the water allocation framework, but I will ask Jo to add some extra detail around how that would work. In the absence of a water allocation plan there is a framework that still exists for making decisions.

Ms WAUCHOPE: The act provides for actions to be received and processed around water extraction licences for ground and surface water. Where there is no plan in effect, the controller would take into account whether or not there was a draft plan and, if there was no draft plan, whether the NT water allocation framework would apply. In this instance the controller would likely have a look at the draft plan even though it is not yet declared as its basis for decisions. What cannot happen in the Western Davenport right now without a declared plan is trading. Trading can occur only where the plan is in effect.

The other limitation without the plan is being able to access the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve, noting the limitations that Amy has described for consent.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are there currently any proponents wanting to trade that water and cannot?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, one that I am aware of.

Mr BURGOYNE: There are no current applications awaiting approval in the Western Davenport area?

Ms TOWNSEND: Not to my knowledge, but there is interest.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is there anything stopping those people right now from applying for water licences? There is nothing stopping them, but I guess it is the process that would then occur without a plan in place.

Ms TOWNSEND: There is nothing stopping them lawfully from applying for a water extraction licence. I imagine that an applicant would be aware of the consternation by some parties about water allocations in the region and that may be a deterrent.

Ms MOSS: Mr Chair, I have an answer to question on notice 4.5, before we continue.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.5

Ms MOSS: I understand we do not have a complete application from Larrimah Farms.

Mrs HERSEY: I have a couple of environment ones, but I will leave them to Output Group 2.0.

Have you met with Peter Wood from Fortune Agribusiness? If so, when was the last time you had contact with him?

Ms MOSS: I have met Mr Wood. I do not know whether it was in the period before us. I would have to double check when that was.

Mrs HERSEY: Given we were talking about Western Davenport before, should the size of a project have an impact on the level of scrutiny that a project deserves from government agencies in general terms?

Ms MOSS: In terms of the size, there is a number of factors about the level of scrutiny from government agencies and others. Probably the most important one is the potential impact to the environment. Yes, we have tiered assessment processes in a range of areas. It would probably be good to have some more clarity about what regard we are talking about, particularly given we are in the water output.

Mrs HERSEY: Are you telling me that I need to ask that in a different output—maybe in Environment?

Ms MOSS: It depends. If we are talking about the level of scrutiny of a water licence, the answer about the size of a development might be different from when we are talking about ...

Mrs HERSEY: The fact that there is no consideration given to the economic impact of a project on a region, including the jobs it might provide, including for Aboriginal Territorians, and other benefits pose a problem for proponents attempting to bring business and prosperity to ...

Ms MOSS: In the tenor of your question, I would say that is in Output Group 2.0.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Bushfires

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output 1.4, Bushfires. Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: Minister, last week there was a fairly serious bushfire at Darwin River that was close to the road. Can you tell me the status of that situation?

Ms MOSS: I suggest that is one we can deal with outside of the Estimates Committee as it is not within the period of budget considerations we are dealing with today.

Mrs HERSEY: Funding for Bushfires in the budget is about \$2m less than the revised figure for 2022–23, and the footnote explains that the difference is due to a reduction for aerial firefighting. Given we spoke about that before, will there be fewer funds for aerial firefighting this year? I note that we spoke about there being extra for that.

Ms MOSS: Yes, we talked about the \$2.5m for the aerial firefighting centre. I will ask Jo to talk through that variation to explain the movement there.

Ms TOWNSEND: The difference in the budget between this year and last year relates to a lot of the one-off projects we had received through the disaster ready fund coming to an end.

We have put in another round of applications to that process, but do not have a decision, so you cannot see it in the budget. Equally, the national aerial firefighting contract that I explained that we contribute to, it also gives money back to us. We are expecting to get about \$700,000, but it is not yet received by us. You will see it is not yet in the money.

Mrs HERSEY: How does that come back to you?

Ms TOWNSEND: It is part of the aerial firefighting contract. There is a process of returning some of those funds. It is a complicated contract, but there is a process of reconciliation each year where we get money back through that contract each year, as well as being able to access the aerial assets.

We traditionally get about \$600,000 or \$700,000 per year, but that process to distribute the money federally has not happened yet, but we are expecting it. There is no reason why we would not get it.

Mrs HERSEY: When will you find out whether you get that back?

Ms MOSS: I will ask Jo to answer that.

Ms TOWNSEND: We are not sure. It is part of the national process, but we rely on it and are expecting it.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the policy regarding interaction with the community, including the pastoralists that may have bushfires on their land? For example, are pastoralists able to help fight the fires or use the equipment to assist in fighting fires?

Ms MOSS: There is extensive engagement with landholders, whether that is pastoral, other government agencies or Aboriginal people. That is a significant part of the work that Bushfires NT does. We have a number of Bushfires NT volunteers who are trained to safely use the equipment and safely fight fires. I will ask Jacqui to talk in greater detail about that engagement with landholders who will be doing firebreak activities on their own land as well.

Ms FORREST: We have an equipment program where landholders can apply for a contribution to equipment that they buy for themselves. We provide brigades with firefighting equipment, such as grass fire units, medium tanker trucks and other equipment. We also provide their personal protective equipment and other equipment. We provide them with accredited training.

We consult with landholders, as do the bushfire councils, when preparing regional plans and larger management plans.

In Central Australia this year we recently purchased 11 mobile firefighter units, which are basically slip-ons and trailers. They will be distributed between the Alice Springs and Barkly regions to assist landholders in mitigation and response.

Mr BURGoyNE: How many was that?

Ms FORREST: It was 11.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there a breakup of the 11, and how many will be in Barkly and Alice?

Ms MOSS: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.6

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

Mrs HERSEY: Can we have a breakup of the 11 mobile firefighter units? How many for Barkly and how many for Alice Springs?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.6.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you confirm a new bushfire council and five regional committees were set up? How are these people appointed, and are all the positions filled?

Ms MOSS: They are established under the *Bushfires Management Act*. There are no current vacancies.

I will pass to Jacqui to speak on the process for people being nominated for those roles.

Ms FORREST: It is by nomination, and it is largely our stakeholder groups that will nominate members such as farmers and Central Land Council. These nominations are made to the minister, accepted and ministerially appointed under the *Bushfires Management Act*.

Mrs HERSEY: How many properties were found to be noncompliant with the *Bushfires Management Act* in the past year, and did anyone face fines or have criminal action instituted against them?

Ms MOSS: This is a good story. Bushfires NT runs a compliance and enforcement program. It is prioritised around the Darwin and Katherine fire protection zones. As with weed management, there is a high level of compliance with people wanting to do the right thing.

Compliance with firebreak regulations in rural and residential areas in Darwin and Katherine is consistently above 90%. Following engagement, education, advice and instruction on how to do it, we get good compliance rates.

There were 6,118 inspected in high-risk fire protection zones in Darwin and Katherine in 2022, and 92% of those were found to be compliant on their first inspection, which is great news.

As with weeds, there is an escalation process on enforcement. It is not necessarily from first inspection to fining or punitive action. It is an escalating process and, following that, 99% of those properties eventually achieved compliance.

In 2022 a total of 206 warning letters were issued to landholders, and 42 landowners were issued with infringement notices. Enforced firebreak installation action was initiated on a further three properties, and we do not expect that this will change dramatically. We will continue to have a high level of community engagement, understanding and a desire to engage with Bushfires to make sure they are protecting their own lives and property, but also playing that important role in their communities.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has there been any assessment on fuel loads in and around Alice Springs by Bushfires NT?

Ms MOSS: I will go back to when we spoke a bit about buffel in my opening statement, acknowledging that is a contributor to the fuel load and that we have a technical working group currently looking at the classification of buffel as a weed potentially in Alice Springs. We have management actions around things like buffel that do not necessarily all sit with Bushfires NT.

Ms TOWNSEND: As part of the buffel technical working group that met last week, one of the things they made clear is that they would need and are recommending an extent of buffel mapping work. I have made a commitment as the Chief Executive Officer to progress that mapping work, not just for that committee but for broader planning generally.

Mr BURGOYNE: To confirm, that is the same group headed up by John Gaynor?

Ms WAUCHOPE: Yes.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.4

Ms MOSS: The one declined water licence reported was a renewal where the water was not being used. That was the reason that renewal was declined.

Ms MOSS: Can I just correct the record as well, in terms of applications for water in the Western Davenport region. I understand there are actually two applications for new licences. I wanted to clarify an earlier conversation we were having around cost recovering SREBA. The cost recovery is on all activities, not just levy on wells.

Mrs HERSEY: In your opening statement, you spoke about \$1.75m on mapping. Is that for LiDAR?

Ms MOSS: Mapping the Future is part of the Rangelands output. I am happy to talk about it briefly.

Mrs HERSEY: Can I send you the question? I really want to know about it.

Ms MOSS: Can we do that?

Mr CHAIR: That completes questions for Output 1.4 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – ENVIRONMENT
Output 2.1 – Environment Management and Policy

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 2.0, Environment, Output Group 2.1, Environment Management and Policy.

Mrs HERSEY: I had a couple on Singleton Station on environment. In determining that the Singleton Station project required an EIS, the EPA cited key uncertainties around the extent of groundwater dependent ecosystems. Is this part of the determination made when granting a water licence?

Ms MOSS: There are two related processes. There is one regarding the water licence and one on a more extensive environmental assessment which might take into account some of those same matters.

It will be matter for the NT EPA. There has been a body of work done on that region and a decision previously.

Ms TOWNSEND: The decision-making criteria for whether a water extraction licence would be granted would be based on the need of that water, whether the water was available and any plan that was in place. The Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan and its guidance documentation to make decisions in the Western Davenport refer specifically to groundwater-dependent ecosystems and how they are to be accommodated in decision-making.

The NT EPA has a different set of criteria. It is looking at significant environmental impacts, whereas the *Water Act* is much more constrained to water-related impacts.

Mrs HERSEY: How long will the EIS process for Singleton Station take?

Ms MOSS: That is the question that Paul started answering previously. That is probably a hard answer to give. There are statutory time frames on our end for the NT EPA and government decision-making, but there will be sets of circumstances for the proponent to provide information. We do not control those time frames. I will hand over to Paul to talk more about those statutory time frames that exist within our processes.

Mr PURDON: For the Singleton proposal the EPA is preparing draft terms of reference for that environmental impact statement. The next step with those terms of reference is for them to be published for public comment. That is a statutory time frame of 15 business days.

Once that time frame is ended, the EPA has another 15 business days to finalise those terms of reference and then provide them to the proponent.

At that point, it is with the proponent to do the work that is required to satisfy those terms of reference. In the case of this proponent, Fortune, it has done a lot of work already and is, hopefully, in a good place to turn that around and submit a draft EIS to the EPA reasonably quickly.

That draft EIS goes on public exhibition, and the time frame for that sits between 30 and 60 business days, depending on the decision of the EPA, which has not occurred yet.

Fortune will then have to prepare a supplement to that EIS responding to comments either from the public, government agencies or the EPA itself. That is another time frame that sits with the proponent to prepare that supplement.

Once that supplement is submitted back to the EPA, it is published for 15 business days for public comment. The EPA then receives those comments and has 45 business days to complete its assessment report and provide that to the minister.

The minister has 30 business days to consider that report and the EPA's advice on draft approval and to make a decision on whether to issue an approval.

There is a good flowchart on the EPA's website that sets out all these processes with the time frames. We would be happy to send you that link. It basically covers those steps I have just talked you through.

Mrs HERSEY: What about the EIS for Middle Arm?

Ms MOSS: Can I clarify what in relation to the EIS for Middle Arm?

Mrs HERSEY: When will that commence?

Ms MOSS: It will follow a very similar process, noting that it is a large assessment.

Mr PURDON: The process is the same as I just described; it is just in a different stage of the process. The terms of reference for Middle Arm were issued last year. DIPL, as the proponent, is preparing the environmental impact statement. We are expecting it to be submitted sometime in the second half of this year. Then it will go through the process I just explained.

Mrs HERSEY: Last year we spoke about the Large Emitters Policy. Have you had any applications or projects that have triggered the Large Emitters Policy in the past 12 months?

Ms MOSS: Yes, we have projects that have triggered the Large Emitters Policy. I am just clarifying the figure.

There are four projects, noting that they are not all about petroleum as there are different circumstances under which the Large Emitters Policy is triggered. There are three for petroleum environment management plans and one in land clearing.

Mr BURGOYNE: How was it decided that the one in land clearing would be covered under the Large Emitters Policy?

Ms MOSS: It will be because they anticipate they will breach the threshold.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is there anything looked at, once the land has been cleared, in regard to the improved pasture and the carbon that the soil will capture as a result of that? I understand that, obviously, when people clear land there is an initial loss of trees and everything, but is it looked at for what the improved pasture will put back in?

Mr PURDON: The accounting model that the department relies on to estimate emissions from a land-clearing event takes into account the clearing of vegetation and the use of that land afterwards. Whether it is the burning of the vegetation or the growth of crops, or whatever, that is factored into the overall emissions loss or sequestration as a result of that activity.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you look at whether cattle will be run or other agricultural pursuits?

Mr PURDON: For the purposes of determining whether the threshold is exceeded, no.

Mr BURGOYNE: To finalise what I was saying before, do you not take into consideration the benefits of the improved pasture that will be put in afterwards and the carbon that then could be sequestered?

Mr PURDON: Although the threshold and exceeding the threshold does not take all that into account—as well as potentially changing the way you are dealing with the cattle—the requirement of the policy is to provide a greenhouse gas abatement plan. That plan can be looking more holistically at the carbon flux or change in that property and its management. It is open for a plan to be provided that looks at herd management, cropping or other ways to manage fire better and that sort of thing, to be reducing emissions overall for the operation of a business, not just the clearing event itself.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is this just another hurdle for people who want to clear large tracts of land? We already have all the hurdles or checks and balances that applied previously, so by adding this in now for anyone who wants to clear a large tract of land, what hoops or additional regulation will they have to meet when it comes to this Large Emitters Policy? Do they have to show that they will offset?

Ms MOSS: The greenhouse gas abatement plans that Paul spoke about are not overly prescriptive from our perspective. We acknowledge that you can trigger the threshold by being a petroleum operator or by clearing land. There are many different and potentially innovative ways that people can deal with emissions—either reducing, mitigating or offsetting emissions—and they can put forward that plan on how they intend to manage the emissions.

In terms of hurdles, we are talking about a large threshold for triggering the Large Emitters Policy. We are not necessarily talking about small-scale activity, but levels of activity that are triggering the Large Emitters Policy. Most people's expectations would be that providing a plan for how to manage emissions is not unreasonable.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is there a pathway for someone to show how they will offset those emissions under the current legislation and framework? If I have cleared a large tract of land and will improve that soil, can the department send someone out and check the carbon in the soil? In 12 months' time I will improve that and, therefore, that will offset and is part of the plan. Can that happen?

Mr PURDON: There is no clear pathway because this has not been done before. Various options are available but it requires a level of rigour in accounting the carbon in soils or carbon lost to the atmosphere and looking at various options and what that might mean for overall emissions loss or gained. There is nothing off the shelf we have in this space for land clearing.

Mr BURGOYNE: That is the point I am trying to make. When we clear a tract of land and burn trees, we know the amount of emissions that will be reduced, but there is no clear pathway, as you stated, to show how we will offset that in some of these instances. That would be difficult for many proponents to navigate.

Mr PURDON: Although there is not that pathway, there is a range of options and a lot of flexibility in this space. With the expectations on this particular industry, and land clearing as well, we are open to considering the options available and how we can accommodate and manage expectations on land clearing, given that we have not received one before and we have not done this before.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are you currently working with the proponent who has triggered this Large Emitters Policy by wanting to clear land to see how they could then work through it into the future?

Mr PURDON: Yes, we are trying to work with this proponent and the NTCA as well.

Mrs HERSEY: The offset policy released in January 2023 does not allow the trading or purchase of biodiversity credits. What was the rationale behind that, and would we not want to encourage trading to, in turn, encourage biodiversity credits?

Ms MOSS: Importantly, offsets are a last resort. There is a range of other things we want people to do and their shareholders want them to do on emissions before they go to offsets. We want offsets to be delivered in the Northern Territory when they are used.

Mr PURDON: Could I clarify whether the question relates to greenhouse emissions or biodiversity offsets?

Mrs HERSEY: Biodiversity.

Dr FISHER: There are two offset policies; one relates to greenhouse gases and the other specifically to biodiversity.

The immediate reason is that there are no biodiversity credits in existence in Australia at the moment. The Commonwealth Government is currently investigating the creation of a nature market that will essentially generate biodiversity credits, and there is some discussion that they could be used for offsets. We do not want to consider that at the moment because, where biodiversity offsets are required, we want those to occur in the Territory and to be for the benefit of the Territory and the offset providers in the Territory. We do not want industry just to be able to purchase them from elsewhere—from interstate, for example.

The value of biodiversity credits is yet to be established. We would prefer to use the offset regime that the Territory has established, which is suitable for Territory circumstances, before we contemplate allowing industry to use credits generated elsewhere or using a different approach.

Mrs HERSEY: Obviously down the track that will come in.

Dr FISHER: I think we could reconsider it after the nature market has been well established and biodiversity credits have been scrutinised. You would understand there has been a lot of controversy recently about carbon credits and the robustness of carbon credits that have been generated in various ways. Given that we have designed a biodiversity offset regime that is actually suitable for the Territory and explicitly addresses the characteristics of the Territory, we are not that keen on just accepting credits that are generated elsewhere.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Katherine, if you have any more questions about biodiversity credits, that was actually Output 1.1, Flora and Fauna. I would just bring you back to Output 2.1, at the risk of us not getting through the rest of the outputs this evening.

I am intrigued by it. I did not know there was such a thing as biodiversity credits. I have just learned something—nature markets. There are certain connotations.

Mrs HERSEY: What policy work is being done on carbon capture utilisation and storage by the department? Do you have a policy framework for potential onshore carbon capture utilisation and storage in the Territory?

Ms MOSS: The questions on carbon capture and storage should be directed to the Chief Minister. That work is happening under DCMC. It is an important area. Minister Manison spoke about it on Tuesday, and it is part of the mix.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – STATUTORY BODY **Output 3.1 – Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority**

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 3.0, Statutory Body, Output 3.1, Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority. I suspect there are questions.

Mrs HERSEY: There is a small increase in the budget papers to the funding for the NT EPA—about \$125,000. The footnote says that it is to support sustainable economic reconstruction priorities. Does this mean more staff to reduce processing and approval time lines?

Ms MOSS: There is funding in Budget 2023 for both the environmental assessments, which is a separate line item, and \$2m for the petroleum ops. Yes, that funding will support the operations of the NT EPA and make sure that we can assist it in keeping up with an increasing workload that is also increasing in complexity.

I meet with the Chair of the NT EPA relatively regularly and get reports about what that workload is looking like. A positive is that the increasing workload and the complexity of these projects means there is increasing interest in investing in the Northern Territory and undertaking a number of different projects. We are keen to continue to support it to do its work effectively.

Mrs HERSEY: Will there be more staff employed in that area to reduce the approval time lines?

Ms MOSS: There will.

Mrs HERSEY: How many staff?

Ms MOSS: There are significant focuses on things like critical minerals and renewables projects. We want to make sure we have a very efficient process that does not create a hurdle to some of these green energy projects. We want to make sure they are being progressed in the Northern Territory. We have a great competitive advantage and want a regulatory system that is robust and supports that.

Mr PURDON: We will be employing more staff to support the impact assessment and the approval function of projects.

With the prioritisation of green energy projects, hydrogen projects and critical mineral projects that need to go through the assessment process, we are looking, within our environmental assessment team, at employing five staff—a modest increase—and within our regulatory branch two extra FTEs to support the environmental approvals and administration of those.

Mrs HERSEY: How many FTE?

Mr PURDON: It is two. There will be a total of seven.

The budget allocation for this purpose also included some additional budget for the Flora and Fauna Division, given its important role in providing technical scientific advice to the NT EPA through the assessment process. Alaric, you might correct me, but possibly there will be another three FTE for Flora and Fauna as well.

Mrs HERSEY: Given the seven new staff, how do you think that will affect the approval time lines? Will that make a considerable difference?

Ms MOSS: It is a hypothetical question but one that I will be happy to say that yes, I assume that will be the case. It is an increasing workload for the NT EPA, which has skilled people with great expertise and supported aptly by the department.

Yes, that will assist it in making sure things are considered in a timely way within the statutory time frames.

Mr PURDON: Yes, we think that will help us with statutory time frames. One thing I want to point out, which is of interest to us, is the analysis we have done of assessment time frames under the new *Environment Protection Act* and the old *Environment Assessment Act*.

The key difference between that legislation is the old legislation had fewer statutory time frames for our business. Although it had a couple of tiers or levels of assessment, the EPA was reluctant to use the tiers and only really employed the environmental impact statement process.

The *Environment Protection Act* now has statutory time frames for every step of the process that sits with the EPA, the department and the minister and has three tiers of assessment that the EPA is willing to employ and keen to use.

The actual average time frame for an assessment under the *Environment Protection Act* has halved or thereabouts, compared with the old legislation.

Although we are talking about needing to add resources to make sure we can do the assessment process more efficiently—and it will—we now have legislation that allows for the process to proceed quicker, particularly for the lower levels of assessment, not so much the environmental impact statement process but those other lower tiers of assessment.

Mrs HERSEY: Regarding the environmental impact statements, what is the average amount of time for those processes currently?

Ms MOSS: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.7

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

Mrs HERSEY: What is the average amount of time for the EIS process to play out currently?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.7.

Mrs HERSEY: What are the applicable time lines that must be adhered to during that EIS process?

Ms MOSS: I will ask Paul to talk through the statutory time frames on our end. I acknowledge that there are elements of that process which require the proponent to provide information, and we are not in control of the time frame for them to do so. I think we have already done that.

Mrs HERSEY: Would the roadblocks be with the proponent, depending on how long it takes them to do their part?

Ms MOSS: What roadblocks are you referring to?

Mrs HERSEY: In the environmental impact statements, the process to draw out—are there any roadblocks to make that draw out potentially over years?

Ms MOSS: I will ask Paul to speak to that as I am not aware of specific circumstances where it has as a result of action on our end. We have statutory time frames to follow.

Mr PURDON: While we do not think of them or refer to them as roadblocks, there are things or events which occur during assessment process which means the process takes longer. Sometimes, the EPA receives information from proponents, reviews that and decides it needs further information because certain information that has been requested has not been provided. That means there is another step in the process of going back to a proponent and getting them to do work.

Another thing which will delay proponents' completion of the assessment is when they vary their project during the assessment itself. We have had a number of proposals throughout the years where there have been numerous variations to proposals while they are in the assessment process. This means that the process needs to go back to a certain point in time where the terms of reference may need to be reviewed and reissued because the proposal has changed so much or, because they are changing their project on the go, they need to provide new information into the system in relation to the new project. That means the process takes a lot longer.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the longest amount of time an EIS has taken from beginning to end?

Ms MOSS: I might need to take that on notice. Paul, do you know?

Mr PURDON: I will not give you an exact answer—if you need one we can chase that up—but it is in the order of approximately seven years. That may be the longest one I can think of.

Mrs HERSEY: Could you take that on notice?

Ms MOSS: Yes, but we are talking about a specific period?

Mr PURDON: The proposal I am thinking of was some time and suffered from both the reasons I gave before.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to set a time period for it?

Mrs HERSEY: No, that is fine. What is the longest time in this period?

Ms MOSS: Are you asking which one has been active the longest out of the EMPs active in the period?

Mr PURDON: Is that under the *Environment Protection Act* under current legislation for this financial year? We will not have much data for that.

Mrs HERSEY: Not for the last financial year?

Mr PURDON: We might not have. We might have two projects that may have gone through an EIS process and completed in that time. There will be some information, but it will not be necessarily as informative as you might want.

Mrs HERSEY: We will go through the process anyway for seven years.

Question on Notice No 4.8

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

Mrs HERSEY: What is the longest amount of time an EIS has taken from beginning to end in this?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.8.

Ms MOSS: Can I put some information on the record that is helpful in relation to this?

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you.

Ms MOSS: Some information has been provided to us by the Chair of the NT EPA about how that process and time frame works under the new act compared with how it worked under the old act. That is probably useful.

Under the former act, the average time frame was 17 months from referral to the minister. Under the *Environment Protection Act*, the average time frame is 8.2 months from referral to the minister. That is a huge difference in the length of time that it is taking from referral to getting to the minister for a decision. We now have a fit-for-purpose piece of legislation to make the process not only robust but also much more efficient and certain for all involved.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.6

Ms MOSS: Out of the 11 mobile fire units distributed to landholders in Central Australia and Barkly this year, nine are in the Central Australia region, and two are in the Barkly region.

Ms MOSS: I will add some clarity to something else you talked about before regarding hurdles or roadblocks. In terms of the information from the NT EPA, increasing complexities are probably the biggest contributor at the moment.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you, minister and all the staff. I appreciate your time this evening.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 4.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 4.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs related to Environment, Climate Change and Water Security.

On behalf of the committee I thank the officers who provided assistance to the minister this evening.

Ms MOSS: I thank all the officials as well. They did a tremendous job. I appreciate it, especially so late into the evening with us.

The committee suspended.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Mr CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to introduce your officials accompanying you for portfolios of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

Ms MOSS: I introduce the Department of Health officials joining me today, Dr Marco Briceno, Chief Executive Officer; Cecelia Gore, Executive Director Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs; and Dr David Mitchell, Chief Psychiatrist of the Northern Territory.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding Mental Health and Suicide Prevention?

Ms MOSS: I will introduce relevant output executives if they are required to answer any specific questions. I acknowledge the efforts of mental health staff at all levels of the health system, who not only collectively worked to keep Territorians safe during the pandemic but continue to diligently and proudly provide core services to those in need.

Budget 2023–24 continues the work of delivering on the priorities outlined in the Labor’s Plan for Building Resilience in Future Generations & Investing in Mental Health policy position paper, which includes infrastructure enhancements and investment in community-based solutions for the Mental Health service system.

In terms of ongoing work in mental health, this budget’s highlights include:

- working with Neami National and Danila Dilba to improve access to whole-of-life community mental health services through the new Darwin health centre
- continuing the successful co-responder model in Darwin for 000 mental-health-related callouts to better assess patient needs prior to emergency department presentations
- focusing on partnerships with other providers of mental health services, including the Darwin Private Hospital mental health unit and the veterans’ wellbeing centre when operational
- continuing an after-hours mental health response in Katherine Hospital emergency department to prevent unnecessary transfers to Royal Darwin Hospital
- providing training and skills development for frontline primary healthcare staff in regional and remote centres to be more confident in responding to people with mental health concerns
- investing in models of care that support people to live in their own homes, including expanding the housing accommodation support initiative to Katherine and Alice Springs.

In 2023–24 will also see the continuation of key initiatives arising from the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Bilateral Agreement. This is a five-year agreement with a total investment of \$43.9m, with the Commonwealth investing \$30.65m and the Territory investing \$13.25m to expand mental healthcare services in the community.

In 2024 a new Head to Health adult mental health service will open in Katherine. Planning for and beginning delivery of Head to Health kids and adult services based in Alice Springs which will focus on remote children and their families in Central Australia. That is aged zero to eight for the kids’ service. Enhancement of headspace centres will increase access to multidisciplinary youth mental health services which translates to an increase in staff and more resources to reduce wait times and support more young people and the nature of the enhancements of therapeutic supports to enable more complex clients to be seen. Negotiations between the NTPHN and providers will determine which sites this will benefit. There is \$3m over five years to support perinatal mental health screening.

All of these initiatives will be commissioned in partnership with the NT Primary Health Network—or the NTPHN—to ensure that there is no duplication and we have the best use of available funding.

Suicide prevention requires whole-of-community solutions, only some of which are represented in the budget allocated to the stewardship of the Department of Health. The current Northern Territory Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework 2018–23 expires this year, and a comprehensive regional engagement of planning initiative is under way to develop the new five-year strategy. This will be accompanied by an implementation plan and the continuation of the Community Grants Program.

Current funding provided by the Department of Health to non-government service providers for suicide prevention-specific activities is \$1.925m. This includes NT-wide community small grants and evidence-based suicide prevention activities and training workshops, including Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training—ASIST—and safe talk, which are focused on the provision of training and education of the signs, symptoms and promotion of awareness of suicide and suicidal behaviours.

The bilateral agreement also provides additional investment aligned with the NT Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework, including \$9.3m for the universal aftercare services, meaning that all Territorians who are discharged from hospital following a suicide attempt will receive immediate follow-up care; and \$1.3m to ensure all people in the Territory who are bereaved or impacted by suicide can access postvention support services.

The suicide prevention community grants have continued across the last five years, from 2018 to 2023, aimed at supporting locally led activities and projects that progress action in one or more of the following

three priority areas: building inclusive communities and strengthening community resilience; addressing stigma and discrimination; and raising awareness of effective suicide prevention strategies and practices.

To date the grants awarded have a total of \$1.2m of up to \$10,000 grants provided to over 160 projects across five project rounds. A new sixth round of the suicide prevention community grants opened on 1 May 2023. All previous grants awarded are listed on the NT Health website.

NT Health chairs the whole-of-government suicide prevention coordination committee that requires all frontline agencies to report on their responsibilities and actions outlined in the Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework 2018–2023.

Other areas of focus include infrastructure that helps communities and creates jobs. The capital works program for NT Mental Health is continuing and will see the completion of the mental health inpatient unit expansion at Royal Darwin Hospital and the Stabilisation Assessment and Referral Area on the Royal Darwin Hospital campus to provide appropriate care for people presenting with a mental health emergency.

We will continue to invest more in effective models of care to manage patient flow and growth in our activity with expanded virtual care and care closer to home.

Mr Chair and committee members, I am happy to take questions from the committee with the officials who have joined me this evening.

Mr CHAIR: I hand over to the shadow minister for questions on the opening statement.

Mr YAN: Thank you for your opening address. I also thank all the public servants who are here late on a Thursday evening. I appreciate your time and you being here.

First I want to touch on a couple of things you mentioned in your opening statement, specifically about the new mental health inpatient unit. We know some work on that has commenced. When do you expect that facility to be online and available?

Ms MOSS: That project is for a mid-2024 completion. It is under way. It is part of a broader suite of infrastructure improvements that are happening around the Royal Darwin Hospital campus, which includes the stabilisation unit I spoke of earlier. It is an over \$50m package of works that is going into mental health infrastructure, which is important.

Mr YAN: As part of that new facility, how many beds will be available for mental health patients?

Ms MOSS: I will find my bed numbers. It is important that we specify the kind of beds we are talking about because there are subacute beds in the community as well as the mental health inpatient unit, which is meant to be about 18. The youth inpatient unit has five, and there is a range of others. There are also beds in subacute care in the community.

Mr YAN: I was specifically asking about the new facility in Darwin.

Ms MOSS: For the mental health inpatient unit that is 18 and is additional to the five beds in the Youth Inpatient Program, the 20 in acute care in Cowdy Ward and the 11 in the secure care, which is the Joan Ridley Unit. It is an 18-bed facility.

Mr YAN: There are 20 in Cowdy Ward, five in the Youth Inpatient Program and 11 in the JRU. There will be 18 beds in the new inpatient facility?

Ms MOSS: Yes. Six in the Stabilisation Assessment and Referral Area, which is a triaging, patient-flow and assessment area. They are different purposes.

Mr YAN: What is the staffing model you put together to manage the 24 new beds in the new facility?

Ms MOSS: We need to ensure we have a strong workforce for this additional infrastructure. The department has been working on that not only for our mental health workforce but broadly across the Department of Health. The Chief Minister will speak to that next week.

There is a recruitment campaign across the entirety of Health, which is international, and that includes the mental health workforce. I will ask Marco to speak about the workforce for these new infrastructure projects coming online.

Dr BRICENO: Our intent is that we are working on the model of care which will be aligned to that new facility. Once the model of care is defined, which will include our existing and new beds, the staffing profiles, under the service delivery model, will be decided. We can then recruit to it. We are in the initial stages of that predesign and aim to build and recruit to that workforce before the facility is ready to go.

Mr YAN: Once you have worked out your model of care and find out what your staffing component will be, you will then recruit to those positions to manage the new facility?

Dr BRICENO: That is correct.

Mr YAN: Will any staff from the mental health units currently in RDH be taken out of RDH and moved across to this facility, or will it be an entirely new staffing complement?

Ms MOSS: There will need to be broader planning once we have the new units built and online. We will take into account the new 18 beds, the Stabilisation and Referral Assessment Area and clinical planning and ensure that our resources are used where they are best needed and where the needs dictate.

Dr BRICENO: The Department of Health is conducting some work on clinical services planning across the whole service. We are also working to develop a clinical services capability framework which allows us to match the requirements to the level of service which we intend to deliver. The planning is going broader in the health space which involves mental health.

The planning of the staffing and the model of care is on-train, and we will then aim to decide what the staffing profile will be depending on the service which will be delivered in this new facility. It is probably too early to provide you with a straight answer on whether we will be moving staff from Royal Darwin to the facility where there will be new staff or a combination of both. At the moment, we are in the analysis stage.

Mr YAN: As part of that staffing profile you are looking at, have you considered the additional budgetary cost which will be borne by health to staff this facility?

Dr BRICENO: Yes, we have considered that there will be implications to our bottom line in the budget. It is unknown at this stage how much of the existing footprint of the staff will be part of this new facility and how many will be new staff which will require extra budget. That will be part of the planning process.

Mr YAN: As part of the future estimates and this budget, have you considered putting an allocation in the budget knowing that there will probably be additional staff required for this new mental health facility?

Ms MOSS: We will be doing that when we are clear on what those needs are. I can be clear that we will ensure that those new facilities have the staffing required to run them. We will make sure that is reflected in the budget.

Dr Briceno has carriage of the larger Department of Health budget. We have a budget process. We will make the representations needed, if and when we need to make them, relating to funding for these facilities.

Mr YAN: This relates specifically to the new facility because there are issues dealing with mental health patients currently in RDH. There was a root cause analysis completed by the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist regarding intubation of patients at RDH. Do you have those findings? What are the recommendations from that review?

Ms MOSS: Firstly, I will talk on the Stabilisation Assessment and Referral Area investment. This relates to the triaging of patients who might appear at RDH in high levels of mental health distress who can receive that assessment and support in a much more appropriate setting than what the current ED can provide. That is an identified need and will take the pressure off the ED and improve patient flow. That is incredibly important.

Given that I have Dr Mitchell with me, I will ask him to speak to his findings.

Dr MITCHELL: In answer to your question regarding the root cause analysis, the Chief Executive of Health, in his foresight when he first stepped into the acting position, identified this as a really important, pertinent issue and commissioned the root cause analysis that we carried out.

The recommendations that we made have to take into account the fact that we do not have the new facilities, as we speak, and have to make changes. There need to be immediate changes, things that we can do now, and things that we have to project into the longer term. One of the immediate recommendations that we have made is that we need a forum for all of the stakeholders to meet regularly to understand when people are being intubated for psychiatric purposes and that these decisions are never made lightly. Those stakeholders include CareFlight, the emergency department and the psychiatry service. These should be regularly discussed.

We have also recommended that there is an escalation process. If a person is intubated for behavioural disturbance within the hospital, it should be identified quickly and escalated to higher levels of authority so that it can be acted upon and minimised.

The other recommendation was to revise the procedures of the management of patients under the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* when intubated. That policy is being made and revised. There are forms and procedures which articulate the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* with how a patient enters a mental health facility under involuntary treatment. One thing that we identified is that we clearly need a box on the Form 9 for entry into the hospital that allows clinicians to identify that a person has been intubated because one of the issues we had is that we cannot be completely clear regarding the number at the moment that were intubated in any given period. We need to be more specific.

Extending on that, we will have a new *Mental Health and Related Services Act* in 2024. Some of the recommendations that came out of the review shine an important light on this issue. The Chief Psychiatrist will have policies and procedures to monitor chemical restraint and restrictive practices to shine a light on that and to work closely with our other agencies—such as the Community Visitor Program and the health complaints commission—to make sure that patients always get the highest level of optimum care.

That outlines the immediate, medium and longer term as we position ourselves for some of these new infrastructure that will come on board and hopefully deleverage some of the issues of bed flow and improve the situation for all Territorians.

Mr YAN: Based on that root-cause analysis and the detailed work that you have done, how many mental health patients have been intubated during the reporting period? Are we recording that now?

Ms MOSS: Yes, that is recorded. My understanding is that is fewer than 20 per year. Again, I will hand to Dr Mitchell to add any further context on that.

Dr MITCHELL: The minister is correct. The records analysis showed in a period of roughly two years we located about 29 intubations of psychiatric patients for the purpose of behavioural disturbance. One of the criticisms we found is we do not know whether it is slightly more. We do not think it is significantly more. Conservatively, we think it is about 29, give or take a few more.

We took a sample of 20 to better understand what was happening in that process. We can say that if you think about the context—which is important—there are about 1,200 admissions in the Northern Territory every year, so we are talking about 1%. That means 99% of patients do not get intubated and about 1% do. That is an important clarity for people to understand the context of this issue.

Mr YAN: I take it then that since your root-cause analysis was completed our records are far better on the intubation of psychiatric patients than previously. Would that be the case?

Ms MOSS: That would be my understanding. Again, it is probably for Dr Mitchell and Dr Briceno to make an assessment. Yes, that would be my expectation and understanding.

Dr BRICENO: Yes, that is correct, minister. It is the practice. The documentation of intubations and decisions has remained a clinical issue. We examined documentation at a clinical note level to analyse individual cases and to manage patients on a clinical basis.

The issue we had was more to do with the data being collected in a way that can be audited easily. That was the main challenge we had. It was not that intubations were not documented; it was difficult to manually

extract that information for auditing purposes. We have put some controls in place to improve the way we document in order to easily identify those patients for monitoring processes.

We are putting extra controls in place not only in our system at the moment, but also that look to the implementation of the new electronic medical record that we are rolling out in our hospitals at the moment. That will facilitate the process significantly.

Also the intended new mental health services act will provide even more emphasis on the importance of that documentation and notification to the Chief Psychiatrist.

Mr YAN: How many instances of chemical restraint have been recorded for psychiatric patients during the reporting period as well?

Dr MITCHELL: I will answer it more broadly. Within the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* review there was a recommendation made that section 63 of that act—which is the non-psychiatric treatment of the psychiatric patient—is not clear enough for making determinations on how chemical restraint and medication of patients should be treated and how it should be monitored.

I cannot give you a clear answer. It is clearly a recommendation within our review that the new mental health act makes it clear.

The thing you need to contextualise that with is that the term ‘chemical restraint’ is very broad. It is hard for me to tell you the exact figure, because what does that actually entail? If we are giving a medication to calm someone down but also to treat them, that is not exactly chemical constraint, but it is a continuum.

We are wrestling with a complex and ugly problem, and we need clarity. The recommendation within section 4 of the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* review clearly speaks to having better reporting mechanisms. There is also a section in the review which clearly talks to the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist having better authority and statutory authority to monitor such things. That said, there are processes through the Community Visitor Program where these things are monitored, but we want more clarity. I hope that makes sense.

Mr YAN: It does. My take from that is that the updates to the act will provide requirements for recording and reporting and a determination of a level of what chemical restraint becomes. Is that right?

Dr MITCHELL: That is correct. You have to think of it in the broader context of restrictive practice, because chemical restraint is only one component of that. We are not clear enough within the current act. We need to be clearer in our procedures. We need to have more clarity. The general public demands this.

Ms MOSS: We expect that to be out for an exposure draft in November this year for public comment and for further stakeholder engagement, noting that there has already been a significant process of consultation and that will continue.

Mr YAN: Okay, good. That was my next question.

Ms MOSS: The work has already commenced on that exposure.

Mr YAN: At this current point in time within our act, who provides the approval for chemical restraints or intubation of psychiatric patients?

Ms MOSS: They would be clinical decisions made in the process of treatment and presentation.

Dr MITCHELL: At the end of the day, in a really practical way, we need to understand that these are decisions made by high-level, highly experienced, highly skilled clinicians. They do not necessarily need a pathway of approval. They need to make a clinical decision dynamically and in the moment. We are talking about highly skilled proceduralists who do that. We need a way of understanding why they do it and reporting, if that makes sense.

It is always a balance between getting it right, in regard to putting the care and the consumer in the centre of the treatment journey, and allowing clinicians to do what they need to do. An example of that is if you had a behaviourally disturbed patient for psychiatric reasons in an emergency department and could not wait to get a clarification on whether you should intubate or not, you need to make decisions and be responsible for the decisions you make. If there are issues, there are pathways to review that.

Mr YAN: I just wanted to make sure that there was probity and rigour regarding the decision-making processes before we go down those paths because they are quite restrictive paths.

Is there a risk to a person from intubation? I suppose there is always a risk to any procedure. Is there a specific risk to intubating a psychiatric patient? Are there any long-term effects from repeated intubation for psychiatric patients?

Dr BRICENO: Expanding a bit on the answer on the Chief Psychiatrist before, the decision to intubate tends to follow a previous decision which was to provide appropriate sedation of the patient at that time. Then the decision to intubate is not made to manage the psychiatric condition. It is to manage the potential loss of the airway of the patient that has been sedated. The decision of intubation is related to that.

Like any procedure in medicine, there are risks of intubating a patient. That is why this needs to be done in the most planned manner by the most senior and expert clinician on site, hence the decision sometimes to intubate a patient in the community before transfer because doing so on the plane is difficult and risky. In other instances it is the emergency department in the hospital because it is a critical care area where the right skilled staff and equipment is available.

There are some complications in the acute setting, such as putting the tube in the wrong place or putting it in too far or not far enough, damaging the patient's teeth or the tissues around the mouth and the open airway. There is then risk of the patient vomiting during the procedure and aspirating some into lungs and others, hence this is a decision which is not made lightly and is not done unless absolutely necessary.

Long-term complications depend on the length of intubation of the patient or not so much the intubation per se, but being mechanically ventilated and lying in bed for a long period of time. There may be some complications later, such as inflammation of the airway. With repeated intubations, the more this is done the more they are exposed to acute complications, and there may be some scar tissue if there is damage to particularly the open airway.

Mr YAN: I ask because I was part of a coronial inquest where there was a finding of repeated intubation of a psychiatric patient with damaged airways. Whilst it may not have contributed to the death of the person, it contributed to their health issues longer term. That is the reason why I asked the question.

What is the longest time that a patient has been intubated in a Northern Territory hospital in relation to psychiatric care?

Ms MOSS: I will seek advice on that. I am mindful that when talk about small numbers we do not identify people.

Mr YAN: I do not need the person.

Ms MOSS: I understand you do not want me to identify, but I do not want to inadvertently identify anyone either. I note that you are potentially straying from the opening statement. Marco or David, could you provide some guidance? I want us to be cognizant that we are talking about small numbers in a small community, and we do not want to identify people.

Mr YAN: I am happy to take that question on notice, if that is easier.

Question on Notice No 4.9

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

Mr YAN: What is the longest time a psychiatric patient has been intubated in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 4.9.

Mr YAN: It has been reported from other jurisdictions, and I believe it is fact, that sedation and intubation is generally a direct result of a lack of mental health beds. Would that be the case in the Northern Territory, and will the new facility address those issues?

Ms MOSS: I will ask either Marco or David to comment specifically on the first part of your question. The addition of beds and spaces to triage people will be excellent for achieving better outcomes for people who are coming to the hospital in high times of mental health distress. It will be a more appropriate environment experience for them in the ED and with clinicians. It is a welcomed infrastructure investment for the outcome of Territorians.

Dr BRICENO: The lack of availability of beds is a contributing factor but not the only contributing factor. In the Northern Territory one significant factor we have identified to the local analysis is probably the distance where the patient comes from and the length of time required to access definitive care. The journey does not start in the emergency department; it starts in a remote community. There are multiple practitioners and teams involved in the care of the patient, a changing environment et cetera. Some of the causes for a lot of the mental disturbances may have a higher impact in the escalation of behavioural concerns that leads to heavy sedation and potential intubation. Even though we identified that the lack of access to an immediate bed was a contributing factor, we only consider it to be a contributing factor and not the lead reason.

Mr YAN: I know from experience that we are required to use the absolute least restrictive practices for the treatment of mental health patients. Unfortunately, sedation, chemical restraint and intubation are at the high end of what anyone would consider least restrictive practices. What controls do you have in place at the moment to go down that least restrictive practice model of care?

Ms MOSS: David and Marco have touched on this previously regarding the escalation protocols. Also, we have clinical staff who are highly skilled and highly experienced making very difficult decisions, which they do not do lightly, within the nature of the treatment of mental health patients. I suggest that we have probably touched on that already, but I do not know whether Marco and David want to add anything further, noting that there are checks and balances.

Mr YAN: I am speaking about the absolute least restrictive practices that we as clinicians—I am saying a collective 'we' because I am putting me in part of this group—are supposed to use in the Northern Territory. We do not seem to be using these all the time. Is there anything else that we could be doing to use less restrictive practices?

Ms MOSS: Dr Mitchell has already outlined that for 99% of patients that is not occurring.

Mr YAN: That is fine but for the 1% of patients, are there less restrictive practices that we could be using to manage those psychiatric patients?

Ms MOSS: I just wanted to be clear that the premise of the question was not that this is ...

Mr YAN: No, not everybody—the 1% who we are having to use those restrictive practices on.

Dr BRICENO: I am happy to commence the answer and then hand it over to David to finalise it.

I agree that is our aim. Our aim is to provide a less restrictive practice. That goes to my previous answer about providing the best care at the right time and the right place. That means care closer to home. One of the initiatives that we are driving is providing that care closer to home in order to avoid that extrication of patients from communities into hospital when that could have been avoided.

Increasing capacity and capability in our primary healthcare spaces, our community-based mental health services in our regional hospitals and the ability to treat more patients there before they are required to be airlifted out and brought into an emergency department will reduce restrictive practices. Unfortunately, some patients do need—despite our best efforts, it escalates—heavy sedation and more restrictive practices.

We have seen data on the reduction of restrictive practices in the Northern Territory in recent times. This is quite significant data from national sources compared with other jurisdictions.

There is always room for improvement. We are committed to continue to do so. The steps taken into the new *Mental Health and Related Services Act* and some of our internal practices to drive that is testament to it, as is the intent to invest more in out-of-hospital mental healthcare rather than more into hospitals to prevent patients escalating to when they actually do need restrictive practices.

Mr YAN: I will have questions later about care in communities. Apart from the 20 in Cowdy and the 11 in JRU, are we utilising any other beds in RDH for mental health or psychiatric patients?

Ms MOSS: I am aware that happens from time to time. I am assuming you are talking about outliers. There are 13% of outliers.

Mr YAN: Are the 20 and the 11 for Cowdy and JRU full?

Ms MOSS: Yes, 13% of mental health patients during 1 July 2022 to 31 March 2023—1,392 outlier bed days, so 12.9% of all mental health patients bed days for that period.

Mr YAN: Do we have any ...

Ms MOSS: Also less in Alice Springs.

Mr YAN: That is always good. We like less in Alice Springs.

Do we currently have any mental health patients in A&E today? It is just an interesting question I thought I would throw in.

Ms MOSS: I am not sure. We do not have the data for today. It is not in the reporting period. We understand it is unlikely today though.

Mr YAN: Unlikely today is good news.

Ms MOSS: There are available beds, so it is unlikely. It is not within the period we are talking about, Member for Namatjira.

Mr YAN: That is good news. I remember some years ago when the new correctional facility was built at Holtze, part of the requirements at the facility was a mental health facility built next door. I think it was 30 or 34 beds. That was supposed to be utilised as a mental health facility. Are there any plans to revisit and fund this as a mental health unit as it was designed for back in the day?

Ms MOSS: Regarding the complex behavioural unit at the correctional facility, it has remained under Corrections management in operations to date. There has still been a partnership arrangement where we have a number of mental health patients who require acute inpatient unit being treated at the Joan Ridley Unit.

There has been a feasibility study completed by the Department of Health about the CBU, and a small-scale trial of service provisions is planned for later this year.

Mr YAN: Plan to look at CBU to be utilised for what it was initially designed and built for?

Ms MOSS: We will be running a small-scale trial of the service under the Department of Health.

Ms GORE: The proposed trial would be looking at a small pod of the CBU being used for in-reach from Health to that facility. Since the CBU was built, we have come to a better understanding of the potential patient cohort. At the moment, it is acting as a respite centre to address complex mental health concerns amongst the broad prison population. If it was moved outside of the fence, it would only be available to those who are considered not fit to plead. The current numbers of that in the Territory is not right to justify the full investment in a 24-bed unit.

At the moment it is being optimised as a timeout space for people with a range of complex concerns in the prison environment, which is probably good for them in health and wellbeing. There is a small cohort where we would like to make a pod available for intensive care so they do not need to be transferred to RDH.

Mr YAN: Effectively, we are talking about prisoners from the facility, rather than accessing JRU or Cowdy, being managed by Health in CBU with Health staff, psychiatrists, psychologists ...

Ms GORE: That is correct.

Mr YAN: When was that trial to commence?

Ms MOSS: Later this year.

Mr YAN: I look forward to hearing about it at the next Estimates.

Currently, how many allied health staff are working in mental health? If you can, I would not mind a breakdown for adult and youth inpatients if possible.

Ms MOSS: I do not have the breakdown of adult and youth inpatients. I need to take that on notice, but I have 51 FTE for 2023 across all the mental health services.

Mr YAN: Across mental health?

Ms MOSS: Yes. If you require further breakdown ...

Mr YAN: I was specifically looking for allied health staff.

Ms MOSS: Yes, it is 51 across all services. A further breakdown?

Mr YAN: Yes, if I could have a breakdown please. I am happy to take that on notice. As part of that, I would also like a breakdown of how many are psychologists and psychiatrists.

Ms MOSS: For psychiatrists we have 43 FTE. The 51 is an addition to that.

Mr YAN: There are 43 FTE psychiatrists. And psychologists?

Ms MOSS: Psychologists will part of the 51.

Mr YAN: In that 51 if I can get a breakdown of those I will pick up who the psychologists are.

Ms MOSS: And a breakdown of child and adult?

Mr YAN: A breakdown between adult and youth inpatients. I have the question ready to go now. Sorry, Hansard.

Question on Notice No 4.10

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

Mr YAN: Minister, of the 51 FTE [Editor's note: following clarification from the minister, the Member for Namatjira requested that this be changed to 76] allied health staff working in mental health, can I have a breakdown of how many are for adult inpatients, youth inpatients and how many psychologists are part of that breakdown—adult and youth as well?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes. I am just noting 51 is across ...

Mr YAN: Across the Territory.

Ms MOSS: Just in inpatient—yes. I understand what you are asking for. I want to be clear on the record that 51 is not just inpatient.

Mr YAN: Yes, and the breakdown for inpatient of adult and youth.

Mr CHAIR: Do we need to restate the question again?

Mr YAN: No, the minister has the question.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 4.10.

Mr YAN: I am happy to stay on the opening statement or we can move to the Output 5.2.

Mr CHAIR: There are two outputs and one Output Group; it is up to you what you would like to do.

Mr YAN: It is up to the minister.

Ms MOSS: Member for Namatjira, I would suggest we have moved out of it already. I am happy to go to the output, unless you still have questions on the opening statement?

Mr CHAIR: Or there could be a question for whole-of-government fiscal strategy.

Mr YAN: What is your current contribution to Grow NT?

Ms MOSS: The current figure is \$214, 591.

Mr YAN: What was our previous funding for Grow NT?

Ms MOSS: That is the figure. They were funded through a five-year funding agreement from 2017 to 2022.

Mr YAN: How long has Grow NT been providing services in the Territory?

Ms MOSS: They have been offering peer support in the community. There have been ongoing conversations with Grow NT about their funding and avenue streams that are available through the NTPHN, for example. It might be more fit for purpose for the activities and the supports that they run, but I will ask Marco on speak to that in greater detail.

Dr BRICENO: They have been delivering services in the Territory for many decades. I do not have the specific number available. As the minister hinted, the existing agreement was a five-year agreement that expired in 2022 and was extended for a year until December this year.

Mr YAN: Do we have a funding commitment for Grow NT past December this year?

Ms MOSS: No, we do not.

Mr YAN: Is there any reason why we are no longer funding Grow NT past December if it has been providing a service for a number of decades?

Ms MOSS: I touched on this in my previous answer. The advice I have received is that there have been ongoing conversations about other, potentially more appropriate, avenues of funding for the services that it provides such as those provided by NT PHN. Bridging funding has been provided whilst the organisation looks to those avenues to continue the projects. I will ask Marco to add further details.

Dr BRICENO: The appropriate source of funding ongoing for the services that Grow NT provides, which are valuable to the Territory, are more reliant on funding that is commissioned by the Commonwealth, usually to the primary healthcare network, NT PHN. We have decided that it will be appropriate that you continue ongoing funding through that avenue rather than through the NT Government. That service is more aligned to that funding stream for ongoing services.

Mr YAN: Has your office and department been negotiating with PHN for the ongoing funding post the end of this contract in December?

Ms MOSS: My office is not involved in the funding agreement with Grow NT. That conversation has been happening at a department level for quite some time and before I was in this role.

Mr YAN: My advice is that Grow NT was told that there were discussions happening between the Northern Territory Government—I expect through Mental Health or Health—and the national PHN and that they were not working with it to negotiate the funding. Grow NT contacted PHN and were advised that no discussions had taken place between the Northern Territory Government and PHN. That is what I am trying to clarify.

You are saying that you are trying to transition the funding to PHN and there were discussions. Grow NT has contacted PHN, and PHN has told Grow NT that no discussions have taken place, so effectively its funding will cease in December this year with no ongoing support.

Ms MOSS: I am not party to those ongoing conversations and negotiations. The advice I have and what I would be encouraging Grow NT to do is to have those conversations with NT PHN. I will ask Marco to speak in more detail about your question.

Mr YAN: I would like to get to the bottom of this, because it seems to be a bit confusing.

Dr BRICENO: I will commence the conversation and maybe pass it to Cecelia to provide extra details. With any grant we offer to any organisation to commission services, the services are reviewed periodically to ensure they are still aligned to the needs of the community and the organisation, in this case NT Health.

When those conversations occurred in the past with this organisation, it was highlighted that we were no longer seeing the alignment of the services it provided with our priorities and funding. However, we thought its service was more aligned with the funding that the Commonwealth provides for the delivery of community-based mental health services, including support groups like Grow. We advised that it should continue those conversations with PHN to ensure that it accesses grants that will allow it to continue its services going forward.

While we provided them with an initial one-year extension for that conversation to occur, we then gave them notice that our intention was not to renew. For them we have a concession period where alternative funding can be secured to avoid any disruption of that service to our community.

The priority for NT Health is to deliver more services, as I mentioned before, in remote communities. We felt that funding was better utilised to invest in services that are outside of the greater Darwin area. There are many other providers that deliver that service in Darwin, mostly through the PHN and the Commonwealth, hence our decision to try to channel the service that Grow provides down the same avenue of how the similar services access their funding.

Mr YAN: I appreciate the clarity on that. Grow NT was of the belief or was told that NT Health was to be contacting PHN to assist with that funding changeover. When Grow NT contacted PHN, PHN said that there were no discussions between NT Health and PHN on that matter. That is where the confusion sits.

I go back to the minister's opening statement about suicide and the whole-of-community solutions. After X number of decades and service, Grow NT fits in there. Whilst I am pleased that you are focusing on remote communities outside of Darwin, there is also still a need in Darwin. Grow NT has been fitting into that niche.

I need to find out where that clarity is with communication between NT Health and PHN. Grow advised us that did not happen. Now they find themselves about to run out of funding. I believe—as a lot of people do—that they are a critical service to our community. They are based on a volunteer organisation that, effectively, is not costing the Northern Territory Government a lot of money.

Ms MOSS: I will go to Cecelia to add some addition context. She is familiar with the communications that have occurred with that organisation over quite some time.

Ms GORE: The communication with PHN was unfortunate timing. The PHN has a significant changeover of staff in this area. The first meeting that Grow had with the PHN after we had talked to them, they met with staff who had no visibility of all the previous negotiations which had occurred. That has been clarified with Grow and the CEO of the NT PHN. We have provided Grow with the evidence of the communication that had been occurring over nearly 12 months with the staff of PHN.

The second part of that is that PHN has to make its own assessment and commissioning. All that NT Health could ever do was recommend, advocate and suggest strongly that this was a viable and important organisation to support. Those processes then go into their framework for what is the shape of the service system in the NT.

When Grow started about 60 years ago, it was one of the very few providers. They are now one of dozens. Some of those are also organisations in the Territory—like 221—which are home-grown charities seeking philanthropic funding and working at where the gaps in the service system are. That has become quite a crowded and competitive space in the NGO sector, which is great for the NT.

NT Health is trying to continue to provide a base from which Grow can continue to advocate for future funding from a range of possible sources, not just the NT PHN. There are people who fundraise who do philanthropic donations. Grow is a national organisation which gets money from a range of different sources.

In good faith we are trying to make sure they feel they have a basis for support, but it will not be from the NTG because of these other priorities and how the service system has changed. We have a new Head of Health centre in Casuarina being run by Neami; TeamHEALTH has broadly expanded its offerings; and we have small charities and philanthropic people who are working in this space as well. We need everyone as we do not have an unlimited pool of resources to use.

Mr YAN: I find it disturbing that because there was a change of staff in PHN and corporate knowledge and history has been lost, we have an organisation that has provided decades of service to the Territory and to Territorians looking to cease as of December for the sake of a couple of hundred thousand dollars.

There is a \$43m Commonwealth package for mental health in the NT. I understand your position about needing to transition Grow across to PHN because it is a better fit—I think Grow understands that—but it is in a position where it is in a bit of difficulty. A couple of hundred thousand dollars, even \$100,000, would give it a six-month lifeline to get that negotiation done with PHN, although PHN has probably already set its budget.

Ms MOSS: My advice is that there has been that level of understanding and those conversations and that extension of funding to allow that to occur.

Mr YAN: Due to a loss of corporate knowledge within PHN, the negotiations have dropped away. If we are not funding Grow NT post-December, what else will we put in place to ensure peer support services for Territorians? Being a peer supporter and volunteer supporter, it is an important area.

Ms MOSS: It is an incredibly important area. As Cecelia alluded to previously, there is a range of different services across the Northern Territory that are providing services for peer support. In fact, it is an area that is growing. From my recent visit to MHACA in Alice Springs—which you would be familiar with—it has peer workers and it is an important part of its workforce. The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia NT branch—MIFANT—is similar.

We are focused on supporting our Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce and have the framework for ensuring that people with lived experience continue to have mechanisms to have a say in how our core services are delivered. That makes them more effective for those who are receiving them.

We are focused on the importance of lived experience, and I do not want that to get lost. A significant part of Dr Mitchell's work has been connecting with lived experienced groups across the Northern Territory to ensure they are supported and that we have the frameworks to continue to hear the voices of people who take on the mental health services and interact with the systems so that we can make improvements to co-design. It is very much front of mind for us.

Mr YAN: I sincerely hope there is an outcome for Grow NT. It is an important organisation that has been here for a long time. I would hate to see it disappear from the Northern Territory.

Ms MOSS: I want to clarify that the 51 I talked about earlier was for only the Top End region. We were talking about 51 and one in the East Arnhem region. We will still get you that breakdown. The total is 76 across the Northern Territory, including Central Australia, but we still need to provide you with the breakdown.

Mr YAN: Mr Chair, amend that from 51 to 76.

Mr CHAIR: That will be for question on notice 4.10.

Mr YAN: I want to quickly touch on Alice Springs. How many youth mental health beds do we have in Central Australia?

Ms MOSS: There are no youth-specific beds in Central Australia.

Mr YAN: Are there any plans for mental health funding from the Commonwealth to bring any youth mental health beds into the regions outside of Darwin and Palmerston?

Dr MITCHELL: You have to contextualise the size of the Territory. We have 220,000 people; we are small. In the Top End of the Northern Territory we have a youth inpatient program that has five beds for a population of roughly 120,000 to 150,000. The greater area of Alice Springs has about 40,000. If you extrapolate that, you would not even have one bed. If you created one bed, that one bed would be empty most of the time. Do you staff that with a skeleton staff for a bed that is not filled?

I was intrigued by your question because when I was last in Alice Springs, I spoke to the child and adolescent service because I had the same interests you are raising. It told me that it has one youth requiring inpatient care every one to two months. I think that clarifies the need.

Within the pie that is mental health there are lots of needs, and we have to be good stewards of that money and need to spend it in the right places. I do not think necessarily the inpatient bed solves that.

We need lots of investment in the community in ambulatory care so that people do not need beds in the first place. I am putting out a pragmatic scenario. People bang the drum that we need a bed, but clearly there is not the population to sustain a bed.

Mr BURGOYNE: I want to confirm that when a young person needs mental health assistance at Alice Springs Hospital—I have heard instances where people have had eating disorders—are they currently treated in the paediatrics ward?

Ms MOSS: There is a mental health inpatient unit. We have to be clear about what age we are talking about when we are talking about young people. A young person who is 16 and over might be treated differently in that regard from a young person who is under that age.

There is a child and youth mental health team that operates out of Alice Springs and works on an outreach model. They can be admitted to paediatrics.

Mr YAN: Thank you, Dr Mitchell, for your explanation; that does clarify a few things.

If we have a young person who comes in with a psychiatric issue, how are we managing them within the environment in Alice Springs?

Ms MOSS: It probably depends on the set of circumstances. It might be with assistance and input from a relevant professional in Darwin providing input into the care for that young person being cared for in Alice Springs. It might be through the paediatrics ward, for example, or through that child and youth mental health outreach team. It depends on the circumstances we are talking about.

Obviously, when we are talking about zero to eight, we are also going through that process of commissioning that Head to Health Kids centre.

Mr YAN: Is the Head to Health Kids available to everybody? Who will be managing that program?

Ms MOSS: Who is managing and running that program is a process that we will go through with the NT PHN. It is in the stage at present of being co-designed. There is a consultation under way with existing services, Congress and First Nations representatives about how we can make sure that is the best fit for the community, that we are not duplicating any services and that we are providing culturally sensitive services. Yes, the point is that it will be accessible and people will not need an appointment to access those services.

Mr YAN: Will it be available for kids from town and out bush? Will it be running in the Top End, or will it be only a Central Australia thing?

Ms MOSS: Head to Health Kids is in Central Australia. It is a Central Australia specific investment. There is also the Head to Health specific Alice Springs investment. There is already an adult Head to Health centre operating in Darwin out of Casuarina, which is run by Neami.

Mr YAN: As part of the new builds for the youth detention centre in Alice Springs and the new one at Holtze, are specific mental health beds or units included in the designs?

Ms MOSS: Not to my knowledge.

Mr YAN: Will we have a dedicated, or do we have a dedicated, mental health team or at least a mental health professional aligned to those facilities?

Ms MOSS: They are questions that you need to direct to Minister Worden, but I am well aware that there are health services that are operating in Don Dale and in the youth ...

Mr YAN: Mental Health would be providing services to youth detention. The provision of those services would be managed from within Health.

Ms MOSS: Currently there are external providers that are providing health services within youth detention, but I will ask Cecelia to add some extra detail.

Ms GORE: The provision of wellbeing services for the young people in detention is run through a primary care model. It is a GP-led, nursing-led, Aboriginal practitioner-led approach. Where more intensive additional supports are provided for higher clinical needs it is an in-reach service from Health. The actual services are run, funded and employed through funding from Territory Families. Congress provides that service but can call on the psychiatric expertise of the Mental Health team, but it is not a Health-run service, if that makes sense.

Mr YAN: What I am alluding to is if you have a young person in the youth detention centre who requires being taken to a mental health unit in either of our hospitals, how does that fit within your framework?

Ms GORE: It fits in this way. Essentially we would say that the overwhelming majority of young people in detention require intensive supports for a range of concerns, and the approach to them is therapeutic. That then hopefully provides a really strong framework and a strong cultural framework that, hopefully, is preventative for the need for intensive emergency transfer, but the consultant liaison positions—psychiatrists and clinical psychologists—will provide advice to those providing the day-to-day care to make sure those children get the therapeutic supports they need, often in situ. Not many of them require transfer to hospital.

Mr YAN: You were speaking earlier about outliers. Has there been any discussion to assist in managing those outliers with Darwin Private Hospital?

Dr MITCHELL: The simple answer is that the private hospital is not gazetted as a treatment facility, so it would not be practical to move a patient under the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* to a private hospital. In short, the arrangements do not exist. It is important to understand on a practical level why they cannot exist. Bed-buying arrangements exist in other jurisdictions and other regions of Australia. I think it is an important thing to always consider, but it currently does not.

Ms MOSS: There are also additional subacute beds to help with the patient flow at Royal Darwin Hospital. There are seven of those, and that is in direct response to outliers at the hospital.

Mr CHAIR: I suspect my question will go to Dr Mitchell. How does that work for the arrangement with DVA and veterans' mental health brought into RDH? How does that flow? Is it the same process?

Dr MITCHELL: It is a good question. Being a veteran, like you, I am particularly interested ...

Mr CHAIR: Thanks for your service.

Dr MITCHELL: Thank you. One of the difficulties with mental health is always that a lot of funding for veterans comes from the Commonwealth, so everybody who stays a day in uniform is entitled to non-legislated liability cover which is incredibly generous and a wonderful thing. However, it is difficult because we do not always have the services in the Territory available.

One of the things I recommended we consider is that we need some mapping to better understand where the services exist and where the gaps are. That is something we need to think more about. We are not there yet in coordinating all of those things. Obviously, we enjoy a range of mental health services for veterans in the Territory, but the services are heterogeneous and there are gaps. There are probably instances where veterans want to get into the Darwin Private Hospital and cannot because there is not a bed available.

I agree that much more can be done in this space to support the Private. In some ways I am hamstrung because my locus is within the public service. It is great to have these opportunities to advocate for it, because I want to see more done for veterans in the Territory.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention output. On behalf of the committee, I thank the staff assisting the minister this evening. I appreciate that it is quite late, so thank you.

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

YOUTH

SENIORS

DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to the questions relating to the minister's portfolios of Equality and Inclusion; Youth; and Seniors.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and then make an opening statement regarding your portfolios.

Ms MOSS: I introduce the members of the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities executive team who appear with me today and will assist me in responding to your questions. These members are Mr Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer, who you have seen before today; Ms Samantha Livesley, General Manager Community Participation and Inclusion; Ms Kim Charles, Chief Financial Officer; and David Ah Toy, who is the Executive Director of the Reform Management Office.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you want to make an opening statement?

Ms MOSS: In the interests of time, I will not make an opening statement. I was intending to, but the committee probably has questions.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2023–24 as it relates to the portfolios of Equality and Inclusion; Youth; and Seniors. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on the budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr BURGOYNE: It has been spoken about over a number of different portfolios that money that comes out of the Youth budget ends up being spent supporting programs like the town camp community centres in Alice Springs. Is that the case?

Ms MOSS: I assume that you are talking about the youth hubs. Yes, there is funding in Budget 2023 for the youth hubs in Alice Springs.

Mr BURGOYNE: Beautiful. Can you advise what KPIs are attached to that funding?

Ms MOSS: There are four elements that the Youth Development Program is there to promote: listening to young people; keeping kids safe; early intervention, teaching and learning with young people; and caring for young people to keep them strong. There is an agreement in place with Tangentyere Council. There is the intention to do an evaluation of that program. It has reported previously on its activities regarding this particular program, and there will be an evaluation at the end of this funding.

Ms LIVESLEY: We fund Tangentyere. It will report the number of children, the ages and the range of activities it is offering at the youth camps. As the minister mentioned, we will be undertaking an evaluation of the program delivered to date to inform future delivery and enhancement of that program in the town camps.

Mr BURGOYNE: How much money has been spent to date on that program?

Ms LIVESLEY: The investment for this financial year for the town camps is \$2.3m.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is this a part of the initial funding to provide these town camp community centres, or has there been additional funding provided since the original agreement? I thought that was \$1.83m, if I am not mistaken.

Ms MOSS: The expenditure to date is \$1.6m. That is out of the \$2.32m for this financial year. Are you asking about the previous agreement? I would need to double check the amount. That is not in this period.

Mr BURGOYNE: I want to confirm a few things. We have had one figure of \$2.3m spent to date.

Ms MOSS: There is an investment of \$2.3m in 2022–23. Expenditure to 31 March was \$1.621m.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many young people have been engaged in this reporting period for the \$1.6m spent?

Ms MOSS: I am advised there has been a total of 8,747 children and young people attending 188 unique activities, which include weekend bush trips that are about connection with country and culture, during the contracted period from December 2021 to 30 March 2023. The predominant ages of the children and young people attending were between six and 11 years. We will take a review of the service to inform future investment in the model.

Ms CHARLES: The agreement commenced last year and was extended. This year \$2.3m is the total budget and the agreement amount. The amount of \$1.621m is the expenditure to 31 March.

Mr BURGOYNE: There was a figure of 8,748 children who attended the facilities as well as camps since December 2021. Is that individual children?

Ms MOSS: They would not be unique. They would collate the numbers at their events, but it is 188 unique activities and 8,747 attendances at those events and activities.

Mr BURGOYNE: You have obviously done some assessment of how the program was going because you have decided to continue funding it. What assessments have occurred to date that led you to continue the funding arrangement?

Ms LIVESLEY: We have been working with Tangentyere, and there has been no actual formal assessment but they have been funded for 18 months. It is the continuation of the program while we do a formal evaluation to inform any future decisions going forward.

There is the number of unique activities delivered as well as the number of attendances in the youth hubs. The feedback we have received from Tangentyere and the young people and children attending as well as the families is that it has been a really positive program that has been delivered.

Mr BURGOYNE: Was there no assessment criteria that led to the additional funding being provided?

Mr DAVIES: When this project was initiated, Tangentyere had to recruit a team of youth officers who could run the program. It took it to scale, and it was fair to say we had to do some work to make sure the three facilities being used were to a standard that they could be properly utilised. It has taken a while for the program to bed down and start to get some scale and capability in it. It is too early to just turn it off without a proper evaluation.

We will extend the existing grant agreement for the next six-month period to 31 January. That extension will ensure the services cover the September and October school break and the end of school year holiday periods while we do an intensive review and have a good look at the program. We will make sure we interview the officers who are working in the program, the traditional owners who have been working there and Tangentyere.

We think it is worthwhile sticking with this program, particularly given that it is engaging young people. We want to make sure that in doing so we are taking the time to do it properly.

Mr BURGOYNE: From previous conversations we have had I know about the hub at Karnte camp and Trucking Yards. You mentioned three facilities. Where is the third one?

Mr DAVIES: The third one is at Hidden Valley.

Mr BURGOYNE: Initially it was to provide four—north, east, south and west. Is there a fourth site being looked at?

Mr DAVIES: No, not at the moment. We have made sure that we can fund the programs properly that are being run with the dollars available. The fourth one could be an option in the longer term, but we would need the right funding support to do it, and that is not available right now.

Mr BURGOYNE: Which town camp would you be looking at?

Mr DAVIES: We would have to talk to Tangentyere about that and seek its advice.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has there been one particular town camp that has seen more children utilise the hub than any others?

Mr DAVIES: We would have to seek that advice. I have visited all three sites and each of them is different, but we do not have that detail. We could unpack those numbers. I am sure we could check and see which ones are being most utilised.

Mr CHAIR: Do you want to put that on notice before I close this off?

Question on Notice No 4.11

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

Mr BURGOYNE: Could we have a breakdown of the number of youth utilising the facilities at Karnte camp, Trucking Yards and Hidden Valley as it relates to the youth hubs?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 4.11.

Mr CHAIR: The time is expiring. I would like to give the minister an opportunity to close. I thank you all for coming in this evening. I appreciate you waited a long time to get 12 minutes worth of time on record for all your hard work.

Mr YAN: Good questions!

Mr CHAIR: They were good questions. I appreciate that you sat there for a long time. Some of you came in this morning and again this evening and were away from your families. It is appreciated and acknowledged.

Ms MOSS: I thank the officials from Territory Families who joined me today and did a tremendous supporting me and answering questions throughout the course of the evening. I also thank the committee; it is a late night, and you have been here all day. Thank you to everyone involved.

The committee concluded.
