

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

Mr CHAIR: I welcome everybody present to this public hearing of the Estimates Committee. This is the 25th year of the Estimates Committee process. The procedures of the committee have become well established over that time and are outlined in the Estimates Information Manual which is available on the Assembly's website.

I will, however, highlight a few key procedural points. The Estimates Hearings Agenda gives the order that outputs will be considered. I remind members to seek clarification from the minister at the beginning of a hearing if they are unsure of which output a matter falls under.

It is important that each question on notice is given a number and repeated so its terms are clear. I will interrupt whenever a question is taken on notice and to ensure this occurs. I will also interrupt when answers are given to clarify the question number it refers to.

Questions on notice must be answered by 13 July 2026 under the Assembly's resolution. The committee is not able to accept any answers after that date.

I will allow 20 minutes for opening statements and a five-minute warning will be given at the 15-minute mark, which will sound like this.

I ask that agency staff leave promptly when their hearing is complete so that we can admit the next agency. There will be a short break between each agency for the transition.

MINISTER FINOCCHIARO'S PORTFOLIOS

CHIEF MINISTER

NT ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed with consideration for the estimates of proposed expenditure in the order set out in the Estimates Hearings Agenda, commencing with the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you to the committee. We welcome everyone to Estimates 2026. I am joined by Kirsten Kelly, the NT Electoral Commissioner and Kostas Trikilis, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner. I will not make an opening statement, as is normal convention and tradition with the independent statutory officers. They are free to make their own opening statements. I will pass to Ms Kelly.

Ms KELLY: Good morning Chair and members of the committee. With me today is the Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Kostas Trikilis. Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

The Northern Territory Electoral Commission, otherwise known as NTEC, is an independent government agency responsible for the impartial conduct of Legislative Assembly and local government council elections in the Northern Territory.

In addition to delivery elections, the NTEC has statutory responsibilities including Legislative Assembly electoral boundary reviews and supporting local government representation reviews; financial disclosure, education and community engagement; the conduct of fee-for-service elections and ballot services; enrolment support; research; and corporate functions.

Legislative Assembly and local government general elections are fixed by legislation and held every four years in August, with local government elections occurring 12 months after the Territory election, most recently held in August 2025. This election cycle, together with the preparation and post-election phases, represents a significant and resource-intensive period for the NT.

Nationally, elections are often described as the largest peacetime logistical exercise in Australia. This is particularly relevant in the Northern Territory where election delivery extends well beyond election day. Election delivery involves many months of logistical planning for equipment and training of staff, voter education and engagement, extensive communication activities, assurance activities including event rehearsals and service delivery across diverse and remote communities. Post-election activities include evaluation, reporting, legislative reform and planning for the next election cycle.

Outside general elections electoral activity remains high. Since August 2025 local government elections there have been seven by-elections conducted by the NTEC, with a further two by-elections scheduled for July. Six supplementary elections were required following the August 2025 local government elections.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the NTEC staff for their contribution to the 2025 local government elections, the supplementary elections, ongoing by-election activity and the delivery of our corporate and statutory functions. I also acknowledge the significant casual workforce comprising over 400 staff who supported the delivery of the election.

My thanks further extends to the Queensland Electoral Commission for providing 500 laptop devices to support the 2025 local government elections; the Electoral Integrity Assurance Task Force, which was established at the NTEC's request to support the integrity of the 2025 local government elections; and the Northern Territory shared services provided by the Department of Corporate and Digital Development, which delivered elevated support during the election event. These contributions are critical to maintaining public trust in the democratic process.

In regard to current enrolment in the Northern Territory, on 30 April 2026 the enrolment rate is 91.9%. that represents 155,465 people who are enrolled to vote in the Northern Territory. There is an estimated 13,657 unenrolled electors out of a total eligible elector population of 169,122.

It is important to note that whilst there are a number of Territorians who are unenrolled, provisional voting continues to be available in the Northern Territory for eligible voters not on the roll where their vote will be admitted where their eligibility to vote is confirmed.

Since 1 July 2025 the NTEC has conducted seven local government by-elections at a cost of approximately \$225,000. Elections are delivered on a marginal cost recovery plus 15% corporate overhead which is applied for by-elections but not applied to general elections. There have been three fee-for-service elections conducted, generating income of \$8,200. Due to election commitments and capacity, no additional ballot services were provided by the NTEC during that period.

The NTEC delivers a range of education programs including joint programs with parliamentary education services, school elections and curriculum-linked programs, and adult education initiatives. A key initiative is our Democracy Dash. This is an interactive program that is held in Darwin and Alice Springs across the year where students engage with democratic institutions.

During the reporting period, there were 112 education sessions delivered, 12 school elections conducted and three Democracy Dash events delivered with 237 students participating. Overall, as at 31 May, there have been 4,743 participants in our education programs.

With regard to the 2025 local government elections held in August, 16 of the 18 local government councils participated. Coomalie Community Government Council participated in a general election that was held concurrently with the 2025 local government elections. Barkly Regional Council and Groote Archipelago Regional Council did not participate due to them participating in recent general elections.

A snapshot of the election is as follows. At the close of rolls, there are 151,035 electors enrolled in local government areas across the Territory. Fifty-four elections were conducted to fill 144 vacancies. Two hundred and seventy-one candidates nominated. Thirty-four elections were contested. Fourteen elections were uncontested. Six elections partly failed where there were insufficient candidates. Twenty-nine candidates were dual candidates running for both principal mayor position as well as a councillor vacancy.

The turnout for the 2025 local government elections was 55.8%, with the highest turnout being 74.5% and the lowest being 10%. Informality for the election was 6.9; that equates to 5,097 votes. We had the highest number of candidates on the ballot paper for the Alice Springs council elections. We had 25 candidates contest the elections in Alice Springs.

Voting services provided for the election included six early voting centres, 17 election day voting centres, 14 remote voting teams visiting 72 locations and providing 252 hours of voting services.

It is important to note that with uncontested elections, the planning is prepared based on fully contested elections and revised down after the declaration of nominations.

There were also three urban mobile teams that visited hospitals and correctional centres providing voting services.

Communications for the general election commenced from 1 July until 8 September across three phases where phase one encouraged enrolment. Phase two focused on voter education and empowerment, and phase three was the final call to vote and participate. Channels used included TV, radio, digital, social media, print signage and direct mail.

There were over 880 website views, 71.3% via mobile devices with just under 180 SMSs sent to electors and just under 105,000 emails also sent to electors. Daily election updates were published online throughout the voting and count period as a new initiative.

Regarding voter behaviour, early voting continues to be a popular choice for electors with just over 51% of people choosing to vote early, 31% on election day, 7.3% absent voting where an elector votes outside of their council area but is still able to cast a vote. If an elector was in Alice Springs but enrolled in Darwin, they were still able to attend a voting centre in Alice Springs and cast an absent vote. Postal voting is still popular at 6.2% and mobile voting comprised 3.8%. There were 310 declaration votes submitted for the election.

A cost estimate of the election was provided at \$2.87m; the actual cost for delivering the election was \$2.16m, that is compared with \$1.86m in delivering the 2021 election. Cost variations reflect differences in the number of participating councils, the number of contested elections and the electors enrolled at the close of rolls.

The NTEC does not receive appropriation to conduct local government elections and is required to manage election costs across financial years through its existing budget and often required to bring its appropriation forward and receive equity injections to manage the cash flow.

Councils are responsible for election costs, which includes direct and apportioned costs. Invoices were issued to councils in December 2025, with individual council election reports published in February this year.

The major cost drivers for the 2025 local government elections were staff wages, comprising 62% of the cost; communications being 12% of the cost; travel and accommodation being 6% of the cost; transport and materials 5% being each of the cost; and IT costs around 4%.

Cost pressures continue for electoral commissions in service delivery, as with other service providers, associated with wage growth, inflation and transport and accommodation cost increases.

For the 2025 local government elections, there were 65 complaints received; 39% of them related to campaigning; 19% of those related to campaign material; and 19% of those related to candidate eligibility and the nomination process.

Campaign donation returns were introduced for local government elections on 1 July 2022, and they were first applied to the general election in 2025. Eleven candidates submitted campaign donation returns across three councils, with a total campaign donation of \$86,597. All the campaign returns are published on the NT Electoral Commission website.

As mentioned earlier, six supplementary elections were run following the local government elections. These were held in November across five local government council wards to fill vacancies not filled at the election. The cost of those supplementary elections was \$71,896.

Post-election evaluations were conducted by the NT Electoral Commission, with 9 councils participating in face-to-face debriefing sessions. All councils receive debriefing presentation resources, even if they did not participate in the debriefing sessions. Feedback provided by councils will inform service provision.

Key challenges for electoral commissions continue in areas such as misinformation, disinformation, emerging risks with AI generated content and increasing public and stakeholder expectations. The NTEC must remain prepared and responsive to these risks.

Ongoing challenges for the NT Electoral Commission include base budget constraints, capability gaps, our system fragility and resourcing current and future statutory functions. Our 2022 capability review of the NTEC identified risks that remain relevant today. These findings have been reinforced through a recent organisational review. The NTEC is working across government, with shared service supports and with the Department of Treasury and Finance to address these challenges to support organisational stability and preparedness to successfully deliver the 2028 Territory election.

The NTEC must remain in readiness to deliver elections at any time while preparing for future general elections. Recent local government legislative changes now allow for elections to be conducted if selected by councils, by the NTEC, within 18 months before the next general election. The operational impact of these changes will be assessed over the coming election cycle.

The NTEC participates in local government representation reviews. The next local government representation review will commence this year under the *Local Government Act*.

The NTEC also participates in and supports the review of Legislative Assembly boundaries. The next redistribution is scheduled to begin in early 2027 under the *Electoral Act*. Any boundary changes implemented through that process will be applied for the 2028 Territory elections.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this opening statement, and I am now happy to take any questions.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, commissioner. I will finish these notes here and then we will go to questions.

After the completion of the statement, 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 invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. Other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on an output.

Are there any questions related to the statement?

Ms UIBO: My question is about the redistribution committee and who will be appointed. When will those decisions be made about the appointment for the redistribution committee in 2027?

Ms KELLY: The redistribution committee is set by the provisions of the *Electoral Act* and chaired by a retired judge. The Electoral Commissioner is also on that, as well as the Surveyor-General. We will be looking to formalise arrangements coming to the end of this year to allow the committee to convene early next year.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I know you have been very busy. You have had three elections recently, from what I recall—the City of Darwin, the Nightcliff by-election and Chan Ward. Can the Electoral Commissioner advise the committee of the total cost to the Northern Territory Electoral Commission of conducting the August 2025 City of Darwin election?

Ms KELLY: The cost to conduct the 2025 local government elections was \$2.163m, with the breakdown of 62% of that comprising staff wages; 12% advertising; vehicle hire being around 5%; and staff travel accommodation and reimbursement around 6%. The bulk of the costs are associated with staff wages. The apportioned costs—as I mentioned earlier, the costs to councils paid or charged as a direct cost, which was attributed directly to each council based on costs that council is receiving the benefits of—make up the largest part of the total election costings, 70%.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: On that basis, could you give me an idea of the approximate cost per ward out of the City of Darwin ones?

Ms KELLY: We do not charge per ward; it is for the whole of the council elections.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Was it \$2.163m?

Ms KELLY: The cost for the City of Darwin 2025 local government elections, including GST, was \$688,309. That is the City of Darwin's portion of the overall cost of delivering the 2025 ...

Mr O'GALLAGHER: If you roughly divided that by the four wards it would be a quarter of that or something?

Ms KELLY: It is more the total costs which includes service provision for the City of Darwin.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Can the Electoral Commissioner advise the committee of the total cost of conducting the recent Chan Ward by-election?

Ms KELLY: I can provide that information. The Chan Ward by-election for the City of Darwin is still continuing with final postal votes due for return at 12 noon this Friday, which will be followed by the distribution of preferences. The final costs are yet to be known, but I have made public statements that the estimate of costs is around \$150,000 to deliver that. That is an estimate, with the final costs being charged post-election.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: An estimate of \$150,000.

Ms KELLY: An estimate of \$150,000.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You would add that on to the previous costs.

Mr CHAIR: Just a point of clarification on the Member of Karama’s question, all encompassing—including council, NTG—what was the cost of the council by-election?

Ms KELLY: All of the 16 councils participating in the 2025 August local government elections, the total cost was \$2.163m. For the City of Darwin, their component of that was \$688,309.

Mr CHAIR: Is that the total spent—is there no other spending from other areas outside of council?

Ms KELLY: No. The reference to the Chan Ward, that is a separate election, so it is not part of the cost of the 2025 local government elections.

Mr CHAIR: What was the cost for the Nightcliff by-election?

Ms KELLY: The cost for the Nightcliff by-election is \$220,000. I note that it includes non-voter activities and a compliance review associated with Part 10 of the *Electoral Act*, which is the financial disclosure.

Mr CHAIR: We have the recent Nightcliff by-election, the recent general election for council and the by-election for council. In this can I ask the 2024 cost for Nightcliff?

Ms KELLY: The 2024 cost for the division of Nightcliff?

Mr CHAIR: Yes, the 2024 general election for Nightcliff.

Ms KELLY: I might have to take that one on notice. My apologies; I have 24 figures, but I do not think I have the breakdown by division. I have the total cost of the 2024 election.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Drysdale, please restate the question for the record. My question is: what was the cost of the Nightcliff electorate during the 2024 Territory general election?

Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Electoral Commissioner?

Ms KELLY: Yes, the question is accepted, noting that it is a combined event, so it may take a bit of time to pull out the direct costs that are associated with that particular division as it is a whole-of-Territory event.

Ms UIBO: Chair, can I confirm that this Estimates is the reporting period of 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026, and the question you asked that the commissioner has accepted to take on notice is actually related to August 2024, the previous Estimates period.

Mr CHAIR: That is a very fair point, Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: Maybe it is null and void for this reporting period.

Mr CHAIR: I am happy to strike that last question, being outside of the reporting period, and we will just deal with questions inside the reporting period.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I want to get a clear idea of the City of Darwin one, the Nightcliff election, the Chan Ward and so on. I am only looking at the rough numbers and trying to work it out, but it seems to be around \$500,000 or \$600,000 that we have expended as a result of the transfer of the Member for Nightcliff from council to coming to here and all those elections, would that be a fair assessment?

Ms KELLY: I can only comment on the actual estimate of costs for the City of Darwin Chan election, which is currently estimated at around \$150,000, and the costs for the division of Nightcliff by-election, which were around \$220,000, acknowledging that it includes additional statutory checks and balances.

J DAVIS: You noted that enrolments are up, but you also noted in your annual report at page 5 that voter turnout continues to decline. What strategies are in place to address that?

Ms KELLY: It is correct. We have seen, since the application across the Territory of the Australian Electoral Commission schedule direct enrolment program, an increase of our enrolment participation which now sits over 90% and what we have seen is about an 8% increase in our role over that time. That means we have more people who are required to vote. What we are seeing—this is not limited to the Northern Territory—is declines in participation across Australia.

The NT Electoral Commission, within its remit—we talked earlier about our education programs. It is really important to engage with young people because our youth enrolment is quite low, so it is important we have those programs in the schools. Because we are often running by-elections—that is an opportunity to engage with people through enrolment. It also gives us an opportunity to check enrolment.

Outside of our election activities, there is no funding to engage in participation—I will say that before we lead into a general election event, as was the case in 2024. A 19-week engagement in education program was rolled out across the NT. I think the cost of that was over \$300,000. We had three teams moving throughout communities and providing information, not just about voting at Territory elections, but also local government elections and creating resources in community. That was a good opportunity for the Electoral Commission to identify local assistants, who were then engaged and paid to support elections following that time.

There is work for the Electoral Commission to do to engage with stakeholders to keep discussions around elections and the importance of voting happening outside of those general election events. That is something we are passionate about doing.

J DAVIS: In relation to the education events, and working with young the people you talked about, in the annual report I think you said that 107 sessions were delivered in Palmerston, Darwin and rural areas, with three in regional schools and five in remote schools. How are the areas chosen and has the commission identified any way to increase education outside those urban areas?

Ms KELLY: The schools often will contact the NT Electoral Commission, so there are education and civics resources available on the NTEC website which allow teachers to self-guide and even adults education, so those resources exist now. With regard to participating in democracy dash in school elections, it is initiated by the schools, and we do see in Alice Springs a lot of remote schools will come in to participate in the democracy dash. It is not programmed by the NT Electoral Commission; it is on request and supported through school—school-based.

J DAVIS: Does that include—how do you plan your adult education sessions? I saw you had done seven in this reporting period.

Ms KELLY: That is based on reach-out, but a lot of adult programs are run through Parliamentary Education Services, which the NT Electoral Commission participates in as part of that.

J DAVIS: Is there any measure or evaluation of what impact those programs have on voter engagement?

Ms KELLY: Not in a formal sense, no, apart from in ad hoc feedback about the success. There is certainly opportunity there to work with other education providers and stakeholders to look at those programs.

J DAVIS: On a separate matter, do you have a costing of the early voting period—the two-week voting period. Actually, that would go to a previous—it is outside this output. How much does it cost to run two weeks of early voting as opposed to one week?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For the council election.

J DAVIS: For the council election, yes, thank you Chief Minister.

Ms KELLY: I do not have that breakdown, but I can look at doing it. What would need to happen is looking at specific voting and the cost in staff wages, then making some estimates on other costs associated with that. I can take that on notice if you are happy for that?

J DAVIS: Yes, thank you. That would be great.

Question on Notice No 1.1

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

J DAVIS: Can you please outline the costs of running a two-week as compared with a one-week early voting period?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Ms KELLY: I accept the question.

If I may, I will provide some context to that question, because we get asked about reducing services, voting centre numbers and voting hours, particularly through early voting. We acknowledge that even reducing voting periods to accommodate for the elector need, you usually have to put on additional staff, so instead of having people come over across a two-week period, you need to be resource responsive to be able to service.

I just make that comment, but certainly I am happy to get that information for you.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.1.

J DAVIS: I think you may have answered this for the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the redrawing of electoral boundaries. When you were talking about who is on that committee, that was in answer to that question.

Ms KELLY: That is correct.

J DAVIS: Thank you. You said it will be early 2028 that it will be ...

Ms KELLY: Early 2027, the committee will convene with administrative actions occurring at the end of this year to establish a Chair.

J DAVIS: When would we expect to know what those boundaries will be?

Ms KELLY: There are statutory timeframes for those processes to be followed. They have to be enforced if there are any boundary changes for the 2028 Territory elections, and the process usually takes around 12 months. There are a number of public consultation periods required through that process.

J DAVIS: Is it possible to get detail of what those consultation periods look like? Are they publicly available?

Ms KELLY: Absolutely. The previous redistribution report is available on the NTEC website, which includes a timetable of the statutory consultation periods required.

J DAVIS: Thank you.

Mrs ZIO: Is there any mechanism under the current legislation for the Electoral Commission or taxpayers to recover the cost of a by-election where a vacancy occurs shortly after a general election?

Ms KELLY: Can I clarify whether that question relates to Legislative Assembly or local government elections or both?

Mrs ZIO: Both.

Ms KELLY: In regard to Legislative Assembly by-elections, there is no cost-recovery provision in there because they are unscheduled. They are usually covered through a Treasurer's advance because they are unscheduled events.

With regard to local government elections, the councils are responsible for the reasonable costs in conducting the elections and the costs incurred by the NT Electoral Commission. Outside of cost recovering through the councils themselves, they are the only avenues to cost recovery.

Mrs ZIO: Thank you for that. with the general elections, there is no cost-recovery mechanism. Can the commissioner confirm that the cost of these by-elections is ultimately borne by taxpayers?

Ms KELLY: I can confirm that the costs for council elections are invoiced, as is practice, to local government councils, and that is a cost owed by councils. I can confirm that costs for general elections, including by-elections for Territory elections, are paid for through general elections. The NT Electoral Commission submits a budget proposal for those, and that is through an appropriation. Initially, it falls mainly through Treasurer's advance and for by-elections, as is current practice, it is recovered through Treasurer's advance.

Mrs ZIO: I guess my question is that you would agree that repeated election events within a short period places a real measurable financial burden on taxpayers.

Ms KELLY: Legislation exists where casual vacancies occurred in how they are conducted, and the Electoral Commission is responsible for conducting those elections and recovering costs through existing practices.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any further questions? That concludes Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any further questions for the NT Electoral Commission?

Thank you for making the time to be with us today. We thank you. The committee will have a short rest as the Office of Integrity and Ethics Commissioner joins us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Before we break I put on the record my thanks to the Electoral Commission. They do an important job. It is a difficult decision in a dynamic environment. I know a lot of preparation would have gone into today. I thank everyone who participated and contributed to the information that has been provided today.

The committee suspended.

OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Office of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you, Mr Chair and the committee. I am joined by Peter Shoyer, who is the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner; the CEO, Reece Kershaw APM; Ms Bronwyn Haack, Executive Contract Officer; Mr John Lynch, Executive Officer; and Ruth Brisbane who is the Senior Administrative Officer.

Mr SHOYER: Good morning, committee members. It is with great pleasure that I provide this opening statement as the inaugural Integrity and Ethics Commissioner for the Northern Territory. I started as commissioner on 1 June, so forgive me if I am not fully across all details. I am sure I will be able to answer most of your questions with the assistance of the staff of the office.

I am honoured to take up this critical position. The new IEC brings together key integrity functions with the aim of creating a stronger framework for the promotion of integrity and accountability in the Northern Territory. I aim to build a commission that is known for its resolution and fairness for acting independently without fear or favour.

The new expanded organisation will enable the bringing together of skill sets and expertise to create more opportunities for staff to support the work of each integrity function.

I thank all the staff members of the various offices for their ongoing work, dedication and commitment to the integrity and public administration and serving the Territory community. I recognise the challenges each office has faced in recent times in the transitional period. I am committed to supporting staff wellbeing and creating a safe and supportive working environment for everyone.

The budgetary information today is presented separately by output group, aligning to the individual offices during 2025–26 in the period up to 31 March 2026. I will give a brief overview of the work of those different offices.

The Office of the ICAC has a statutory function to prevent, detect and investigate improper conduct in public administration. During the reporting period, up to the end of March, 312 reports were received. We anticipate that there will be an increase in reports for the full previous year over the prior year.

We carried over two investigations from the previous financial year and commenced four new investigations during the reporting period. During the period, three investigations and one review have been completed, resulting in one public statement, one investigation report and two general reports.

Prevention and engagement remain a core pillar of the work of the ICAC with 107 education and training sessions delivered to approximately 4,346 participants during the period.

Regarding the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner and Judicial Commission, the Ombudsman's Office has a statutory role across administrative review, police conduct, corrections, information access and privacy oversight, as well as supporting the independent Judicial Commission with secretarial and investigative roles.

Demand for services in all these areas remains high overall with activity levels expected to remain relatively consistent year on year. As at 31 March 2026, there have been 1,706 approaches to the Ombudsman's Office and we would expect there to be nearly 2,300 by the end of the financial year.

In-jurisdiction approaches have included 440 police conduct complaints and 345 complaints involving correctional services. Police complaints are trending down slightly but only because there was a substantially higher level of police complaints in the previous year. Correctional services complaints are trending up slightly.

Complaints regarding other government departments remain a significant proportion of our work. The increasing use of artificial intelligence by complainants is influencing how matters are presented and how they are dealt with.

In the information access and privacy space, enquiries, complaints and data breach notifications are all increasing, perhaps reflecting a rising awareness of data protection issues, contributing to a greater demand for advice, training and capability-building across government agencies.

The office has also taken over responsibility for the *Public Information Act* with one matter currently under consideration.

Regarding the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission, the commission accepts complaints relating to health, disability and aged care services. The commission's objectives include providing an independent, just and fair mechanism for resolving complaints, contributing to review and improvement of services and encouraging awareness of the rights and responsibilities of users and providers.

This office is also handling an increasing number of complaints and enquiries. In the period to end March 2026 the commission received 693 approaches, an increase of 24% on the previous equivalent period.

In closing I acknowledge to work of former acting commissioners and Ombudsmen, most recently Naomi Loudon, Bronwyn Haack and Ruth Brisbane. The work each of the acting officers has undertaken in a time of change must be recognised. I thank them all for their work in keeping each of the offices delivering outcomes for Territorians.

I look forward to working with stakeholders and with all staff to establish the Office of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner as a high-functioning body and an office of choice for skilled staff.

I welcome the opportunity to answer questions.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any questions on the statement? Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, commissioner, and all the best for your new role.

Under the new arrangements, where a matter crosses over between multiple functions within the IEC—for example, an Ombudsman complaint may also raise potential ICAC issues, freedom of information issues and conflicts, health complaints issues et cetera—how is the lead function determined and who will make that decision?

Mr SHOYER: I should say that in the past in one or two of these roles I was engaged fairly often in talking to other office holders about how we could best ensure that every complaint was dealt with, but there was not unnecessary duplication of work. This is a process that went on informally between offices in the past.

How I am intending to deal with that from now on is to establish a strategic approach which will look at different functions, how they are carried out and the best way to ensure the same outcome—that matters are investigated but that there is no unnecessary duplication. We will be developing a strategy which will look at essentially a public interest approach to how all these matters are assessed and conducted.

We are also looking to establish a group within the organisation of senior officers—we will call it a board, but it may end up with another name. More significant cases will be dealt with, judged against those strategic touchpoints to establish what should be investigated and who should do the investigation. A lot of the matters that come through—there are a large number of them—will still be dealt with routinely on a day-to-day basis, but the board will identify the major matters and will consider the best way to deal with these matters and who should be looking at them so that there is no unnecessary duplication. That is not to say that in a particular case there will not be matters where a complaint will be dealt with under more than one function or one aspect of a complaint will be dealt with by one function and other aspects by another function. Broadly speaking, we are trying to take a strategic approach where we look at what is in the public interest as to how best to deal with individual matters that come before us.

Ms UIBO: What safeguards are now in place to ensure that information obtained under a statutory function is not improperly used, shared or relied upon in other functions where it would create a possible conflict or unfairness procedure?

Mr SHOYER: There are statutory provisions about protecting the confidentiality of information. We will have to look at how we work those into that assessment process, but, by and large, working within those statutory provisions that require confidentiality, we will be looking at information sharing which is already provided for in a number of the Acts where you do need to consult with other people to work out how best to deal with the matter. There will be some information sharing within the statutory limits, and that will be dealt with in any strategy. There is already provision in legislation to allow that sharing of information so that we can work out how best to forward complaints and how to deal with them.

There may be situations where a conflict of interest may arise or a potential conflict of interest, and there will be limitations on who can look at those matters based on any procedure for dealing with that conflict of interest.

Over time I would expect that there would be quite a bit of information sharing. At the moment each office acts on its own database. That will be maintained until such time as we work out the best way to approach that. I suspect that will be for some time. As I say, there are existing statutory provisions for information sharing. We will work within those, but we will also be looking at working together to establish the best way to proceed.

Ms UIBO: Are separate teams, reporting lines and information barriers now operating across the functions of the ICAC, Ombudsman, Information Commissioner and health complaints functions? Are all the staffing shared across the multiple offices?

Mr SHOYER: As I indicated, I have been here for a week. We are looking at the best model to operate these matters. There will be sharing of staff because we are looking at protecting the individual functions and making sure that each function that is included in statute is carried on as that function, but we are also acutely aware that we have overlaps where staff have expertise in certain areas that they can share and that we can improve the way the offices function with the sharing of staff and with staff taking on different roles. That will always be with the statutory functions in mind. At the moment it is pretty much business as usual while we work on establishing a new working model for the combined offices.

J DAVIS: You described the potential of working together and sharing resources. Why is the new integrated office costing more than the five standalone offices that it replaced?

Mr SHOYER: We will need to look at how best to use that money. At the moment I am very much looking at the best way to utilise it. We will use every cent we can get. I am more than happy to improve services on the basis of additional funding. At the moment we are working through a model which will take into account the existing level of funding.

J DAVIS: Although I note in the budget there is a higher level of funding for the new office.

Has the amalgamation resulted in a net loss or gain of staff? I think the current FTE is 35. What was the combined FTE across the former offices?

Mr SHOYER: That reflects the current FTE; as of the moment it is around that level. We anticipate that we will actually be able to increase the staffing to some extent. There were a number of vacancies when I came into office. We are looking at the best way that we can actually use those overall to improve the performance of the office.

J DAVIS: What is the current vacancy rate across the commission?

Mr SHOYER: Of established positions, I think we have two vacancies within the Ombudsman's office and two within the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission. I will go through those again. I have a breakdown as at 15 May rather than the end of March: two, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner; two, health complaints; and eight positions vacant at the office of the ICAC. I am not sure all of those are funded. They were positions that previously existed or were on the books, but I do not know if there was full funding for those.

Ms UIBO: Where a conflict is identified between the Integrity Commissioners' different statutory roles, what is the process for notifying the inspector, and what happens to that matter while the inspector determines how it should proceed?

Mr SHOYER: There is a process in place in the legislation to notify the inspector. It is then a matter for the inspector to consider the best way to proceed with that. The inspector may suspend any investigation into that matter while that is underway or may come back relatively quickly, and that may be able to proceed. It will be a matter for the inspector's judgement.

There are different conflicts of interest. There will always be potential for conflict of interest in a particular matter which will not necessarily arise from the fact that more than one organisation could potentially look at a matter. Sometimes it will be because of a personal relationship or a personal interest of some kind. In addition to the statutory provisions, we will be looking at producing a single document which sets out the process and the policy behind that. The legislative provisions will be bolstered by an internal policy which also sets out process.

Ms UIBO: Is there a timeframe for that?

Mr SHOYER: No, not at this stage, but I suspect that will be done fairly quickly because obviously we want a clear process. There are already conflict-of-interest policies in place for the individual officers, so it is not a matter of starting from scratch; it is just unifying the policies so that they say the same thing across the office.

Ms UIBO: Will the new integrity office publicly report on how many conflicts of interests are identified each year, how many are referred to the inspector and whether those matters are managed internally, externally or through another arrangement?

Mr SHOYER: I would have to talk to the inspector about that. I have had an opportunity to talk to the inspector but not at that level of detail. I would see no issue about reporting overall levels of conflicts that are identified and referred to the inspector, but I would have to talk to the inspector about that.

Ms UIBO: Noting Mr Kershaw's role as the CEO and previously a senior police officer in the Northern Territory and the ADF—thank you for your esteemed career—in terms of managing any conflicts of interest when there may be NT Police complaints or matters that are brought to the commission, what arrangements are now in place to manage the actual, potential or perceived conflicts in relation to complaints, investigations or protected communications that may involve NT Police and the CEOs role?

Mr SHOYER: The same statutory provisions will obviously apply—reporting to the inspector. There is a huge amount that Mr Kershaw can bring to the office in terms of particularly ICAC matters but also potentially police matter to the extent that there are any potential conflicts of interest. We have already undertaken to the inspector to provide an overview of possible conflicts of interests there.

I would not see Mr Kershaw's previous involvement in Territory police from precluding him from being involved in police matters, but there may well be a number of matters that he would not be involved in, and we will look at the best way to handle that. There is not necessarily a requirement for Mr Kershaw to be involved in the handling of police complaints or dealing with police matters, but he has a great deal of experience, expertise and background in the matter, so we will look at the best way we can utilise his skills and experience. That may or may not involve police matters.

Ms UIBO: Further to that, noting the CEO role is predominantly about the human resourcing and the functioning of all the different offices that are combined in the IEC, even if the CEO is not involved in the substance of any police-related matters that may come to the commission, the CEO may have responsibility for staffing resources, systems, budgets and corporate priorities. How will the commission and the office ensure that the CEO cannot influence the prioritisation, resourcing, timing and handling of any matters that may involve police?

Mr SHOYER: I have already talked, to some extent, about the creation of a board to look at matters on the basis of a strategic approach. To some extent that will cater for that sort of situation. At the end of the day, though, matters about priorities given are a matter for me in terms of investigation and the resources needed for any particular investigation. Mr Kershaw will have his input. I will, obviously, be working within budgetary restraints, as I have done in the past. Those decisions on matters like that will be a matter for me with input from various staff, including the board and Mr Kershaw. That is the approach I will be adopting.

Ms UIBO: Where a complaint relates to NT Police or the Australian Federal Police and possibly former colleagues of the CEO, former subordinates or matters connected to the CEO's former policing roles, how will these specific matters be dealt with within the commission?

Mr SHOYER: Again, Mr Kershaw has a lot that he can contribute. You noted that he will be doing a lot along the lines of the chief executive. I think he can contribute in some ways to the oversight of police matters. He can certainly contribute to the work of intelligence in a broader sense and looking at the potential for dealing with improper conduct across the board.

We are certainly aware that he has some relationships with existing police staff. Those individual relationships will be raised where they might create a conflict of interest; they will be referred to the inspector. In general, the approach would be where he has a close existing relationship with police he would not be involved in those matters.

J DAVIS: Commissioner, congratulations on your appointment, and yours too, CEO.

I want to clarify there are no specific governance arrangements put in place to manage any actual or perceived conflict of interest for the CEO. It will be managed by you and the inspector on a case-by-case basis; is that correct?

Mr SHOYER: There will be an overarching conflict-of-interest policy. There are also specific arrangements in the legislation for the inspector. That is the process that has been recognised by parliament as the way to approach that. It will be a matter for the inspector to consider if there is a potential conflict of interest that arises.

Before we get to that stage, there will obviously be matters where there may be a close relationship with a particular officer. It may not be a police officer; it may be someone else. This does not just apply to Mr Kershaw; this applies to all of the staff and officers. That is the approach that will be taken in line with policies and the legislation.

Ms UIBO: It may be early days and I note that, but in terms of the possible board or tribunal establishment, is it your intention that it is a—to the Member for Johnston's question—way of sorting out some of that internal governance, that there could be possible legislation that could then be implemented to safeguard that within the integrity commission as opposed to relying on the current commissioner of the day having that board or tribunal established if it is not legislated?

Mr SHOYER: It will be an internal board of senior staff so it will not necessarily include anyone external. Whether it is recognised in legislation or not is a matter for parliament. The authors of the report that led to the establishment of this office recognised there needs to be a reasonable amount of flexibility as to the best way to operate within the new office. I would not necessarily be looking at establishing a legislative framework for that. That is entirely a matter for parliament.

J DAVIS: What was the total cost—this may be a question for the Chief Minister—for recruitment of the commissioner, CEO and inspector on the commission?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As a matter of privacy and practice, people's salaries are never disclosed in that way. There is the budget for the commission and it is now up to the commissioner to make sure that the office is funded with the staff required within that budget envelope.

J DAVIS: I was asking about the recruitment cost, not the wages.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.2

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

J DAVIS: What were the recruitment costs for the commissioner, CEO and inspector on the Integrity and Ethics Commission?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.2.

J DAVIS: You just said that, as a matter of privacy, a salary is not disclosed at a senior executive level. Is that across the board?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Governments of all persuasions never go into what staff are paid or a particular salary.

J DAVIS: Is it that the public cannot know how much a commissioner is being paid?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is inappropriate to go into people's individual contracts. If you are very interested in this area, I would encourage you to ask those questions of OCPE. It is the agency that manages that for whole of government. Perhaps it is best to direct your question to OCPE, which will be Minister Hersey.

J DAVIS: Mr McClintock conducted the three-week review that recommended merging the integrity bodies into this commission. He has since been appointed the inspector. What was the process for that appointment? How many candidates were considered?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr McClintock was already conducting the function of ICAC inspector. The transition over to IEC inspector for the remainder of his contract was a practical way of establishing that role. He has vast amounts of experience and having been the ICAC inspector that was appointed by the previous Labor government and completing those roles and being involved in the review, he has a clear understanding of the functions. That was accepted by the parliament, so he was then recommended to the Administrator for appointment.

J DAVIS: Was the process that it rolled over from being the ICAC inspector; is that correct?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Effectively.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 3 – OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER AGAINST CORRUPTION
Output 3.1 – Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Operations

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 3, Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption, Output 3.1, Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Operations. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Commissioner, the annual report shows the office had 16.1 FTE down from 21.2 FTE the year before, with the vacant positions not advertised to manage employee expenses. The inspector also noted the agency had been significantly under strength and said, 'No agency in the position of the ICAC can perform its public duties adequately whilst so understaffed'.

Are you now satisfied commissioner that the ICAC is properly resourced to perform its investigations, prevention, education and oversight functions?

Mr SHOYER: Having looked at the new budget and being in place for a short time, over the next year we will undertake a transitional phase. We will ensure that we are fully staffed; we will undertake our roles from there and I think it is something that I will only be in a position to judge in six months' time given there is some understaffing. I think that will give us an opportunity to look at the best way to spend our resources across the agencies and to make an assessment of whether we need additional funding.

At this stage I am not in a position to say that the resources are not sufficient and what we need to do is do our best over the next financial year to make sure we function as effectively as possible.

Ms UIBO: The annual report also showed that the ICAC did not meet its targets for investigation completed within six months or 12 months, achieving 25% and 50% respectively. What are the main causes of those delays, and what is the current status of the remaining legacy investigations now with new Integrity and Ethics Commission?

Mr SHOYER: With respect to active investigations as at 31 March there were three that were still open. These numbers are down significantly from previous years chiefly because the type of matters that the ICAC is required to investigate itself have reduced, with changes to the legislation which required the ICAC clearly to focus on the most serious matters.

As I indicated, there were three matters finalised for the financial year and four investigations commenced. One of the difficulties, in terms of the KPI, was a matter which had a huge elapsed time and was suspended for more than a year. That changed the average days to well above the level. It had an elapsed time of 1,362 days, although, as I say, more than a year of that was suspended. I would anticipate that there will be a much-improved figure from that point of view. That one particular matter took a very long time, and two out of the three finalised investigations were finalised within 365 days.

J DAVIS: In the budget papers you note that this year you received 600 allegations. What is the target for allegations for next year?

Mr SHOYER: That figure of 600 is an estimate for 2025–26 based on figures at the end of March. The note indicates that it is due to an increase in allegations as a result of mandatory training, targeted education activities and publication of investigation outcomes. Looking at that figure based on more recent trends it may be slightly under the 600, but it will still be relatively close to that estimate made at the time.

We have put the target at 300 again. In a lot of ways it is very hard to estimate the number of matters that are coming in. I think based on historical data that target of 300 is a reasonable estimate, and this year's figures are higher because of those factors that have been indicated, I hope.

J DAVIS: I noted that footnote and it said, as you said, that complaints doubled basically because people were better informed and the 300 reflects underlying demand. Is the assumption that once 'better informed' winds down, less people will be complaining because they do not know they can?

Mr SHOYER: I think they are less minded to, and that really represents the historical figures and trends. That could be part of the explanation or changes that are occurring year on year. Obviously if we find that figure is going to be increased over time, then we will have to look at why is that. I certainly do not want to pull back from continuing education, but it is more based on the historical figures as to what a normal year is. That is our best assessment of why it was an abnormal year this year.

J DAVIS: Is there an intention to continue that public outreach and promotion?

Mr SHOYER: Absolutely. One of the figures I gave beforehand was a significant amount of public training which will be continued. It may be that over time that higher figure is a better estimate of what is occurring going forward. Based on historical figures, that is probably what we are looking for in terms of the reports that are coming in and the allegations that are received.

J DAVIS: What does that mean for you in terms of those extra 300 that came in last year? Where will those concerns go?

Mr SHOYER: In terms of reports, assessments are still being conducted within the timeframe in the KPIs. We can obviously engage more staff to ensure that is ongoing. I think certainly beefing up the ICAC areas, where there are currently staff not engaged, is going to help deal with those.

One of the things that we do is investigations. We have a small number of investigations, given the statutory requirement, for us to focus on. The more serious are corruption matters and anti-democratic matters. We are always going to have a relatively small number of investigations, but that will depend on what comes in from year to year. Most matters that we assess as requiring further action we can refer back to public bodies.

One of the other KPIs is that we estimate about 40 matters will be referred back with a requirement to report back to us on those matters. A large number of the other matters that are assessed are not necessarily proceeded with further because they are assessed as not requiring that.

Essentially, yes, there is a lot more work there that is being dealt with fairly effectively. Part of that is through referring back to agencies. It is going to be part of this process of assessing what the best way to use resources is and getting staff in so that we are up to a full complement of staff. We are using everything—all those matters, all the staff efficiently—but at the same time continuing those education and public communication processes.

J DAVIS: I have a couple more questions about ICAC. Acting ICAC Commissioner Naomi Loudon's last general report contained an investigation review into hiring practices in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Did that investigation look into the appointment of the current CEO, Ms Vellar?

Mr SHOYER: Sorry, I do not know. I think it was fairly specific in terms of the scope. This was Operation Banksia, I take it?

J DAVIS: Correct.

Mr SHOYER: There were four recommendations made. I think it was finalised in March 2026. I am not sure that it was in relation to that specific appointment. There were recommendations made to the OCPD and the department. I could take that on notice. I honestly do not know who was involved or which recruitment processes they were looking at.

J DAVIS: Thank you, I would appreciate that.

Question on Notice No 1.3

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

J DAVIS: Did the ICAC review Operation Banksia include an investigation into the appointment of the current CEO?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Mr SHOYER: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.3.

J DAVIS: Chief Minister, I am confused. You said that it is not common practice to disclose wages, when it is in fact common practice. I note that in answer to question on notice 719 you provided salary information of all the commissioners. What is the salary of the commissioner?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you asking me?

J DAVIS: Yes, Chief Minister.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you want to restate the question?

J DAVIS: What is the salary of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner, noting that you have previously in written questions disclosed salaries of all commissioners?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Again, that is a question for OCPE. I do not have that information.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – OMBUDSMAN’S OFFICE
Output 4.1 – Ombudsman’s Operations

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0, Ombudsman’s Office, Output 4.1, Ombudsman’s Operations. Are there any questions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, I have an answer to a question on notice 1.2 taken on notice in Output 3.0 regarding recruitment costs.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.2

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is \$52,000.

Ms UIBO: In the Ombudsman’s own-motion investigation which found that Territory prisoners were held in conditions that were ‘unreasonable and oppressive’ in the tabled report to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on 27 November 2025, the report found and focused on the unreasonable and oppressive conditions, including severe crowding, exposed in-cell toilets, drinking water located above toilets, limited showers, poor sleeping conditions and very limited access to family. What confidence does the new IEC have that the Northern Territory Government, Corrections and Police departments have fixed some of these systemic failures in the report that was identified?

Mr SHOYER: That report related to police use of watch houses and Corrections use of watch houses but predominantly was in relation to Corrections use of watch houses. Seven of recommendations—there were 16—were accepted in full or in principle by both agencies, four were not accepted by NT police and one applied only to Territory prisoners held by Corrections and was accepted in principle by Corrections. The remainder of the recommendations were noted or accepted in principle or in part. We are aware that a number of those have been adequately addressed. We are continuing to seek updates from Corrections and Police in relation to those matters. All I can say is we are continuing to pursue a number of matters because we think they require further work on implementation.

Ms UIBO: NT Police did not accept four of the recommendations or only partly accepted the overall recommendations including a minimum cell space, routine family contact, daily showers and outdoor time. Without those recommendations being fully implemented by the NT Police Force, is the office satisfied that people held in watch houses in the Northern Territory are being treated appropriately and in accordance with the standards that the community would expect. If not, what further follow-ups—as you mentioned, keeping an eye on this with the recommendations—or escalation options are available to the newly established IEC?

Mr SHOYER: NT Police are in a slightly different situation to Corrections because generally speaking prisoners or people in custody are held in NT Police facilities normally for a shorter period, but in any event, we intend to pursue that as we do with all our reports to ensure that recommendations are not only agreed to but are implemented over time, and we will be continuing to work with police. This is important in terms of the facilities that people in custody have. The requirements will change depending on how long they are in custody, and the less time that that is, particularly in a Corrections context, it is important where they are not in a purpose-built facility. We will continue to pursue that with Corrections and NT Police.

Mr CHAIR: I will call a quick 10-minute break for the committee. This will be a chance for everyone to go to the bathroom and then reconvene at 10.40 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Opposition Leader, over to you.

Ms UIBO: I continue my questions related to the Ombudsman's office.

The primary recommendation from the watch house report which was an own-motion investigation was that Territory prisoners be removed from watch house facilities as a matter of urgency and monthly updates should be provided to the Ombudsman's Office. Is the Ombudsman's Office or the IEC receiving those updates? Are they adequate updates? Is the office satisfied that Northern Territory prisoners are no longer being held in watch houses for inappropriate lengths of time?

Mr SHOYER: I will ask Ms Haack to answer this one. She was the author of the report.

Ms HAACK: Corrections is reporting to us the numbers of Territory prisoners in watch houses. The numbers are very small. The last time our numbers were reported on the report was, I believe, in about March when there were significant weather events across the Territory. It was a time when the Stuart Highway in some places was closed. They report to us how long someone has been in custody; their date of birth, so we can know if they are a child; and what the plans are to remove them. We have been pleased at the small number. It certainly was far less than we were aware was previously occurring.

Ms UIBO: I note you said that the Department of Corrections was reporting regularly. Does that extend to the NT Police Force reporting regularly?

Ms HAACK: It is Corrections that is reporting to us. These are Territory prisoners. The report was directed at people who would normally be in a correctional facility as opposed to someone who might be in and out of police custody, for example.

Ms UIBO: Thank you for that clarification.

You recommended in the report that for 18 months Corrections and NT Police provide the Ombudsman's office with details of any Territory prisoner held in a watch house for seven or more days. How many such reports have you received within the reporting period so far? What do they show about where and if the problem is continuing for those oppressive and unreasonable conditions?

Ms HAACK: Yes, there was one report. I would have to check, but I believe it was March. It related to two individuals who had been south of Darwin. In the circumstances I previously just described where the Territory was very wet, I think parts of the Stuart Highway were closed, they were both female Territory prisoners.

Ms UIBO: I note since the report was tabled in the Northern Territory parliament on 27 November 2025 there was a death in the Tennant Creek watch house. Does that have any functions of reporting around the Ombudsman's office or is that a completely separate reporting function?

Ms HAACK: The Ombudsman's office obviously has a role, along with other statutory agencies, when there is a death in custody. Under our Act we have certain powers. I think, without speaking about any specific matter, you will be aware there is the Coroner involved in matters, there is our office and there are also police in relation to the initial investigation.

Ms UIBO: In the annual report for the Ombudsman's office, it says prisoner complaints declined despite prisoner numbers soaring, and this may be because prisoners face barriers in contacting the Ombudsman's office when they are locked down, held in watchhouses or they have limited phone access. What steps are being taken to ensure that prisoners can reach the Ombudsman's office if there are conditions that are deteriorating in terms of their being isolated and in the watch house?

Mr SHOYER: I will take that one. Generally speaking, prisoners all have access to phones. We take steps to ensure that those phones are maintained. We visit prisons from time to time, but we also try to ensure that they can get access. Prisoners can also write confidentially to our office.

Lockdowns present an obvious issue. We accept situations where, for the security of the prison, that needs to occur. Generally speaking, complaints eventually find their way to our office. It can have a short-term impact on the number of complaints we get. Clearly, it is something we would like to be avoided as much as possible in terms of lockdowns. If there are circumstances that lead to increased lockdowns, it is something that can limit access.

Mr CHAIR: Sorry, Leader of the Opposition. The member for Fannie Bay has a follow-up from your question.

Mrs ZIO: Mine is probably to the Chief Minister. Can you provide an overview of what we inherited when we came into government and how conditions might have improved over the past in watch houses?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What we can tell is a positive story of change. Coming into government, Labor for years has been using police watch houses as prisons. The report that Ms Haack did, as Ombudsman—Ms Haack, I cannot remember the exact timeframe, but I know part of it dated back through the previous government—would that be correct?

Ms HAACK: November.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: From November. Okay. It was during our time, but we had been in government since August that year. August, September, October, November—the report is done.

At some point in the Palmerston watch house, for example, we would have 130 people having to stay at the watch house. As you know, a watch house is normally somewhere, if police make an arrest, they bring them in, process them and they are either bailed or face court the next day and then are moved either into a remand situation or release situation. Normally, it is a matter of a couple of days; in remote settings, it might be around a week. That is the traditional use of a watch house.

Under Labor, as I said, we had this long-term—years—using of police watch houses as prisons, which are not built to be prisons. With our mandate to be reducing crime, which was a significant election commitment we made to the people of the Northern Territory, our change to bail and other laws in October through the parliament as we promised, increased the pressure on watch houses, as Labor had not been doing the work to invest in prison infrastructure. They took an ideological approach to this rather than dealing with the issue and the root causes.

We have been able to bring online a youth remand centre, a youth boot camp and bail accommodation in Alice Springs. We have the Katherine work camp being built now at Katherine CDU. Of course, there is a number of other facilities across the Northern Territory which has effectively seen our watch houses empty. We have police coming up next, but I imagine if the question is asked, ‘How many people are in Palmerston watch house today, for example?’, it would probably be about 20 to 30, compared with the 130 that we were seeing as a result of Labor’s failure to invest in additional prison infrastructure and prison places.

We are certainly on a path of improvement, acknowledging the report that was done by the Ombudsman. This is a legacy issue that the CLP came to government on and has addressed swiftly. In 18 months we have been able to turn those numbers around.

Ms UIBO: Perhaps the Member for Fannie Bay has not read or is not familiar with the report which speaks specifically to the timeframes of the self-imposed motion for the report throughout the last quarter. In reading from directly page 2 of 79, the Acting Ombudsman, Ms Haack, who is before the committee, said:

Throughout the last quarter of 2024, significant legislative reforms were introduced aimed at reducing crime including amendments to bail legislation which resulted in an increasing Northern Territory prison population.

It is clear to me that the Department of Corrections had no alternative but to find a way to accommodate the growing prison population and was legally obliged to do so. However, as this report sets out, the conditions for Territory prisoners held in police watch houses during this period was unacceptably poor in several key regards. No prisoner, regardless of their offence, should be held in such conditions.

I clarify that for the Member for Fannie Bay who obviously has not read the report.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Speaking to that point, Opposition Leader—you quoted it correctly—Corrections had no choice because the government that you were a minister in did not invest in infrastructure. Within a year

of coming to government, we brought online an entire new prison in Berrimah. I give a huge shout-out to Michelle who runs the Berrimah Correctional Centre and received her medal yesterday as part of the King's Birthday Honours.

We stood up an entire new prison, boot camps and remand centres and work camps in 18 months to relieve the pressure that was left behind by you. Corrections and Police had no choice, because for our government it was not an option to leave criminals on the street because you had failed to do your job.

Mr CHAIR: We will come back to the questions. The Opposition Leader will have the first questions, and we will keep on the questions and not focus on individuals as we go through.

Ms UIBO: I thought it was the responsibility of the government of the day to answer the questions, not talk about two to three years ago.

The annual report says that Corrections is struggling with the administrative and infrastructure burden of overcrowding and that there are 'extensive and increasing delays' in responding to complaints and the Ombudsman's inquiries. Are those delays compromising the ability of the Ombudsman's office and the new IEC to provide effective oversight of their function?

Mr SHOYER: There are, from time to time, delays on individual matters. Clearly, where any agency has to deal with an increase in matters it can put additional stress on them. It was noted in the annual report, which put the department on notice that there was a need to look at additional resources, or more dedicated resources, in that area. Therefore, we continue to experience delays in some matters. I think it is something that everyone has to deal with the resources they have.

Yes, it is something that in Corrections over time we have always stressed the need for there to be prompt responses to all matters. It is something that I have experienced over a number of years within Corrections and other agencies, but it is not compromising our ability to do the work. It may impact on timeliness.

Ms UIBO: The Ombudsman's office received 2,293 new approaches in 2024–25, a 14% increase, with complex matters also increasing. At the same time the Ombudsman's office had 17.03 FTEs as at 30 June 2025, with four staff on long-term absence, compared with one staff member the year before. Is the office properly resourced to keep up with complaints to ensure there is police oversight, Corrections matters oversight and own-motions investigations ability?

Mr SHOYER: Again, we are looking at a new office which combines a number of functions, and we will look at the best way to allocate those resources for the future. We think that there can be increased efficiencies.

In terms of the ongoing work at the office, the individual staff who were on long-term leave would have been replaced in due course. It is not necessarily a matter of not having those people in place.

One of the things that I suppose a number of departures from the office over the past 18 months or so, including myself previously—it did create a situation where we needed to get new people in, train them up and have them become expert in the area so that we could continue to deal with the matters that were coming in. That was certainly the case in the police area, where we needed to get new people in and train them up.

That has led to some slight delays, but that is just part of doing business, I think. You will always have a situation where some people move on who meant a huge amount to an organisation and new people have to come in and fill the roles. That is something we are coping with, and in terms of resource allocation that will be part of the process of developing the new model for the combined offices.

Ms UIBO: According to the Ombudsman's annual report, police conduct approaches increased to 651 in 2024–25, a 40% increase on the previous year. The report also identified significant complaints about the use of force and failure to de-escalate, including involving young people and people with mental health conditions. What are the main systemic concerns that the IEC, and formerly the Ombudsman's office as its own standalone independence—that statutory body—are seeing in police conduct complaints?

Mr SHOYER: I will ask Ms Haack to respond in detail in a moment, but simply to say, yes, that was a very significant increase. If you look at the previous two years, the numbers were considerably lower than that. Numbers this year to the end of March have reduced somewhat, but they are somewhere in the middle between the high last year and the lower figures for the two years before.

There have previously been instances where it has been up around the level of last year, and they were dealt with in due course. The numbers that are particularly significant, I think, are the police conduct matters, which at the more serious end are not necessarily about administrative matters; they can be about things like excessive use of force, whereas there are a lot of matters at a lower level that are dealt with and can be dealt with fairly effectively by other means, including simply getting the parties together to try to sort the issues out.

In terms of the more serious matters, they have not increased quite as much, but there is still an increase that we are looking at. What we need to do as part of the process of establishing the new office is to look at how best to deal with those matters to look at the specifics, including the use of force.

I will just ask Ms Haack to talk a bit about the types of complaints specifically.

Ms HAACK: In relation to the types of complaints, I mirror what the commissioner said. I suppose with some detail we get a very broad range of complaints by people. I do not think that complaints being made is necessarily always a negative thing. I think we would be very concerned if we received no complaints, because people raising issues with us is positive.

We get anything from people being unhappy that they engaged in driving conduct and received a ticket and someone else did not—things like that can be dealt with through a customer service inquiry—to matters where police use force or are required to use force. Those matters are reviewed carefully by our office. We need to be very careful to take into account that people are interacting with police in some very difficult circumstances for them and their families. Some of the behaviours that are exhibited towards police can be quite extreme. We look at that footage very carefully, and in appropriate matters work with professional standards in police about the appropriate disposition for those matters.

It really is a very broad matter. Police are putting a stop to an individual behaving often in—they are intervening in someone's conduct, and some people do not appreciate that. As well all know, various people have various responses to that.

Ms UIBO: When you were the Acting Ombudsman the annual report notes deaths in police custody during the reporting period and that work with the ICAC and police on a memorandum of understanding for critical incident oversight was paused. Does that pause leave a gap in independent oversight? When should Territorians expect that the framework should be finalised?

Mr SHOYER: Perhaps I could respond because the work on that memorandum commenced when I was previously in office.

It was an initiative of the ICAC, and it was essentially about looking at serious matters and getting notification for the ICAC and the Ombudsman in the most serious matters—for example, where there had been a shooting or someone was significantly harmed or at a time when police were involved. That was to clarify the role of ICAC and the Ombudsman and how we would potentially be immediately notified and look at what might be appropriate circumstances. That was going on and still goes on, I am sure, on an informal basis. Then there would be discussions between the ICAC and the Ombudsman about the best way to handle the matter.

Obviously, with combining the two offices that is still something we need to pursue this with the Commissioner of Police so that we are informed immediately and can get a sense of what action we should take. Clearly, you have the internal police standards command—professional standards command—in matters where there has been a death you may well have the Coroner as well, but the early notification and consideration of the best approach is important, and it was recognised as important by me and the ICAC.

I will be taking it up again with the Commissioner of Police in due course, but it is not something that necessarily has an impact on the way that matters are handled. It will just, I suppose, codify the way that those matters are dealt with for the future.

Ms UIBO: Do you know who authorised that pause in the work for the MOU?

Mr SHOYER: Sadly, circumstances occurred where that discussion did not continue on, with the former ICAC leaving; it just went to the side. It was not a formal decision to pause it, I do not think. It was something that I raised at the time, but there were a number of other matters that needed to be attended to, and simply it was not actioned.

Ms UIBO: Do you have the numbers of the police conduct approaches in the reporting period from 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026?

Mr SHOYER: The number for that period was 440. My maths is okay, but if you extend that to the four quarters that will be in the high 500s but less than the 651. That may change during the quarter, it just depends, but our estimate would be in the high 500s for the full year.

Ms UIBO: Chair, can I seek leave to table the own-motion investigation into conditions for Territory prisoners in the Northern Territory Police Force watch houses November 2025?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is this the one that was tabled in parliament?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You want to table it today, even though it is already public?

Ms UIBO: Obviously, the Member for Fannie Bay has not read it and does not realise it is under your government period.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is your opinion, Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: If it is easy for her to read it, I have a copy right here.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think it ...

Mr CHAIR: Okay ...

Ms UIBO: I think it is up to the committee, not the Chief Minister.

Mr CHAIR: The committee will decide. Member for Johnston, do you have an issue if it is tabled? Member for Karama? Right; we can table it.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Mr Chair.

J DAVIS: I am following up on the questions in relation to police complaints. Has the Ombudsman made any recommendations to NT Police as a result of the complaints in the reporting period?

Mr SHOYER: It would be normal in the course of responding to some matters to make complaints. I do not have the details on numbers. There are various categories of seriousness of complaints, category 1 being the highest and category 2 being lesser. There is a report for each category 1 matter, which may include recommendations or may acknowledge recommendations that have been made by the Professional Standards Command. Category 2 matters may also include some recommendations. It is not as common. Then there is the complaints resolution process which is a less formal process.

I do not have figures on the number of recommendations that were made. I can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.4

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

J DAVIS: Can you provide details of any recommendations made to NT Police as a result of complaints over the reporting period from the Ombudsman?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Mr SHOYER: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.4.

J DAVIS: What powers does the Ombudsman—or now the commissioner—have to ensure that recommendations are considered and implemented?

Mr SHOYER: When a recommendation is made, there is a provision that requires the commissioner to consider that recommendation and respond to the recommendation. They will indicate whether they accept it or not, or whether they will make some suggestions for a slightly different approach.

If that recommendation is not accepted, there are a number of courses. One of them is to make a report to parliament. The other one—and perhaps more commonly followed—is to indicate in the annual report the recommendation being made and the response of NT Police to it. That is then reported on in that matter rather than having a separate report necessarily. That has happened in the past.

The information you are talking about would be normally reported on in the annual report as well, but that is some way down the track. It is a matter of either following that formal process or reporting it in the annual report so that people are aware at least that there are recommendations being made, the nature of it and the response of the NT Police to it.

J DAVIS: Are any recommendations made outlined in the annual report?

Mr SHOYER: They should be. I cannot speak to the last annual report. They would normally be recorded. I do not know if there is a formal process. It is not formally set out. In the examples that have appeared before in the annual report, anything that involved a recommendation would normally have reporting saying what the recommendation was and whether it was accepted or not. That is a recommendation made by the Ombudsman as opposed to recommendations that might regularly be made by the Professional Standards Command and supported in essence by the office.

J DAVIS: Has the ombudsman historically, and will the commissioner keep, an overall record of how many recommendations are made and accepted?

Mr SHOYER: We have not produced a detailed framework like that. They have been recorded in the annual report. It is something we could consider if it is considered of value to report and update on that. Normally when we make a formal report—this is not just in relation to police conduct matters; this is in relation to anything else—we will produce recommendations and will report on those in upcoming annual reports until such time as they are implemented.

I have not taken the same approach with the police recommendations which are usually either accepted or not within the timeframe of the year end and explained in the report. That may be of value to indicate where they are at and what is happening with them.

J DAVIS: I look forward to it, commissioner. The Ombudsman's office or the commission remains unfunded to perform the NPM function under OPCAT (Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture). What specific oversight activities relating to people in custody are not currently carried out because that resourcing is not there?

Mr SHOYER: To give some background, the National Preventive Mechanism I was appointed some time ago as Ombudsman to undertake that role. We were given some seed funding by government to establish that but my understanding is that there has been no further funding. I need to have a conversation with government about where that is going from now on. For the moment, we have been undertaking very limited activity in terms of keeping in touch with the NPM network and just monitoring what is happening elsewhere there are very different approaches across all Australia including some jurisdictions that are not pursuing that at all and others that provided some funding for it.

I think it is important to recommend that, at the moment, people can make individual complaints to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman can conduct reviews. In fact, with the seed funding we conducted a review into solitary confinement but at the moment we do not have those additional resources. Potentially if we identify the major issue we would look at allocating resources to a particular investigation under the Ombudsman function. I think it is something that I have not had the opportunity to discuss with the government because I was essentially a Cabinet appointee at the time. It does not have a legislative base in terms of that role. That is something I will pursue with government.

J DAVIS: Recognising that you are one week into the job, do you have a sense of what it might require to perform the OPCAT duties?

Mr SHOYER: At the time we proposed various levels of funding I think as to the different types of models and, at the time, there was a role there for Children's Commissioner and the Community Visitor Program so

it was not just the Ombudsman's office that would be involved. We would have to review those figures and look at the models that are happening in each of the jurisdictions and have discussions with government about what it would look like. That is something we would have to do more work on now.

J DAVIS: Does the Ombudsman receive complaints from the Darwin Transitional Custody Centre that comes under your jurisdiction?

Mr SHOYER: That is the space in Mitchell Street?

J DAVIS: Yes, correct.

Mr SHOYER: Anything that is administered by either NT Police or NT Corrections we would potentially receive complaints relating to the administration of those spaces.

J DAVIS: And if G4S is running?

Mr SHOYER: They would be doing it under the auspices of Correctional Services, so yes, generally speaking, if it is Correctional Services that are overall running the place, then we would see G4S as being a contractor to Correctional Services. That may impact slightly on the way we approach matters, but my understanding is that we visited about three weeks ago.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any further questions for Output 4.1?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 4.

OUTPUT GROUP 5 – INFORMATION COMMISSIONER
Output 5.1 – Information Commissioner Operations

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 6 – JUDICIAL COMMISSION
Output 6.1 – Judicial Commission Operations

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 7 – HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMPLAINTS COMMISSION
Output 7.1 – Health and Community Services Complaints Commission

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 8 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 8.1 – Corporate and Governance

No questions.

Output 8.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the Office of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner for attending today.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Before everyone leaves, I thank our new commissioner and his team at the Integrity and Ethics Commission for their first Estimates appearances in the new organisation. We look forward to the work they will do. I thank everyone who was involved in preparing for today's session.

The committee will now move on to consider the outputs relating to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Mr CHAIR: Good morning. Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair and the committee, I am joined by Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, Mr Luccio Cercarelli PSM; Deputy CE, Jean Doherty; and Robert Csar, who is our Executive Director Corporate Services.

We might change people in and out over the course of the afternoon, if that is all right with committee members. Obviously, as we move to Defence NT or Territory Coordinator, but otherwise, this is the team I have with me right now. I will move onto my statement.

Last year I sat before this committee and set out our government's priority. They were clearly centred around three core things we promised Territorians in the August 2024 election; that was, to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our Territory lifestyle.

This year I can report that we have stayed focused on those three priorities and have continued to back them with action. We said repeatedly that we want Territorians to judge us on our actions, not our words. As the key central agency, that has been our focus across the whole-of-government.

In my budget reply in May, I said we had Territorians' backs and that our community comes first. That is why we are focused so acutely on delivering those three commitments. It is incredibly important that we stay focused on those because that is why Territorians elected our government.

We made a lot of progress over the last 12 months and there is more work to do—always more work to do. We are encouraged by the progress we have been able to make to date.

That is why, in 2026, our focus remains squarely on growth, security and certainty—growth in our economy, certainty for Territory families, businesses and investors and security in our community, jobs and unique Territory way of life.

That progress depends on a capable public sector, which we have, which I am proud to be the Chief Minister of. Clear leadership and an agency at the centre of government that can drive coordination and delivery is at the heart of what Chief Minister and Cabinet does—make sure that every agency is focused and delivering on our core focus as a government on reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our unique Territory lifestyle.

The CMC supports me, not just as Chief Minister but as Minister for Defence NT and Minister for Territory Coordinator but my Cabinet colleagues. They help drive strategic policy, regional coordination and our engagement with the Commonwealth.

Over the reporting period CMC had provided that stability while supporting government to deliver on our priorities, as I said, and at the same time has continued to strengthen its own internal capabilities as we refocused following the election in the MOG changes to have a much more lean agency but focused on our core strategic values as a government.

We have been finalising the agency's structural realignment to make sure that our department is set up to deliver on those strategic priorities that we have as a government. The realignment also moves to a single deputy chief executive position in Ms Doherty, which simplifies our reporting lines and supports clearer, faster decision-making, which is something we are very focused on. Just as importantly, it strengthens CMC's economic leadership so that we can drive better delivery in our growth agenda, being that second key pillar that we committed to.

That work is led by the Executive General Manager of Strategy, Economic Growth and Development, Louise McCormick. As at 31 March 2026, CMC as an agency had 216 FTE, which was compared with 226 as at 31 March 2025. The budget also keeps the agency's appropriation broadly stable with a slight decrease from the original 2025–26 budget of \$85.184m to \$84.94m in 2026–27.

Members will also have noticed a significant one-off variation of \$60m in the revised 2025–26 budget under strategic policy reform and Aboriginal partnerships. As noted in the budget papers, this is primarily due to the costs related to the McArthur River Mine settlement, which happened earlier this year.

Beyond the agency's internal settings, the real story of the year is the work the CMC has done to deliver our government's priorities. Over the last 12 months, CMC has helped drive and coordinate delivery across our three priorities—reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our unique Territory lifestyle—while strengthening the systems, partnerships and governance that sits behind that work.

That has meant backing practical action on community safety through our reducing crime strategy, and through specific measures that Territorians can see and understand, including:

- building on Declan's law
- strengthening police powers
- introducing minimum mandatory sentencing for assaults on frontline workers
- delivering new sentencing laws with stronger penalties for domestic violence murderers
- standing up the first cohort of our police public safety officers
- trialling personal OC spray for eligible Territorians
- expanding the Circuit Breaker Program
- rolling out ready to work programs across Northern Territory prisons.

In the 2026–27 budget, that work was backed in by a record \$1.73bn investment in law and order, which includes more police, more police public safety officers and Corrections staff, targeted infrastructure upgrades and continued investment in programs that tackle offending and reoffending.

It has also meant turning our economic agenda into action by:

- launching the rebuilding the economy strategy
- establishing the Defence industry council
- upgrading the Berrimah export yards
- extending our HomeGrown Territory build grants
- supporting mining and resource approvals
- progressing a new visitor economy strategy
- delivering important procurement reforms
- simplifying regulatory processes through lands and planning legislative amendments
- declaring the Northern Marine Complex a Territory development area.

In restoring our lifestyle, it has meant backing practical reforms and initiatives that make life easier for Territorians, including:

- abolishing light vehicle roadworthy inspections
- making swimming in schools permanent
- locking in waterfowl hunting limits for five years
- expanding the Supercars program to three full days
- securing national law changes in relation to fencing and supervision in childcare centres, which we led

- purchasing and progressing for the planning of Silkwood, which everyone is very excited about.

Let me now turn to some of the major pieces of work from the reporting period. One example is the implementation of the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce recommendations. Following the release of the Saying Yes to Business report in May 2025, the government committed to 70 actions to reduce approval timeframes, ease regulatory burden and increase business certainty. The government is on track to implement all 48 of the 70 recommended actions it committed to deliver within 12 months, which will be 16 July as our deadline for that, and we are on track.

These reforms are delivering more efficient planning and land-clearing processes, improvements to the fidelity fund and stronger representation for small business, all of which support our commitment of cutting approval timeframes by representation for small business, all of which support our commitment of cutting approval timeframes by 50% and giving businesses greater certainty.

Another important example is the Northern Marine Complex. Following passage of the *Territory Coordinator Act 2025* the government gained an important new mechanism to accelerate priority projects, streamline regulatory processes and strengthen coordination around economically significant investment. In February this year I made the first declaration under the Act declaring the Northern Marine Complex a Territory development area. That decision marked a clear shift to a whole-of-government approach to delivering this project of economic significance, with the Territory Coordinator now leading planning, coordination and implementation support, while ministers and agencies retain their delivery responsibilities.

Work is now underway on the Territory Development Area plans that will guide the strategic development of the Northern Marine Complex including the Darwin shift lift facility and marine industry park. Separately, the Arafura Rare Earths Nolans Project has now been designated the first significant project under the *Territory Coordinator Act* giving the \$1.6bn project coordinated oversight through approvals and delivery and helping position the Territory as a critical mineral supplier for Australia and its partners.

The same focus on long-term economic development is also shaping our work on the Gove transition. This work is being led in partnership with traditional owner groups, the Northern Land Council, Commonwealth, Rio Tinto and developing East Arnhem Land through the Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group. Our focus is on supporting a successful transition from mining, creating the right conditions for private investment and progressing land tenure arrangements that give proponents certainty and support long-term economic opportunity for East Arnhem. The appointment of an assistant minister for the Nhulunbuy transition, Ms Oly Carlson MLA, alongside high-level coordination support within CMC, reflects the importance we place on securing a region's future.

Just as important, CMC has supported significant integrity reform through the establishment of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner and office delivering on the recommendations of the independent McClintock–Hiley report. This reform is about strengthening integrity functions and restoring public confidence through a stronger and more accountable framework.

CMC has also continued to support major national health and disability reform. In January this year, the Northern Territory secured up to an additional \$1bn in health funding over five years through National Cabinet as part of the National Health Reform Agreement valued at \$3.4bn in total to the Territory. This represents the single biggest federal contribution to Territory hospitals in our history and will help us continue to provide high quality care in some of the most challenging service delivery circumstances in the country.

We also continue to advocate for a fairer, share of Commonwealth funding in areas such as maternity services, aged care, primary care and emergency aeromedical retrievals. As part of the same national reform effort, the Territory has agreed to implement the Thriving Kids Program from October this year, adapted to the Territory's conditions and aimed at improving early intervention supports for younger children with developmental delays and autism.

CMC has also led and coordinated the government's recovery efforts following emergencies and disasters which we saw across the Territory. The 2025 high risk weather season was unprecedented in its scale and complexity requiring major restoration efforts and the repatriation of hundreds of residents back to their homes and communities. Disaster payments were activated across all local government areas including the distribution of more than 3,000 prepaid debit cards to affected residents, alongside planning and implementation of a \$30.5m urgent road repair package.

Work also continues through the \$100m flood recovery fund to support rebuilding a long-term resilience and impacted communities. This effort has depended on the work of hundreds of Northern Territory public

servants and many external partners including other jurisdictions, local councils, community organisations and emergency support agencies. We cannot underestimate just how many people have been supporting this really important work since November last year.

We have remained very closely engaged in national and Territory efforts to protect fuel supply and ease cost of living pressures as well. The Northern Territory Government has worked with the Commonwealth in industry to support supply continuity while also taking practical steps to improve transparency and certainty for Territorians. This has included declaring petrol and diesel under the *Price Exploitation Prevention Act 1949* issuing a please-explain notice to stations with higher than average prices, introducing a 24-hour fuel price lock and appointing a fuel supply coordinator to work across governments, industry and suppliers to help ensure reliable supply and stronger national understanding of the Territory's unique fuel needs.

I acknowledge the important work of DefenceNT within the agency. Government is supportive of the defence presence here in the Northern Territory in its capability, personnel exercises and the infrastructure that it brings. DefenceNT works closely with me to promote the Territory at every opportunity and to make the case for greater defence investment here.

In February we established the Defence Industry Council to give industry a direct voice to government and sharpen our advocacy for defence jobs, capability and investment. This was important because it then led into Defence Week 2026, when we launched our Northern Territory Defence strategy. That set out five key priorities for the Territory and it means that industry and government are speaking with one voice when it comes to advocating for the Territory.

Those five priorities are maritime sustainment, the Army's littoral pivot, northern theatre logistics, northern basing and ranges, and innovation, testing and evaluation. We will continue to push hard for greater defence investment in the Northern Territory because it strengthens our economy, workforce and our strategic position.

I draw the committee's attention that CMC also reports to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Office of the Commissioner and Public employment falls under CMC for budget purposes, however, all questions relating to this portfolio should be directed to the Minister for Public Service.

Thank you Mr Chair for the opportunity. I am now happy to take questions.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Chair and I thank the Chief Minister and the officials accompanying her today.

The recent floods and cyclones exposed serious failures in your government's disaster response and recovery efforts. Territorians across many communities, as you have acknowledged, were given little warning about rising flood waters causing enormous anxiety and confusion. Aboriginal organisations say they were ignored; local government were cut out of emergency response and evacuees said that they were treated without dignity and vulnerable aged care residents were placed in unacceptable conditions and Territorians were forced to fight for basic information, basic payments and basic respect during this process.

This was not just a weather event; it was a test of your government's competence, your planning and your care for people outside of Darwin. On that test any Territorian would say that the CLP government failed under your leadership. Chief Minister, on 15 March you acknowledged this and said publicly that there would be a review into the flooding and cyclone response and at this time on that date you said:

I absolutely hear people and I am hearing that widespread, but I think the scale of the impact is so profound we're also not seeing the response.

I know out in Darwin River for example, people felt incredibly isolated and I hear that and I'm not denying it.

We did have, I think, six SES teams out there and they made five rescues at the time, but that's cold comfort to the people that we didn't get to. We take that on board and that's why making sure we review things is important.

Chief Minister, you have said nothing about this review since that statement despite the fact there are many lessons to be learned and applied from these recent events. For the committee can you please outline for Territorians when you will hold the review into the emergency response from your government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What we have seen since November last year is an unprecedented sequence of weather events that impacted the entire Northern Territory. I mentioned in my opening statement the fact that every local government area was open to disaster relief funding, for example, we had the cyclone Fina event in November, Murray Downs was then flooded and those people were evacuated to Ali Curung. We had flooding twice in Alice Springs and Daly River was evacuated to Darwin twice. A number of other remote communities, including Palumpa and Jilkminggan, had to be stood up into emergency relief. We then had the last cyclone in March in which Numbulwar people were brought to Darwin for a short period of time out of an abundance of precaution.

If I could summarise the five months of weather events that we had, it would be that there was no injuries or loss of life and that is a huge accomplishment for our emergency services teams who worked tirelessly to protect people from what was unprecedented levels of weather across the Territory. That put an enormous strain on our individuals. I do not think we have ever run an emergency operation centre for as long as we did; we had NEOC in Alice Springs for much of the time as well.

We are proud as a government to have provided the support on a scale that has never been delivered before where there is no loss of life and no injuries where it could have been so different. Could things have been done better? Hindsight is 20–20 every single time. That is why you quoted from me.

There are always reviews. You were in government for eight years so you know that after Cyclone Marcus and other events that happened under your watch that internally there is a look back at how we can do things better. That work is yet to take place because we are still in the recovery phase. We are in June now. This really does not sit exactly with CM&C but it is a very important topic.

CM&C is responsible for recovery which we are in right now but the response phase is led by Police. I welcome any questions when we have the Police Commissioner. We will have the Fire and Emergency Services commissioner available later today as well.

We are still very much reacting to the impacts. We have had mass repatriation of people home to communities which has been fantastic. As you can appreciate, people are desperate to get home. We were able to accommodate people in a number of ways in a much more comfortable environments where people were immediately evacuated to Foskey Pavilion, for example. This facility has been used by every government for as long as I can remember growing up here, Member for Arnhem, including yours.

I said a number of times as I stood up every day in press conferences answering the media's questions and the community's questions regarding everything that was happening at the time, that we are dealing in an imperfect environment and situation such is the nature of emergency management.

We have exceptional Territorians doing exceptional things. The communities were just amazing. One of the greatest, wonderful thing that came out of all the horror, trauma and tragedy of these events was the community spirit.

I was just in Katherine two weeks ago speaking with Ben Hockey—you would know Ben, Opposition Leader—who is affectionately known as the sandbag man. It is people like Ben who just rally to pull people together to do unbelievable things. They did not have to do it but they did it because it was that sense of pride, duty and responsibility to the community they love so much. People like Trent de With. There are just so many. I have written so many letters to people thanking them for their incredible generosity and heart and community spirit.

There is water still to go under this bridge, pardon the pun. Coming back over the Katherine River, I can tell you it was wonderful to see it much lower than it was a few months ago.

Mr CHAIR: I bring the committee's notice to Standing Order 109(5):

Questions may not be asked which reflect on or are critical of the character or conduct of those persons...

Opposition Leader, the only issue I took with your question would have been the failed leadership critique. I will give you a chance to withdraw just that line if you would like with comments from the community being fine.

Ms UIBO: If the community has said that there was a failure in leadership, am I not allowed to repeat that here?

Mr CHAIR: It was during the question that you put forward, 'your failed leadership' as a statement from you.

Ms UIBO: I understand. Thank you. I will clarify any further questions and take that on board. I appreciate it.

I appreciate that you answered that. There is a lot I agree with in terms of the work around the community response to all the severe weather events in the Northern Territory in the last six months.

To put you back on track, will you commit to the review that you said there needed to be? What sort of feed-in process will the community, businesses and industry have into that review? You mentioned internal reviews which happen as part of everyday government business. That is fine. But this relates specifically to a review or inquiry into the severe weather events and the emergency management and response.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The reviews will be—as I just described—internal reviews on what we could we have done better. I want to be really clear that we are still actively in response phase. That will continue for probably another couple of months, if not longer. These things tend to have a longer tail end.

Our focus right now is on making sure that people are able to get back into their homes. There are huge amounts of road works, for example, the \$30.5m that we stood up straight away went out the door straight away, and because it was an emergency we were able to get the money moving. For example, Coleman's Contracting and Earthmoving has done an incredible job on Wooliana Road. I went there after the flood, and I could not believe that the entire road had been eaten away and completely absorbed into the river. I am not a technical person, but I did not think we would have to build a road back on that spot. Coleman's has done an incredible job.

The fact that we are able to have the Daly River boat ramp back over, that the Barra Nats is happening is an absolute feat of engineering, grit and determination to get things done. There will be internal reviews on how we can do things better, but there is still so much work happening, including the finalisation of the \$100m flood recovery fund that I put on the table straight away as an addition to normal business. That is in addition to the \$30.5m for roads which were critical to get people in and out. There are still roads that are very—up until about a week ago, I am not sure if it is still the status now, but one of the roads to Palumpa we still had limited ability to run more than an eight tonne truck on it, which shows you how sodden the land still is. Things are still very wet, so that continues, Opposition Leader. We are focusing on bringing services back online as fast as possible and the safest way possible is our top priority right now.

Ms UIBO: Once you are out of the recovery phase, which you have emphasised twice now, will there be a public review or an inquiry into the emergency management response?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. I have been clear. All the normal processes that have happened under successive governments, it is not a political thing it is a process, will take place but we are still in that response phase.

Mr YOUNG: To confirm, no opportunity ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, recovery phase.

Mr YOUNG: To confirm, there is no opportunity for people that have been impacted by the floods, that were evacuated by the floods, local businesses that were evacuated by the floods to have a chance to raise their voice to speak to this inquiry that you spoke about earlier of opening up, it is going to be an internal review rather than an inquiry?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I did not say there is no chance; do not put words in my mouth. What I said is that we are still in recovery phase, then there will be all our internal processes which are not necessarily to the exclusion of people impacted. It is fair to say that people are negatively impacted; their homes were flooded.

I went to Katherine after the flood. It is the second biggest flood they have ever had, where people's entire life was dumped out the front of their house. Their entire life had been completely saturated by this horrible, dark, muddy water, the stench of it will forever be stuck in my mind. The horror of it. I stood next to a wall and put my hand above my head where the water levels had been. I stood in someone's kitchen, and all their

belongings were—the level of heartbreak is inconceivable. There is undoubted impact on Territorians, and what governments can do is provide the frameworks for support.

For example, that unprecedented scale of disaster relief funding that we pushed out across—this is multi agency, multi disaster, multiple reactions all happening at the one time and we were able to do it successfully. Could we have done things better? Of course, but to pretend like a review will change the fact that people's lives have been completely turned upside down from this is foolish. People are impacted and now we have to do everything we can to support people as best as they can get back to their normal life.

Mr YOUNG: I totally disagree that it would be foolish. It gives the opportunity for people who were impacted that had lost their house ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have asked you once not to put words in my mouth, Deputy Opposition Leader.

Mr YOUNG: ... you said the words foolish ...

Mr CHAIR: Stop! Stop, all parties. Member for Daly, please come through the Chair.

Mr YOUNG: Through the Chair, as the Chief Minister said ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sorry, Mr Chair. Can I add that I will not be verbed today. That is not what I said.

Mr CHAIR: Questions will come through the Chair. I will then give permissions for the question to go forth, and the Chief Minister will then have the time to respond. I will now go back to the Opposition Leader on questions on the opening statement.

Mr YOUNG: I am still continuing on. I totally disagree with the Chief Minister that it would be foolish not to hold an inquiry for people from the public ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, I take exception to that. That is not what I said. If I am going to be misquoted ...

Mr YOUNG: It is on the *Hansard*.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Totally misquoted—for whatever political game he is trying to play.

There have been thousands of public servants, many of whom are watching this right now, who have dedicated the last five months to keeping Territorians safe—Territorians in your electorate safe, Member for Daly—in providing them food every day, support, comfort, a shoulder to cry on when it is needed. We had hundreds of volunteers come up from interstate, serving hot cups of coffee, providing blankets and jumpers to people. The scale of it has been an extraordinary humanitarian exercise which, as I said, ended in no loss of life or injury, but substantial loss of property and impact and trauma on people's lives.

If you want to sit here and play politics because you put out your little press release ...

Mr YOUNG: Through the Chair, I did not get to finish my question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Your question is wrong, and I will not be answering a question where you are verballing me.

Mr YOUNG: I was not verballing; I was just quoting back. Again, what we need to understand is why you will not hold an inquiry where people who were directly impacted can be heard. That is pretty simple. That is ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have not said they will not be. I said there will be an internal review, which does not necessarily preclude people who have been impacted. That will be after the recovery phase.

Ms UIBO: In regard to a range of concerns that have been raised with our Labor opposition that came up specifically about floods and cyclones, as per the mention in your opening statement, why was the evacuation for Palumpa and Nauiyu residents the second time around left so late that residents were already inundated by floodwaters and emergency crews were put at risk having to undertake evacuations in incredibly difficult conditions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not accept the premise of your question. In any event, that is a question for Police.

Ms UIBO: Is there no coordination by your department whatsoever?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. Again, let us not belittle the very people who have supported your community to be safe and repatriated home. CMC, as I said at the start, do the recovery phase. The response is led by police through the Territory Controller, which is exactly the same system that we inherited from you when you were in government. That has always been the process.

It is not that I do not want to answer the questions; you are just asking the wrong people. When Police come up in a couple of hours' time, please make sure you ask all those questions.

Mr YOUNG: To be clear, because there were issues, for the second time residents were evacuated out of Nauiyu where it took over 24 hours for people to be evacuated and helicopters to come in, which meant they were not able to get everybody out; there were 70 people left behind that night. People literally had to wade through the water to get in a small boat to then be evacuated to safety on the road, along Daly River Road, near Five Mile ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a wonderful speech, Member for Daly, but it is a questions for Police.

Mr YOUNG: No, it leads into the question ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a question for Police.

Mr YOUNG: You do not know what the question is yet.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do know, because none of it has anything to do with CM&C.

Mr YOUNG: None of it has anything to do with you? Let me lead into the question ...

Mr CHAIR: If you could ask me the question?

Mr YOUNG: Yes. Going back to the question, why did it take more than 24 hours when you knew that the river was going to flood ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a question for Police. That is not a question for CM&C.

Mr YOUNG: I have not finished the question; you keep butting in. Why did it take you more than 24 hours? Was it because the evacuation centres were not set up in Darwin?

Mr CHAIR: I think it is clear that should come under Output 14.0 when the police are here. Chief Minister, are you happy that is the correct output?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am very happy to answer any questions about the response when Police are here, because they are the Territory controller; they run the emergency operation centre. It is the appropriate agency to ask these questions of.

Mr YOUNG: But surely you would be across it as the minister. You have sat in those meetings.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are pathetic.

Mr CHAIR: Stop! Okay. Everything will come through me. There will be no cross-chatter. Chief Minister, your comments will also come through me. We are on the opening statement. Opposition Leader, do you have any further questions on the opening statement?

Ms UIBO: Yes, thank you, Mr Chair. Chief Minister, is the Territory emergency management committee co-chaired by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the NT Police?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The TEMC is, but when the EOC is stood up it is run by the Territory Controller.

Ms UIBO: And in relation to timeframes, is that a 24-hour or 48-hour period before an emergency?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, I do not understand your question.

Ms UIBO: When does it go from the Territory Controller—from the co-managed committee, from TEMC, to just the power of the Territory Controller?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: During response, it is the Territory Controller—during recovery. There is a handover. When an event like a cyclone is coming and we are preparing for the cyclone when the EOC is stood up and the cyclone is happening, for example, even in the immediate aftermath, if you could call it that, that is the responsibility of the Territory Controller and then it shifts to recovery phase, which would be to Mr Cercarelli.

Ms UIBO: You mentioned daily press conferences. There was a difference with the communication that was coming from the government. There were daily standups during the anticipated cyclone, particularly Fina and Narelle, but there were not daily standups for updates for any of the floods that happened from Central Australia to the Top End. Has this been reviewed and will changes be made to this communications plan?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is just simply not true.

Ms UIBO: You did not go out and stand up every single day when there were floods, but you did during the cyclone. There was a difference. I am wondering if that has been taken on board and will there be changes to that approach?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A cyclone is a couple of days. Floods are weeks, if not months, and I would have stood up several times a week throughout every component of all the weather events. It is one thing for me to stand up; let's not forget the regular briefings from the Emergency Operations Centre itself, which was led by police. They are the ones doing the public comms. The actual communications to community come through SecureNT, and there is the additional overlay where officials would stand up at a number of levels, not just the emergency controller but through to me and other ministers depending on what stage we were in.

For example, when it came time to—when there were questions in relation to emergency payments, that was dealt with by Children and Families, so Minister Cahill stood up. If there were issues in other areas, it just depended on what the most pressing, urgent matter of the day was.

Ms UIBO: Thank you. My question was about the daily standups for the floods. I note that you have said several times a week, and that is fine, but the difference with the communication was during the two cyclone events there were daily standups, but during the flooding—yes, it was many weeks, but there was not daily communication from your government in that respect. So my question is, will there be changes to that approach?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I do not accept that to be true. Government was communicating with Territorians every single day. Whether that is me or someone else is irrelevant. There has been consistent communication with affected communities during that entire period.

Ms UIBO: In another jurisdiction there were daily standups by their premier when they were going through some severe weather as well, so I just point out that people do look to the government to get their information, updated responses or warnings. I am purely asking from a communications point of view, that has been taken on board since the public has no opportunity to feed in formally to your government in relation to communications, response and feedback because we are still in the recovery phase, as you have said. I am wondering when and how people will have that opportunity to feed into your government about things that could be better for—guess what—the next Wet Season, which will be coming at the end of this year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no question in that.

Ms UIBO: How can the public feed into the response and making it better?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have already answered this, Opposition Leader. I am not sure how many times you can ask me the same thing. We can spend all day on you asking me the same thing if you want, and I can give you the same answer ...

Ms UIBO: Is there no mechanism whatsoever?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will say the answer again.

Mr CHAIR: Opposition Leader, Chief Minister, please!

The question has been asked multiple times; I believe the Chief Minister has answered it. It might not be the answer you are looking for, but we ...

Ms UIBO: It is not me; it is the public.

Mr CHAIR: I believe we have gone over it a few times in a few different ways.

Opposition Leader, it is still your time on the opening statement.

Ms UIBO: You were speaking about the procurement and tenders and the processes for supporting businesses here in the Northern Territory.

J DAVIS: Can I ask a follow-up question on floods before you go there—a very brief one?

Mr CHAIR: You will be getting the floor next.

Opposition Leader, with your line of questioning on the statement, are you asking all of your questions in one big chunk?

Ms UIBO: I can do it any way you want, Mr Chair. What would you like me to do?

Mr CHAIR: The Member for Johnston has a follow-up question if you are happy.

Ms UIBO: Yes, we can stay on that. That is fine. Good luck getting an answer.

J DAVIS: Do you accept that climate change is a factor in this sequence of unprecedented events?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not sure exactly what you mean. We believe in climate change; there is indisputable evidence of that.

Mr CHAIR: I will stop you there, Chief Minister.

Member for Johnston, can you confirm if you are seeking the Chief Minister's opinion or the department's position?

J DAVIS: My follow-up question was: if so—thank you, Chief Minister, clearly you do—how is the department factoring in climate change into future planning and investment?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The reality is that the worst-ever flood in Katherine happened 20 years ago. Weather is volatile and unpredictable at the best of times.

As a government we have to make sure we have the best possible systems in place with the right people in the right positions to be able to make sure that we are doing, first, the public education component and, second, then providing response as required.

An example of that would be bushfires. Again, this is not for this agency, but by way of further explanation, we have had a lot of weather Territory-wide, so there is a huge volume of vegetation that is growing now. We are expecting it into the drier months, which is now, next month and August. It could—I say 'could' because we do not know; we cannot predict it—lead to a severe fire season. It is about being prepared for that, well in advance, including having community consultation meetings. We have done, up and down the Stuart Highway, sessions with landowners and we have contacted local governments about all those things—be prepared, have your firebreaks done, have your fire plans in place et cetera. This is a good example of how, as a government, all you can do is be prepared as possible.

J DAVIS: I understand what you are talking about in terms of preparation in relation to where we are at now, but I am talking more about long-term preparation and factoring in climate change in terms of future prevention and protection for Territorians.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What would that look like to you? I do not understand your question.

J DAVIS: My question is: how is this government investing in protecting Territorians against the impact of climate change, given the extreme weather events we are facing and are expecting to continue?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have just answered that; it is with the preparation. We cannot control the weather. We can control many things as a government, and weather is not one of them. It is about having mechanisms in place to prepare for events and then support people when and if they arise.

Mrs ZIO: In relation to our flood recovery fund that we rolled out, I am wondering if you can give us an update on the initiatives that have already been announced.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. The flood recovery fund is being led by Minister Jo Hersey, obviously as a flood victim herself both in the big floods on 1998 and again this year. We allocated that \$100m. What we really want that funding to go towards is building back better.

There is a component of that we must work with the federal government on, so there are a lot of rules around how we deal with that. It is quite stringent, their expectations of us, so we are focused through Ken Davies and his small team on making sure that we are doing that work so that we are surveying the Territory, identifying key areas.

The \$30.5m in the roads is separate to the \$100m, and that roads money is out the door; that was and continues to be important.

On 18 April I announced that \$12.5m spend out of that \$100m. That is the first phase of funding, and \$4.9m is going towards flood mitigation which is immediate works that Lands, Planning and Environment need to do in Alice Springs. That was identified as Alice Springs was flooded twice this season as well, which is highly unusual, but there are works we can do to make sure that if that flood was to happen again that the water flows better. That is part of that important work.

It was incredibly important to me and my entire team that the \$100m was not Darwin-focused funding. We saw floods everywhere; there are issues right across the Territory. The infrastructure deficits we inherited on coming to government are huge, but we cannot sit around and lick our wounds about it; we must pick up and move forward the best we can with what we inherited.

That \$4.9m for Alice Springs, this is just out of the first \$12m; there is another \$88m to go.

There is \$4m for the Katherine north levee and drainage works. That continues the levee work. As people watched and went through the stages of the Katherine flood, the levee was working well—and I credit Trent for keeping everyone up to date with his live vision of all of that on his bicycle as he went around. That worked well until the flood levels rose so high that the water came in over the top, so we are looking closely at what else we can do in Katherine, given it was successful to a point, and what the next stage might look like, particularly, those drainage works. Everyone will be familiar with the footage of the water bubbling up through the drain in the main street.

We have allocated \$2.5m for early warning and IT solutions Territory-wide and drones. This will be for Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services, who are on later today, and I know they are very excited about this investment. The use of drones was done very well by our fires and allowed us to map and track floodwater and clearly identify, so—if there was another time—next time we will know at what level which houses go underwater. The use of drones gives us capability long range where we cannot get people out.

As you can imagine with the scale of the floods, the Stuart Highway was cut off twice at two different points; communities were completely isolated. Boats are not an option. You can helicopter to some extent, but then when the weather is bad you cannot put aircraft in the sky. There were a number of limitations, whereas a drone is much lower risk and can be extremely effective.

We also have allocated \$0.6m for the Jawoyn Association in the Big Rivers region because they are very keen to do a design of Maud Creek bridge upgrades. To my understanding—the Opposition Leader can correct me if I am wrong—just about every year Maud Creek does flood over the road, so this is a long-term project that Jawoyn have wanted to do. We are backing them with that work, to get that design of what it could look like. That is being led by our CMC, but supported by the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure because, ultimately, we would be the ones who end up commissioning those works. They want to deal with the design, which we are happy for them to do. There is \$0.5m for the Nauiyu future plan, which is being led by DLI.

This came from members of the community. Obviously, they had the first evacuation and were at Foskey Pavilion for a number of weeks. Everyone was keen to get home. That was disruptive to people's lives and

heartbreaking. Then, to have to evacuate again—the community sentiment was strong, ‘How many times can we live through this?’

There is a great groundswell of support from Nauiyu people to look at potential alternatives or plans going forward. Of course, that has to be done incredibly respectfully. I have been clear, all along, that it has to be led by the community, it is not something government can impose on people. It is fair to say that anyone can understand—for people to have to go through that twice in a matter of months, let alone how many times Daly has been evacuated over the years—and appreciate that they do not want to have to do that again. No-one wants any community to have to go through that again.

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I ask if we could wrap up this question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay.

Mr YOUNG: I have a follow-up question into this; it is relevant to this.

Mrs ZIO: I have one last one.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is the 12.5. The remainder we are working through with the federal government. I am hoping in the next couple of months I might have more to say about that, but we have to work with the federal government on those.

Mr CHAIR: We will have the Member for Fannie Bay, then the Member for Daly and come back to Opposition Leader.

Mrs ZIO: Given that we specifically talked about Nauiyu, I wonder if the planning involved in trying to get Nauiyu up to the stage where they do not have to be evacuated, how many houses are we planning to build in government, and how many houses did the former government build in its time in government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a good question. I have that somewhere. The previous Labour government built about nine houses in Nauiyu. I think we have between 20 and 30 that we will be building for that community. As part of this future plan—again, I am not pre-empting what the community might decide it wants to do. Let me be clear that government is just one stakeholder in deciding where community housing goes. There is the federal government, the land councils, the community itself—a number of partners who decided where remote housing goes, of which we are one.

It would be fair to say our position would be that any new houses that are to be built should be built in safer zones. There is a lot that needs to be worked through.

Mr YOUNG: You mentioned in your previous answer \$500,000 being allocated to look at a future plan for Nauiyu community. You also mentioned the \$8m for the road projects. I understand that \$8m is for Woolianna Road, Daly River Road, Cox Peninsula Road and Port Keats Road.

I pick up that in April Ken Davies told the *NT News* that \$20m had been allocated to the Daly River community from the government’s \$100m flood recovery fund. Are you able to give me a breakdown of that \$20m that he announced for the Daly River community? So far, you have spoken about \$8.5m so there is still another \$11.5m that has not been spoken about.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not speaking for Mr Davies, of course; he is not here. My understanding is what he was referring to was the significant cost that will be incurred in that community, including damaged houses, the health clinic—all of those types of things, not just in funding for new infrastructure.

Mr YOUNG: Can you confirm if that \$20m is coming out of the flood recovery fund, from the \$100m. That is what he stated; that it comes out of the flood recovery fund. I am trying to get a breakdown of that \$20m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I did not hear that interview so I cannot comment, but the numbers I have read out are what we have allocated officially from the flood recovery fund, which is at \$12.5m. The remainder is yet to be allocated.

There is lots of government spend in and around all of the flood affected areas outside of the flood recovery fund. We want from the recovery fund the ability to build back better. In order to build back better and to leverage that money with the federal government to get the fifty-fifty co-contribution with the federal

government, we have to work closely with the federal government on that. That requires the federal government's approval, joint comms and a whole range of other things.

We are still working through that process. We want to make sure that money is spent in the best possible ways to future-proof.

Mr YOUNG: As I stated, only \$8.5m had been allocated for the Nauiyu community even though your flood recovery coordinator, Ken Davies, said that there was \$20m allocated for Nauiyu community. Can I get a breakdown of the other \$11.5m or the \$20m that Ken Davies announced? If so, can I get that question on notice?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I just answered your question. I did not hear the interview. I cannot comment. I am not Ken Davies. I can tell you is how much of the ...

Mr YOUNG: He works for your government. He has been allocated the flood recovery—you should know.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, there will not be any interjection. I will clarify, Standing Order 109(2)(a) says:

statements of fact or names of persons unless they are strictly necessary to render the question intelligible and can be authenticated

Mr YOUNG: I will give the facts through the Chair. The *NT News*, on 21 April, put an article out stating that \$20m had been allocated to the Nauiyu community. He has been appointed as the flood recovery director—I think that is his title—under the Chief Minister. I am trying to get an understanding of where this \$20m has gone and get a breakdown of that \$20m that has been announced by your government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Member for Daly, I will say it again. I am talking about the \$100m from the flood recovery fund, of which we have allocated \$12.5m. There is \$30.5m which has been attached to the fund and is essentially DLI funding for roads and other critical infrastructure, which is on top of the \$100m, of which a portion of that is for Daly because we have fixed the roads there and have people back home. A lot of money has been spent, plus the money that has been spent to refurbish homes.

It is more that we have spent \$20m. We would have spent at least \$20m of Territory money in Nauiyu. That remaining \$88m of the flood recovery fund is yet to be announced. It will be announced, but it will be done, hopefully, in conjunction with the federal government.

Mr YOUNG: I am just confirming that the \$20m that Ken Davies, the flood recovery director, announced is not from the \$100m flood recovery fund. Is that correct?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is program. It is works that we are doing.

Mr YOUNG: Is all that \$20m within that flood recovery fund? Or is it some of it? Part of it? I am trying to understand the breakdown.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will go through this again and make it simpler. There is \$35m that is being spent on roads. Some of that is for Nauiyu. I do not have a breakdown, but you have been out there, and I have been out there; the roads are fixed. The money has been spent.

Then we have \$12.5m only that has been allocated out of the \$100m. Of that, \$4.9m is for Alice Springs, \$4m is for Katherine, \$2.5m is for Fire and Emergency Services, \$0.6m is for Jawoyn and \$0.5m is for the Nauiyu Future Plan. That is on top of all the other money being spent in Nauiyu.

Mr YOUNG: My understanding is the \$8m that has been allocated for roads is for Cox Peninsula Road, Daly River Road, Port Keats Road and Wooliana Road.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is this funding?

Mr YOUNG: Moving on from the \$20m, in one of your answers to the Member for Fannie Bay you spoke about \$8m which has been allocated for road projects. That \$8m is for Cox Peninsula Road, Daly River Road, Wooliana Road and Port Keats Road. Can I get a breakdown of the cost for each of those roads, from that \$8m?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That will be from DLI, so make sure you ask the Treasurer tomorrow.

Mr YOUNG: Many residents from Nauiyu, Palumpa and Wooliana asked me about the recovery, and the deployment of the ADF to the Daly region. You said it did not meet the threshold. Can you explain exactly what that threshold is?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I found your tack during the emergency responses on this really interesting, to say the least, given that you are a Labor opposition with a federal Labor government.

The Northern Territory Government does not and cannot deploy the Australian Defence Force; only the federal government can do that.

Mr YOUNG: You can request it. You can request the ADF ...

Mr CHAIR: Stop! Member for Daly ...

Mr YOUNG: We were just ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, I am speaking. There will be no more cutting off any individuals—the Chief Minister is answering—just like I will not allow anyone to cut you off during your questions.

Mr YOUNG: You did with the ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, to keep this in order I will move to warnings if I have to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Only the federal government can deploy the ADF. Under a very strict and controlled process jurisdictions can request support from the ADF, but there are so many thresholds to be met first that they will not even process the first stage of it unless the government have reached those thresholds.

I said many times in the dozens of press conferences that I did on all these situations that we have ADF embedded in our EOC. In the actual room where all the Northern Territory Government people are there is an office specifically for the federal government. They are there every step of the way. These are highly operational decisions; they are not decisions for me. Again, they are better to be asked in Police.

You pretending like if I had have asked we would have got it is completely factually incorrect. In fact, we were rejected for support. I do not begrudge the ADF for that; they have many competing priorities, which is not for me—it is for the Minister for Defence, for the Emergency Services minister, and I respect the process. I do not say that with any negativity towards the federal government at all; I genuinely do not. It is the process, and when they can help and we meet the threshold, they do; and when we do not or they cannot, they do not. That is the reality.

Mr YOUNG: To be clear, this did not just come from me; many residents and businesses were asking me that had been impacted by the floods along Wooliana Road—many of the residents in Palumpa and Daly River—because they saw the assistance that the Katherine region got with the ADF, which was deserving and needed at that time, so people were trying to understand. You went to see Wooliana and Daly River the sheer damage that was there, the amount of sand, mud and the destruction of buildings due to this flood. People are trying to understand exactly what is the threshold to bring in in the ADF to get businesses and residents back up so that they can get home quicker. They are confused why the ADF were not called in, and what the threshold needs to be to get the ADF in.

Did you put a request into the federal government for ADF assistance?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Again, I go back to my original comment which is this is a very political path to go down during an emergency. I cannot understand where the political win is for you to try to blame the ADF and federal government. It is a function of the ...

Mr YOUNG: A point of order. As I stated, this is not political, it came from residents and business owners. I am not trying to get a political win, I am asking questions on behalf of my constituents.

Mr CHAIR: What is the specific point of order?

Mr YOUNG: I have just put my statement out.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You have consistently harped on about this, and I have diplomatically tried to answer questions, given that I appreciate the extraordinarily complex dynamic global environment that the ADF is operating in and our federal government. We were working closely with the Minister for Emergency Services and federal government ministers in a respectful proactive way and it is important for governments to respect limitations on certain issues.

I have the utmost respect for our Australian Defence Force personnel, and I very much appreciate that they are a symbol of support and security. Everyone wants to see them; they are our heroes. Do not get me wrong, I completely understand the community sentiment, it is the way you make it sound is as if we did not want them. That was not the case, because it was far more complicated and onerous than you make it out to believe. You are contributing to this concern in the community, which at a time when people are already concerned about a number of other things, I cannot understand why you want to add more confusion on top of that.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, I note that in the terms of reference for this committee we have a precedence of asking questions which is shadow ministry, followed by crossbench members, other community members then guest members. We are still on the opening statement. I will get questions from the Opposition Leader, followed by the Member for Johnston and then the floor can be given back to you.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: To finish my answer for the Member for Daly, the process, rules and guidelines are on the Australian Defence Force website. This is not a secret situation, it is published on the website of what the thresholds are for support.

Mr YOUNG: I will let my constituents know that the ADF website is there and to write to them. Could I ask how many times did you write, call or ask the federal government for assistance? My first question about the ADF, you said you had asked for assistance.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not an ask, we have to go through a process, it is totally operational and those questions can be asked of the Police and Fire and Emergency.

Ms UIBO: What is the reason for withholding the 75% of disaster relief payments to some affected Territorians and not others. Who has this policy applied to and who has it not applied to?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a question better asked of Minister Cahill, Minister for Children and Families.

Ms UIBO: Hopefully her office is listening, I will definitely be asking that question in her session. In regards to the full relief payments and people returning home—I assume this would be a Minister Cahill question—why were they withheld and the decision made to wait until people were fully returned home. It is noted that we are now seeing Territorians from Nauiyu community return in stages. This means many months without the critical support and relief payment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Those questions are for Minister Cahill, Children and Families. They will be ready to answer these questions.

Mr YOUNG: The household goods replacement grant of \$8,843, is that a question for Minister Cahill or you.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, any of those categories A and B.

Ms UIBO: Do the responsibilities for post-evacuation sit with your department, CMC? Should we ask questions now, or would that be with the Police, as the handover period that you spoke about?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It just depends on what it is. For example, we moved people from Foskey because we recognised they would need supported food, accommodation and amenities—all those types of things—for a lot longer than anyone would ever want to stay at Foskey Pavilion. We made those transitional arrangements with Batchelor Institute and Batchelor Outdoor Education Unit. They are run by the Department of Children and Families so anything to do with those is for Children and Families.

We run the recovery in terms of organising everything to be cleaned up and ready for people to be repatriated. The repatriation is coordinated by us and delivered by Children and Families, so it just depends on what you are after.

Mr YOUNG: Going back to the ADF for, hopefully, one last question if we get the answer. Chief Minister, obviously Katherine saw the ADF come in, which was needed and supported by everyone in the House. I am

trying to understand what the process was to call in the ADF and what was the threshold for the ADF to come to Katherine?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Member for Daly, I will not do your job for you. It is written on the ADF website, as I said at least half a dozen times today, that it is an operational decision out of the EOC. These questions are for Police when it comes up in a couple of hours. You can ask those questions then.

Ms UIBO: I have other questions on the opening statement on a different topic. Is it okay?

Mr CHAIR: Yep, crack on.

Ms UIBO: Crack on; let's do this!

Chief Minister, regarding tenders, we received a written response from your department at 9.58 am today, so thank you; better late than never. Of Chief Minister and Cabinet procurement contracts, 62% went interstate to a value of \$237,000. When we are talking about buying local and advocating for local Territory businesses to be part of the important supply and demand path for businesses, does your government consider buying local and supporting our Territory businesses to be a core part of your government's economic strategy? If so, how is this principle applied or not applied in this case the procurement decision made by your own department?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Certainly, buying local is a huge emphasis as part of everything we have been doing as a government. It has been part of the reason why we have led wide-ranging changes to procurement and engaged with key stakeholders across the Territory around what that procurement framework needs to look like. Minister Cahill has led the charge on that through the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations who have done an excellent job. On top of all the work that we have done, not just in streamlining regulatory processes and cutting red tape and changing the way procurement operates, we have also put in place the Territory Procurement Champion. That allows us as a government to have a clear focus.

We have also strengthened government's partnership with the Industry Capability Network. I acknowledge that the previous government was working to some extent with ICN, but we have leaned in hard on their capability to make sure that, as a government, we can clearly monitor and see the extent to which contracts go to locals and to give locals a platform to have a chance. We are so focused on that. I was just in Aileron for the signing of the significant project's status for the Arafura Nolans Rare Earth Project, which is exciting for the Northern Territory. It is only exciting if locals benefit from it.

We do not want to see \$1.6bn in projects just walk across the jurisdictional lines or out of the country. We acknowledge there are components that inevitably will, and that is just doing business. We are focused on the way we created the partnership with Arafura and ICN so that ICN is profiling all of the contractors in the Territory and their capability and they understand what Arafura's needs are. Arafura will use ICN so that Territorians have a shot at every component of the work. Whether they get them will remain to be seen, but Territorians need to have the opportunity and the chance. That is the power of having the focus we have.

That being said, given a holistic government approach, I am happy to hand over to Ms Doherty to answer that specific component.

Ms DOHERTY: In relation to the contracts awarded to business entities outside the Northern Territory, there were four awarded out of a total of seven, so the 63% relates to fairly small numbers of contracts in general.

The four contracts let outside the Northern Territory, of which two were specialised trade stands which were required for our Defence exhibition activities interstate—the trade stands are required to be stored interstate because it would cost about three times as much to move them back to the Territory after they have been used for those specific exhibition stands. That provides an explanation for the requirement to use an interstate supplier for that one.

Another one of the contracts related to an online ballot system. The reason why an interstate provider is used for that contract is because it avoids any conflicts of interest or privacy issues involved with using a local supplier for that when it comes to the online voting for employee bargaining arrangements and the like. That is one for OCPE.

Then, finally, we have specialised data provision that can only be provided through an interstate supplier, given the specialised nature of the data that is provided where it relates to Commonwealth Defence matters.

That is the four consultancies that total \$237,156 compared with a total of \$378,000 in consultancies for contracts.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate the answer and the detail in that. Some of the follow-up questions, I am assuming, relate to the response Ms Doherty has just provided on behalf of CMC.

The department awarded a contract worth \$91,754.73 which went for a Northern Territory exhibit at Land Forces 2026, Expo Pty Ltd, a New South Wales-based company, listed not being a Territory enterprise; and the \$88,897.28 contract for the exhibit at IndoPacific 2025 to a New South Wales-based company, listed again as not being a Territory enterprise. As well, the department awarded a contract for \$43,084.80 for Defence data capture and engagement support to DECnet Pty Ltd, a New South Wales-based company also listed as not being a Territory enterprise. That covers some of those contracts you expanded on.

Will you ensure that Territory businesses are the beneficiaries of your own procurement contracts? How will you apply some of the outlined principles for procurement requirements in the Territory to your own department?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thank Ms Doherty for answering that. You can see they were a small handful of unique situations where we could not procure locally.

Everyone understands that these major Defence exhibitions happen interstate and the cost of bringing it up and down would be completely unreasonable to be borne by the taxpayer. Whilst it is regrettable, it is necessary because we would be spending even more taxpayer money moving things around.

As I said, being the central agency and the strategic lead of government, it is important to us to lead by example. The work we have done in procurement reform—which is still ongoing, might I add. I know that Minister Cahill will be extremely happy to get any of these questions, by the way, when it comes to Business, Trade and Asian Relations.

I know that work we are doing is to make it easier. When I think back to when we were in opposition just 18 months ago, it was one of the single biggest concerns that Territorians had. It was about procurement, what government was doing, the process for procurement and complexity of it. There was a range of issues. It was something we heard loud and clear from Territorians—no matter where we were in the Territory—that they were let down and disappointed by the processes that had taken place under your time in government.

It has been a clear focus for us in the last 18 months and part of that has also been the work we have done on the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce which is that industry-led body that we pulled together and said to them that we have heard from Territorians about the chronic red tape that is stifling business and not adding value to Territorians. We told them to tell us about it and we let them loose. They came back with a 70-page report, and we made a commitment to implement the first 48 within a year, that is 16 June. I have been firm that there is no movement on 16 June, which is why everything has been done already. I think there is one left, which will be done by 16 June.

In any event it shows our commitment. I said at the start, and have said many times, we want Territorians to judge us on our actions not our words. They can see through what we are doing, the changes we are making, our discipline to make those changes, our commitment to deliver on our election commitments. We have backed that with action and that is what people needed after a period of being talked at and things being talked up but the rubber never hit the road.

We have taken the opposite approach to the previous government in making sure that we are practical and focused on tangible outcomes. That is why this year being about growth, certainty and security continues on last year's theme. People want to see the action and the work being done and they understand for some components there can be a lag time. We can make a piece of reform and it does not start to filter through for a while whereas other reform can happen instantaneously and it can be felt instantaneously.

People generally appreciate and understand that. Lots of Territorians wish they could have everything yesterday—I feel like that too, I wish we could do things faster to feel the impact straight away—but that is not the case for every regulatory reform. Given our procurement changes, our Territory Procurement Champion and our Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce and all the work we are doing across government, there is a clear commitment in this space.

Ms UIBO: Is it appropriate that southern companies are there to sell to the Territory rather than Territory companies?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not understand your question.

Ms UIBO: Were there southern companies that are procured contracts?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you trying to have a crack at the fact that the Defence stools were by southern companies, even though we just explained it to you? Is that what you are trying to do?

Ms UIBO: No, I am asking you is it appropriate that there are southern companies which are there to sell to the Territory rather than having the Territory companies (inaudible).

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not understand the context of your question. We just talked about the two Defence exhibitions we had and explained why. Are you saying is it appropriate for them to be doing that?

Ms UIBO: Are the Territory companies there to add value and they do the setup. I understand that; I am not silly. I have listened to the answers to questions. I understand that the back of house, but in terms of the front of house, is it the southern companies delivering that message on behalf of the Territory government or is it the Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it is the Territory businesses.

Ms UIBO: Yes, that is what I wanted to understand.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For example, there were about 20 businesses involved in one of the exhibitions. We do this really well, particularly in Defence, where industry are highly mobilised to attend and showcase capability. We know that unfortunately there is this awful myth that ends up running around the country, that the Territory is really small and they do not have the capability to do this and that. This is something we are trying to clamp down on and it is why I was in Canberra last week, pushing that message. It is why we are working closely with ICN because we know we have the capability. Opposition Leader, I know you know we have the capability and I think there is not a single member of parliament who does not understand how powerful the Territory is that we have what it takes to get things done.

When we go down for those showcases there is a contingent of local Territory businesses taking every opportunity they can to have a conversation with anyone who will listen about our ability to deliver.

Ms UIBO: Thank you for the clarification, that is what I was hoping to hear.

You mentioned Gove Futures and the transition that is happening on the East Arnhem Land peninsula in your opening statement. I know there are people in Nhulunbuy and the East Arnhem region who are feeling that they have been left high and dry. They have been facing the closure of the mine; uncertainty over jobs; rising costs, particularly for housing and essential services; town governance; and are now facing the loss of their only major supermarket in the township of Nhulunbuy.

Many people, from my recent visit to Nhulunbuy, feel that your government has gone quiet on the importance of the East Arnhem Land peninsula and the Gove and Nhulunbuy region. We know that you have appointed Oly Carlson, the Member for Wanguri, as assistant minister. There is no authority attached to an assistant minister role. There is no major funding package in your budget. The community of Nhulunbuy, the township and the surrounding region of East Arnhem are feeling like there is no real plan and are just seeing a lack of leadership in that space.

Who is responsible for the Gove transition? Is it you as the Chief Minister or is it the assistant minister, Oly Carlson, a non-member of Cabinet?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Let me be clear: the future of Nhulunbuy and the future of East Arnhem is incredibly important which is why—obviously I am the responsible minister; this is being led out of CMC which again reinforces how important this is. Having Oly Carlson as an assistant minister gives me an entire dedicated resource on top of what I do to be able to focus on this, along with Louise McCormack who is very experienced to do this body of work. We have some of our best people in government on this job.

What I will say is if people in that region are feeling left high and dry, it is because of the total lack of progress your government made. I was mortified and horrified by the inertia that had happened, given we are approaching that deadline of Rio pulling out. It is a travesty that it has been left to the eleventh hour to try to do something about that town. The Gove Futures Reference Group had been meeting, there had been

no-one driving it from the previous Labor government and there had been no finalising of key issues. People had grown despondent as to what the point of the meetings were.

I sat down with the board of Rirratjingu and Gumatj and asked them about it. They were genuinely—this is at the start of us coming to government—questioning whether that was the right vehicle to get the job done. That is how it had been left to disintegrate. Time passed under the previous government, so things are at a critical point.

We are just a few years away from Rio being out of that community. A lot of work has already been done to wind down the mine. A lot of people have left. We are very concerned about this and are working with the traditional owners, land councils and the federal government. I was talking to the Prime Minister a couple of days ago about this issue.

This is top of mind for us as a government; no-one should feel forgotten. If they feel forgotten it is because of the previous Labor government.

Ms UIBO: I want to say a big sorry to all the public servants in the East Arnhem region who have heard what the Chief Minister said, that you are not doing your job. I apologise on behalf of ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sorry, Mr Chair—what on earth is that?

Ms UIBO: ... that, saying that nothing happened over two years ago.

Mr CHAIR: Stop, everyone!

Ms UIBO: I think it is quite ridiculous to have that narrative and monologue by the Chief Minister in an Estimates Committee hearing.

Mr CHAIR: Stop. Opposition Leader! That was out of order. We will go back to questions. We will keep this orderly. We will not take shots with statements. Opposition Leader, do you have any further questions?

Ms UIBO: I have lots more.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, can I respond?

Ms UIBO: Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr CHAIR: Stop.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I cannot leave that hanging.

Ms UIBO: It is not up to you; it is up to the Chair, and he has given his direction.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am asking him to speak.

Ms UIBO: You are supposed to answer questions, Chief Minister.

Mr CHAIR: Opposition Leader, are you happy to withdraw the comments about the Chief Minister?

Ms UIBO: In what regard?

Mr CHAIR: The comments you made reflecting on her.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The comments she made about the public service are completely misconstruing everything I said and are completely untrue. We have incredible teams of public servants who ...

Ms UIBO: Absolutely, we do, so saying that they did nothing over two years ago is disrespectful.

Mr CHAIR: Stop, Opposition Leader. Will you withdraw those comments?

Ms UIBO: If the Chief Minister withdraws her comments that there was no work done; those public servants were doing their job over two years ago.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I am sorry.

Mr CHAIR: Stop! If you are not withdrawing, I will give the Chief Minister a chance to reply.

Ms UIBO: I have not asked my next question, Chair.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Let me be very clear. Leadership comes from the top, and when there is an absence of leadership the public service does everything they can to keep the wheels of government moving. There was an absence of political leadership by the previous Labor government on this, which is why this issue has dragged on for as long as it has without resolution. It is why on coming to government it was one of the first things I picked up and took a deep dive into. I met with leaders and made sure we had Oly Carlson doing the important work to build relationships so that we have some focus on this. The clock is ticking. We cannot sit idle on this like Labor did.

That is nothing to do with our public service that does an incredible job across the Territory delivering services for our community. This is about a lack of leadership at the top of the previous Labor government, and any insinuation otherwise is completely false.

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, I have further questions.

Mr CHAIR: I note that there will be no further interjections from any side when someone is talking. There were multiple interjections. If there is another interjection it will simply lead to a warning and then I will kick someone out.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, you said assistant ministers would not be an extra cost or burden to the taxpayers, and last time I checked Nhulunbuy was not in the Wanguri electorate. Within the reporting period, how much travel expenses have been racked up by the Member for Wanguri in her assistant minister role to travel to Nhulunbuy to report back to you because you are not there?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Opposition Leader, you are such a cynical, negative person. I have just outlined how not just me as Chief Minister is supporting the transition but also a colleague who is a legitimate assistant minister for this portfolio doing that work, and you want to sit here and denigrate that work for some sort of political gain you think you will make out of criticising it.

To be able to support the regions you have to be in them. I do not believe in governing from Darwin. Yes, Oly Carlson has travelled to Nhulunbuy in the reporting period. There have been two trips. It totalled \$4,451, which is the cost of flights. Assistant ministers do not cost taxpayers additional money in the sense that they are not paid for that additional work they do. What is important is that we are sitting down with key stakeholders working through all the complex and challenging issues regarding this transition, and we are not ashamed of that. I think \$4,451 is money well spent being on the ground with the people of Nhulunbuy supporting what is a highly disruptive, complicated and difficult transition of an entire mine moving out of a town and moving towards, hopefully, several new projects to plug some of that gap that Rio leaving will leave behind. Has the budget for the mental health and wellbeing initiative been slashed? Caelan is telling me that the dogs are more expensive now (so he's only getting them in about twice a year) but he told me he didn't do the Wellbeing sittings/Estimates snacks for Estimates because of the budget and the dogs being so much more expensive. Unless the dogs prices are about 40 times what they used to be, I can't see how that would be the case.

Ms UIBO: Chair, I still have some questions on this. Chief Minister ...

Mr CHAIR: Opposition Leader, I will take the follow-up from the Member for Johnston.

J DAVIS: A quick one on travel. This is a question on behalf of the Member for Mulka. Prior to becoming the assistant minister in the Nhulunbuy transition, how many times did the Member for Wanguri travel to Gove and for how many days? What was the purpose and cost of these visits?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would be outside of the reporting period, which I would have dealt with last Estimates. For this reporting period, it is the two.

Ms UIBO: Does that come from your ministerial budget, or is that from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet's budget?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Ministerial travel.

Ms UIBO: Where exactly in the budget is the dedicated funding package for Gove Futures?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Again, it shows the naivety and lack of care that you are giving to this issue in your desperate attempt to score a political point ...

Ms UIBO: Just a simple question—where is it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: ... on an entire region whose future hangs in the balance of this being successful. This fear and scaremongering approach is damaging to communities at a time when there is already great apprehension about what the future holds. This is no joke or political kick; this is entire communities and towns of people who are facing a mine that has been there for generations pick up and go, with the question left of what happens next.

It must be done respectfully and carefully. It is complicated; there are lots of legacy issues relating to Rio and the transition. There is, obviously, population decline which then erodes other services being able to continue. This is a difficult time for that entire region.

We are incredibly focused on it. To add to the work we have done, we have also created a CEO-level government transition task force—again, something that was not there under the previous Labor government.

There is no dollar figure solution from the Territory government to just somehow make this better. There is no making this better with money, which I know is something Labor does not understand. The only thing that will make this better is for us to support the people of the region to have the best opportunity to create economic development once Rio pulls out.

That transition has to be happening now because it will take a number of years for new proponents—whatever that looks like that is suitable to that region—to gather steam and hopefully plug part of the gap from Rio. That is the only way. That work is instilling confidence in the private sector that there is a future in Nhulunbuy—there is substantial interest.

We are making sure we are working with all of the TO groups and all the stakeholders—the federal government is a huge stakeholder in this, land councils and Rio are stakeholders—to make sure the fundamentals are right.

J DAVIS: A quick follow-up on that to clarify. This is also a question from the Member for Mulka. I take it from your answer there is no dedicated funding in the 2026–27 budget to assist with the Nhulunbuy transition?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I just explained why there is no amount of money that deals with the transition. I do not even know what you are talking about when it comes to what that money would do. The only thing that can support the transition is private sector investment.

What government is doing in the region—which is, I guess linked, but also distinct—is \$355m upgrading the Central Arnhem Road, \$201m of which is Northern Territory Government funding. The remainder of that is Commonwealth. There is the \$9m upgrade of the Gunyangara tourist precinct which looks gorgeous and is being enjoyed. That supports private sector coming into that region. Then, of course, there is our remote housing commitment which is \$4bn remote housing commitment. There is the \$30m for the Yolngu-led Garma institute establishment, \$30m for the Nhulunbuy cyclone shelter and multipurpose facility, and \$20m for upgrades to Gove Hospital. There is huge amounts of money going into the region from the Northern Territory Government.

If you want to call that part of the transition, call it part of the transition. What I am talking about is plugging the gap. When Rio goes, what is in its place? That is what the transition is that we are talking about.

Mr CHAIR: We will adjourn for lunch. The time now is 1 pm. We will reconvene at 1.30 pm. We will still be on opening statements with Opposition Leader having first question.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, we will kick straight back into it.

We are still on questions on the opening statement. Are there any further questions?

Ms UIBO: I am continuing with a couple of questions on Gove Futures. Will you be able to table a detailed Gove Futures implementation plan, showing who is responsible, the funding allocated, the milestones to be met critically by 2027 and 2029, and what services your government guarantees will remain in Nhulunbuy once Rio Tinto exits?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I explained this in great detail earlier. There is the Gove Futures reference group which is made up of all the key stakeholders. They are working through all the substantial issues regarding the transition, including land tenure and infrastructure that is being left behind by Rio Tinto. All that work is happening.

I just read out a huge amount of government funding going to Nhulunbuy. This is just Territory government money. There is \$201m for Central Arnhem Road upgrades. If that road is bituminised, that makes it much easier for communities to travel as well as for the facilitation of economic growth and development. There is \$9m that has just been completed for the Gunyangara Tourism Precinct which is beautiful. It is fantastic.

There is all the money that goes into remote housing as part of our 10-year \$4bn housing agreement. There is \$30m for the Garma Institute, \$30m for the Nhulunbuy cyclone shelter and multipurpose sporting facility and \$20m for upgrades at the Gove Hospital. That is all critical work going into the town.

When we talk about transition—it is very important that you and others understand—Rio Tinto were once there running a huge mining operation which had large volumes of people working, living and spending money in the community. The mine generated significant royalties both to the Territory and traditional owners.

Rio Tinto is leaving. When Nhulunbuy asks, 'What is next?', that is the fundamental question and has to be led by the traditional owner groups on the ground. Government is not preparing some shiny document to say, 'This is our strategy'. It would be worthless. It is really important that we support all the stakeholders to resolve some of the key outstanding issues as soon as possible so that the 'What next?' is identified and can start. The 'What next?' can only be private sector-led. What are the next major economic opportunities in the region and when does that money start to flow? That is what will support the future of that town. That is what we are talking about when we talk about transition. It is not the federal government or Territory government coming in and somehow plugging a Rio Tinto-size hole. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about how we to the greatest extent possible support that community to maintain all its liveability, lifestyle and security certainty once Rio leaves. The only way to do that is to ask, 'Who and what is next?'

I am now joined by Louise McCormick who is leading this work for CMC. If you want to add anything, Louise, go for it.

Ms McCORMICK: I have been leading the work since mid-February this year. Up until now most of what I have been doing is a deep dive in with community. I have taken on the chairing role of the Gove Futures reference group, which includes traditional owners, a federal government representative, Rio Tinto and DIL.

As part of that, it is feeding into a governance framework that has been set up both at the Territory level and federal government level. We have a new taskforce that has been established in that timeframe. The Australian Government has also set up an interdepartmental committee, which I am presenting to tomorrow, to keep all the engine parts of government moving towards the decisions that need to be made for a smooth transition.

As the Chief mentioned, part of that is partnering closely with the stakeholders on the ground. On the Gove Futures website there is a statement by traditional owners in particular about walking together and being on this journey together. That is exactly what we have been doing over the last few months.

The two key decisions which provide that environment for future investment is getting decisions on land tenure and what that looks like post-Rio Tinto, as well as the assets that are on the ground and transitioning those to the future model as well.

Most of it to date has been working with those stakeholders. I held a workshop with them in April to nail down those decisions. There has been lots of discussion, but it is decision time, I guess, and we have been working with them on that.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate the detailed response. In regard to the taskforce that has been established, could you share with the committee who is on it?

Ms McCORMICK: We have chief executives from all the key departments that will be part of that transition story: the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, from a land tenure perspective; the Attorney-General's Department; the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure; the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations to look at the small business economic development; and the Territory Coordinator has joined us as well as a watching brief.

Ms UIBO: With the \$200m for the Central Arnhem Road, will there be specific parts of that road—the Member for Mulka is interested because that goes across my and his electorate, Mulka and Arnhem—and how will that be identified in terms of where the sealing happens? Obviously there is a lot more than 200 kilometres of dirt road that needs to be sealed, and that is what that would cover if we are lucky. What would be identified as the priority areas on the Central Arnhem Road.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a good question and it is definitely a question for DLI. They are managing all of that and doing all the stakeholder engagement. Every time we build a bit of road, we have to negotiate with all the TOs and everyone involved. It is not straightforward, but DLI can explain to you which sections of the road are next and how they are approaching it.

J DAVIS: I have a couple of follow-ups on behalf of the Member for Mulka.

How many times have you travelled to Gove since being appointed and how many Gove Futures reference group meetings have you chaired since your appointment?

Ms McCORMICK: I went in February when I first came back after long service leave, and then in April and May I have been. We are ramping up meetings to monthly because of all the decisions that need to be made through the group. Meetings used to be quarterly. Our next meeting is 19 June.

J DAVIS: To return to an earlier question to the Chief Minister in relation to the travel for the Member for Wanguri, could I seek the answer to that in the reporting period? I understand she was appointed in February, so from July to February.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have it for the whole reporting period, which is 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026, because she was fulfilling that role, even though it was not the specific title. That was the two trips which were in December and February.

I will be in Nhulunbuy either next week or the week after—we are just finalising that—as well as for Garna. It is a continuous work in progress.

I want to be clear that it is very important. We are very invested in the outcome, but we are one in a number of stakeholders. It will not be the Territory government in and of itself which can deliver a successful transition; it has to be all of us. The statement by all of the TO groups—there is a strong working relationship and understanding amongst all of us—is that we want the best outcome that has to be led by the people on the ground. We will be there every step of the way but, ultimately, those decisions and the consequences of those decisions will be driven from the leadership groups on the ground.

J DAVIS: To clarify in terms of travel, prior to her official appointment, the member formally went once. I think you said that was in anticipation of the role?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, she was the assistant Treasurer last year. In her role as assistant Treasurer, I had her working on this for me as well. When we did the change of assistant ministers to give everyone a new opportunity to learn different parts of government, I formalised that with the specific naming. Otherwise, she was fulfilling that role.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: You mentioned you raised this as part of your discussions with the Prime Minister. Are you able to give us any insight as to what role you think the federal government needs to play in this?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. It is top of mind for both of us. We want a good outcome. As I explained, as federal and Territory governments, we have different roles to play. Each of them is equally important and different. By making sure we move to those more regular cadence of meetings and come down to decision-making time now, the time for talking and fleshing things out is coming to a crunch point. We need to be anchoring some decisions to give certainty so we can take the next steps.

As I said, every day that goes past is just another day closer to Rio leaving. It means it is another day closer to what fills that gap. I can confidentially say that everyone is mindful of that. Everyone wants a strong Nhulunbuy moving forward. Everyone understands that it will be incredibly difficult to find a new Rio. That is not really the realistic goal here; there will be a gap. It is minimising that shortfall as much as possible.

Because of the inertia and lack of leadership under the previous government, there had not been much going on or progress through those meetings through lack of direction. Now that we have picked it up and said, 'Hang on, this is too important. We cannot just let time evaporate in front of our eyes'. There is literally a clock ticking on this one.

The federal government has been much more responsive. That is Louise's job, to make sure. My job is to make sure it is top of mind for all of us.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any other questions on the opening statement?

Mr YOUNG: I will go back to a couple of questions about the flooding.

As we have seen, residents are starting to return to Nauiyu in a staged approach, depending on where their houses are up to. Can you outline what safety risk assessments were done before you started sending residents home?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, definitely. There was a lot of public commentary about that but I can assure everyone that all of the appropriate measures were assessed. I will pass on to the chief executive, as the recovery coordinator, and he can step you through all of the processes. Obviously, there are a number of communities that happened at different times. We sent people through the houses, checking electrical—literally every fundamental had to be checked first.

Mr YOUNG: Just to be clear, just for the community of Nauiyu I am asking for.

Mr CERCARELLI: To reinforce what the Chief Minister indicated, we undertake a wide range of assessments of the properties by different agencies, from engineering through to electrical, power, water, health and the like to ensure that the services that are expected within the community can be maintained.

Each agency head responsible for their area of service delivery is consulted with. For example, in relation to the health clinic the CEO of Health is consulted to ensure that we are able to run a health clinic and are able to service the needs of the community; Children and Families in relation to a wide range of services that are provided such as any domestic violence shelters and the like, which we may not own

The big one is DLI in relation to the road network, the airstrip and the housing, which are gone through individually and signed off before we allow anyone to enter those homes. As a collective, we are assured that everyone signs off on their area of expertise prior to taking anyone home.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a list of that and are you able to table those assessments that have been done? When I was there a week or two ago, what I could see were abandoned buildings with asbestos signs still up—the risk of children walking around and potentially going into those buildings. There were still plenty of trucks and builders driving around; it was almost like a construction site, so I am trying to understand how a decision was made to ensure that people were safe for when they get home. Many residents who have returned have also asked me this question and are quite concerned. Are you able to table those safety risks?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am very happy to answer the question, Member for Daly. We have a community who has been out of their homes twice now, for several months. People are very much wanting to get home.

Mr YOUNG: I understand that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am still answering the question. We did everything we could to facilitate visits and it took a number of weeks before we could have the first busloads of Nauiyu residents home to, for example, go and collect their things. We could not send contractors in to clean houses until people had the opportunity to go through anything that was particularly special. Feedback we received was around cultural significance and belongings of people who ...

Mr YOUNG: I think I sent you that letter, yes. I know that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You either want me to answer the question or not.

Mr CHAIR: Sorry, Chief Minister. Member for Daly, we have already discussed this point. We will not be interrupting the Chief Minister during the answer.

Mr YOUNG: Mr Chair, it was just about tabling—with respect—the safety risks to show that it was safe for people to go home. That was the question.

Mr CHAIR: If you have a point of order, raise it through the Chair. Do not cut the minister off when answering. If your question is not answered, make a point of order to me and I will make the assessment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Particular items of cultural significance, particularly people who had passed away. Even that in and of itself was contentious because people—if government had said to me, ‘No, you cannot go visit your house for three weeks’, I would have been really upset about that. I would want to go home, but we could not. We took the prudent steps to make sure it was safe enough to be having people visiting given the extent of the damage and the works needed to take place.

We facilitated a number of busloads of people to visit their house, take what needed to be taken and provide any guidance in relation to what would be saved, turfed et cetera.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Mr Chair! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was in relation to what safety risks were put in place, and I asked for that to be tabled, for when people returned home. It was a direct question that happened quite early after a letter I sent the Chief Minister. They were the concerns from the residents.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If you do not want to hear the answer, then the answer is no. There is no one document to table, so the answer is no. If you do not want to hear about why Nauiyu was safe for people to return home—the community that you are elected to represent—and you just want to feed fear and misinformation, then fill your boots.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Mr Chair! Standing Order 110; relevance.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will not support that, so the answer is no and we can have the next question.

Mr YOUNG: I am not creating any fear; they are genuine questions in relation to safety.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you. Member for Daly, do you have another question?

Mr YOUNG: Again, with major works still underway across parts of the community, who was responsible for ensuring residents’ safety during these works? If there is an incident happening with, for example, asbestos which is still through abandoned buildings, which I do not think would be safe—trucks are driving through the community and it is almost like a construction site. Who would be liable if something happens?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Your question is ridiculous. Are you telling me that on non-flood or emergency event times there are no trucks driving through Nauiyu? Is that what you are saying?

Mr YOUNG: There are many more trucks than would usually be driving through. There are also buildings that have asbestos which have been abandoned. There is also still plenty of mud, silt and sand across the streets in Nauiyu, so there is a liability question if something was to occur. Residents have raised that with me; they are quite concerned about it. It is almost like a huge construction site. There is a difference between a couple of houses being built and rebuilding a whole community or recovering a whole community. They are real concerns. I am not sure if you have been down there since.

Mr CHAIR: Can we get to the point of the question. Your question remains on liability—correct?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a ridiculous question. The asbestos was there before; 400 people live in Nauiyu and they were living around the asbestos buildings which are all registered in the appropriate regulatory registers, managed and maintained in accordance with all the stringent laws. They were all there before and they are still there now so that is the status quo.

In terms of vehicles moving around, we have less than half the number of people in that community than we normally would. People want to go home; no-one is being forced to go home; the people who are there want

to be at home. At the end of the day, the scale of what you are talking about is painting a distorted picture. What we have is utes with water blasters and pressure blasters and people cleaning up rubbish and trucks full of sand that they are clearing away. I am not sure what you expect. Are you saying that the people of Nauiyu should have to live at Batchelor for the foreseeable future?

Mr YOUNG: No. I am not saying that. What I am asking is: what was put in place to ensure the safety when you have asbestos in buildings? Yes, there was asbestos in the buildings before the flooding event, but floodwaters have gone through those buildings that have asbestos in them, so there is a risk of children going into the abandoned buildings. We need to understand who is liable if something happens with asbestos. More broadly, considering it is like a construction site—I am not sure if you have been there. I am not trying to be tricky or smart; I have been down there and seen it myself. It is quite dangerous walking around.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you for your opinion. This is Estimates; it is not, Member for Daly, an opinion session.

I do not know what you want me to say. The asbestos buildings that were there before—and managed under the regulatory frameworks that all asbestos buildings around the Territory are managed—are still there today. People need to look after their own children; there is no more reason why children would be anywhere near asbestos buildings today as they would have a year ago, five years ago or 50 years ago. It is the same.

Mr YOUNG: The difference is a lot of this ...

Mr CHAIR: We are going around in circles.

I welcome the Year 10 and 11 students from Essington who are in the gallery. Thank you for coming in, and I hope you enjoy the rest of Estimates.

I have a question, but I am going to ask where I can place it. It is on your reference to PPSOs in your opening speech. I am seeking to know numbers in training, when they are graduating, especially through the lens of Palmerston. Would that best be at Output 14.0 in Police?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, probably, but I will be talking about PPSOs in my opening statement, so I am sure you could probably park a lot of your questions on PPSOs in my opening statement for Police. I am happy to support the committee through the questions at the right spot and the right time.

Mr CHAIR: Any further questions on the opening statement?

Mr YOUNG: I have two more questions. Were residents provided any reports or advice regarding asbestos risks, given asbestos warning signs remain visible on a number of the properties?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Member for Daly, the people who live in Nauiyu have lived in Nauiyu since those buildings were there, before and after. It is the same. I do not understand this line of questioning. Before the floods and after the floods everything is the same.

Mr YOUNG: On 6 June at 2 pm the Northern Regional Emergency Committee held a meeting regarding the rising water levels at Nauiyu and were advised that helicopters were ready to go with the evacuation. However, the directive was given to hold evacuees because there was no accommodation ready to receive evacuees. There were no evacuation centres stood up ready to go. As a result, there was a 24-hour delay which meant that 70 residents were left behind that day and had to wade through water to get on a boat to then be evacuated to Five Mile. Why was the immediate safety of residents not put ahead of the concerns about whether an evacuation centre would be put up or not?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The safety of every Territorian across the Territory impacted by all the weather events was paramount, which is why no-one was injured or killed.

Mr YOUNG: Out of luck.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not sure where you are getting your information from, but you are more than welcome to ask that question again when Police is here.

Mr YOUNG: As I stated, it came through the Northern Regional Emergency Committee meeting held on 6 June.

Mr CHAIR: Is it a question?

Mr YOUNG: It was out of luck that no-one was injured because they had to wade through water.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is really a selfish thing to say that it was out of luck. It was not out of luck. We have men and women across the Northern Territory pulling on blue, green and orange uniforms, making sure that people are safe. That is not luck; that is sheer commitment and dedication of the people who protect us ...

Mr YOUNG: You delayed by 24 hours ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a disgrace

Mr YOUNG: ...to get people out of Naiuyu community.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: ... that you sit there as some sort of armchair warrior pretending like you could have done a better job, like you have all the answers, when all you are doing is throwing stones at the very ...

Mr YOUNG: It would not have been hard to do a better job.

Mr CHAIR: Stop!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, Mr Chair, I will finish answering my question, with all due respect. These are the people who save lives every day. You have ...

Mr YOUNG: I am talking about your leadership ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, you are not.

Mr YOUNG: ... making those decisions. I am not talking about the public service.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, I put you on a warning.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are welcome to ask Police when Police comes in, but do not denigrate the hard work of the men and women who have done everything they can to have a successful outcome.

Mr YOUNG: This is about your leadership.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Anyone looking from the outside in would say that that was an incredible response we delivered over five months, and you want to nitpick with your hindsight sunglasses on from the comfort of your lounge room. People were waist-deep in water, helicoptering and evacuating people out. People were driving through flood waters, and you sat around in the comfort of your home, absolved from all of it.

Mr YOUNG: No, I was there.

Mr CHAIR: We will stop there.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay, good for you.

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister and Member for Daly, we are stopping that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Chair, there is an additional component, given safety seems to be the Member for Daly's concern for his community—I think it is more political pointscore more than safety—I will have Luccio Cercarelli answer some more of those components about how we made sure every house and how the community is safe because we do not want this misinformation continuing to be perpetuated and undermining confidence in communities who want to go home and get on with their normal life.

Mr CHAIR: This answer will be heard in silence.

Mr CERCARELLI: As I was saying earlier, each house is certified prior to any family being allowed to return home. Contractors on site are required by law to have safety plans in place to ensure that what they do is managed appropriately. We have staff on ground from multiple agencies daily inspecting the work that has been undertaken to ensure that safety standards are maintained. Movement of vehicles on a road network is not unusual. I acknowledge that there are an extra number of vehicles there. The alternative to not managing the process in a safe way and allowing people to return home is, as the Chief alluded to, it would be several months in addition to where we are today before anyone could get home. We are talking mid-September, probably later, to wait for every home to be built.

It is not unusual to have works occurring around residential properties. It happens in subdivisions all around the Northern Territory. It is how we go about managing those and how we go about contractors managing those events. I would encourage any community member or the members here present today, if you are aware of a safety breach please report it. There are staff on the ground; report it through to my agency, and I will have it investigated. We take safety seriously, not only of the community members but of the people who are there working on the projects, many of whom are local community members who have been engaged by Green River to undertake work in their own community.

J DAVIS: I have a couple of questions on which output I ask questions in. Where do I ask questions about the lobbyists register?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In 9.1.

J DAVIS: I have two very brief questions. Under Chief Minister and Cabinet Budget highlights, on page 16, you listed de-densification of social and affordable housing with a budget of \$1.5m. Can you clarify what that means?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Unlike the previous Labor government, we try extremely hard to make sure our budget is what we will spend going forward. We had to do a lot of budget repair in budgeting for items that Labor had no clear funding for or completely neglected to make sure was in the budget.

Public housing is a significant area of reform for us this year. Last year we spent a lot of time focusing on policing, laws and those types of things; this year there is a very big focus on housing. This is evidenced by the fact that we have our police public safety officers training now. They are fully funded in this budget to build to that capacity of 212 over the next two years.

There is a densification review that the department is doing as well. It is important that CMC has a portion allocated for whatever—we anticipate coming out of what the department is doing that there will then be work for us to do. That is a budget line that allows us to do that work.

J DAVIS: Was this in last year's budget or in the coming budget?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In this year's budget.

J DAVIS: In plain English, what does de-densification mean?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is basically—we are looking really closely at—a part of it came out when the Member for Drysdale had the (inaudible) commission do a review into an outlet in his electorate. Part of what they reported back on was that Gray is one of the most community housing-dense suburbs in the whole country. The Member for Karama will be very familiar with this, as are a number of local members of parliament for their communities. It is about doing an analysis of that densification and if we need to be not growing that densification further. Do we need to be de-densifying—that is, have a different mix of housing in those particular suburbs that might be some of the most dense suburbs in the country? It is a piece of work around what is our housing footprint across the spectrum. Obviously, there is social and affordable, public housing—all of those different types of housing. What does that footprint look like so that we can map out where it should go into the future.

J DAVIS: It is a mapping and research—that is what that money will be spent on?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, that is what the department is doing. I expect once the department has done that work, then there might be whole-of-government coordination work that needs to be done by CMC which would be what that money is spent on. If that does not happen, the Treasurer will be a very happy man and will get \$1.5m back at the end of the year.

J DAVIS: You spoke in your opening statement about the government's commitment and action on reducing crime. You identified the sentencing, Criminal Code, bail and youth justice amendment Bills as key measures intended to reduce reoffending and improve community safety. What specific evidence, research, modelling or departmental analysis was relied on in developing these Bills to demonstrate that they will reduce reoffending or crime?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not know that this is for the reporting period, but in any event, we had a Territory election in August 2024 off the back of what had been the most significant growth in crime and repeat offending that the Northern Territory had ever seen. It got to the point where people were leaving in droves, businesses were closing down and we could not attract private sector investment. The whole ecosystem of the Northern Territory had come under severe pressure and threat because people did not feel safe to even go to the shops and do their grocery shopping anymore. We saw DV increase by 82% in the period under Labor.

We were at a crisis point of a proportion we had never seen before. Our commitment to Territorians over an enduring period of time, both in the lead-up to 2020 and 2024, was clearly about law and order. Many of the policies we implemented in October 2024 had been policies that we had taken to two elections and developed in consultation with communities in reviewing all of the data over all of those years.

We took that deliberate, urgent action in October 2024 and have continued with that in consultation with police and other stakeholders about where we can have an impact on reducing crime Territory-wide. The numbers are speaking for themselves. We are seeing huge downward pressure of crime. We have reduced the number of offences down to 2017 levels. We have been able to wind back the clock, as no other jurisdiction has, on the number of offences. In virtually one year or 18 months, we have reduced the number of offences Territory-wide back to 2017 levels.

There is a lot more work to do. We are steadfast in our commitment to that work. We continue to make sure the police, corrections and our courts have the tools they need while we tackle the root causes of crime, which is an incredibly important component of all of this. The work we have done in Corrections is to make sure people are able to access skills training, education, DV and alcohol training—all of those things—and the work we have done in Children and Families for early intervention ...

J DAVIS: My specific question was what specific evidence, research, modelling or departmental analysis was done? Was there a regulatory impact statement prepared? Was there any cost-benefit analysis? Did the department model the impact on prisoner remand numbers? Did the department model the impact on reoffending rates? What specific date, evaluation or evidence links these amendments to reduce reoffending outcomes?

To be clear, I am not asking whether the government supports these measures, I am asking what specific evidence was relied on in developing these Bills?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a number of Bill. I can think of probably a dozen we have passed. All of them go through their own individual process and are ultimately put to parliament and passed. Your question is probably far too broad to be able to answer in any meaningful way.

J DAVIS: Was any specific evidence relied on in developing these Bills?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is so old news. Member for Johnston, your style is incredibly predictable.

J DAVIS: Through the Chair, it is not me who is here to defend themselves ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You constantly ask this and we constantly answer ...

J DAVIS: Through the Chair!

Mr CHAIR: I have your question. I will give the Chief Minister a final answer. Then we can move on to the next question.

J DAVIS: With respect, I am not the subject of Estimates; the Chief Minister's portfolio is. I want to put that on the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is for police anyway; I am not really sure.

The answer is every piece of legislation is looked at and measured individually. I mentioned earlier in a response that some changes you make are able to be felt instantly and others take a longer period of time. That is true for law and order as well. Some of our reforms had an immediate impact—bail, for example. Others will have a longer-term impact. Others are used more than others; it depends what it is.

There is no global answer to your global question, and I reject the premise of it that this is not based on evidence. We talk a lot about community consultation, but I think the lived experience of Territorians over the last eight years of Labor speaks for itself. How much more evidence do you need before you do something? For us, that was more than enough.

Mr YOUNG: Back to floods, I just want to ask ...

Mr CHAIR: As long as it is not repetitive.

Mr YOUNG: No, it is not. It is definitely a new question, but I just want clarification of what output it will be in. It is about the evacuation of residents. Does that sit with Police or Emergency Services?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Evacuation is Police; coming home is us.

Mr YOUNG: Coming home—back home?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As in repatriation.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the appropriation Bill 2026–27 as they relate to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Ms UIBO: My question for the Chief Minister and her department is specifically about a review process.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry—a what?

Ms UIBO: A review process. I want to understand when the decision was made for the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet to review the tragic death of Kumanjayi Little Baby—to be overseen by CMC rather than led by the Department of Children and Families.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I acknowledge the tragedy and heartbreak that Kumanjayi Little Baby represents for every Territorian. It was absolutely awful and continues to be a very sad time, particularly for her family and community.

The Minister for Children and Families has the lead on child protection and is doing a lot of work in that space. It was wanting to be elevated to a more whole-of-government level, that strategic coordination, which is what CMC does. On request of Minister Cahill through to the chief executive, it came through CMC, and that request was accepted.

Ms UIBO: Thank you. Just understanding the timing of that decision being made.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We do not have the exact date, but the timeframe would have been around last sittings. I am not sure if that is helpful. I am happy to take it on notice if that is more helpful.

Ms UIBO: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 1.5

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

Ms UIBO: When was the decision made for the review of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet into the tragic death of Kumanjayi Little Baby to be overseen by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet as opposed to the Department of Children and Families?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.5.

Ms UIBO: I am trying to understand why the terms of reference for that review have not been made public yet.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That decision sits with the Minister for Children and Families, so you can ask her that question when she is up.

Ms UIBO: I have a copy of the terms of reference, as the Minister for Child Protection provided it to me just yesterday. My understanding is it was public, but I cannot find it on the CMC website. If it is being led by Chief Minister and Cabinet, why is it not being publicly output by your department versus the department being reviewed, which is the Department of Children and Families?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I believe it was part of the Minister for Children and Families' media release announcing it. The terms of reference were part of it.

Ms UIBO: How does the scope of the review that is being led by your department differ or build on the coronial investigation into specific circumstances and systemic responses leading up to the tragic death of Kumanjayi Little Baby's death?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The functions are quite different. The Coroner has all of her own powers under the *Coroners Act* to undertake all types of investigations and provide recommendations to government. They are then legislated and so we have reporting obligations and all those types of things. It is a much higher threshold for the Coroner and her powers.

What this review is—not to speak on behalf of Minister Cahill because I know she would be more than happy to speak at great lengths about this, given the importance of it. The review is about the circumstances in that case and the actions of the agency and what learnings can be taken from that.

Ms UIBO: Will the outcomes of the review be made public from your department?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, Minister Cahill has already said that she will table that in parliament.

To go to your earlier point, I am aware that there will be a connection between the Coroner and the inquiry—obviously, not overlapping roles because they are distinct—they will make contact with each other at the right time.

Ms UIBO: I know that this will be of high public interest. I am asking for the broader community as much as we want the family to have some closure as well, Chief Minister, as I am sure you would agree.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do.

Ms UIBO: Regarding the terms of reference, we have been told it is public, but we cannot find it publicly. I would like to table a copy of the terms of reference which is the independent investigation into the conduct of the Department of Children and Families by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

I also table a copy of some of my letters for requests around the follow-up actions from the government in regard to understanding some of the unfortunate circumstances.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Opposition Leader. Is anyone opposed? Consider it tabled.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Mr Chair.

In terms of Output 9.0, I have another line of questioning to 9.1. I am just confirming.

Mr CHAIR: We are still on ...

Ms UIBO: The global?

Mr CHAIR: Yes. Have you finished with whole-of-government questions?

Ms UIBO: Yes, thank you.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any other whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

OUTPUT GROUP 9.0 – ADVICE AND COORDINATION

Output 9.1 – Strategic Advice and Coordination

Ms UIBO: I anticipate that the Member for Johnston will have very similar questions on this line, it is about the lobbyist register. Chief Minister, your lobbyist register was established in February 2025, has it been audited or reviewed since that time?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to pass on to Ms Doherty.

Ms DOHERTY: The lobbyist framework was introduced and commenced in early 2025, fulfilling an election commitment of the Northern Territory Government. It sits as part of the broader integrity and accountability framework and works in with other pieces of legislation, such as the ICAC Act and other forms of governance and accountability in relation to integrity.

The model is aligned with most other jurisdictions across Australia, which requires lobbyists to register and declare their interests and previous interests on a public facing website that has been set up. It essentially regulates third-party lobbyists in a way that provides transparency around engagement with ministers. As part of the registration process, a lobbyist must identify their nature of employment, whether they are a contractor et cetera. They must identify whether they have been convicted of an offence in the last 10 years with a specific focus on fraud and theft. They must identify any other illegal or unlawful behaviours or any other breaches of codes of this particular lobbyist framework or any other lobbyist framework across Australia.

They must also identify within 10 business days of any material change to their circumstances, which needs to be declared. The lobbyist register is published on the CMC website and is administered by CMC in the sense that CMC undertakes compliance where that is required. To date there are 26 lobbyists registered on the public register and there has not been any breaches reported in relation to any of those registered lobbyists at this point in time. There are no requirements at this point of time for any compliance action to be undertaken.

The review of the lobbyist register is regularly checked and oversighted internally by our compliance team. As I mentioned, there has been no requirement for any escalation of the compliance activity under the framework to date.

Ms UIBO: With the 26 lobbyists which are registered on the Northern Territory Register of Lobbyists, most other jurisdictions have about 60 or 70 lobbyists. Are you confident that all lobbyists that should be on the list are on the list and registered appropriately?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If they are not, they are the ones in breach. This is going back to outside of this period. Ms Doherty, if my memory is not correct, we broadly reached out to known lobbyists and wrote to everyone to say that these are the new laws and the expectation in the Northern Territory. There was a lot of media about it at the time. I cannot comment on other jurisdictions but this is certainly the Territory has never had before. The fact that there is 26 on there provides a new opportunity for transparency and scrutiny and ultimately the obligation is on those people to be doing the right thing and making sure they are complying. If they are coming to the Territory, they have to be on that register.

Ms UIBO: Could I confirm that they are not handwritten registrations but are online?

Ms DOHERTY: I can confirm they are online registrations and that we did write to all listed registered lobbyists in other jurisdictions as part of our commencement of the new framework. The number has increased since the website has been initially launched. We had about five or six in the first week and there has been an increase in the number of lobbyists registered. This is a sign that the education and awareness campaign has worked.

Ms UIBO: There is a lobbyist register code of conduct and I quote:

*'A Minister must not knowingly and intentionally be a party to lobbying activities by:
(a) a lobbyist who is not on the Register of Lobbyists;*

Could you confirm in this reporting period that all your ministers are meeting the requirements set out in the lobbyist register code of conduct?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. As Ms Doherty said, there have been no compliance requirements of infringements of that. The obligation is on the lobbyist to be on the register and make that notification. We have no instances to say that there is non-compliance, which is good.

Ms UIBO: What are the consequences if a minister is not conforming to the lobbyist register code of conduct?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If a minister becomes aware of the breach of this code by a lobbyist or a person or a person employed or contracted by the lobbyist, they must disclose the breach to CMC. We have had no instances of that. If a minister knowingly breaches this code, then the Chief Minister may, amongst other things:

- make the minister apologise
- require the minister to stand aside or resign
- refer the matter to an appropriate authority for investigation, of which I can stand the minister down during that time if so required
- discuss the matter with the minister and seek the views of Cabinet before making a determination.

There are four different actions that could be taken. There has been no noncompliance.

J DAVIS: My questions are mostly answered. What is the budgetary allocation for the lobbyist register?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is funded from within. We already have a compliance team in CMC. That has just been part of the core business that they do. It is an election commitment, so it is very much a part of the agency's operating environment.

Ms DOHERTY: We previously estimated the establishment of the website and the setup costs to be approximately \$17,000. That was from within existing resources. The compliance and monitoring of the lobbyist register is done within our government's information reporting team as well as with support from the legal policy team in Chief Minister and Cabinet.

J DAVIS: If there was a violation of the code, would that be publicly available?

Ms DOHERTY: Yes. If there is a breach of the code of conduct, that lobbyist would be placed on a watchlist, and that watchlist would be published additional to the existing declarations on the website.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Can I confirm that we should be asking you questions relating to Defence NT?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Robertson Barracks and Defence families play an important role in my electorate and in other electorates in the wider community. Robertson Barracks borders on my electorate. In the recent NT Defence Strategy 2026, one of its key priorities is 'Army's littoral pivot'. Can you please outline how the NT Government is supporting the Army's littoral pivot and ensuring that communities such as mine benefit from the future Defence investment?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For the benefit of the committee and Hansard, I am now joined by Jimmy Kiploks, our General Manager of Defence, Security and Resilience as part of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

The National Defence Strategy is a key document on which we base our strategy. We created the Defence Industry Council where I wanted industry to be leading the Territory's Defence strategy and for all

of us to have a clear message so that no matter whether it is me or industry going to Canberra, all had one message, one ask and one proposition.

That work was done and announced during Defence NT Week. It was modelled off the National Defence Strategy. That has been reflected in all our communications and conversations with senior Defence officials, both of the United States and the Australian Defence Force, that recognition that it delivers what the National Defence Strategy needs.

To that extent, the Army over a number of years has been moving to littoral, which is an amphibious pivot for what is normally soldiers marching through the bush. They will now be on barges and boats, landing in mangroves and all sorts of things like that. We see an opportunity here with the Northern Marine Complex, which is the ship lift that the previous government commenced construction of. There are 246 hectares of water frontage that is government-owned land next to the ship lift. Together that is a Territory development area which allows us to have a focused and coordinated development of that site to make sure that we are producing a product ready for the market.

We see an opportunity, given 1st Brigade's pivot to littoral to be potentially providing opportunities there at the Northern Marine Complex. They are the conversations we are having at high levels and are hopeful of an outcome there.

Essentially, our goal is to deliver additional Defence personnel into the Territory which we know then boosts our population and supports our sporting groups, workforce, kids in schools and all of those wonderful things that Defence families bring, and the economic opportunities that flow from it as well. It will also allow the Northern Territory to play its role. We are much of a mandate that a strong north is a secure Australia. That is the message we continue to push.

I am happy if Mr Kiploks wants to add anything to that.

Mr KIPLOKS: To reinforce what the Chief Minister said, the Army's littoral pivot offers the Territory an opportunity to benefit and see additional Defence personnel come into the Territory and additional opportunities for industry and the Defence industry. Bringing landing craft into the Australian Army is an enormous investment in that littoral pivot. The Australian Army might end up having more vessels than the Royal Australian Navy. It is a real opportunity to leverage what is happening, what 1st Brigade's role is and what happens at the Northern Marine Complex.

In the strategy what we tried to do was specify some specific decisions we want to go after in the Territory. Number one here is about advocating for the home base in the 1st Brigade's littoral force and the first batch of the landing craft to be delivered in Darwin using local industry and the ship lift to maintain, repair and support them.

When you look at what the Army's plans are, they will distribute their littoral force across Darwin, Townsville and Brisbane. There are good reasons for that. Our objective is to say we should be prioritising Darwin first. There are a number of reasons for that—strategic geography, the training ranges in the Territory, the marine rotation being in Darwin and the opportunity to train with them and how they are interoperable together, and the opportunity that offers to help deliver, as the Chief Minister said, on the national Defence strategy which is one of the biggest areas focused on Australia's northern approaches.

We are looking at how we can present the Territory as an option to ensure the Army can deliver on its strategic objectives, which is to deliver a littoral force that can operate in Australia's northern approaches. We think the Territory is ideally situated for that.

That is the big target we are after. 1st Brigade already has been allocated as a littoral brigade. Our objective will be to demonstrate not only that it should be prioritised but they should leverage local industry and opportunities to take advantage, particularly of those landing craft coming in.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, we will take a short 5-minute toilet break. Member for Fannie Bay, you will have the floor, I promise. The time now is 2.34 pm. We will resume at 2.39 pm.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, we have reconvened.

Mrs ZIO: Given we are talking about Defence NT, I would like to ask a question about what steps the government is taking to help Territory businesses access supply chains and win more Defence-related work in the Northern Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass over to Jim in a second. Basically, it goes back to what I was saying earlier about Arafura. Working with Industry Capability Network is allowing us to have a detailed understanding of how much Territory content there is in this work. For example, with Defence spending it is about 90 cents in every dollar that Defence spend in the Northern Territory goes to a local business. Defence literally is putting food on the table for Territory families. In terms of bang for buck, it does not get better than Defence spend in the Territory for local content.

That is why we are so focused and why our strategy aligns with the National Defence Strategy and why I wanted it to be industry-led and the private sector ownership of the strategy rather than it be something that government was forcing upon industry because the growth in Territory business and new opportunities for Territory businesses is there. This is why the Northern Marine Complex is also so exciting; obviously that is far bigger than Defence. Defence is an aspiration for us in that complex, but it presents a new industry and new opportunities for people to establish businesses and grow their workforce and their profession. I will throw to Mr Kiploks. That is the whole part of our focus.

Mr KIPLOKS: To back what the Chief said, the way you obtain opportunities for Defence industry and for industry to grow in the Defence sector is to attract more Defence presence into the Territory—more Defence personnel, more platforms located here, more operations from here and more exercises from here. That is the first part.

The second part is then to ensure that everyone in Defence and across the Defence industry understands the capability that is present in the Territory and how that can be used. Again, that is working with organisations like ICN NT to identify who those particular businesses are and how they might fit into those supply chains—whether that is direct supply chains supporting acquisition projects, maintenance and sustainment projects or whether it is interglobal supply chains as part of working with some of these Defence primes.

I guess it is multifaceted as we work across all these different components of the Defence sector to be out selling what the Territory is offering and what Territory businesses are offering. Part of that will be to direct Defence NT to get out there to engage with local industry and understand what capabilities they are offering, liaise back into those Defence primes and back into the Defence Department itself and ensure they appreciate what capability is resident and understand the workforce issues and how we can bring skilled workforce to bear on particular issues. It is a whole engagement piece.

We spoke earlier about the trade shows like Land Forces and Indo-Pacific. Again, they are great opportunities to showcase Territory businesses. At Indo-Pacific in November in Sydney we were able to showcase 23 organisations from the Territory—companies and organisations—and they were able to be on the stand to meet with senior decision-makers from Defence and the Defence industry. It raised awareness of the capability and opportunities. That is all part of the strategy we lay out.

In the NT Defence Strategy we have identified that one of the key roles we can play in working with industry partners like ICN, the Chamber of Commerce and Master Builders is to develop that single regularly updated picture of industry capability, including the skills, workforce, accreditation, facilities, throughput and surge capacity available in the Northern Territory. We can demonstrate as those exercises come and as allied and partner nations come and use those training facilities when they visit—whether it is HMAS Coonawarra, Tindal in Katherine or Alice Springs—we have the capability here and they can get their kit repaired and get things they need when and where they need it.

Mr CHAIR: I have follow-on question that might be for the general manager; the Defence struggles historically with filling postings to the Northern Territory for a variety of reasons. Are we communicating with Defence on the benefits we are doing—things like homeowner grants and that kind of thing—which could really incentivise postings to the Northern Territory and that additional spending for our economy?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is an excellent question, Member for Drysdale. I just had this discussion with the Chief of Army not that long ago, and there is more work to do at our end. It is about packaging up some of these historical myths. You an ex-serviceman, and a lot of what I am doing—going around the country and speaking on this Defence platform—is about trying to move the old narrative on the Territory is somewhere that people do not want to be posted. It is not true, and the data does not show that either.

There have been decisions made by successive federal governments about where troops end up, and that is something that is not in our control, but what we can do is make sure that Army, Navy, Air Force and our allies understand the offerings here, the schooling opportunities, the services that are available and what type of lifestyle people might have. Of course, our HomeGrown Territory Grants are the best in the country, so when you have a housing situation nationally where people for their first home will have to pay \$1m-plus, it is completely unachievable for most people. They can come here, access \$50,000 and build their future here.

We are doing that work; there is more of that sell for us to do, but a lot of it has been direct one-on-one myth-busting, including meeting with Admiral Paparo of INDOPACOM not long ago and a number of other senior officials. It is about directly, in a sustained way, keeping on top of the narrative and letting this old narrative fall to the wayside and the new one being pushed through, which is that the Territory is a vibrant, thriving, growing place to live, a great place to raise a family and we are the natural strategic location. We are the only capital city north of Brisbane, and we are the natural capital of northern Australia of which our Defence forces and federal government need to place a high level of focus, resource and attention on.

J DAVIS: I have a question in relation to Defence. Last month, Mr Kiploks sent an email to all NT Government department heads requesting the consider creative ways to celebrate the US 250th anniversary on 4 July. Have any departments responded with ideas on how to mark the occasion and, if so, what are the estimated costs?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, 4 July is the 250th anniversary. The United States are key partner of ours. We have had the Marine Rotational Force for 15 years. We commemorate the sinking of the *USS Peary* every Bombing of Darwin anniversary and the Battle of Coral Sea commemorations. They are enduring relationships. Those relationships will only grow into the future. There was public media commentary about this, but essentially the Australian American Association, for example, mark the commemoration every year, and it is about whether there are other agencies doing anything. Just like we would celebrate other multicultural days of significance, this one is no different.

J DAVIS: Has any money been earmarked from any departments for 4 July celebrations?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Not to my knowledge at this stage. If anyone was going to do anything it would have to come from their existing budget.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 9.1.

Output 9.2 – Strategic Policy Reform And Aboriginal Partnerships

Mr CHAIR: I note that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for Aboriginal Affairs policy and coordination, and questions relating to this component will be considered when Minister Edgington appears before the committee next Monday 15 June 2026. Noting that, are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Are we still allowed to ask questions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: CMC are responsible, so they will appear, but Minister Edgington is ...

Ms UIBO: On Monday next week.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, correct. While I get the chance, I want to thank our entire team. They do an incredible job and worked hard to prepare Minister Edgington for upcoming Estimates. I know they look forward to providing the answers on the hard work they are doing.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 9.2.

Output 9.3 – Territory Regional Coordination

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 10.0 – OFFICE OF THE TERRITORY COORDINATOR

Output 10.1 – Office of the Territory Coordinator

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 10.0, Office of the Territory Coordinator, Output 10.1, Office of the Territory Coordinator

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, given you are the minister for the Territory Coordinator, the Territory Coordinator himself has only exercised your powers twice for projects that are already well and truly underway here in the Northern Territory. Do you think that this represents value for money in terms of taxpayer dollars? Can you confirm the amount of money for this function so far, which we have estimated through the budget papers as \$27m thus far?

Mr CHAIR: Opposition Leader, if we can re-ask the question so we do not ask for a personal opinion.

Ms UIBO: Just reiterating the last bit, because I am sure you do not want me to repeat everything, how is the value for money for taxpayers for the anticipated estimation of \$27m so far for this function benefiting taxpayers in the Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not sure where you are getting your figures. It was about \$5.3m and is budgeted for \$6.1m this year, so about \$11m in total. In terms of value to Territory, the amount of confidence that the Territory Coordinator—the legislative regulatory framework and the coordinator himself—has brought to growing and rebuilding the Territory economy has been enormous.

I encourage you, when you speak to Minister Cahill—when she is out and about in our Asian region speaking with major proponents, they are referencing to her the Territory Coordinator legislation. When we move around the country, people are talking about it. The framework is nation leading. Other jurisdictions are looking to us and are jealous. It is underpinning a certainty that cannot be underestimated.

I know that is hard for you to understand because this has been a political battleground for whatever reason, but the reality is that with no Territory Coordinator what we have is a ship lift, which is a building coming out of the ground. It will pull ships out of the water and put ships back in the water. By having the Territory Coordinator designate the ship lift and 246 hectares of water frontage land as part of the Northern Marine Complex, this delivers an entire product to market. This delivers a sophisticated coordination between all the agencies involved—for example the Land Development Corporation, the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, CMC from an economic overview perspective. It brings all of that together into a strategic and rigorously organised precinct.

It enacts the Territory development area plan, it allows that area to be planned, it allows it to be top of government's mind—we have said it is critically important to the future economic success of the Territory, so we have marked it as such to give it that elevation and hyperfocus. It turns a thing that was one piece of infrastructure into an entire, complete, new industry for the Territory. We were just talking about Defence; even the ADF is suddenly talking to us because of the strength in the Northern Marine Complex being a Territory development area.

When the Chief of Army and key ADF personnel are coming to the Territory—that includes the United States—they are meeting with the Territory Coordinator, aside from meeting with me because they want to know and understand it better. That is a huge signal of success and support.

It is politically easy to say they have only designated one thing or there are only two things. The scale of them has never happened in the Territory before. The designation of Arafura Rare Earths Nolans Mine as a significant project is another Territory first. I stood with CEO Darryl Cuzzubbo at the site a few days ago, and this question came from the media that there is cynicism about the role the Territory Coordinator has to play. I answered the question and then Darryl came over and said, 'Wait, I want to answer that question again to reconfirm from the private sector perspective how important something like significant project status is to investors, as a signal to the market and as confidence to the proponent that they will have that high-level oversight and stewardship.' It shows their level of commitment on behalf of the government so that there is a partnership.

We signed, in the example of Arafura, a statement of commitment which has all these shared objectives. For example, the key focus for our government is what is the benefit to Territorians. It is easy to talk a big game about \$1.6bn, but if none of it ends up as work to local tradies, work to local businesses in growing capacity and growing workforce, then what is the benefit outside of royalties? What we want is benefit to the everyday Territorian, seeing their community growing and thriving, their business growing, their employment opportunities looking bigger and better than ever before, and engagement in the regions.

These are literally the jobs on country we talk so much about, and Arafura has an enormous commitment to the communities in and around Aileron and the people of the bush in relation to all the different pathways that will be needed to support economic engagement in those projects.

That is an overview, but I am happy to pass on to Stuart Knowles. Those dollar figures you had, Opposition Leader, were incorrect and I read out the correct ones.

Ms UIBO: To clarify, that was the overall since the Territory Coordinator office commenced. The \$15m revised budget 2024–25—in the figures that are before us, \$5.3m in 2025, and then \$6.1m in 2026. That is why I added that all up, that is \$27m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. I can understand how you got to that, and I will have Ms Doherty explain to you why that is not the case.

Ms UIBO: That is fine. That is the figure that we added up since the overall duration of the office.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is fine. I can understand that. We will explain it.

Ms DOHERTY: Thank you for the clarification of the scope of the value of the Office of the Territory Coordinator since establishment. I confirm that in the 2024–25 revised budget statement that there was an additional amount passed through the Office of the Territory Coordinator output group. That does not relate to the Office of the Territory Coordinator business; it went through that output group arising through the machinery of government changes.

There were still some ins and outs associated with the function and that additional money, in relation to the \$20m figure that you quoted, relates to around \$10m in the (inaudible) of gas purchasing, which was discussed in the last Estimates Committee hearings, which is in relation to gas energy security for the Northern Territory. The funding is no longer residing in that output group, so that was an anomaly and it passed through on the energy security for gas.

Ms UIBO: Thank you for the clarification. Chief Minister, the current budget only lists two KPIs for the Territory Coordinator, which is 120 stakeholder engagements and 90% client satisfaction. Why are there no KPIs for actual economic outcomes such as investment attracted, jobs created, decisions expedited or approval timeframes reduced?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have an answer to Question 1.5 which I will put on the record first, if that is okay, Opposition Leader.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.5

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The question was from the Opposition Leader to me about the independent review into the conduct of the Department of Children and Families. On 11 May 2026 the Honourable Robyn Cahill OAM MLA, Minister for Children and Families wrote to the CEO of the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet requesting the commissioning of an independent review into the conduct of the Department of Children and Families in relation to the case of Kumanjayi Little Baby.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: KPIs are important, and some of the metrics that you offered that could be a KPI misunderstand the role of the Territory Coordinator. The Territory Coordinator only uses those powers for example when there is a Territory development area or a significant project. We announced the TDA on the Northern Marine Complex in either January or February, and the significant project has just become one as at last Monday.

What now happens is that allows the Territory Coordinator to pull together, for example, project control groups around those projects, keeping a rigorous eye on all the normal channels that those approval processes have to go through, seeing in advance where hurdles might be and what we can do to pre-plan and pre-position for those to make it as smooth and efficient as possible, and to be regularly engaging with the key stakeholders.

In the case of the Territory development area, there is the planning work that has to happen. Mr Knowles can speak to that because it is a whole process in and of itself which is quite different to the significant project. Mr Knowles' job is not to walk around government, look on people's desk and ask, 'How long has that been

sitting on your desk?’ Whilst it was always intended as this carrot and stick, in an ideal world the Territory Coordinator should never have to exercise the powers. It is the facilitation and coordination in advance and keeping an eye on everything that gives it teeth.

There is a broader remit across the whole of government to be involved in issues, just like Ms McCormick mentioned about Nhulunbuy Futures. I am comfortable with the KPIs because a 90% satisfaction rate from the client, as in, this example might be Arafura for a significant project—I do not think many people could claim that kind of success. We had the previous Labor government’s list of major projects that never went anywhere and more were falling off the perch than ever came to fruition. This is an entirely different way of doing business. I appreciate it is new, but we are comfortable with that and it is already delivering dividends.

Stuart, would you like to add anything?

Mr KNOWLES: I do not have much to add. There is definitely just the presence of the Territory Coordinator legislation, and my statutory position does have a lot of what we describe as non-statutory outcomes, which can be difficult to measure. The fact that I could take a heavy touch or a light touch, if you still get the same outcome, the light touch is probably the easier way without using the statutory powers. There are a lot of effects and positive outcomes which are happening in parallel through the presence of the Territory Coordinator.

J DAVIS: In relation to this consultation question ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that on the Northern Marine Complex?

J DAVIS: No. It was the earlier question asked by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the target of 120 stakeholder engagements.

Mr Knowles, are you able to outline who you consider as a stakeholder for those 120 engagements and what are those engagements? Does it include a phone call, a meeting or what constitutes an engagement?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy if Mr Knowles is happy to answer that question.

Mr KNOWLES: I had 260 stakeholder engagements during the reporting period. Those stakeholder engagements include industry, business and different levels of government. Why I say that is I have been specific and deliberate about engaging with local government across the Territory and land councils. I have engaged directly with all four land councils.

I was also invited to Kalkarindji last year to attend a full CLC meeting on country, which was fantastic to go and explain and allow people to understand a bit more that the Territory Coordinator can offer benefits to Aboriginal people with opportunities on Aboriginal land that will be positive in terms of outcomes in jobs and revenue and so forth.

I do not count phone calls in those engagements; it is face-to-face meetings. I have been deliberate about getting out and about around the Territory to ensure that I am meeting in the regions, as well as east and west, across to Nhulunbuy as well.

J DAVIS: Are you able to provide a complete list of all the agencies, businesses and individuals you have met with, including the subject matter at those meetings?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We would not be able to provide that, Member for Johnston. Suffice to say, all of it is related to economic opportunity. The role that the Territory Coordinator is now having—we are now talking about the light touch. Being involved in the future of Nhulunbuy is important because of its strategic focus. Obviously, we are talking about plugging a hole the size of Rio Tinto. It is a big hole.

To make sure that people, particularly traditional owners, are understanding the role of that legislation, given a lot of the incorrect negativity and the fearmongering that was happening at the time of passing the legislation, Mr Knowles is now doing extensive body of work across the Territory to make sure people feel comfortable, understand and have the chance to have questions answered but, more importantly, have the opportunity to see how it could benefit them.

Like with Arafura, the Territory’s wealth is in the regions. The jobs are in the regions, which means Territorians living in the regions should have the greatest opportunity to participate in that economic future and success. That is our focus; we want Aboriginal people living on country, a stone’s throw away from some of the biggest

projects in the Territory—including Beetaloo, for example—to have their foot in the door to be first in place to access that, if that is what they want. That is part of the broader benefits that Stuart was speaking of outside of those specific designations and statutory function.

J DAVIS: Does the Office of the Territory Coordinator come under the lobbyist register?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass to Ms Doherty.

Ms DOHERTY: The lobbyist register is open for all lobbyists who engage with ministers. It is in relation to ministerial engagement.

J DAVIS: In this case, it would not be in relation to the Territory Coordinator. I note Mr Knowles said, in answer to Written Question 143, there was a commitment to using interpreters when engaging with people where English was not their first language. Are you not able to provide a list of who meetings have been with? I heard you say there have been some outside of Darwin, so I am presuming that there would have been meetings with people whose first language was not English. Are you able to update on how and whether you are using interpreters?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There has been an extensive number of meetings outside of Darwin, as the Territory Coordinator mentioned and I reiterated. There has not been a requirement yet to use the interpreter service. Obviously, we have the interpreter service as part of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. It is a critical part of what we do as a central agency. Minister Edgington is able to answer all questions about the interpreter service, and its available as required, but generally speaking, meetings with land councils would not require it.

J DAVIS: Just one final question from me. In the case of the Northern Marine Complex, which we have talked about, what specific legislation was identified as a barrier to the development, and what was the legal basis for the Territory Coordinator exercising powers to set that legislation aside?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, say your first question again?

J DAVIS: It is one question, so in the case of the Northern Marine Complex what specific legislation was identified as a barrier to the development? What was the legal basis for the Territory Coordinator exercising powers to set that legislation aside?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: See, that is again a misunderstanding, which I will take as an innocent one rather than a deliberate attempt to undermine the work of the Territory Coordinator. That is just not how it works. No legislation under either the Territory development area or the significant project has been set aside. All of the normal processes are still there for proponents. What the Territory development area does is provide a sophisticated planning of a precinct that will generate economic opportunities of a wide scale of significance to the Territory.

The work now is to develop the Territory development area plan to make sure it is a specifically designed precinct to meet the economic needs of the future and make sure it is designed and delivered in a way that will have proponents wanting to use it. We need it to be successful. I explained earlier, if we had not done this all we would have is a ship lift sticking out of the ground, which would lift ships up and down. What we will now have is a huge precinct where we would foreseeably house Army's littoral pivot, where we could have a range of what you imagine: painting; blasting; electronics; furnishing; welding—all the requirements that go into maintaining a vessel. The ship lift will now pick it up, move it, then it will travel wherever it needs to go and, in some cases, have several interactions with different businesses across the precinct.

I do not know if you are familiar with Henderson in Perth, but that is the type of model we are looking to, albeit Henderson has ship-building capacity, which we are not proposing. All of that in regard to servicing, maintenance and fabrication requirements, we are so perfectly positioned for it. There is no facility like this between Cairns and Perth. That is a very long way, and the Territory is at the top of that; we could cut days off shipping routes and turn things around more quickly, which means greater productivity for people with vessels, and huge opportunity for local Territorians.

That is the power of the Territory Coordinator, being able to do that without having to absolve any legislative processes.

Ms UIBO: I think that is the first time I have heard the Chief Minister speak positively about the ship lift, so that was very engaging.

Was it the intention of the Territory Coordinator to streamline and fast-track economic projects, which we have outlined, and why have you now brought in an Executive General Manager for Strategic Economic Growth and Development? Should this sit within the Territory Coordinator's roles and powers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Again, two separate functions. Not every part of the Territory's economic growth story will sit or have oversight of the Territory Coordinator. It is really for the high-level and scalable projects or Territory development areas. You must remember, CMC is a central agency; we need to be providing economic and strategic support across the whole of government, outside of the critical and bespoke work the Territory Coordinator is doing.

An example of this is with the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations; it is responsible for being an economic driver of the Territory and does all our Asian relations work, for example in making the engagements, making sure proponents understand the benefits of investing in the Territory.

There is a bigger piece. Ms McCormick's role is to provide the support to the Territory Coordinator but they are separate functions. One is to make sure that there is a central agency where driving the economic agenda of the Territory. The Territory Coordinator is to make sure that where a project or an area hits a point in time where it requires or should have the benefit of that extremely diligent oversight of government, then we can move it into that basket. Whole-of-government economic policy is not something that Territory Coordinator does.

Ms UIBO: Noting last year on 20 October, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and President Donald Trump from the USA signed a critical minerals agreement that specifically identified Arafura Nolans Project as a priority project. Since then, Arafura has secured major international backing, Commonwealth support and off-take agreements, private capital and reached financial investment decisions. Why has your government only just declared it as a significant project after all the heavy lifting had already been done? What practical value has your declaration added in terms of value?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is just a fundamental misunderstanding because the previous Labor government was engineered differently in its mind regarding this. The previous Labor government thought, 'Oh wow. That is a project. We will stick it on a list and give it a fancy name and hope like hell that makes it turn into something more than just a concept plan on a map'.

We are not taking that approach. I do not know how many times I have said this. That model has shown it does not work. It did not leverage better outcomes for projects. The previous government was constantly adding projects to that list or deleting the ones that fell over. None of them transpired.

It is not right to say that this is coming in at the end. Territory Coordinator is coming in at the start of Arafura's real journey. They are turning a sod in September. It is now a viable project where that company has made its final investment decision and said, 'Yep. All systems go'. They have pushed to all-systems-go button and reached a tier that says to us that they are ready to deliver in the Territory. We are ready to match that with the oversight and support that they need to see the successful completion of all phases of this project.

To your point, I thank—and I had the chance to thank—Ministers Madeliene King and Catherine King and the Prime Minister last week regarding the federal government's support. You are right. That meeting with the Prime Minister and President Trump was a total game changer for Arafura. We have all been anticipating that final investment decision for a number of years.

You will be aware when you were in government that they had started building the work camp out there and things were moving. Then everything halted. The Prime Minister and President Trump were able to kick that off in a rigorous way that brought the world's eyes on to that project for the sheer significance of it. It would not have reached the point it is now if it was not for the support of federal government. On behalf of Territorians, I am extremely grateful for that.

Currently, China produces approximately 90% of the world's critical minerals and rare earths. This will give the Northern Territory an opportunity to deliver what is such an important resource to sovereign capability in Australia. It will be producing that product from ore through to oxide which is such a complicated and technically difficult and Australia-first type of mine project. It is very exciting because of the innovation it brings.

This is a nationally and globally significant project. It is so important for the Territory because it gives us an opportunity to show this country and the rest of the world that we have a role to play in the security of this

nation when it comes to critical minerals and rare earths. The importance of this product cannot be underestimated. It is used in technology, defence equipment, batteries and a whole range of other areas.

Mr KNOWLES: I have been working with Arafura since day one of being in this job. It was not like we were not already collaborating, working together and planning. For me, it was about where I could best add value. Designating it sooner was not going to add any value. We had, through working together and collaborating, hatched this plan around the timing of the designation. That is important because what is before Arafura now is a massive logistics exercise that is going to need permits and approvals.

They also have plans for phase 2 expansion of their mine, which is another massive piece of work that will require a whole raft of approvals as well. It is a complex project that cuts across multiple agencies, so being there now with the *Territory Coordinator Act* powers open to support this major project—because the government wants to give 100% support to see it successful because of its significant importance to not only the country but also our allied partners. That is the reason around the timing.

Ms UIBO: Will you commit to publishing performance data that goes beyond just the 120 stakeholder engagement satisfaction metric and include areas to show approval times that have been saved, bottlenecks removed, statutory powers used, private investments secured in terms of dollars and also local job numbers that are created so that Territorians have faith that the \$11.4m of the Territory Coordinator office is being well spent on behalf of Territory taxpayers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can assure Territorians that it is money well spent. That will play out over time. As I said earlier, you suggested those additional KPIs, and I have respectfully responded as to why they are not KPIs for the Territory Coordinator.

People can rest assured that there are a number of statutory obligations we have around the use of powers and all of that is required to be tabled in parliament. There is a whole range of mechanisms that must be adhered to, so the stringency around all of that absolutely remains.

We are as excited to showcase the importance and benefit of the Territory Coordinator as anyone, so any opportunity we can express milestones publicly will absolutely be made. There are very much rigorous notifications and other reporting obligations processes that we will of course adhere to.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: As you know, I was formerly in the Chamber of Commerce, so I am a big supporter of local business—I always will be. I want to get down to some metrics that I can actually understand and that I know the business community will understand. How many jobs is the Arafura Nolans project expected to create during construction and operations?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A number of reports have been done into the economic benefits that Arafura presents the Territory, and the conservative figure is 600 jobs during construction. The CEO of Arafura was expressing the other day that it is likely to be more, but we do not want to be taking any pages out of Labor’s playbook around hyperinflating job numbers and all of this other stuff. It will be what it will be. Our focus is not on the talk; it is on the action and making sure that those jobs are meaningful jobs or meaningful pathways for Territorians. The conservative estimate is 600, and then once it is completed the ongoing estimate is about 350.

It is substantial ongoing, particularly if places like Alice Springs can secure their portion of that workforce; Tennant Creek, for example; local workforce in Aileron and the surrounding areas; and of course Katherine, Darwin and all parts of the Territory.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: These projects are not just seen in isolation. Beyond the mine itself, what opportunities does the project create for Territory businesses, contractors and service providers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is the work we are doing with ICN, and that is why signing that statement of commitment between Arafura and the Northern Territory Government is important. It is why the significant project status is important. It allows us to hold each other accountable; so Arafura will be holding us accountable and we will be holding them accountable. It is this mutual respect and reciprocal obligations that we have that are a very important of this being successful going forward.

ICN will be putting the packages through—that capability network. We are doing a roadshow for Darwin, Katherine, Tennant and Alice Springs. We are making sure that every local business that might want to be involved in one way or another can understand what the requirements will be going forward and be able to be part of ICN, which gives them an opportunity to be part of the future story of that mine. It is not just if

people conjure up images of miners or people driving huge trucks or whatever it might look like; this is every facet of supporting a work camp. There is catering, toilet paper and stationery requirements—it is limitless—even waste removal, for example.

There are plenty of opportunities for Territorians, and that is where we are focused on leveraging the benefit. Royalties will be nice one day, and it is forecast to make about a \$25bn contribution for the life of the mine for the Territory, which is nothing to sneeze at, Member for Karama, but I have to say that my more pressing focus is to make sure that we are getting as many Territorians in the door. The first time a little crack in the door appears for jobs and work, I want our people in there first. That is my focus.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I heard the Leader of the Opposition raise, and you mentioned it in part of your speech, about local content; I am a champion for it, I can tell you that. Can you share a bit more about how Arafura Oil is local content and what commitments, if anything, have they given in this respect?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are following our Territory Benefit Plan, which expresses how Territorians should benefit. They have signed up to our Territory Benefit Plan. Over the top of that we have overlaid the statement of commitment which clearly has all our mutual obligations on there. Using ICN NT, local work capability and all of those things, is a part of it. I am confident and comfortable in where this journey is starting, and now it is about us holding each other responsible and accountable to make sure it happens.

The roadshows are an important part to make sure that every business, up and down the Territory, has a chance to understand it and be a part of it. That is not to say that Territorians will win all the work. Obviously there must be the value proposition there, but being part of it from the start is critical. Having the chance from the start is critical, and that is where our energy is and has been. That is where our discussions with Arafura have been, and everything they are saying back to me has been meeting our expectation. We will continue with that.

Mr KNOWLES: The initial mine life is 38 years, but the resources are known to be much greater than that 38-year mine life, so there is potential for this mine to be going for 50-plus years. This operation is 350 direct jobs for multigeneration opportunities, 135 kilometres north of Alice Springs. It is sensational.

Arafura, particularly around that statement of shared commitment, are focused on the long-term sustainability of this operation. To do that they recognise that they want the jobs based locally. They also recognise that there are high-skilled jobs required as part of this operation. While those skills may not be available immediately out of the Northern Territory, they want to build those skills locally so they have that local workforce.

They are making all the right commitments and all the genuine direction we expect of them. They are also being clear with the people they are engaging to work with them that they will also share that same sort of commitment to the Territory.

Mr CHAIR: We will now break for 15 minutes until 3.45pm.

The committee suspended.

OUTPUT GROUP 11.0 – GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Output 11.1 – Support to Ministers and Leader of the Opposition

Mr CHAIR: We are proceeding to Output Group 11.0, Government Support, Output 11.1, Support to Ministers and Leader of the Opposition. Are there any questions? Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: Can you confirm whether any staff employed in your office or any other ministerial offices have been based interstate since you took government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to take that on notice for you, Opposition Leader.

Question on Notice No 1.6

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

Ms UIBO: Can you confirm whether any staff employed in your office or in any ministerial office have been based interstate since you took government?

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

Ms FINOCCHIARO: I do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.6.

Ms UIBO: Further to that, for any such staff, have taxpayers paid for flights, travel, accommodation allowances or other costs for that staff member to travel between an interstate city and Darwin or Alice Springs in order to perform their ministerial office duties?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to take that on notice as a follow-on from the last question.

Question on Notice No 1.7

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

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, have taxpayers paid for flights, travel, accommodation allowances or other costs for officers to travel between an interstate city and Darwin or Alice Springs in order to perform their ministerial office duties?

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

Ms FINOCCHIARO: I do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.7.

Ms UIBO: This may be on notice as well. Will you please table a full list showing which office those staff work in; where they are ordinarily based in terms of interstate cities or towns; how many taxpayer-funded trips have been provided; and the total cost to taxpayers to date, including travel allowance that may have been given to the ministerial staff member?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.8

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

Ms UIBO: Will you please table a full list showing which office those staff work in; where they are ordinarily based in terms of interstate cities or towns; how many taxpayer-funded trips have been provided; and the total cost to taxpayers to date, including travel allowance for ministerial staff?

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

Ms FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.8.

J DAVIS: I have one question on behalf of the Member for Mulka.

Could you advise whether there will be any funds provided for an independent researcher for the Independent members of parliament as were provided in the 13th and 14th Assemblies?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you very much for asking the question for the Member for Mulka.

This is, I think, a question that has come up every Estimates that I have ever been a part of, and is a matter for the Department of the Legislative Assembly which will be appearing before Estimates. I am aware that they provide Independent and crossbench members with library services and research services, but any additional resources questions are best directed to the DLA.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 11.1.

Output 11.2 – Support to the Administrator

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 11.2, Support to the Administrator. Are there any questions? Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: Can you please outline why the Administrator's office received an additional \$1m in taxpayer funding last year, more than \$1m additional in the 2026–27 budget?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass to the chief executive.

Mr CERCARELLI: I may just lead off and then pass over to the deputy. The funding was to fund the actual expenditures occurring. The Office of the Administrator for support to the Administrator has traditionally been under-funded since at least 2021 to the tune of, at last account, a touch over \$820,000 in over-expenditure and under-funding.

This additional funding is to fully fund the existing and ongoing operations and expenses out of the Office of the Administrator that has been traditionally under-funded since those early days.

It is just to ensure that there are sufficient funds within that office to ensure that we can meet the expenditures that are occurring and have occurred continually for a number of years.

I will ask if the deputy wishes to add anything.

Ms DOHERTY: To confirm, the Office of the Administrator has, in the last four or five years, consistently received the same baseline budget of around \$2.7m or \$2.9m thereabouts. It fluctuated a little over COVID, in that it went down because of the reduced travel requirement. However, as the CEO has indicated, the office has consistently been in a position where it had to have its funding topped up at the end of the year in order to meet the expenditure year on year.

The office, obviously, undertakes a significant program of work, including delivering a civic and diplomatic program of around 600 events annually, highlighting and promoting Northern Territory business, culture, engagement, community and trade relations through travel and attendance at events, as well as bringing together the Government House as the official residence and opening Government House to the public. There is a requirement there, obviously, for the maintenance and heritage aspects of Government House, which also form a large part of the budget.

The funding which was provided to Government House to provide an appropriate baseline level of expenditure was not new money in the sense that it was reprioritised from within the department's existing budget, primarily through under-spends in some allocation of money arising post-machinery of government—the settling in of the restructured agencies—as well as carry-overs from the previous year.

In effect, this is just fixing a continuing legacy issue that government had in relation to not having the appropriate level of baseline budget to reflect the actual expenditure for some four to five years.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any other questions on Output 11.2?

That concludes consideration of Output 11.2.

Output 11.3 – Government Services

No questions.

I note that Output Group 12, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, is the responsibility of the Minister for Public Service and questions relating to this output group will be considered when minister Hersey appears before the committee next Tuesday 16 June 2026.

OUTPUT GROUP 13 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 13.1 – Corporate and Governance

No questions.

Output 13.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Output 13.3 – Shared Services Provided

No questions.

That concludes consideration of all outputs relating to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. On behalf of the committee, I thank department officers for attending today.

The committee will now proceed to consider outputs relating to the Northern Territory Police Force.

Chief Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, thank you. I thank the entire department at Chief Minister and Cabinet. They do an incredible job and our refocus has allowed us to make sure, as an entire government, that we are focusing on those three key pillars of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our lifestyle. I thank everyone, especially the team who have been up here with me today, and everyone who has rotated in and out. A lot of work, time and energy goes into making sure we are well prepared to answer the questions and be transparent with the community, so I thank each and every one of them for that hard work. It is an important part of the process that we value deeply. Thank you very much, everyone.

NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE FORCE

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Police to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Northern Territory Police Force. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you, Mr Chair, and to members of the committee. I am very pleased to introduce the officials joining me from the Northern Territory Police Force today. We have the Police Commission, Martin Dole APM; the Acting Deputy Commissioner, Travis Wurst; Emma O'Leary, the Chief Financial Officer; and next to me is Lisa Wilson, the Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer. I will introduce other officials as they are required to come up.

The CLP government was elected with a very clear mandate to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our unique Territory lifestyle. In our year of growth, certainty and security, community safety remains our number one priority, and the 2026 budget reflects that commitment with a record \$1.73bn law and order budget. That builds on last year's record law and order budget of \$1.5bn, and the budget delivers funds across police, courts and corrections to support safer communities, strengthen frontline capability and provide a more secure future for Territorians.

Importantly, this investment is not only focused on responding to crime, but also to addressing the root causes of crime through prevention, intervention and support services. The budget funds additional police officers, police public safety officers and corrections officers; it invests in critical infrastructure, strengthens frontline policing capability and supports programs focused on domestic violence prevention, victim support and reducing reoffending.

These investments build on significant reforms already delivered by our government, which include Declan's law, the strongest bail laws in the country, expanded police powers to deter knife crime, the introduction of OC spray for self-defence, stronger sentencing laws and tougher penalties for domestic violence offenders, longer police-issued banned drinker orders and reforms to fast-track court matters, reduce delay and better protect victims.

Together, these measures represent a comprehensive approach to reducing crime, strengthening community safety and restoring confidence across the Territory. We promised Territorians action on crime and the latest data shows that we are delivering on that promise. Total offences rose from fewer than 30,000 in 2017 to nearly 41,000 in 2023 under the previous Labor government. In just 12 months of a CLP government, that

figure has already fallen to below 31,000 offences. Importantly, the number of victims fell by 10.2% in our first year. House break-ins are down by 23%, assaults are down by 11%, commercial break-ins are down by 32% and motor vehicle theft is down by 23%. These improvements are being seen across the Territory. House break-ins are down by 38% in Darwin and 31% in Palmerston. Commercial break-ins are down by 49% in Darwin while motor vehicle theft is down by 17% across Darwin and Palmerston. Total offences are down by 25% in Alice Springs while assaults have fallen by 24% in Nhulunbuy, 10% in Katherine and 12% in Tennant Creek. While there is still much more work to do these results show we are moving in the right direction, and we will stay the course.

More Territorians are feeling safer in their homes, businesses and communities and regaining confidence. The foundations are being laid for stronger economic growth, and that is already paying off. A key part of that effort is ensuring that the Northern Territory Police Force has the resources it needs to keep Territorians safe. The 2026–27 budget delivers a record \$654m investment in the Northern Territory Police Force alone, which is an increase of \$46m on last year, which is an increase on the previous year.

Reducing crime starts with backing our police, and this budget puts more officers on the street, strengthens frontline capability, expands community safety programs and delivers critical infrastructure upgrades across the Northern Territory. More than 180 police officers graduated from the police college last year, and we are determined to maintain that momentum and cadence.

The most significant policing reform in a generation will come to life with the first police public safety officers graduating soon. Territorians want to see police in our communities, visible, proactive and preventing crime before it happens. That is why this budget includes a \$48m investment over four years to properly establish the police public safety officer workforce supported by \$15.8m in ongoing annual funding and a target of more than 150 new police constables to be recruited this year.

The budget also invests \$176m in police facilities and housing repairs and upgrades, including funding in 2026–27 for 41 new police homes and six new police stations to modernise our ageing infrastructure. Additional investments include \$5m for domestic, family and sexual violence co-responder early intervention programs; \$3.5m for school-based policing initiatives; \$2.5m to expand electronic monitoring capacity; and \$1m in additional wellbeing support for the Northern Territory Police Force and Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services personnel. Our police work hard every day in challenging circumstances, and this budget ensures that they have the people, the resources and the infrastructure they need to continue to keep Territorians safe.

Today we announced that the Nightcliff Police Station will become the new headquarters of Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services. This will deliver a practical long-term outcome for the police force and Fire and Emergency Services. This transition will create additional capacity within police headquarters, allowing further consolidation of the administrative and support functions that underpin frontline policing. At the same time, it will provide the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services with a standalone facility that they need to effectively run their operations across the Territory.

Labor's record on the Nightcliff Police Station speaks for itself. They promised a 24/7 police station but delivered a \$12m administrative building only open during business hours. It was never even designed to operate as a fully functional police station, lacking basic infrastructure such as a watch house. Rather than continue the fiction we are putting the building to work where it can deliver the greatest operational benefit while continuing to back our police with record investment in law and order and the resources they need to keep Territorians safe. Importantly, there will be no impact on frontline police services across the community. Planning for the transition will now commence.

The Joint Emergency Services Communication Centre will temporarily operate from this site while upgrades are undertaken at the Peter McAulay Centre before the facility formally transitions to its new role as the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services headquarters from May 2027.

This budget reflects the government's commitment to reducing crime, strengthening community safety and restoring confidence right across the Northern Territory. Safe communities are the foundation for a growing economy. When people feel safe in their homes and businesses, they have confidence to invest, employ more people, grow and have their families here. That is why backing our police, courts and corrections system with record investment, while continuing to implement reforms that are delivering results is so important to us.

I place on the record my sincerest thanks to the men and women of the Northern Territory Police Force. They pull on that blue uniform every day, leaving their families to go and protect ours. We are grateful for it. Whether

they be on the front line, in specialist units, in remote communities or supporting operations behind the scenes, it is their professionalism, dedication and service that is deeply appreciated and meaningful.

Policing is a demanding profession. We recognise the sacrifices made, not only by the officers but by their families who support them. As we approach National Police Legacy Day on 17 June, it is fitting to acknowledge the important work of Northern Territory Police Legacy as well which has supported Territory policing families since 1990 and serves as a constant reminder that families remain an important part of the police family.

National Police Legacy Day is an opportunity to recognise the life-changing support provided to the families of officers who have lost their lives while serving their communities. It is also a reminder that the policing family looks after its own and that the commitment and sacrifice made in service extends beyond the individual officer to those who stand behind them.

This government stands firmly behind our police and is committed to ensuring they have the people, resources and infrastructure they need to keep Territorians safe. The results would not be possible without their efforts. Territorians are safer because of the work they do to serve and protect Territorians.

I am happy to move to answering questions.

Ms UIBO: I would like to check with the Chief Minister that she is comfortable to answer some of those questions specifically regarding the emergency response for floods and cyclones.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. That is fine.

Mr YOUNG: What was the total cost for the helicopters used to evacuate residents from the Nauiyu community?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We will have to take that on notice because it might have been a multi-agency response. For example, it may not have been Police which contracted the helicopters.

Mr YOUNG: I will just add a bit on to that question which would have to go on notice because it is relevant to that question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am fine with that.

Question on Notice No 1.9

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

Mr YOUNG: Could you please provide a breakdown of the total helicopter cost to evacuate residents from Nauiyu affected by the floods? In that breakdown, could we get the number of helicopters used, hours flown and the cost per operator? Also, which companies or providers were used to provide helicopters for the evacuation? Were there any privately owned? Also, could we get a breakdown of the cost to each company?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.9.

Mr YOUNG: I will ask this question again; it relates to the evacuation as well. Why did the evacuation happen so late when floodwaters were already inundating the community, taking on board there were 70 residents left behind at Daly River who had to wade through water to then get on a small boat. I believe it took a number of hours to then get people up to the Five Mile to safety?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We discussed this publicly at the time. Obviously, in those successive weather events, unprecedented levels of rain were happening in all the wrong areas. Just because you have rain does not mean there would necessarily be a flood—it has to flood in certain catchments. I think it was described at the time as we received effectively a ‘rain bomb’ in a couple of key catchments, which absolutely put pressure

on the system like we had never seen before. I am happy to pass over to Commissioner Dole to go into that more, particularly in his role as Territory Controller.

Mr DOLE: Member for Daly, I think it is important in answering that just to explain the emergency management framework a bit. The emergency management framework is made up of local response, regional response and Territory response. In this event we had all three mechanisms working at the same time. We successfully evacuated the community of Nauiyu two or three weeks before the event you are talking about and that went off without a hitch because the decision was made to evacuate early. Daly River has good telemetry, and it gives us good indications on when the river may rise and reach levels in which we are required to evacuate that community, and planning was well advanced to carry that out.

However, extraordinary weather events rose to unprecedented levels which were not predicted and which we had not seen. Those weather events also impacted the ability to helicopters to get in and fly safely, impacting the safety risk of people who were coordinating the rescue as well as residents. There was some delay in completely evacuating that community because of the extraordinary weather events. My understanding is that Palumpa was affected as well as Daly River, and we had aerial evacuations in both communities that had to be delayed because the impacts of the weather stopped helicopters flying.

Mr YOUNG: My understanding was that the Northern Emergency Committee held a meeting on Friday, 6 March to talk about the rising water levels for the community of Nauiyu, and it is understood that in that meeting it was discussed that the evacuation centre had not been stood up in Darwin. That was why there was a delay to evacuate people from Nauiyu for 24 hours. Can you confirm if that was true? We understand the multiple weather events. Was there a request to get support from the ADF like we saw with the evacuations at Numbulwar, which would have got everyone out at once?

Mr DOLE: You have just confused me with the reference to Numbulwar there, sorry.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are two separate questions. Ask the first one and then ask the ADF one.

Mr YOUNG: The Numbulwar reference is regarding using the Air Force to get residents out in two trips—I believe you will be able to tell me that. It was a much quicker operation. I am getting to the fact that it took a whole day, but then the helicopters had to stop and it left 70 people behind to then wade through water to get in a boat and be evacuated up to Five Mile. This is a safety concern for residents. I am trying to understand why the Air Force was not called in to get residents out from Nauiyu with the understanding the water was rising.

Mr DOLE: It is a complicated question. Emergency management is never a perfect scenario. I will do my best to answer and then I will hand to the Deputy Commissioner, who has a bit more of the specifics about this event. On that request you are referring to, which is assistance from Commonwealth agencies including the military, we had to ensure that we have exhausted Territory capabilities and resources first, so planning was well underway for those evacuations to take place in that community. We had sufficient resources in the Territory. It was not the resources that prevented that evacuation; it was the weather events at the time that delayed that evacuation and some people were left in community.

I am happy to pass to the deputy commissioner to expand on that a touch further.

Mr WURST: In relation to the shelters in Darwin, firstly, there were two shelters available: one in Marrara and one at Foskey Pavilion. That was not a reason for the evacuations to be delayed. As the commissioner indicated, we had 18 air assets—helicopters—that were assisting with the evacuation, and because of the weather closing in we had to cease those evacuations.

There are up to two of those emergency committee meetings that you spoke of held each day, and one of those meetings in the afternoon considered that particular scenario. We had rescue boats in the community for contingency in case that occurred. We used those flood rescue boats to move those last 70 residents who we could not get out via air evacuation, and we moved them to higher ground, which was Five Mile.

You say they had to wade through water, but that was kept to an absolute minimum. We had additional policing resources in the community along with other services that were assisting to make sure everyone could be moved through safely as quickly as we could.

For your question on Defence assistance to the community (DAC), Emergency Services can provide you with the specifics in relation to the numbers and when those requests were done, because that is a function

of their agency. We did have one Commonwealth asset provided to the evacuation process from a Commonwealth department through that DAC request.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you. I am trying to understand—and I appreciate both your answers, commissioners. Commissioner Dole, you stated in your answer that you exhausted capability, so you were not able to get people to react quickly and get people out from Daly River. Is that the case?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sorry, that is absolutely not what the Police Commissioner just said. If you continue to misquote and verbal people, we just will not answer your questions.

Mr YOUNG: I said I just wanted to understand.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, you are not. You are putting words in people's mouths deliberately.

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, Member for Daly, the Chair has this.

Mr YOUNG: Those were the words that were used. I am just trying to understand it further.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It absolutely was not.

Mr YOUNG: You can go back through the *Hansard*.

Mr CHAIR: We will not be repeating or putting words in of what witnesses say that is not actually—Member for Daly, how you have repeated it is not how I heard it. I ask that you re-ask your question without stating ...

Mr YOUNG: That is fine. No problem, Mr Chair.

There was a huge weather event, as we stated, and people from Palumpa were being evacuated. There were other areas being evacuated, so I am just trying to get an understanding why it took until the following day, when we knew that the waters were rising, to start the operation to evacuate people, which then meant 70 people were left there. I am just not sure why the Air Force was not called in, because they are obviously able—it was in Numbulwar. I see the Chief Minister laughing; it is not funny. People have been traumatised by this event.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Because this question has been answered. In fact, the deputy commissioner just answered your question and you refused to hear the answer.

Mr YOUNG: Mr Chair, I have asked ...

Mr CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, everyone ...

Mr YOUNG: You stop me when I interrupt. I ask for the same respect, Chair.

Mr CHAIR: Okay. I will ask if we can just get to the question. Member for Daly, could you please ask the question.

Mr YOUNG: It is a pretty simple question. Why were the ADF or the Air Force not called in to evacuate people to ensure that no-one was left behind? At the end of the day people's safety was compromised, some people from the group of 70 were traumatised by the event and having to wade through water. I have spoken directly with them. I am just trying to get an answer for them as to why the Air Force was not called in to get people out in the same day rather than over two days, which led to compromising their safety, and whether they felt that their safety was compromised.

Mr DOLE: It is a bit more complicated than you are suggesting with contacting the military. My answer to the original question was: the request for services from the military is dependent on the Territory depleting the resources available to us. That had not occurred in these circumstances. There was the DAC request but the level of DAC support that comes from the military is dependent on our ability to use local assets and contractors, of which there were sufficient.

It is a little different to the situation in Numbulwar where large aircraft were used, which were not able to be used in the Daly community. It was dependent on rotary assets because of the nature of the event and the airstrip. It is not as simple as saying, 'Give us a helicopter.' They were not available from the military; that is why we used planes for Numbulwar—slightly different situations.

We had sufficient resources. The planning was sufficient. Evacuations were occurring. They would not occur over two days. However, the inclement weather prevented that rescue from continuing. That would have prevented that rescue from continuing, whether it was the Northern Territory Police coordinating it or the military—no-one would have been able to land aircraft in the weather we got over that period of time. That is why there was a delay and some people were left in that community. Contingency planning was done to evacuate those people by flood boat to higher ground until they could be rescued by rotary aircraft.

Mr YOUNG: How many people can fit on the plane, or was it a helicopter, used for Numbulwar to evacuate through the Air Force, compared to how many people on a helicopter evacuated from Daly River? It is my understanding Daly River it was about three or four and Numbulwar was roughly how many you can fit from that evacuation—to get an understanding. Per helicopter for Nauiyu, it was three or four ...

Mr CHAIR: With that question ...

Mr YOUNG: It goes to the point of the ...

Mr CHAIR: Yes, you are stepping out of the Northern Territory ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It can go to any point.

Mr CHAIR: I will call it that the NT Police Commissioner is probably in a position to know the capability of ADF.

Mr YOUNG: Those flood response, recovery results ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I add to it, Mr Chair, for clarity for the Member for Daly. For some reason, he does not understand this. The Northern Territory does not get to say to the ADF, 'Hey, we would like six Hercules at 4 o'clock please.' That is not how this works.

Mr YOUNG: No, but you can request ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We can and do request within the framework and ADF often says no or provides an alternative. The commissioner has just explained that fixed-wing aircraft could not land at Nauiyu. It is not and was not an option. I am not sure how many times officials have to tell you that for you to understand it, but that was not an option.

A rotary aircraft was provided through the DAC request and that was it. That is a decision of the federal government, not a decision of the Northern Territory. We continue our planning and resources. The acting deputy commissioner has just said there were 18—I remember doing media conferences about this at the time—sourced rotary wing aircraft to do that evacuation.

As the commissioner has just said, irrespective of whose helicopter it was, the weather would have grounded all of them. It is not a comparison to compare it with Numbulwar—completely different air strips and circumstances and inclement weather.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, I know this is an important matter for you and your electorate. We have an hour left. I feel satisfied with the answer. I will let you continue asking questions, but I ask that it does not get repetitive.

Mr YOUNG: That is no problem. It will be the last question on this. Can you confirm that an ADF or Air Force craft could not land on the Daly River airport?

Mr DOLE: Member for Daly, it is not our position to choose what we want. We ask the military for an effect, and they tell us how they achieve that. We ask for assistance with evacuation. We got a Commonwealth asset which was a rotary aircraft, which complemented the rotary aircraft available within the NT.

Mr YOUNG: There was no request for ...

Mr DOLE: We do not specifically ask for types of aircraft; we ask for an effect to be carried out by the military, and they tell us how they achieve that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is a request, but we cannot say, 'We want six Hercules.' We say, 'We need 400 people evacuated and we need it done in this time frame.' They either do or do not provide support. That is the difference. We do not get to ask for aeroplane types, trips, personnel numbers—none of those things. We simply say that we need this, and they either say that it is something they can or cannot do. That is exactly what happened.

Ms UIBO: My next few questions are around emergency flood and evacuation. I would like to place on the record my thanks to the commissioner, particularly to Northern Commander Terry Zhang. He was phenomenal in all aspects for many weeks in guiding the team, particularly in the Big Rivers Region and the eastern pocket which affects my electorate of Arnhem.

He was, at one point, my favourite person in the Northern Territory because he was efficient and was able to channel all the concerns that I was having raised to me as the Member for Arnhem, directly to him; he was resolving many of these concerns in an efficient manner. I would like to put that on the public record and commend Commander Zhang, who did a phenomenal job.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you, Opposition Leader. That is meaningful to our people, and I appreciate you saying that.

Ms UIBO: That includes the many other people in his command, and I was able to see that firsthand as the local member.

Chief Minister and commissioner, the people of Jilkminggan were provided only a short amount of warning to physically evacuate from their community, despite asking two days earlier, due to significant flooding in Wugularr, which had always been an early warning trigger for locals that it would also flood. I am wondering about this, in terms of the decision-making process, why the evacuation—which could have been done a few days earlier—was left to the last hour?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy for the Police Commissioner to answer that.

Mr DOLE: Thank you, Member for Arnhem. As per my previous answer, emergency management is not a perfect scenario, as we are guided by the weather. There were significant flood events over a prolonged period, which meant catchments reacted unusually and not as predicted. There were rises that were quicker than predicted. Everything was done in relation to giving people as much notice as possible, but the prolonged nature of the flooding in this scenario combined with the number of events that we were dealing with led to unpredicted rises in some of these areas.

I take your point that people in the community had a trigger point that they were aware of. I also need to remind you that this operation was happening across three different stages—local, regional and Territory—at the same time. I apologise that they were only given a few hours' notice. Everything was done in as much planning and preparation as we could to ensure that people evacuated safely with as much time as possible.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, commissioner, I appreciate your response. In regard to the evacuation for Numbulwar that commenced ahead of Cyclone Narelle—which was conducted with professionalism and efficiency—the residents of Numbulwar were evacuated to the Nightcliff High School gym. I am fully aware of that facility not being utilised in previous evacuations. Were there other potential locations that were considered for the evacuation of the residents for Numbulwar?

I understand there was talk about the old Flip Out site at Eaton Drive in Darwin. Being of a large—and possibly better—facility to house the number of residents from the Numbulwar community when they were evacuated, rather than being split across Nightcliff High School, Free Spirit Resort and the use of transitional housing facility in Batten Road, Karama/Berrimah.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will start the answer and then pass over to the Police Commissioner. I think you are conflating a couple of issues. We used Free Spirit Resort for older and more vulnerable people. There were a lot of requests from elderly Aboriginal people and those with disabilities saying that they needed a quiet, supportive environment, which we were respectful of. Across all the weather events, Free Spirit was used for that vulnerable cohort. Through the EOC, a number of options were identified, and Flip Out was not a viable alternative. I am happy to pass on to the commissioner.

Mr DOLE: Thank you, Member for Arnhem, for your question. There were other sites considered as an alternative, but Nightcliff High School was never meant to be an evacuation centre; it was always a staging area. It was identified as somewhere we could stand up quickly, stage people and then transfer them to

Foskey Pavillion and other shelters that were already established. It was never designed or intended to have long-term evacuees in it.

Cyclone events are slightly different to flooding events in that they are slightly more predictable; they are faster moving, impact the Territory for two or three days and then it is generally business as usual if there are no impacts to the community. The people from Numbulwar were not displaced as long as some of the people from flooded communities as with prolonged evacuations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I was able to go to Numbulwar shortly afterwards. I know it is your electorate. Luckily, there were few trees down over roads, and that was all able to be cleaned up quickly, then obviously we commenced the repatriation of people home as fast as we could.

Ms UIBO: I must have missed your invite, Chief Minister, to jump on the plane to show you around my electorate, but maybe next time. How many other potential locations were considered for evacuation for Numbulwar residents?

Mr DOLE: I believe Flip Out was initially considered, but it was only a transition, so we quickly landed on the Nightcliff High School option. FreeSpirit was always a consideration because it was housing medically vulnerable people throughout all the emergency events over that high-risk weather season.

Ms UIBO: Although Katherine is not my electorate, I live there too. Were you briefed or aware that frail aged care residents in Katherine were being evacuated to an open-sided basketball court in the middle of the tropical low where they were forced to huddle in the middle of court to avoid getting wet before evacuation, and if so what steps and measures will be implemented to ensure that this type of evacuation process can be avoided and the aged and frail will be better catered for in the future.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Certainly, if that happened it is a disappointing outcome. I acknowledge the tireless efforts that everyone had and the pressure to move high volumes of people in very short periods of time across the Territory consecutively. That would be one for Children and Families. Was it medical evacuation?

Ms UIBO: Aged care residents.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It might be Health, but ask both.

Ms UIBO: We will not want to miss the opportunity, thank you.

Kumanjayi White died in Alice Springs on 27 May 2025 after being restrained by an off-duty police officer in a supermarket. He was a young Warlpiri man living with cognitive disability, and his family, community, legal advocates and others have repeatedly called for transparency and accountability and an independent process. This was also raised to me by the four Aboriginal land councils at Barunga for their joint executive council on Friday. Almost a year later the family of Kumanjayi White was informed during their own sorry business and on National Sorry Day that there would be no charges laid in relation to this matter following a review that was conducted by an unnamed interstate police force, and the family have been left with unimaginable grief and few answers.

I am hoping we can get some answers regarding the use of force review conducted by the unnamed interstate police force which was handed to NT Police and the DPP without the family's knowledge in April this year. This is what the DPP used as the basis for its decision not to lay charges over the tragic death of Kumanjayi White. Will you release the review finding so that Kumanjayi White's family and Territorians alike can understand how this decision was arrived at?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: First, that would be a matter for the DPP, but this has had a number of layers of review and oversight. I acknowledge the obvious hurt to family and friends. The process has taken place, and the outcome is the outcome. I am happy to pass onto the Police Commissioner, but there is not more to say on this matter than what has been said in public.

Mr DOLE: It is firstly important to acknowledge that the significant impact that this has had on the family of Kumanjayi White. It is always difficult when people are injured or harmed as a result of police action. Our thoughts continue to be with the family of Kumanjayi White.

The interstate police jurisdiction that carried out the use of force was the Queensland Police Service. I have said publicly when we made the announcement that no charges would be laid in relation to this. That material does not belong to the Northern Territory Police Force so it is my decision to release that publicly. That was

facilitated at the request of the DPP, completed by the Queensland police force and given to the DPP by us. That material now forms part of the coronial investigation and is the property of the coroner. The coroner will make those determinations on what exhibits will be released prior to or during that inquest.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate that response, Chief Minister and Commissioner. I will confirm that the police force that conducted the review was the Queensland police force.

Mr DOLE: That is correct.

Ms UIBO: I was not aware of that detail. I appreciate it. Chief Minister, with that review, were the terms of reference specifically set? Who set them? From your previous answer, I assume it was the DPP. Or was it the police force?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was not done by us. It must have been between DPP and Queensland.

Ms UIBO: You and the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence have previously criticised the NT coroner for doing her job. The Australian Bar Association said that your criticism could be reasonably seen as, 'a coordinated and unfounded personal attack on an independent judicial officer'. You have yet to respond to the recommendations of the Walker coronial. You and your Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence have both failed to engage meaningfully with the inquest findings and the murders of four Territory women.

Why would a reasonable person have any faith that the engagement is meaningful when it comes to listening to coronials, those important recommendations by the Northern Territory coroner when it comes to Kumanjaji White's death or the coronial inquest for Kumanjaji Walker and any recommendations that arise from it will be taken seriously by your government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I reject the premise of your question. Coronials have a very stringent statutory process that all coronials go through, including the deaths of the four women and every other coronial that has gone before it and that will go after it.

The Attorney-General leads this. She has statutory obligations and timeframes to write to each agency seeking their feedback. They have statutory obligations by which to respond. She then has statutory obligations in which to inform the parliament, et cetera.

All those processes are the same processes that were there when you were Attorney-General. None of that has changed. It is always made public regarding which recommendations are accepted either in full or in principle or in part or whether they are not accepted. That has and will continue to be the process. The commissioner may have something to add but that is the position.

Mr DOLE: Formal responses to inquest findings are directed by us to the Attorney-General as required under the *Coroners Act*. They are also provided to the NT coroner. The Northern Territory Police has stood up a coronial recommendations implementation committee in the last 12 months to address those coronial findings specifically from Walker and the other coronial inquests that findings have been directed at Police to ensure they are implemented are the ones that have been accepted and sent to the coroner and the Attorney-General are implemented. Progress is reported on those every six months on the Northern Territory Police Force.

Ms UIBO: Are either of you aware that the use of force review findings have been shared with Kumanjaji White's family?

Mr DOLE: That is a matter for the coroner. That has not been done by the Northern Territory Police Force.

Ms UIBO: To be clear, was the auspicing of that review by NT Police outsourced to Queensland Police and then that went directly to both the DPP and the coroner?

Mr DOLE: Yes. That is correct. The whole criminal investigation package makes part of the coronial investigation form now that goes to the coroner. That material that was created for the purpose of an opinion by the DPP now sits in the hands of the coroner and will make part of her investigative package.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate the response. Can you identify one policy, protocol, operational directive or legislative change that may be a direct result of the pending coronial inquest? I know often departments get on the front foot and start to look at implementing some of their own internal findings. Is any of that work afoot currently? If so, are you able to and willing to share that with the committee?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you talking about in relation to Kumanjaya White, did you say?

Ms UIBO: Yes, Kumanjaya White, thanks.

Mr CHAIR: If I could clarify, Opposition Leader? Were you seeking any change in policy?

Ms UIBO: If through the pending coronial inquest, if there has been any identification of policy, protocol, operational directives or legislative changes that may be already afoot within the department of the Police Force?

Mr CHAIR: I will bring to your attention Standing Order 109(3)(b) that says that questions should not ask to announce new policy of the government, but may seek an explanation regarding the current policy and its application.

Ms UIBO: Thank you. To clarify, not asking for a new policy, Mr Chair. Were there any identification of possible changes for the future?

Mr CHAIR: It probably still falls into that realm. We can ask about current policy.

Ms UIBO: Okay, I will reword the question. Has there been any one operational directive or possible legislative change that has been a result of the impending coronial inquest for Kumanjaya White's death?

Mr DOLE: First, it is important to note this has been in the criminal jurisdiction until two weeks ago. First and foremost is the consideration where there are criminal offences associated with this. That has been decided by the DPP.

The next stage is for us to meet with the Coroner and get some direction on concerns and issues she may have with things that should be looked at and examined as part of the police force. We have some recommendations we will take to her, but we have yet to have that meeting with the Coroner to get some direction on that coronial investigation.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate your response. Is there a training package for the police service about interactions with people with cognitive disability and, of course, public places or private residences—anywhere police may work?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to pass to the commissioner.

Mr DOLE: There is no specific training in relation to people with cognitive disabilities. That is something we are considering to bring to the coronial recommendation committee and look at that policy and working on it.

Ms UIBO: Is there any protocol change or engagement around ensuring that families are the first ones who are told, fully and respectfully, about any investigations or outcomes in investigation non-pursuant in investigations into the death of loved ones? If so, why not?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you insinuating that we did not tell the family before it was made public?

Ms UIBO: I am questioning if the family was—not this particular family, yes, but also in normal protocol and processes, is the family told before that information is made public?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Are there any specific protocols that have been identified early to ensure that there are not tragedies like this that occur in the Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As the commissioner just mentioned, that process now will happen with the Coroner. It has not happened yet, given just how recent the progression has been, as I am sure you can appreciate.

J DAVIS: A quick follow-up from that in relation to you made reference, commissioner, to progress reporting on responses to coronial recommendations. I am wondering whether you could update on any recommendations from the coronial into Kumanjaya Walker? That leads on from the question on behalf of the Member for Mulka, which is that the Coroner made the finding in that case that racism was normalised in police culture and that there is institutionalised racism. There are two parts of this question. One is: can you

report on any responses on that? Secondly, for the Chief Minister: what funding is there in this budget to address the issues of racism in the police department?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In terms of funding we have our cultural reform team, which is fully funded and operationally led by Leanne Liddle.

J DAVIS: In relation to reporting on progress response?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We are just getting that.

Mr DOLE: I will pass to the Deputy Commissioner because he chairs the Coronial Recommendations Implementation Committee. A more complete way to answer your question is to explain to you how many matters are before that committee and the number of recommendations that have been implemented. The Deputy Commissioner can give some detail about the specific ones relating to Kumanjaya Walker.

In this reporting period two recommendations arising from the Kumanjaya Johnson inquest were accepted by the Northern Territory police force. One recommendation from the Big Brother and Little Brother inquest was accepted by the Northern Territory police force. One recommendation arising from the coronial investigation into the death of Kumanjaya Tipinwadi has been implemented and closed. Two recommendations arising from a separate youth coronial inquest have been implemented and closed. Four recommendations arising from the Kumanjaya Walker inquest have been implemented and closed. Three recommendations arising from the Garlett inquest have been implemented and closed. One recommendation arising from the Delvene Thompson inquest has been implemented and closed.

There are currently 22 open recommendations in active management by the Northern Territory police force.

J DAVIS: Is that information publicly available in terms of the recommendations and the implementation?

Mr DOLE: It is not publicly available. It is something we report directly to the coroner.

J DAVIS: To clarify, with the Cultural Reform Unit, can you give the budget figure for that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In this coming year's budget it is \$4.356m.

J DAVIS: On behalf of the Member for Mulka, one more question. In the last Estimates, the Commissioner also stated that police officers in Arnhem have been working with peacekeepers. Could you advise who the peacekeepers the Commissioner was referring to are employed by? Do the peacekeepers continue to be employed in the region and how do the police work with them?

Mr DOLE: We work across a number of law and justice groups across the various regions across the Northern Territory, not just in Arnhem Land. Specifically, Nja-marleya in Maningrida. I do not know whether it is worth getting the Assistant Commissioner from Regional Remote to come up and give you a little more detail if you prefer that as a more extensive answer.

J DAVIS: Given that the Member for Mulka is not here, perhaps we could take it on notice? Is that possible; I am conscious of time.

Mr CHAIR: If we can get the answer today it really is your call. It is your question. The police can provide the answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The police are here ready to answer. Acting Assistant Commissioner James Gray-Spence will join us.

Mr GRAY-SPENCE: The broader approach of the Northern Territory Police in relation to community partnerships and engagement, especially with Aboriginal communities across the Territory, is through our community-led safety plan toolkit which is implemented by the remote sergeants and overseen at the divisional and command levels. Currently, implementation for the community-led safety plans is occurring in the southern desert divisions, which is in Southern Command in 14 communities. In Northern Command, it is occurring in 19 communities. The formalisation of the community-led safety plans remains ongoing as engagement continues to develop.

J DAVIS: Are you able to speak specifically to the question about who the peacekeepers are that police officers are working with?

Mr GRAY-SPENCE: No, I do not know the name of the group, and I will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.10

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

J DAVIS: On behalf of the Member for Mulka, could you advise who are the peacekeepers that the commissioner stated police officers in Arnhem land are working with during last year's Estimates? Who are they employed by? Do the peacekeepers continue to be employed in the region, and how do the police work with them?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.10.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I might add that if it is in relation to law and justice groups, they are funded by the Attorney-General, so the question can be asked there also.

J DAVIS: Specifically, it is who is being talked about in relation to peacekeepers.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I just do not want you to miss the opportunity because our response to the written question might be that this is for the Attorney-General. Then you would not have had the opportunity to ask, so I think you should ask both just in case.

J DAVIS: I appreciate that; thank you.

What proportion of NT Police staff have completed anti-racism training?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Everyone coming through the college—which is, thank goodness, a substantial number of new police we are recruiting—does all of that training. We then have different online and face-to-face training modules for existing police. We have prioritised several significant areas of policing, including the TRG, executive Professional Standards Command and our senior sergeants. That has been a big focus for us, and that will continue. Every new police officer has training at the college and then we have to do the backfill of existing, and we have targeted specific core groups within the police to ensure they have had the training.

J DAVIS: Can you give a current figure or percentage of how many police have completed it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.10

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

J DAVIS: What proportion or percentage of current NT Police members have completed anti-racism training?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated number 1.11.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: This goes back to your opening statement about the budget. Can you outline how this year's budget is backing our police by fully funding what the Police Association has called 'the strongest pay deal in 20 years'.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, and we are proud of that historic pay deal. It is important to make sure that we are highly competitive with our pay and conditions for the Northern Territory Police Force, not only to retain our amazing workforce but to be competitive in the recruitment space. We know other jurisdictions are wanting to gear up their police forces, so we are effectively in competition for people who fill that duty to put up their hand to serve and protect.

We are incredibly proud of the significant best-in-20-years pay deal and, most importantly, it is being funded through the budget. With the previous Labor government, the EBAs were not being properly funded for agencies, which meant they were constantly in a state of shortfall. That is properly accounted for into the forward estimates. Being able to settle that important pay deal is action, not words. It shows us that we are putting our money where our mouth is in terms of backing our police, and it is not just in salaries.

I read out in my opening statement an enormous number of new police homes that will be built, new police stations and upgrades to old stations. This is incredibly significant work that has not happened in far too long. It is part of the police review, and it is work that I have been following right back from opposition through to us delivering it in government now. All these things contribute to our effectiveness to deploy resources, support resources in the field and ensure that community safety continues to be our number one priority.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Thank you, Chief Minister. Are you happy to take a couple of short questions on the PPSOs as part of your opening statement?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I sure am.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: One of the big announcements you have made is that the government is committed to creating a new PPSO stream to increase frontline visibility and tackle antisocial behaviour. This is well received by the constituents of Karama, and it is well received by the constituents in Drysdale, Blain and Fannie Bay. Can you provide an update on the rollout of the PPSOs?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. That is fully funded right through the forward estimates. This year about three or four tranches will go through the college, building up right throughout next year, but all of that is fully funded moving forward, including all the operational funding that attaches to it. That is important because it gives our police force the opportunity to properly embed and plan this into our policing system. It is a significant piece of reform having an entire new rank of police, changing how we use the frontline auxiliary role and amalgamating it with our transit safety officers and public housing safety officers.

The project team commenced in July last year. That has been a huge body of work. Our first squad went into the college on 23 February on an 18-week training program through our police college, and they will be graduating on 26 June, which is much anticipated. They have been out as part of Operation Ventura in Palmerston, which is excellent on-the-job training for them and, from a policing perspective, for those recruits to be given the opportunity to work as part of an operation in their work experience component of the training is beneficial to them.

We are excited by the growth of this, but obviously we only have the first squad of about 20 recruits. When they are spread Territory-wide it will be spread thin, but this is about building a critical mass which is why having it in the budget is so important, so there is certainty that this is continuing and it will be embedded that we have clear separations.

We do not want these police just to be absorbed into constable duties; they are distinct and separate roles. This is public facing, public housing, public transport, high-traffic areas and events. These people put their hand up because they wanted to be boots on the ground all day, every day. This will be a real support to our constable stream to have this public-facing stream and, once we get that critical mass, Territorians will see how valuable it is to have those frontline police mobilised.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: How has the transition of public housing safety officers and transit safety officers into the new stream progressed? How many officers have transitioned into it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think it was about six. I will have to get you that. Five were former public housing safety officers, three were transit safety officers and three former auxiliaries. We had people transition from all three of those streams, which is really great. We are hopeful that, as they move into their new role, once they are out on the street, they will then provide that confidence and reassurance to their colleagues and say, ‘This is fantastic; you have to come on board.’ We are looking forward to that.

The second squad of PPSOs is in the college already; they started on 11 May. They will be graduating in September. Then squads recommence on 3 August. We had some high interest in that squad already. We look forward to that gradual roll-in of the housing safety officers and transit safety officers because the background they have will give them invaluable insights and skills into the work they will do. It is important to have that key leadership to show the rest of the workforce about that transition.

It is all in progress, and three squads this year will start to see an impact by the end of the year, going into next year, completing that training—obviously then maintaining our numbers and utilising them to the greatest capability possible.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: The final question. We talked about the transition. What has been the response from the officers transitioning into the new stream? Are they positive about it, negative, or up and down? I do not know.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass it on to the commissioner.

Mr DOLE: I went out and spoke to the first squad, the transitioning auxiliaries and other streams, such as the public housing safety officers. They were excited to be wearing the Northern Territory Police uniform, having more powers and abilities to address crime in a preventative approach rather than be seen in the cycle of response that we so often talk about.

These frontline officers are our preventative police force. They will be out there addressing antisocial behaviour. The members who will graduate in that first squad could not be prouder to be members of the Northern Territory Police Force.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: It is great news and a great initiative. Thank you.

Ms UIBO: A quick question on PPSOs, if we are on that topic.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, go for it.

Mr CHAIR: Yes. I will follow with a PPSO question after you.

Ms UIBO: How many PPSOs were in the first intake that started and how many are expected to graduate on 26 June?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Give me one second. Yes, 24 recruits started and 21 are expected to graduate in a couple of weeks’ time.

Ms UIBO: How many prospective PPSOs are in the second intake you spoke about?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have 16 in the college now for the second squad. The third squad will be a bigger squad than the second squad.

Ms UIBO: You have spoken about a critical mass of the PPSOs and a full complement, and we understand you were expecting up to 212 FTEs. When do you expect them to be in place if the numbers are 20 and 16? By 2050?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it is on track for the end of next year. Next year we are doing four squads. The squads will increase in size. Yes, we will lose people along the way as well. People will be decided it is not for them for whatever reason. Basically, by the end of next year there will be what I would call critical mass. We will still be recruiting into the third year to reach that 212 number. It will take as long as it takes to get there. The important thing about critical mass is also about managing community expectation.

When we graduate 21 PPSOs and send some to Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and have some in Darwin, you will not feel the strength of that new stream like we anticipate once we have that critical mass. Getting to 212 is important. Certainly, by the end of this year people will notice and definitely by the end of next year.

Ms UIBO: Have there been any PPSOs terminated during this first training intake? If so, for what reasons?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There has been one. I will pass on to AC Muldoon.

Mr MULDOON: There has been one person terminated. That was last week and it was for an internal disciplinary matter.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, can you confirm that these positions will only be urban-based and that there will be no PPSOs used in any of our remote communities?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is correct.

Mr CHAIR: I have some questions that are focused on Palmerston, being the Member for Drysdale. First, I thank the commissioner and all the police force for Operation Ventura. It has been much-needed relief for in Palmerston. My sincere thanks to every police officer involved in that.

Will the PPSOs be posted to the Palmerston Police Station just as regular officers are?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They sure will be. I will pass on to Brendan Muldoon.

Mr MULDOON: The work locations are still a process we are working through. We are looking at our infrastructure, where they will be placed, whether it will be Darwin, Casuarina or Palmerston. They will definitely be placed down in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: And Karama.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They will be in Karama.

Mr MULDOON: The important part is that they will not be in the police station. They will be out on the street.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think some of the constables will be jealous, not having to do all the paperwork.

Mr CHAIR: It probably ties into—this is a broader question that is probably aimed at you, commissioner. With the Police budget, what kind of capabilities are you hoping to grow on, especially in the Palmerston region?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass on to the commissioner to go through what we are looking at moving forward.

Mr DOLE: It is important to acknowledge that the Northern Territory Police have a record budget this year. It is fully funding the implementation of our consent agreement, which is designed to keep our police for longer. Our attrition rates are at the lowest they have been for a long time. Keeping our cops, and our experienced cops, is the aim of being a fully funded police force.

The introduction of the PPSOs relates to our preventative arm of policing so that we can be out there addressing alcohol-related offending and antisocial behaviour before it turns into criminal behaviour and turns into a response activity that our general duties police have to turn up to.

You will see a significant uplift in public-facing police out on the street, addressing matters before they escalate and turn into domestic violence offending, criminal behaviour and unlawful entries because we will have cops out there in uniform, highly visible, addressing those behaviours before they escalate.

Mr CHAIR: Is there anything else for Palmerston?

Mr DOLE: We are continuing to invest in our traffic capability. You will see high-visibility traffic around the Palmerston infrastructure. We have a dedicated superintendent who is embedded in the Palmerston Police Station now who has recently transferred from Tennant Creek. You are in capable hands in Palmerston with the leadership you have across that police station.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We also have a strong technological program as well. John is jumping at the opportunity to get up. There are some exciting things happening. Because of the strength of the budget, it allows Police to push further and develop further capabilities, resource things in a stronger way, create new opportunities. It gives them the breathing room they have needed for a long time.

To then have the government supporting them to make the most of that opportunity—the interactions I have had—it is really noticed by our front line. At the end of the day, that is what it is about. You are trying to maintain a 1,700-plus strong workforce and focus. They are incredibly diligent and determined people. You do not become a police officer if you do not have that duty and call to serve in you.

From my perspective, it is about keeping that flame alive for people and supporting them to do what they signed up to do, which is to serve and protect our communities.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, commissioner and your whole team, from all of us in Palmerston.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister it has been nine months since Justice Blow handed down his findings into the NT Police recruitment processes, and Territorians have not heard anything since. Despite not being appointed under the *Inquiries Act 1945*, which meant that Justice Blow was not able to compel witnesses or investigate allegations of misconduct, he found many shortcomings in senior appointments. In Justice Blow's report he says:

'... promotions to the rank of Superintendent and above during the relevant period were affected by favouritism, bias against individuals, and undeclared and unmanaged conflicts of interest.'

In this inquiry it showed police officers had every right to be concerned about a lack of integrity, transparency and accountability in senior appointments, which has seriously undermined confidence and morale within the police force.

Chief Minister, can you please outline the funding in the budget for your CLP second budget to implement the recommendations of the Blow report into the integrity and transparency of high-level recruitment within the Northern Territory Police Force?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The implementation of the recommendations is funded from within. The first recommendation has been fully accepted and fully implemented by police and closed out by the ICAC; they are happy that it has been done and gazetted. That general order is all done. And the second, in relation to conflicts of interest, has also been done. All of that training and work that had to be done was sorted by May.

Ms UIBO: Justice Blow found conflicts of interest—as you have outlined—and integrity concerns with a number of specific recruitment processes that were based on testimony directly from police officers. What follow up is being done to investigate and address any of those specific cases throughout the report given there is lingering impacts on police morale and confidence in police leadership due to the report?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Justice Blow did his report. There were two recommendations, and as I have just articulated, police have fully implemented both of them.

Ms UIBO: So no forward investigations on any of the testimonials that might have been drawn to Justice Blow's attention?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That was not one of the recommendations.

Ms UIBO: Have any of those matters been referred, to your knowledge, to the old ICAC or the new Integrity and Ethics Commissioner?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not really understand your question.

Ms UIBO: If there were testimonies provided by police officers in the Blow report, you have said that there has been no follow up to any of those cases or testimony. Do you know if any of them have been referred onward, if they have not been investigated within the police or another agency?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are matters for Justice Blow. He would have that, or the ICAC would have that.

Ms UIBO: That would be up to the individual to refer?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I imagine so.

Ms UIBO: Have any of those matters from the Blow report that were outlined resulted in any disciplinary action within the police force?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. As I said, there were two recommendations, and we have completed them.

Ms UIBO: How many members of the NT Police senior leadership team are currently in acting positions, and why are they not in their substantive roles?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass that onto the Police Commissioner.

Mr DOLE: What ranks are you specifically referring to, so I can get you some accurate numbers?

Ms UIBO: Predominantly the assistant commissioners would be helpful and then if we need to go to superintendents and others in various positions across the Territory that are acting roles.

Mr CHAIR: Can you restate the question?

Ms UIBO: Can you outline how many members of the NT Police senior leadership team are currently acting in positions that are not in their substantive roles?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We will see if we can get you that answer now, Opposition Leader. Bear with us for a couple of minutes.

Ms UIBO: Specifically regarding that executive level, for clarification.

Mr DOLE: Currently from the ranks of commander and above, there are 13 executive police members acting in positions that are not their substantive positions, including one deputy commissioner, five assistant commissioners and the rest are commanders.

Ms UIBO: Is there a plan for more permanency to provide a bit more confidence for people to be in those leadership roles as opposed to just acting in them?

Mr DOLE: There is a 100% plan. The deputy commissioner recruitment closed last week, so it is anticipated that process will be finalised within the month. The deputy CEO recruitment closed, and we are just waiting for the delegate to sign that selection. That will be followed by assistant commissioner and commander recruitment in the coming months.

Ms UIBO: My understanding is that all 13 acting positions will be permanently allocated their roles and not acting in their roles within the next two months from what you are saying?

Mr DOLE: Those positions they are acting in will be actively recruited to.

Ms UIBO: Is there a timeframe? Am I correct in understanding one month plus one month, or is there something different?

Mr DOLE: No, we start with the deputies and will finalise that process, then that will flow down. It is anticipated that up to three-and-a-half months we should have all our senior executive positions filled.

Ms UIBO: Why has it taken so long?

Mr DOLE: A few complexities, Member for Arnhem. It was addressing the policy position from Justice Blow and getting that completed. We were addressing some various internal issues so we could advertise the deputy commissioner's position. That has to start there and then we can fill other senior roles.

J DAVIS: In relation to the senior police executive, can you give an update on the status of the AFP-assisted investigation into NT Police executives, noting that the NT Police Association said that the ongoing instability in the executive is not just a distraction; it is disruptive. Where is that investigation currently up to?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It would be inappropriate to comment publicly on an internal investigation.

J DAVIS: Is there a timeframe for that investigation?

Mr CHAIR: If this is an internal investigation, we will not discuss an ongoing investigation. Commissioner, am I correct? Is there currently an ongoing investigation?

Mr DOLE: Correct. It is not closed out. We do not have a final report from the AFP yet.

J DAVIS: How many versions of the Blow report were prepared before the final report was publicly released, and who else had input into that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You would have to ask Justice Blow.

J DAVIS: To your knowledge no sections were removed or changed with input from others?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is a final report and that is the one I have seen.

Mr CHAIR: Any other questions on the opening statement?

Ms UIBO: How many sworn policing roles are currently vacant at the rank of Senior Sergeant and below?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you asking sergeants and below?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you asking FT numbers per station or ...

Ms UIBO: Across the force, Chief Minister, sworn policing roles—the position of a serving officer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a complicated number. Perhaps I could help—looking at the time, obviously you can take it on notice. Could you give me the crux of what you are after? We might be able to help you.

Ms UIBO: I have a few questions about police vacancies, some of the extended vacancy periods, continuous advertising. Some of our remote stations, you would know, Chief Minister, had 33 weeks of vacancies. That position continually advertised to get recruitment to but is not filled. I am wondering how much of that is happening across the Northern Territory. The numbers would be helpful. I am happy to ask it so it is on notice.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We can take that on notice. We do not want to give you the wrong numbers.

Question on Notice No 1.12

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

Ms UIBO: I will add the regional in, if you are comfortable with that, Chief Minister?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: How many sworn policing roles are currently vacant at the rank of Senior Sergeant and below? Can you please provide a breakdown per region across the Northern Territory?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.12.

Mr CHAIR: I will go to the Member for Johnston for a follow-up and then the Member for Fannie Bay has been waiting patiently for her question. Anything remaining we will come back to the Opposition Leader.

J DAVIS: How many sworn officers are currently on sick leave on workers' compensation and long-term personal leave? Can you give it—this will be a Question on Notice, I imagine—for one to three months, over six months and over 18 months?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is sick leave, workers comp ...

J DAVIS: Long-term personal leave.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On personal leave we have 56 officers between zero and three months; 17 between three and six months; 18 between six and nine months; and one between nine and 12 months, to a total of 92.

J DAVIS: For workers compensation and sick leave.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Gallagher Bassett managed those numbers not us, so we do not have it.

J DAVIS: In terms of how many are on workers compensation.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is a question for DCDD. While we think about answers for that one. I have an answer to a question, but I am apologising profusely I do not remember the number, but it was the one about the anti-racism training.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.11

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will provide an answer to Question 1.11; the answer was 78.

In respect to this current question, we can take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.13

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

Ms DAVIS: How many sworn officers are on workers compensation, and the periods of time that their workers compensation runs for—one to three months, over six months, over 18 months.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.13.

Mrs ZIO: A lot of our conversation often goes when we are talking about police at remote stations. I would love to have a bit of a selfish conversation around the Darwin region. Can you provide some about how police will be supported in the Darwin region given that we are a capital city. Will recruits be sent to Darwin station? Will PPSOs be sent to Darwin station?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The answer is yes and yes. Just about every graduation we have officers who stay in the Darwin area. Just as much as anywhere else there are pressures on the need for more police which is why we have such a rigorous recruitment process and with the PPSOs coming online that will be a huge help to communities, particularly like yours. Ultimately, it is about continuing to deliver for police whatever it is they need to do their job, and as we put downward pressure on crime and the data I read out earlier speaks for itself. That allows our police to do more proactive work, the antisocial behaviour and all the other components to policing that under the previous Labor government were impossible to get to.

Gone are the days I remember when we first came to government, we would visit the JESCC. The number of jobs that would be handed over at shift change was unbelievable, in the hundreds on shift change. You imagine then police coming into work for the day having a hundred jobs to get to from the night before then all the new jobs they had for the following day. We have been able to reduce that so that police are able to provide response.

To that extent we have been able to deliver some amazing outcomes through our 000 centre which I am now not going to be able to find the page that I am looking for in one minute, but off the top of my head we have met our bench marks on the 131 444 number in terms of police response to that number so we have done an outstanding job in making sure that those calls are answered within time, and whilst we remain slightly under the 90% target for 000, we have increased the ability answer calls quickly by 10%, which makes a huge impact on the lives of our community. The reason I mention that is because it shows the scale of the mess that was left behind by Labor, the scale of the neglect of our police and the scale of the lawlessness. We have been able to improve it from 79.82% for 2024–25 to 89.81%, which is a smidge short of the 90% of calls being answered within 10 seconds. They are huge improvements, and it is meaningful work making peoples lives better. When you improve one area in law and order then the rest improves also.

We would like to deliver the best service to Territorians in their darkest times of need, and we can show measurable, tangible ways in which we are delivering that. It is a wonderful thing for the workforce, it makes them incredibly proud, and it makes me proud to be the Chief Minister and Minister for Police.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes our time for today. I thank the police and the Chief Minister for coming into the hearing today. I would like to give my sincere apologies to the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services, who put in a huge amount of effort, but once again here we are. I know that a lot of work went behind today, so I would like to give them a big shout out.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Chief Minister and all the agencies that provided assistance. This concludes the Estimates Hearing for today and hearings will recommence tomorrow, Wednesday 10 June at 9 am with questions for the Treasurer.

Before I close the meeting, Chief Minister, I will allow you a brief moment to thank your staff.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thank the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services, as they did not get the opportunity. I know they undertook extensive preparation for today. They make a huge contribution to the Northern Territory, but did not get a chance to showcase that, which is disappointing.

To our police family, thank you for preparing for today, but more importantly, for the work you do to serve and protect Territorians. The downward pressure we are putting on crime statistics is because of the commitment, hard work and dedication of our men and women in blue. I take my hat off to them and they make me proud every day. I know the Territory is a better place because of them and it makes me immensely proud.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Minister.

That concludes today's hearing. We will break until 9 am tomorrow.

The committee suspended.
