

PART II

THE QUESTION PAPER

An index to questions appears at the end of Part II.

Numerical references are to Question Paper page numbers.

An asterisk preceding an entry in the index indicates that an answer has not yet been received.

25 June 1987

**2. University College of the Northern Territory
Enrolments**

Mr SMITH to MINISTER for EDUCATION

1. How many full-time students are enrolled at the University College of the Northern Territory?
2. How many part-time students are enrolled?
3. How many students who completed Year 12 at Northern Territory schools are:
 - (a) full-time; and
 - (b) part-timestudents at the University College?
4. How many:
 - (a) full-time; and
 - (b) part-timestudents are in the Arts faculty?
5. How many:
 - (a) full-time; and
 - (b) part-timestudents are in the Science faculty?

20 October 1987

3. Aboriginal Employment

Mr EDE to MINISTER for LABOUR and ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

In view of the Northern Territory Government's stated commitment to improving Aboriginal employment and in the light of recent reports indicating a decline in Aboriginal employment levels, what are the numbers of unfilled positions in each of the following categories:

- (a) Police aides;
- (b) Trackers;
- (c) Health workers;

- (d) Assistant teachers in Aboriginal schools on Aboriginal communities; and
- (e) Teacher aides in Aboriginal schools on Aboriginal communities?

5. Skywest - Aero-medical Services

Mr SMITH to TREASURER

What are the details of the cost to the Northern Territory government of the financial, legal and other arrangements made with the Skywest Company to finalise negotiations allowing Skywest to begin the aero-medical services in the Northern Territory?

20 October 1987

4. Motor Vehicle Accidents

Mr SMITH to MINISTER for TRANSPORT and WORKS

How many persons have been:

(a) killed; and

(b) injured

in motor vehicle accidents in the Northern Territory so far this calendar year and who were travelling as passengers in the rear of utilities or motor trucks?

ANSWER

As at 30 September 1987:

(a) 7

(b) 27

Alice Springs Plumbing Inspections

Mr BELL to MINISTER for LANDS and HOUSING

Mr Speaker, my question is a repeat of a question I asked during the last sittings. I will ask the question first and then seek your guidance and perhaps that of the Chief Minister to find out who should answer it because there is some concern in construction circles in central Australia with respect to it. Will the Northern Territory government appoint a second plumbing inspector in Alice Springs?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the matter is presently being addressed by my department. There are several issues involved. I have had discussions with the Master Builders Association, as has the Assistant Secretary South of the Department of Lands and Housing, in an effort to find an appropriate solution. One plumbing inspector is employed in the Alice Springs region and there is not enough evidence that a second full-time inspector is needed. However, following discussions involving myself, the MBA and the department, we are looking at alternative solutions to the problem. These have been put to the MBA.

The first alternative is to employ a retired or part-time plumber as an inspector to be on call in periods during which there are several applications before the department and the workload is obviously too much for one inspector to handle. The other alternative is to change one of the staff classifications within the department in the southern region to allow for a joint role of building inspector and plumbing inspector and to fill that position with an appropriate person. I discussed the matter with the Assistant Secretary South as recently as yesterday and this morning. I am very aware of the problem and, as soon as we are able to identify a suitable person to fill either position, we will be taking appropriate steps. As I explained during the last sittings, I am very conscious of the concerns being expressed by those people in the industry who are experiencing delays with the inspectorial function at certain times.

I am also pleased to announce a new development in relation to structural engineering matters, which is another issue that I addressed during the last sittings and one which would be of interest to the member for MacDonnell. There were delays in approving some building plans because, in the absence of suitable staff in the southern region, documents had to be sent to Darwin for checking. In order to resolve this problem, tenders have been called from private firms in the structural engineering field in Alice Springs.

I have subsequently advised the department, upon receipt of those tenders, of an appropriate person who will fulfil that function in Alice Springs, thereby negating any further requirement to send plans and drawings to Darwin for checking and approval. That will reduce delays quite significantly and enhance the efficient handling of applications submitted by private industry.

The specific question in respect of the plumbing functions is being addressed. There are 2 options before me at the moment and it is a matter of finding a person for the job. It is simply a question of sorting the matter out and finding an appropriate person.

Northern Territory Business Council

Mr FIRMIN to CHIEF MINISTER

I refer him to a recent press statement about a request from an organisation known as the Northern Territory Business Council for a meeting to discuss the state of the Northern Territory economy. I ask the Chief Minister to advise honourable members of the background to this meeting and of what action has been taken to put it into place.

ANSWER

As honourable members have been advised on many occasions, the Northern Territory economy is rapidly changing from what has been described as an economy based on the public sector to one driven by the private sector. There is no doubt that this fundamental change in the nature of the Territory's economy will be beneficial in the medium to long term. However, we should not deny that certain of the changes that we are going through will be painful to at least some sectors of the business community. Painful though they may be, they are producing the desired results. We are moving towards private development and an economy driven by private enterprise, which is the only sustainable base for our economy in the long term.

The Northern Territory government is no longer in the business of underwriting virtually every new business development. Our role is becoming that of a facilitator of private enterprise rather than its financier. The budgetary and structural changes implemented by my government in recent times are bringing about a real and sustainable economy where real jobs and real growth are being created in the private sector.

The government's role in the future will be to work in partnership with commerce and industry to let business get on with business. Our job is to keep taxation and government regulations in check and to help with marketing and promotion, and that is what we have been doing. We have seized the initiative and we are actively promoting the growing range of Territory products, capitalising on our proximity to the markets in South-east Asia.

I would ask honourable members to look at a few of the facts and at what has been occurring, particularly during the last year.

Mr SMITH: A point of order, Mr Speaker! The Chief Minister was asked a question which concerned the Northern Territory Business Council and its request for a meeting. He was asked to supply some background on the Business Council's request and some background on when the meeting might take place. I have no problem with the Chief Minister providing evidence on the state of the Northern Territory economy. In fact, we will provide him with that opportunity today on a matter of public importance. I do not believe that it is appropriate for him to launch that debate in question time.

Mr HATTON: I wish to speak to the point of order, Mr Speaker. If I am to properly answer the honourable member's question concerning the background to and purpose of the meeting with the Northern Territory Business Council, it is important that I give some summary of the situation that has led to this meeting being called. That is my purpose in making these points.

Mr SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr HATTON: Mr Speaker, as I was saying, I would like honourable members to look at a few of the facts about what has been occurring in recent times. Mineral production is about to exceed \$1000m, exploration activity is expanding and new mines are opening. There is a boom in offshore gas and oil exploration that promises to outstrip even the tenfold increase of the past 2 years. Tourism has shown phenomenal growth with a 150% increase in international visitors over 4 years. Primary production is steadily increasing its export earnings. Non-residential construction approvals are higher than ever as private developments go up. There is plenty of good news about, news which the doom-and-gloom merchants opposite would have us believe does not exist. But there is no doubt, as I said earlier, that some sectors of the business economy are hurting at the moment.

It is against this background that I was approached by the organisation known as the Northern Territory Business Council which, I might add, was formed only in the last 3 weeks. As a result of that approach, I agreed to a meeting between its representatives and my full ministry.

I would like to address the issue of the formation of the Northern Territory Business Council. I have addressed this House and the public on numerous occasions about our government working with business. Last year, one of the initiatives that was put in place was the formation of an organisation, known as the Business Consultative Committee, which was working with the Minister for Industries and Development. During the last month or 2, there have been discussions between the minister and private sector organisations and it was felt that that structure was not an appropriate means through which to conduct more accurate and substantial discussions between the government and the business community in relation to a number of issues of concern to that community. It was agreed between the Minister for Industries and Development and the business community that we would adopt an alternative structure. That led to the formation of the organisation known as the Northern Territory Business Council, which will allow business to speak directly with ministers rather than working through a government structure. I might say that the Business Consultative Committee involved quite a significant number of senior public servants. The new organisation allows for more direct contact between the ministry and industry representatives.

Following private discussions with business representatives, I can assure honourable members that the intention is certainly to discuss the many difficult problems that are facing the business community as we experience this necessary adjustment to our economy. There is an inevitable shaking-out period and a lot of trauma is arising from that. The intention of the meeting is not simply to outline the problems because I can assure honourable members that the business representatives, together with my ministers, are well aware of those difficulties. What we are hoping to do, and what the organisations are hoping to do, is to sit down together and address positively any initiatives that may need to be taken to improve the method of identifying and easing the burden in this adjustment period.

Arrangements have now been made to hold the meeting next Monday morning. I look forward to this meeting with a group of positive Darwin business people who understand the current economic climate and want to contribute to the economic development of the Northern Territory. Contrary to what certain members of the local press and the economic illiterates opposite would have us believe ...

Mr Smith: At least we do not call them whingers.

Mr HATTON: ... there is no conflict between my government and the business community. I welcome its initiative in forming the Business Council and I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that my government will support and cooperate fully with it.

To respond to the interjection of the Leader of the Opposition, the fact is that many businesses out there are growing and developing at a rapid rate but it is also true that many people in the Northern Territory community have been living in easy times. With massive amounts of government money being pumped into the economy, their businesses and their business psychology have been based upon the assumption that they were operating in a government sheltered workshop, running from one government contract to the next. Those times have changed. If members opposite do not like that, they ought to get stuck into their federal counterparts who have been imposing massive restrictions on the finances available to our government. We are not whingeing about it. We are doing something about it but, in the process, that is hurting Territorians. We will go through the adjustment process and out of it will come a stronger and more vibrant Northern Territory economy.

We will not simply sit back and knock. We are doing it in the face of the continuous and unjustified attacks on the investment environment in the Northern Territory that the opposition have been imposing on us for the last 3 years. Yesterday, we had the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on Actual and Contingent Liabilities which finally has given the lie completely to the opposition's unjustified and unreasonable attacks on the Northern Territory government's contingent and actual liabilities. Members opposite have done untold damage during the last 3 years with their attacks on investor confidence. It has taken a great deal of effort to try to turn that around. With the Leader of the Opposition running around Australia in his new-found desire to make contact with the business community and pretending that it is the first time that it has been done ...

Mr Smith: It has you worried, hasn't it?

Mr HATTON: Not at all, Mr Speaker. I had feedback and I might advise the Leader of the Opposition to do the talking himself next time instead of leaving it to his staff members to undertake discussions with the business community. The business people were quite surprised to find the Leader of the Opposition letting his staff do all the talking. I have no worries at all.

The Leader of the Opposition should get his facts straight before he ventures out. He had no briefings whatsoever on anything that is occurring in the Territory. He did not talk to people in the Northern Territory business community about it. We checked with them and they deny that he made any contact with them about the situation. Lord knows what he said to a number of the people he visited. If he intended to do something positive, he should have done more than merely obtain a bundle of glossy brochures from the Trade Development Zone Authority. He could have obtained some facts and figures to take with him so that he could have drawn attention to some of the initiatives that were occurring.

Mr Smith: The TDZ doesn't put out facts and figures.

Mr HATTON: The Trade Development Zone Authority does put out facts and figures. It is a shame that he did not get a full briefing. Had he done so, he would not have engaged in the unconscionable attack on the first Australian investor to go into the Trade Development Zone. I am talking about Hungerford Refrigeration.

Mr Speaker, we look forward to this meeting with the Northern Territory Business Council and the continuation of discussions with the business community in a more direct manner to address the real problems that are facing the Territory and to work in cooperation towards the building of a real economy. We do not deny that the process of readjustment is painful. It is hurtful but it is absolutely essential that we do it if we are to build a real economy.

Charge for Electrical Inspection

Mr LEO to MINISTER for MINES and ENERGY

Is it the intent of NTEC to charge \$31 for the issue of inspection certificates for work inspected by approved licensed electricians on domestic electrical work?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the honourable member for Nhulunbuy for his question. In fact, he gave me notice of it through the channel that he normally uses: ABC radio. Unfortunately, the ABC is on strike today and I do not have an update on any questions that will be asked today.

The question relates to self-inspection. In fact, ministerial approval to prepare draft legislation to enable limited self-inspection was obtained on 21 November 1985. Implementation has been delayed during the last couple of years but, in its attempts to cut red tape and allow people to get on with self-inspection, this government has organised a facility by which licensed electricians can carry out their own inspections. This will cut down time delays which are very costly. Waiting for inspectors to arrive can result in considerable expense and add considerably to the cost of a home. The facility will allow licensed electricians to carry out their own inspections. This is not new. In fact, it happens in that very progressive state, the wonderful state of Queensland. I understand that it also occurs in a number of overseas countries. Random inspection of contractors undertaking inspection will be carried out by the Power and Water Authority to ensure that standards are maintained. I believe that it is a step in the right direction. It is an example of this government cutting red tape and allowing people to get on with the job.

Mr Leo: At a cost of \$31?

Mr COULTER: Mr Speaker, I previously mentioned the cost of waiting for an inspector to turn up. With the building boom that is still continuing in the Northern Territory, it is difficult to have building, plumbing and electrical inspectors on site when you want them. If you are about to pour concrete for footings and you have a concrete truck and 13 labourers sitting around waiting, \$31 pales into insignificance. There are many tradesmen, including plasterers, who would be only too pleased to absorb the \$31 to be able to get on with the job. The effect of this initiative will ricochet through the whole industry and it is something that this government can be very proud of.

The requirement for contractors to test their own work will bring us into line with the states in an attempt to improve the general poor standard of electrical installation in the Territory. Consultations are being carried out in relation to how the system will operate and these will continue until 27 November. I understand that there is general acceptance of the move throughout the industry.

Charge for Electrical Inspection

Mr LEO to MINISTER for MINES and ENERGY

Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. The minister has not yet told the House whether or not the fee is to be \$31. Could he also confirm, for the sake of the House and the populace of the Northern Territory, that the fee will not be levied only on new houses but will in fact be levied on all electrical work that requires inspection within the Northern Territory.

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, let me return to the first question and give some very definite answers. I do not know where the honourable member gets his information from. I thought that he was fairly clued up on this issue but obviously somebody has recently given him the wrong drum. The decision will apply only to domestic installations.

Mr Leo: For all domestic installations, not just new work?

Mr COULTER: You said all electrical work in your supplementary question. You should get your questions right or accept the answers that are given.

The first inspection fee is proposed to be \$31. That fee currently applies to subsequent inspections. We are trying to remove that impost and, if the member for Nhulunbuy cannot see the advantages of this move, he has a problem.

Efficient Management of the Public Service

Mr HARRIS to MINISTER for LABOUR and ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Mr Speaker, there has been a great deal of recent comment about the efficient management of the public service. What steps has he taken to improve the efficient management of the public service and to link functions of the public service more closely to the business sector?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, that is a very good question. As the member for Port Darwin pointed out, there has been considerable comment recently in the press about the public service and this has had a very unsettling effect on public servants, more so than any changes in administrative arrangements. In the last issue of the Sunday Territorian, the Secretary of the ACOA, Rod Ellis, commented extensively on the Northern Territory Public Service, all of which can be refuted. I am rather surprised that somebody of Mr Ellis' standing would do that. We all read recently in the Northern Territory News that even Frank Alcorta believes that Rod Ellis is a man of some standing and common sense but it is quite apparent to me that, once again, Frank has got it wrong.

In answering the question, I would like first to advise the Assembly that all departmental structures have been approved. The establishments for all departments are controlled by section 26 of the Public Service Act and have been approved by Executive Council, and our departments are functioning very well. As you would be aware, Mr Speaker, there has been a review of upper-level structures recently and we have initiated a review of levels from A1 to E3. That commenced last week and has also been the subject of considerable recent media comment. Much has been made of the fact that we are

carrying out a review. This is the first major review of the Northern Territory Public Service since 1978 and I would have thought that everyone would have welcomed such a review, not the least public servants. In fact, I am aware that many public servants are very glad that we have initiated this review.

There is no doubt that, in some areas of the public service, classifications have got out of kilter. We have established a group comprising senior personnel people in the major departments and a representative of the Trades and Labor Council. This was decided by Cabinet some weeks ago and the review is under way. It will be completed early in the new year. Following that, we will have a far better structure than we have had in the past - one that does have some equity across the board.

Mr Speaker, the subject of the question asked by the member for Port Darwin is one that is very important to me: the ability to make the public service interact better with the private sector. Much of what we have done in the last few months, for the first time, has brought the public service into closer interaction with the private sector. The first of those actions was taken by the Chief Minister in March when he created the Ministry of Labour and Administrative Services. In this case, 'Labour' means employment - far from what is suggested by the name of the party of the members opposite, this is something positive. Labour in this case is something positive: employment. Employment in the Northern Territory is a big part of this government's initiative. We are working to get people employed. In respect of buildings like the Beaufort Hotel, the Sheratons and the casinos, we hear knocking from members opposite, but every one of those projects has created employment in the Territory - employment that would not exist if we had had a Labor government.

One of the results of our actions this year was the removal of an anomaly in respect of recreational air fares. In the past, recreational air fares have not been available for intra-Territory travel for holidays. We were unable, for example, to provide a recreational air fare for an employee in Darwin who wanted to take his holiday in Alice Springs. The holidays had to be taken interstate. I have removed that obstacle and employees entitled to a return air fare to Adelaide can use the value of that air fare to travel within the Territory. That policy has been in place since August. That will create the ability for people from within the Territory to travel around the Territory, to stay in our Territory hotels and to use our Territory facilities instead of taking their holidays either in Asia or interstate. I believe many people will avail themselves of that opportunity. That is one way in which our policies have impacted on the private sector.

Our policy to use office accommodation built by the private sector is another example. The majority of our public servants are housed in buildings built by the private sector, operated by the private sector, maintained by the private sector and cleaned by the private sector. That is creating jobs. We do not have a policy of building our own monuments. We use buildings built by the private sector and we create employment by that means. That again is an example of interaction.

It has been my hope that a Department of Labour and Administrative Services would be developed within the current ministry. The Chief Minister has told me that he has approved that and I am very pleased that we will be developing a Department of Labour and Administrative Services. The emphasis will be on employment. Within that departmental structure, I have developed the ability to get out there, search out jobs and to employ people. I have

placed a strong emphasis on the ability to employ people in Aboriginal communities and in the non-urban communities of the Territory. That ought to please the members opposite but, of course, they will find a reason to knock it and to make it as hard as possible for people to be employed in those places. However, I am sure the members for Arnhem and Arafura will applaud that initiative.

In the development of a Department of Labour and Administrative Services, a strong emphasis will be put on providing services to the private sector in occupational health and safety, industrial relations and employment and training for our young Territorians. The initiatives that we are developing in that regard will go a long way towards overcoming our growing problem of unemployment in non-urban areas. 70% of our Aboriginal population is in non-urban areas - areas of high unemployment. That is a question that I intend to address and to overcome in my position as Minister for Labour and Administrative Services. Again, that will impact on the private sector.

A review of the Government Printing Office is currently under way. The Government Printing Office has operated at a loss for a long time - not a major loss but at a loss - and in competition with the private sector. We have much of our printing work undertaken by the private sector and we are reviewing our current operations at the Government Printing Office. It is my view that, in time, we will develop the ability to have the private sector handle most of the work that that particular facility is carrying out at present.

There is one other matter that I should comment on and that is the reduction in air fares for new recruits and the reductions in Territory allowance following our negotiations with the TLC. That has brought about a better equality with the private sector. We are no longer competing with the private sector in terms of providing allowances and air fares that it could not afford. The private sector in the Northern Territory is now on an equal footing with the public sector in being able to provide those sorts of conditions to employees. It is clear to me that, in the last 6 months or more, we have developed a range of areas that will assist the private sector in the Northern Territory and put in place the Chief Minister's and this government's initiative to create a private-sector-run economy.

Royal Darwin Hospital

Mr LANHUPUY to MINISTER for HEALTH and COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr Speaker, I ask the Minister for Community Services and Health if he will confirm that, prior to the establishment of the Darwin Private Hospital, the Royal Darwin Hospital had 46 public maternity beds available and now has only 22 beds available to public patients or private patients seeking a bed in the public sector hospital with a doctor of their own choice?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, perhaps I could correct the honourable member on 2 points. I am the Minister for Health and Community Services. The Minister for Community Services and Health is the one who has to sign that declaration later this morning. It is not true that we had 46 public beds in the midwifery area. We had 46 beds available for public and private patients at the Royal Darwin Hospital. It is true that it is proposed that the number of beds in that particular area will be reduced to 23 at the appropriate time. I must stress that I have the capacity in the Royal Darwin Hospital to have 48 beds in that

particular area if they are required. I stress the point that that is without taking into account the 64 beds that are available in the private wards at the Royal Darwin Hospital. We can have a capacity there of 64 beds plus 48 beds if we need it.

The matter of admission to the private hospital has been raised a number of times. I do not know whether all honourable members are aware that one does not book into a hospital in the same way as one books into an hotel. People are admitted to a hospital via a doctor, specialist or whatever. It is the responsibility of those professional people to counsel according to the requirements, either medical or financial, of each patient. It is their responsibility to point those patients in the right direction as far as their hospital care is concerned. It is not a matter for the staff at the Royal Darwin Hospital or, for that matter, the Darwin Private Hospital to direct people or counsel people on where they ought to go. I stress that, in the past, it has been the habit that doctors or specialists have merely sent their patients along to the hospital and, because of the dedication of the hospital staff in the admissions area, the requirements of those patients have been catered for. That system definitely will change and the responsibility will rest squarely on the shoulders of the professionals in having their patients admitted to whatever hospital they see fit.

Territory Loan No 14

Mr DONDAS to TREASURER

Mr Speaker, last week, the Treasurer announced he was seeking to have the Territory Loan No 14 extended from \$40m to \$48m and that this needed approval from the federal Treasurer. Given that the loan subscription closed last Friday, can he advise whether the extension was approved and whether the loan was fully subscribed?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Casuarina for his question. In brief, the answer is yes in every respect to that question but I believe that it requires a fuller response. It became apparent from the enthusiastic level of public response to Territory Loan No 14 that the \$40m target that we had set would be reached comfortably well before the subscription date expired. Given the rate of response, approval was sought from the federal Treasurer for expansion of the loan from \$40m to \$48m and I am grateful that Mr Keating responded promptly in the affirmative. A range of investors and ladies with piggy-banks were willing to contribute more money. This loan was oversubscribed very early in its life and the \$48m was easily obtained as well.

Since the Leader of the Opposition has had his charisma implant and has learnt that things are going pretty well in the Territory and one doesn't need to knock anything, he should learn about confidence that is available and which is being displayed through the Territory loan. If this doom and gloom exists and people are so worried about lack of confidence in the Northern Territory, why were we able to obtain oversubscription of \$8m on a \$40m loan?

Mr Smith: After the stock market crash?

Mr COULTER: Ah, the stock market crash! There would have to be something negative that the Leader of the Opposition would find. He could not admit that things were going all right. I think he needs a tune-up on his charisma

implant because it is starting to slip and the real Leader of the Opposition shows through. It is so transparent. It will bring him undone eventually because he will never change. He will knock everything that he gets the opportunity to knock and he will never concede that anything is going well. Honourable members on this side of the Assembly are aware of that and I believe the public at large will soon see through that thin disguise of a new image which the opposition is trying to create around him.

The loan offered attractive and highly-competitive rates of up to 13.6% and, of course, that is another reason why there was considerable confidence in it. It won the endorsement of several well-known investment advisers, but it also demonstrated a gratifying public faith in the Territory and its future at a time when there were plenty of pessimists standing on their soapboxes preaching the end of civilisation as we now know it. For example, there was the member for Barkly's astonishing writings about the possibility of a Commonwealth takeover of the Territory. Who would have ever thought we would hear it?

Honourable members will be interested to hear that the Northern Territory Treasury is undertaking a survey of the subscribers to Loan No 14 to establish a profile of these investors in the Territory and I think the Leader of the Opposition would be interested in the results of that survey. He could call on them too. The only proviso would be that I doubt if they would give him their names so that he would be able to speak to them. That would be consistent with the attitude of the business representatives that he visited recently.

Indications are that surprisingly large numbers of subscribers are Territorians themselves, and that is something that I am very pleased about. If the salt-of-the-earth Territory people are choosing to invest their savings in Territory bonds, that is the best answer to the pessimists that I can imagine. One interjection by the honourable member for Stuart was that they are leaving at a rate of 1000 a week. That interjection was not picked up but I heard him make it.

Mr Ede: A month.

Mr COULTER: A week it was but, anyway, a month. The members for Fannie Bay, Arnhem and Arafura and myself have said many times, if it reaches the point where there are only 2 people living in the Northern Territory, 1 of them will be me. I believe that confidence in the Northern Territory still exists. We were built on hard times in the Northern Territory and we will continue to progress and develop. Territory Loan No 14 and the oversubscription that has supplied \$48m for development of the Northern Territory is only one example of the confidence that stills remains despite the attempts of the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite to knock the Territory at every possible opportunity.

NTGPASS

Mr COLLINS to TREASURER

Why did the Northern Territory government set up its own superannuation scheme when, as we heard yesterday, we inherited a \$120m liability from the Commonwealth and have an ongoing, accumulating debt of, according to the member for Stuart, around \$20m and, according to the Minister for Industries and Development, \$50m?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, that is a good question. Yesterday, we passed the Superannuation Amendment Bill and that was a good opportunity to talk about that. However, because we do not like to go back over hard times and we do not like continually to knock the Commonwealth, I did not use that opportunity. However, honourable members will be aware of the activities of the Minister for Finance, Senator Walsh. Mr Speaker, you may remember that there was very little choice at the time about our accepting or not accepting that particular burden. In fact, it was thrust upon us.

Mr Collins: You could have accepted.

Mr COULTER: Well, we could have. Another option would have been interesting. If, at the time, those transferees had accepted a payout of their benefits, it would have bankrupted the Commonwealth system because it would not have had the money to pay them. That would have been a very interesting scenario at that stage. I forget the exact figures but I will get the detailed information and the timing of how it happened for the honourable member. I do not have that in my head at the moment but it makes very interesting reading indeed to see the amount of money that would have had to be paid out.

We found that we had a liability to Territorians, to people who had set up their homes despite the fact that some Commonwealth departments would not sell them houses and allow them to put down roots in the Northern Territory. We were not prepared to desert those Territorians who had spent a considerable time in the Northern Territory and we were not prepared to walk away from them as the Commonwealth was.

Premiums for Workers' Compensation

Mr SETTER to MINISTER for LABOUR and ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Has the Work Health Act had any effect on workers' compensation premiums currently being charged by insurers?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I can give an answer to the member for Jingili. The Work Health Act has resulted in across-the-board reductions in all classes of occupational rates by the approved insurers. All rates have been reduced by at least 10% before discounts for good safety records are taken into account. The building industry, in particular, has benefited significantly from the new work health measures as rates for that industry have been reduced from the previous level of 18.2% to as low as 11.1%, which is a reduction of up to 38%. General farm rates have dropped from 9.2% to as low as 4.3%, a reduction of 53%. The authority's information base will allow for identification of hazardous workplaces which can then be targeted for remedial action in cooperation with employers and workers.

Such measures should ensure that costs associated with workers' compensation are kept to a minimum. They put the lie to many accusations which have been made and claims by the opposition and the TLC that our system would not work and that we should use the Victorian system. I do not need to highlight the problems with the Victorian system. It is in the red by at least \$500m and is going down the drain at a great rate of knots. Nevertheless, people like Mr Tullgren of the TLC continue to say at meetings

of the Work Health Authority's advisory council, of which he is a member, that we should adopt the Victorian model. How ridiculous!

Prison Trust Accounts

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH to MINISTER for HEALTH and COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr Speaker, my question concerns the trust accounts in the names of the prisons in the Top End. I know there is a trust account for the Gunn Point Prison Farm. Why isn't there a trust account for Darwin Prison and Beatrice Hill Prison? Also, can the minister give me details of the general prison industries trust account?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, rather than give the honourable member details which may not be sufficient to fully answer her question, I will take the question on notice and supply her with the details.

METAL Training Scheme

Mr POOLE to MINISTER for TRANSPORT and WORKS

Mr Speaker, can the minister advise if and when the METAL training scheme, which has been so successful in Darwin, will be expanded to include the Alice Springs region?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the member for Araluen raised this matter during the last sittings. Unfortunately, I was not able to give him any good news then although honourable members will recall that I was well aware of the clear and justifiable need for such a program.

We are talking about young lives. About 80% of young Australians who ride motor bikes require ambulance treatment as a result of accidents in their first year of riding. Community-based training programs interstate, in which young riders are given appropriate levels of training, have led to reductions of as much as 45% in accident rates. Unfortunately, because of the constraints on government when making budget decisions earlier this year, the extension of the METAL program to Alice Springs was not funded. However, that did not stop us from going ahead with some planning, identification of appropriate sites and some training of personnel to eventually conduct the program. I am delighted to say that, as a result of some efficiencies and cost savings within the Department of Transport and Works, we are able now to allocate \$127 000 towards a building for the METAL program in Alice Springs. I am sure that, if it saves only 1 life, it will be well justified.

I mentioned efficiencies and savings in the Department of Transport and Works. We have heard a fair bit about poor morale in the public service. I can tell you, Mr Speaker, that I have visited at least 90% of my departmental staff in their various places of work to see what they are doing and to talk with them about meeting the challenges of this new era in which we have to do more with less. I can say quite frankly that morale is extremely high and I think that is a result of meeting the challenge of having to do things better. I am sure that, apart from METAL, we will be able to find ways of supporting additional programs. The Treasurer is glaring at me but I am sure other things can be accomplished.

We are not saving the money only through administrative measures. I mention administrative savings as being the source of funds for METAL. Like other departments, we have been reducing staff on a voluntary basis and staff numbers were to be reduced from 1440 to 1380 by Christmas. My department has not only met that target but surpassed it whilst continuing to provide an adequate level of service. I believe we have 20 fewer employees in the department than the number targeted for January and that is excellent. We have also reviewed the way we do things. A review of construction standards is already having some results. We now have a new method of constructing school buildings and other community buildings which involves a capacity for relocation. That means that, apart from an initial 10% saving in construction costs, long-term benefits will be far greater. In the context of constraints on the department and the reduction of staff levels, as well as the media hype, it is rewarding to talk with staff at the coalface and to see their enthusiasm for getting things done efficiently and effectively. The Department of Transport and Works is quietly getting on with its job of providing appropriate infrastructure so that the private sector can continue its economic growth.

Mr Speaker, I am sure that we will see the benefits of the METAL program in Alice Springs and, more importantly, of the savings which the Department of Transport and Works is making in its drive for greater efficiency.

Performance Incentives for Chief Executive Officers

Mr SMITH to MINISTER for LABOUR and ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Can he confirm that a Cabinet submission has been prepared by the Office of the Public Service Commissioner which canvasses performance incentives for Chief Executive Officers of between 10% and 45% of salary and which also recommends that low-interest loans be made available to Chief Executive Officers and that annual air fares be made available to Chief Executive Officers and their families?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, it sounds like another beat-up to me. Even if a Cabinet submission were being prepared, it would be inappropriate to speak of it here today. If it is a matter for Cabinet, it goes to Cabinet before it goes anywhere else. However, to put the mind of the Leader of the Opposition at rest, there is no such Cabinet submission being prepared.

Horticultural Industry

Mr REED to MINISTER for INDUSTRIES and DEVELOPMENT

In a ministerial statement in July, he foreshadowed additional assistance for the horticultural industry in the Territory. Is he able to advise what assistance is proposed, particularly in relation to marketing and training?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the government takes the horticultural industry, as it does all other industries, very seriously. The Katherine region is emerging continuously as one of the big players in the Northern Territory's horticultural and grain industries. Recently, as a result of the representations made to the government by the Horticultural Advisory Committee, we have taken up its suggestion and instituted a position whereby

the government will be offering 2 horticultural scholarships in 1988 and encouraging promising young Territorians to take up a field of study in agriculture and horticulture. The scholarships will be for courses commencing at Northern Territory tertiary institutions and then flowing through into southern universities in due course. Hopefully, in this way, we can commence in a small way at least a stream of Territorians becoming professionals in what is a very exciting industry for the Northern Territory and one which has a very big future.

Major research is done on cropping in the Douglas-Daly Research Station. However, we are working on ways to develop more research capability in the Katherine region. At this stage, we do not have an experimental farm in Katherine. Some years ago, the current Katherine Rural College was a government research farm in that region. However, there is other land available in the region. The department likes to do some trial cropping on land under the control of farmers but monitored and sponsored by the government.

We are also proposing, as opportunities arise, to transfer some of the positions - not necessarily the people, depending on their wishes - in our horticultural section from the Darwin region to the Katherine region because there is a need to boost resources in the Katherine region. We will be doing that within the resources of the department by relocating positions within our structure.

The government recently launched the 'Territory Fresh' sticker, a small sticker which has been developed for retailers to place on quality Territory produce as it reaches the shelves of shops and supermarkets. This sticker is to be used by those retailers solely on top quality local produce. We are trying to identify for consumers in the Northern Territory produce which is produced here. Many Territorians no doubt would not be aware of the very wide range of top quality fruit and vegetables produced in the Northern Territory, particularly during the dry season. Many of them probably think that the goods on the shelves come from interstate. Even strawberries are produced in the Northern Territory on a commercial scale yet very few Territorians would appreciate that fact.

The 'Territory Fresh' sticker is to be used to try to encourage Territorians to buy Territorian and we hope that that will be a big success. It will depend largely on the attention and attitude of retailers. Retailers' shelves can be monitored to ensure that the sticker is placed only on top quality Territory fruit and vegetables. I hope I receive reports if ever the sticker is seen on any other fruit and vegetables or produce that is not of top quality. We would then propose to withdraw usage of the stickers from that particular store. We are the only people printing and distributing them.

As a result of input to the government by the Horticultural Advisory Committee, we propose to establish next year a database of information on prices and quantities of fruit and vegetables that is relevant to Northern Territory growers. Currently, we are gathering information as to how we might go about that in order that Territory farmers will have regular, up-to-date information on the quantities of goods being sold, the demand, where demand can be forecast, and certainly the prices on various interstate markets so they can make sales choices themselves in the Northern Territory. The government is doing a great deal to assist the horticultural industry and the Katherine region will play a big role in this regard.

Restricted Areas Inquiry Report

Mr EDE to TREASURER

Mr Speaker, on our latest advice, the Treasurer is still responsible for racing, gaming and liquor and I refer him to his reply on the Liquor Amendment Bill during the last sittings where he stated that the d'Abbs Report, the Restricted Areas Inquiry Report, was being given the very highest priority. Is it his intention to table that document today or tomorrow and give us the opportunity to debate it during these sittings?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the answer is yes. It will be tabled during these sittings.

Funding for Royal Darwin Hospital

Mr TUXWORTH to MINISTER for HEALTH and COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr Speaker, in view of the fact that the federal Minister for Community Services and Health has taken a very difficult and arbitrary approach towards the Northern Territory's licensing of the hospital, has the minister received from the federal minister any undertaking at all that funding to the Royal Darwin Hospital - and I am talking about the base funding for the operation of the hospital - will not be cut or affected in any way as a result of the Northern Territory government's diminution of beds and control of beds in that hospital?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the agreements relevant to funding the Royal Darwin Hospital were put in place in February 1984 and, in fact, expired in June 1987. Despite the information the opposition has been fed through Dr Blewett's office - obviously originating from persons up here in the health area who have a particular aim in mind - there has been ongoing negotiation at departmental level for the renegotiation of that funding for this year. In fact, the previous agreement has been extended by negotiation to June or July of 1988. The reason for that extension was to enable negotiations relating to changes resulting from the private hospital to be taken into consideration and an appropriate funding level finalised. We did not have a specific written agreement from the minister as to what the funding would be in the future. Obviously, it is still under negotiation. We did have full knowledge at officer level of the negotiations and the financial agreements at the time. They are in place. Renegotiations are under way and the department has always been fully aware of that.

Pearl Shell Resources

Mr HARRIS to MINISTER for INDUSTRIES and DEVELOPMENT

Can he advise when the untapped pearl shell resources in the Northern Territory waters will be exploited?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to inform the Assembly of those details. The re-exploitation of the pearling industry in the Northern Territory has been under examination for some time. As honourable members will be aware,

25 years or more ago, the Northern Territory had quite a substantial pearling industry. Before we opened it up once again for export, we wanted to be careful that we did not fall into a trap, as has happened in some other fisheries such as the northern prawn fishery and the barramundi industry, where the numbers of licences issued placed such a strain on the resource that governments were forced to buy some back. In the case of the pearl industry, the same principles apply. The resource renews itself naturally and can sustain a certain degree of harvesting without affecting the base resource.

A working group of Commonwealth and Northern Territory officials has now provided a draft development plan for the pearl industry. The Commonwealth is very much involved in this process because it has constitutional control over coastal waters from 3 to 250 miles offshore, which is the zone wherein most of the pearl resources will reside. The goal of the development plan is to develop a pearl culture in the Northern Territory based on shell collected in waters adjacent to the Territory. The plan has been accepted in principle and the Commonwealth minister has been requested to confirm that he is prepared to enter into the administrative arrangements necessary for the Northern Territory to administer that offshore area on behalf of the Commonwealth, in respect of the pearl shell industry. I am pleased to advise honourable members that the federal minister indicated yesterday that he is prepared to approve the pearl shell development plan and to allow the Northern Territory to administer that particular fishery.

A package of information and a draft advertisement have been prepared and will form the basis of an invitation to prospective participants in the pearl shell industry in the Territory. There are 2 current licences for the taking of pearl oysters in the Commonwealth waters off the Northern Territory. These licences will terminate at the end of this calendar year. No doubt, those operators will reapply for the more permanent licences which will be issued next year. The closing date for expressions of interest is proposed to be 15 February 1988. A date has been determined for selection of participants and licensing will take place on about 15 April 1988.

I am sure honourable members will join me in closely watching the development of the pearl industry in the Northern Territory. Licensees will be able to take some mother-of-pearl, as the shell is known, but the prime purpose of the licences will be the development of a cultured pearl industry in the Northern Territory by harvesting young pearl shell and establishing cultured pearl farms. Honourable members will be aware that we have one successful cultured pearl project here which has been run for many years by the Paspaley family. That particular farm has used young pearl shell harvested in Western Australia. In the future, however, we hope that Northern Territory pearl shell will produce some of the biggest and most valuable pearls in the world, as has occurred with the shell from Western Australia.

Outbreak of Meningitis

Mr EDE to MINISTER for HEALTH and COMMUNITY SERVICES

Is he aware of the outbreak of meningitis over our borders in Western Australia and South Australia? The health service there is conducting a mass vaccination program. What is he doing for the citizens of the Northern Territory in that area? Is he aware that the ceremonial travel from that area up through central Australia is about to start and therefore the matter is of some urgency?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I am aware of all of the matters that the honourable member has mentioned. I have called for a full report from the department.

Site of New Dam for Darwin

Mr FIRMIN to TREASURER

Has the government determined where the new water reservoir for Darwin and its environs will be built?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, as members would be aware, the question of where to build a new water reservoir for Darwin and to serve the needs of the budding horticultural industry and the aquacultural industry has been around for some 10 years. In the last several months, I have talked to various resident groups in Adelaide River, Batchelor and Berry Springs and put to them the options available to government at some of the sites that have been identified for the development of such a facility.

The first preference was for the dam to be built in the Batchelor region and I had a meeting with the Batchelor residents. Engineers from the Power and Water Authority worked very hard to produce a feasibility study for the development of the reservoir in that particular catchment area. I can inform honourable members that I have taken to Cabinet this week an interim report on the proposal to build the Batchelor dam and the results of that report suggest to me that the Batchelor dam should be deferred and that the Warrai dam at Adelaide River should be investigated as the preferred option.

The issue there is whether or not it is feasible in terms of engineering to develop a dam in that particular region. There is also another issue which needs to be resolved in that there are 2 sacred sites in the Warrai Valley. Of course, we have commenced negotiations with the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority to address the issues involved with the sacred sites in that region. I can inform honourable members that Power and Water Authority engineers will be out in the Warrai Valley. We have the advantage of having some core samples that were taken from the region in 1980-81 and we will be reporting back to Cabinet at a very early stage on the development of the Warrai dam and the 2 issues that have been identified: whether or not it is feasible in terms of engineering to build the dam in this location and whether or not the issues involved with the sacred sites in that area can be resolved. I am anxious to bring this to a head and to make a decision because it will affect several investments in the region. Many millions of dollars have been invested at Tumbling Waters, Acacia Gap, the Marrakai Crossing area, the Finnis River, Batchelor and the Adelaide River area.

I have said in this Assembly, in reply to a question from the member for Koolpinyah, that the government is aware of the rambutan plantations and the pastoral improvements that have occurred in the region of the proposed dam site at Batchelor. The Warrai dam site involves another problem. There are exploration licences over that particular region and we are having discussions with the Department of Mines and Energy and the miner involved so that he may start drilling to determine whether there are minerals to be exploited in the area before we flood it. We are also talking to Bill Doyle from Camp Creek who would be the landholder most affected in that area.

As I said, I am keen to bring this matter to a satisfactory resolution as fast as I possibly can because of the the possible effect on the livelihood and investments of people. Many people are now refraining from further development in the region as a result of the government's announcement that it would look at potential dam sites in the area. Nobody wants to build a new house only to find that it will be under 30 ft of water shortly afterwards. I am anxious to come to a decision on this issue to allow development to proceed as quickly as possible. I will keep the House fully informed on developments in this matter.

I would like to thank the people from the Department of Lands and Housing and the employees of the Water Directorate for the haste with which they are addressing this issue. It is to their credit that they have been able to assemble the interim report and present it to Cabinet in such a short time. Although it is some 30 days outside of the time frame which I outlined in an undertaking at the Batchelor meeting, sometimes ministers are a little impatient and attempt to resolve issues faster than is possible. I believe that both the Department of Lands and the Water Directorate have pulled all stops out to address this particular issue. I congratulate them and I appreciate their efforts.

Proposals to Dam Elizabeth and Blackmore Rivers

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH to MINISTER for MINES and ENERGY

In his answer to the previous question, the minister mentioned proposed dam sites that were being investigated. Could he tell me if investigations are to be carried on in relation to constructing a dam at the mouth of the Elizabeth River or at the mouth of the Blackmore River at Haycock's Reach?

ANSWER

Honourable members may be aware that, many years ago, one Phil Purich was in charge of water resources in the Northern Territory. He was very innovative and carried out many water projects in the Northern Territory. The member for Koolpinyah is very close to him.

The proposal to dam the Blackmore River at its mouth, where it is very wide, was discussed some 15 years ago. Another proposal which the Department of Lands is currently investigating and which would be of some benefit, although the people of Palmerston may desire some compensation, is the damming of the Elizabeth River. Given adequate compensation, I am sure that the people of Palmerston would be only too willing to allow that dam to go ahead. It could have a dual function as both a water supply and a recreational lake and the department is examining that. I am unaware of the status of the Blackmore River proposal but I know the investigation of the Palmerston proposal is well-advanced. It would also provide fresh water in a very short time indeed. I understand that salinity would practically disappear in the first year or perhaps 2 years.

Of course, detailed feasibility studies would be carried out before such a dam was built. Filtering and pumping stations would be required and these cost \$22m to build, with electricity costs of about \$750 000 per year. There would also be investigation of possible uses for the foreshores of any lake which was created. I will obtain information for the member for Koolpinyah on the work that was carried out some 15 years ago by Mr Kingston in relation to the Blackmore. I would also like to re-examine those proposals myself. I hope that the Blackmore option could also be looked at in terms of its feasibility and cost-effectiveness in providing water for the people of Darwin.

We need to make a decision on a dam proposal for Darwin. I believe construction would have to commence in approximately the mid-1990s to enable us to meet potential demand. The Department of Lands and Housing is looking at a dam which is an 85-year facility able to cater for a population of 1 million. Honourable members may think that we are looking too far into the distant future but I believe it is a visionary approach. Our immediate short-term needs, however, have to be met by the mid- to late-1990s. Any proposal that can cater for those needs should be fully investigated. The disadvantage of both the Elizabeth and Blackmore Rivers, of course, is that it would not be possible to release water downstream for horticultural use although it may open up some possibilities for aquacultural use.

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

Mr HARRIS to CHIEF MINISTER

Is the Northern Territory government making a contribution to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and, if so, is he able to indicate what the amount of that contribution will be?

ANSWER

I can advise the honourable member that our government has been approached by the Commonwealth government which has proposed a cost-sharing arrangement whereby the Territory would provide instructing solicitors and support staff to the royal commission. It would be premature to commit the resources contemplated until such time as the extent of the inquiry is known because of the possibility of the commission being over-resourced in the Territory. The Territory will provide court facilities and also reporting facilities if required, but it is considered inappropriate that the Territory meet the cost of providing transcripts. The Territory will bear the cost of its officials required to appear before the commission and does not consider the Commonwealth responsible for providing legal assistance to Territory officials.

The Territory government welcomes the commission and believes it can achieve much in addressing the concerns that all Australians have about this particular problem. As to the specifics of the dollars associated with the cost, these are matters which have not been finalised between the Commonwealth and ourselves. Cost-sharing arrangements between the states, the Territory and the Commonwealth will resolve themselves over the next few weeks.

Darwin Private Hospital Fees

Mr SMITH to MINISTER for HEALTH and COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr Speaker, Mr Russell Schneider of the Voluntary Health Insurance Association of Australia said this morning on ABC radio that the Darwin Private Hospital charges are much higher than in many other places in Australia. He said:

And I am of the view it would be cheaper for my members to fly their sick contributors to Adelaide or Brisbane, have them treated there and then fly them back. And maybe we will look at doing that.

Has the honourable minister involved himself in discussions with the Darwin Private Hospital on the setting of its fees and is he satisfied that appropriate fee schedules have been established by the Darwin Private Hospital?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the discussions in relation to the private hospital were always based on whether or not the proposition was viable. We have a major company in Australia involved in the construction and the management of this particular private hospital and it is its commercial decision that it can run the hospital on a profitable basis. Obviously, there has been considerable concern about the charges that will be implemented by the private entrepreneur. Negotiations have been continuing with the various insurance companies so that the gap between the amount charged by the hospital and the amount recoverable from the insurance company is down to a reasonable level. I am advised that the level is now down to about \$10 or \$12 which is the average throughout Australia. At one stage, it looked like being about \$80 or \$90 and that, of course, would not have been acceptable to the consumer. If it were not acceptable to the consumer, he would not go to the private hospital and it would go broke. It is a business matter that is negotiated between the private hospital and the insurance companies and I am sure that they have arrived at an equitable level. The concern for the consumer is that the moiety be no more than \$10 or \$12.

Proposed Amalgamation of University College and DIT

Mr SETTER to MINISTER for EDUCATION

Mr Speaker, my question refers to statements from the federal member for the Northern Territory, Warren Snowdon, about the amalgamation of the University College with the Darwin Institute of Technology. Has the minister received any details of such a proposal?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the honourable member for the question and I certainly hope that honourable members opposite will agree with me when I say that the honourable Mr Snowdon's performance on the matter has been nothing less than farcical. The first I heard of Mr Snowdon's much-vaunted proposal was when he issued a press release after speaking in the House of Representatives to the Students Assistance Amendment Bill on 19 November. In that press release, Mr Snowdon called on the Northern Territory government to carefully consider a federal government proposal to amalgamate the Northern Territory University College and the Darwin Institute of Technology. My immediate reaction was to

ask: what proposal? The Northern Territory government has not received any such proposal from the federal government nor have we received any official indication from the federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training that such a proposal might be on its way.

The matter became a little clearer after reading the speech Mr Snowdon made in the federal parliament when it was revealed that the so-called proposal was being prepared by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission - which I think honourable members would realise is soon to be replaced - for the federal minister who, according to Mr Snowdon, has yet to consider it. I would ask honourable members to consider that scenario for a few minutes. Mr Snowdon is asking this government to consider a proposal that we have not yet received, that we do not know exists and which, apparently, has not even been considered by the federal minister even though, supposedly, he is to put it to us. Obviously, that is a patently absurd statement to have made.

Mr Speaker, let me make something very clear. I am certainly not closing the door on anything the federal government may put to us in this regard. Indeed, I have written to the federal minister asking him to inform me whether or not any such proposal actually exists and, if it does, to send me details as soon as possible. I would like to make it very clear that this government will not accept any proposal which compromises the future of Northern Territory students at either the University College or the DIT. I will repeat that: we will not accept any proposal which will compromise students of either institution.

In saying that, I must express my disappointment and, I suppose, my disgust at the way in which Mr Snowdon has attempted to undermine the basis for any further discussions on the matter. One of the throwaway lines in Mr Snowdon's press release, which he was very quick to abandon, was that students at the University College 'are currently suffering from a lack of teaching staff and morale'. I think the Warden of the University College has very effectively and officially scotched those allegations. Indeed, our teaching-staff-to-student ratios are extremely good. I would also like to point out that the only person who has lowered morale amongst students at the University College is Mr Snowdon himself because he made those comments and accusations during examination time. It is pretty easy to imagine how students would have felt going into quite intense exams when the question of their future had been raised in a statement by the federal member. I reiterate that students at the University College and the DIT certainly have nothing to fear in that regard.

I do not intend to run through the whole history of the issue but I would like to make one point in regard to the amalgamation proposal, and I will quote from Mr Snowdon's speech to the federal parliament on 19 November:

The fact is the Northern Territory government could have had almost everything it asked for, with Commonwealth funding, if it had only agreed to it through the Darwin Institute of Technology, the established tertiary education venue in Darwin. The Territory government was told that, if it placed the university campus at the Darwin Institute of Technology, it would receive the necessary capital funds and that recurrent costs per student would be made available.

It is amazing that that allegation could be made by Mr Snowdon. To say it is 'untrue' would be a massive understatement - 'malicious slander' would be

closer to the mark. In fact, the Territory government was told nothing of the sort. We were told that we could have a maximum of 20 university places at DIT a year, spread over 3 years. Not 1¢ of capital funding was ever offered. I can assure honourable members that, had CTEC suggested that such arrangements could have been put in place for a reasonable number of university students at the DIT - and I remind honourable members that there are more than 200 students presently at the University College in its inaugural year and they are doing courses that are recognised throughout the country as being first class - I would have been very happy to negotiate for joint use of the DIT site. However, CTEC refused to budge from its stance of 20 places or nothing. We went through some rather exciting periods and abuse was heaped on officers of the Territory government by the Chairman of CTEC during that period.

We now see that more than \$7m of federal funding is going towards a building at DIT simply to cater for present demand. That was something that was needed desperately, and it has been catered for. However, that is simply for the students that are presently there and for the administrative needs of that institute. I wonder how much luck we would have had in obtaining another \$5m to put in university-level laboratories at DIT, another \$1m for temporary accommodation for 1 year and funds to expand the library which would have been under extreme pressure.

I reiterate that I am willing to discuss any reasonable proposal that is put to me by the federal government regarding our tertiary education. It is worth noting that, if the Territory had received university funding on a per capita basis equal to the rest of Australia, no more and no less, we would have received \$12.2m this year. Something is wrong when Territory students are not treated equally with other Australians. We are used to it but it rankles and we continue to fight for equality in this country. However, there is no avoiding the conclusion that the Northern Territory federal member has behaved abysmally on this matter. I certainly hope that, in future, he represents Territorians in the federal House and not simply the minority views of certain people in his party who are thousands of miles away.

Recognition of Aboriginals at Arltunga

Mr BELL to MINISTER for CONSERVATION

Mr Speaker, I refer the minister to a letter that appeared in the Centralian Advocate from Irene Sandy and other students at Yirara College expressing concerns that park interpretation at Arltunga does not include any recognition of the importance of Aboriginal people at Arltunga. In that letter, she says:

I think Arltunga history about the miners is all right but it is missing out something. What about the Aboriginal people? They were there before the miners and nothing is said about them in the history. The Conservation Commission should recognise the importance of the Aborigines at Arltunga. It should put signposts and have the Aboriginal history included in the visitors guide and in the pamphlets.

What efforts have been put in train by the Conservation Commission to remedy this shortcoming?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, in my view, the Conservation Commission in the Northern Territory does not have any shortcomings at all. I find its operation generally impeccable. I am not aware of the details of what the member is referring to. However, what I can say is that I am very proud of the Conservation Commission's efforts in restoring Arltunga. In fact, the funding from the Commonwealth government through the Commemorative Program and the Australian Bicentennial Program and the contributions of the Northern Territory on a dollar-for-dollar basis has restored Arltunga virtually to its original status. One of the surprising things about Arltunga today is the cooperation between the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory and the Department of Mines and Energy in restoring and making available certain of the pits and mines in the area for tourists.

I have been to Arltunga several times and I wonder whether the member for MacDonnell has been there several times. From my visits, I am aware of aspects of Aboriginal culture that are there for people to see. In all Territory parks and certainly in areas of historical significance, the Aboriginal people have been recognised. Perhaps what the member for MacDonnell is alluding to is the level of recognition that is given at certain times. If the students of Yirara and the member for MacDonnell feel offended in any way because there may have been an oversight or an omission, in their terms, I am happy to ask the Conservation Commission to examine the matter. However, in doing so, I would officially place on record again that, in my view, the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory is one of the outstanding organisations for conservation of the environment in the Northern Territory and, in fact, in Australia. Everyone involved with the Arltunga project certainly deserves the praise of honourable members here.

Federal Industrial Relations Bill

Mr DONDAS to MINISTER for LABOUR and ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Is it true that the federal government intends to reintroduce the Industrial Relations Bill next year?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, it is my understanding that that is the case. The Industrial Relations Bill is of paramount importance to the Territory and it is appropriate that I advise the Assembly of developments in that area. Honourable members will be aware that the federal Minister for Industrial Relations withdrew the bill from the House of Representatives immediately prior to the July election, and we can all imagine why that was done. I think it is true to say that everybody except the federal government disagrees with and has concern over the provisions and likely effects of the Industrial Relations Bill in its present form. The Northern Territory government is certainly no exception to that. The federal Minister for Industrial Relations has recently advised that he intends to reintroduce that bill in the autumn sittings of the federal parliament next year. I understand the minister has agreed to allow us to put our views forward and we will be making the fullest use of that option.

One area of particular concern to the Northern Territory is the proposal in the bill to amend the Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act. In its present form, the bill seeks to revoke that section of the Self-Government Act dealing with the establishment of those Northern Territory tribunals covering

police and prison officers. I have already written to the minister requesting that that amendment be not proceeded with. There is no doubt that the police and prisons arbitral tribunals have served the Territory extremely well over the years and the federal government has given no reason for the revocation of those tribunals. In fact, it would find it very difficult to give a reason that would stand up.

I have also advised the federal minister of the possibility that there may be further requests for changes to the bill. This will depend on the report from Sir John Moore concerning his examination of the options for a system for industrial relations in the Northern Territory following a grant of statehood. Honourable members should be aware of the importance of any moves by the federal government to change the federal Conciliation and Arbitration Act. The Northern Territory government is specifically precluded by the Self-Government Act from legislating in respect of industrial relations. It follows that the dominant system of industrial relations operating in the Territory is that dictated by the federal act and any changes to it will have a direct effect on the whole of the work force in the Northern Territory. That is not the case in the states because they have control over the arbitral acts in their own jurisdictions. The Northern Territory should certainly be the same. Honourable members can be assured that this government will be extremely vigilant in its scrutiny of the federal government's intentions in this most important area and that it will take every opportunity to protect the Territory's interests in the passage of this piece of legislation through the federal parliament.

High Voltage Electricity Transmission Line

Mr REED to MINISTER for MINES and ENERGY

Can he provide any information on the proposal to construct a high voltage electricity transmission line linking Jabiru, Katherine and Darwin?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I am indeed in a position to advise the honourable member of the latest developments in the proposal to develop 2 transmission lines, one connecting Darwin and Katherine and the other Darwin and Jabiru. Expressions of interest were called for both proposals recently and a short list of tenderers has been compiled. I believe about 5 companies are on the short list.

The line to Katherine is of particular importance to the member for Katherine in the context of recent blackouts there and the opening of the new power station. That new gas-powered generating facility has a 19.5 MW capacity. There is, however, rapid growth in that region. Indeed, the member for Katherine is very privileged to represent such a rapidly growing region and I am sure that, if he had had the opportunity to contribute to debate on yesterday's matter of public importance, he would have been able to tell the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition just what development means in his region. In terms of the development we believe will occur in Katherine within the next 3 years, the new \$33m power station that has just been commissioned will require updating and upgrading. In fact, the generators at the power station are presently operating at 1 MW above their original design capacity. We believe that the 19.5 MW capacity available at Katherine will be exceeded within the next 3 years, at today's rate of expansion. Whilst the contractors who developed the Katherine Power Station went to the trouble of installing an additional pad to mount another generator, there is now some consideration

being given to offsetting the cost of running a line from Darwin to Katherine by not proceeding to mount that fourth generator. That will considerably reduce the cost of the line.

There have been some other recent developments along the road to Katherine. These include a proposal to develop a large generating capacity at Cosmo Howley. Indeed, NT Gas has negotiated with Dominion Gold, the operators of Cosmo Howley, to set up a very large generating capacity in that region. There is now a proposal to investigate further the possibility of supplying electricity on a grid into the Douglas-Daly region. I know that the member for Victoria River is very supportive of that proposal which would make a big difference to the farmers in the region. I am sure that the Minister for Industries and Development would also be very excited about the possibility of having reticulated electricity in the farm region there. It would open up the possibility for additional mine sites in the area to be linked into the system. I believe that an electricity conduit, together with the pipeline, will further open up the Pine Creek district to mining ventures.

The next century will be about energy and people who have energy at a price will be in front as we pass the year 2000. The Territory is very fortunate in having the opportunity to be in that position. It is interesting to note that lead, silver and zinc smelting operations are now being conducted in Europe. That is because of the very low cost of nuclear power which is running at some 2c per kilowatt hour. That is why raw material is being transported to Europe for smelting. It requires a lot of power to melt these base metals down to a state wherein they can be used. The Northern Territory is in an excellent position to be able to provide electricity through its gas and the large uranium resources that it has.

In terms of the line to Jabiru, we have employed a consultant to do an environmental impact statement on the possibility of running a powerline through the Kakadu region to Jabiru to bring Jabiru on line with the Channel Island Power Station. This will provide an additional base load for the Channel Island Power Station and, the more gas that we can burn through the pipeline corridor, the quicker we will reach a point where we can stabilise electricity prices in the Northern Territory. The more electricity we use, the better it is for everybody.

This project is proceeding and the interest in terms of design, construct and finance is extremely high. There is to be rapid development of the region at Jabiru, including the new crocodile motel and the proposed 200-bay caravan park. If Jabiru is to become the hub for tourist infrastructure in that area that, some years ago, the Prime Minister told us it would become, then it will require power. That power can be supplied from Channel Island by running electricity out into that region. The Prime Minister said that he would give us \$70m and honourable members are fully aware of the facts: we received 7 barbecue plates. The order was messed up, Mr Speaker. The consultant is working on the route for the line to enable it to proceed through Kakadu and he will have his environmental impact study report ready very soon. I am hopeful that both projects can start early next year.

Industrial Tribunals and Awards on Statehood

Mr LEO to CHIEF MINISTER

Does he agree with his Minister for Labour and Administrative Services that it would be desirable for the Northern Territory to set up its own system of industrial tribunals and awards to be administered by a Northern Territory body after the achievement of statehood?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I do not agree with the honourable member's interpretation of what the Minister for Labour and Administrative Services said. If he is seeking a clarification of my view and the view of our government, I will give it. Whilst we believe that, on the achievement of statehood, the equivalent powers in respect of industrial relations that apply under the constitutional arrangements between the Commonwealth and the states should apply, that does not necessarily mean that, in the administrative or organisational arrangements, there should be a separate tribunal. That can be done by way of a combined commission of the Commonwealth and Northern Territory. A considerable amount of preliminary work has been done on the practicalities of that sort of a structure. As the honourable member will be aware, Sir John Moore, the retired immediate past president of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, is working as a consultant for our government preparing an options paper for consideration on the whole industrial relations powers question. As I said at the last sittings, we anticipate some results from his consultancy early next year.

We anticipate that there would be a combined commission of the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory. That would certainly be the most attractive option financially. In terms of the practical operation of the industrial relations system in the Northern Territory, it would overcome many of the difficult problems, such as the Moore and Doyle case issues and the jurisdiction-jumping and competing jurisdiction problems that the states are plagued with. Those are matters we would like to avoid and certainly would be determined to avoid so far as the Northern Territory is concerned. I am aware, as I know the honourable member is aware, that all participants in the industrial relations community - employers, the trade unions and the tribunals - are of a similar view.

Crop Contract Scheme

Mr POOLE to MINISTER for INDUSTRIES and DEVELOPMENT

Now that the government has announced the details of its Crop Contract Scheme for the coming cropping season, what is the extent of plantings proposed for this year?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to advise honourable members of the crop plantings for the coming year because it is an interesting story and one which accords with projects across the Territory in that it is a story of growth. The estimate for cropping in the year 1987-88 will be approximately 10 010 ha. Compared with the 1986-87 figure of 7816 ha, this represents a 28% increase. I will give brief details of the crops being planted on those 10 010 ha which I am sure will be of interest to honourable members.

150 ha of peanuts will be planted as compared with last year's figure of 440 ha. The area of production of peanuts, in particular, will be reduced considerably for a number of reasons. There were a couple of bad experiences with peanuts in the last cropping year, as honourable members may have been aware. We had a bad year generally, seasonally at least. 1900 ha of maize will be planted. This is a marked increase over last year's production of 1187 ha. This increase should provide sufficient grain for the Northern Territory market and is in line with a conscious effort to provide more maize for the stockfeed industry. Of this area, 930 ha are covered by the Crop

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ERRATUM

The following 3 questions and answers were omitted from the printed version of the Parliamentary Record. They should be inserted at the end of Questions for Thursday 26 November 1987.

Any inconvenience resulting from this omission is regretted.

Editor of Debates
4 August 1988.

Upgrading of Drains

Mr COLLINS to MINISTER for LANDS and HOUSING

My question relates to a matter I raised in the adjournment debate last night. Will he consider a staged program for the upgrading of drains in Territory towns to a standard at which local councils will be prepared to take over their maintenance and management?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the member for Sadadeen has raised an issue that is of special concern to me, particularly in the Alice Springs area. The drains referred to are the responsibility of the Northern Territory government until they are upgraded to a standard sufficient to allow local governments to take them over.

I am pleased to inform the member for Sadadeen that funds have been allocated in this year's budget for the Department of Lands and Housing and certain upgrading work will take place on a priority basis. The Bradshaw drain will be upgraded first, followed by the Larapinta drain, followed by problem areas in Sadadeen. That, of course, is no reflection on the member for Sadadeen. It is a genuine coincidence because the drain in Sadadeen is by far the most modern and requires the least amount of maintenance.

The Larapinta drain is of the greatest concern to me. In fact, only last week, I directed that certain urgent works be undertaken at the junction of Larapinta Drive and the drain because of the large amount of water that had accumulated there. I must admit that that action occurred as a result of a direct representation to me by the member for Araluen who expressed considerable concern about the long grass and mosquitoes breeding in the water that had collected around in the drain. Mr Speaker, you would be very much aware of the problems experienced in Alice Springs during times of heavy rain and major flooding. Those problems need to be dealt with as a matter of some priority, particularly in the Alice Springs area.

I am not aware of any significant concerns in any of the other major communities throughout the Territory. However, to take on board the question from the member for Sadadeen, I will certainly ask the Department of Lands and Housing to investigate the matter. In due course, I will report to the member for Sadadeen in writing.

Statistics on Visitor Numbers

Mr PALMER to MINISTER for TOURISM

Can he advise of any statistics he has on visitor numbers in the Northern Territory so far this year and the revenue derived from that source, and is he able to advise whether the target of 1.1 million tourists by 1991 is still achievable?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, following a preliminary survey, we announced a figure of 762 000 visitors to the Northern Territory this year. That figure has been revised downwards by the small number of 25 000. It has been very difficult to quantify the amount of money that contributes directly to the Territory economy. However, estimates put the amount at close to \$300m. I can say that

the average growth rate in all areas of visitation to the Northern Territory is 15%. That applies to both international and domestic tourists and, incidentally, happens to be some 5 times the national average.

I believe that many factors will contribute to an ever-increasing number of visitors coming to the Northern Territory. Of course, one reason is that, in the Top End, we have yet to experience the full overseas impact of 'Crocodile Dundee'. People are still arriving on the east coast of Australia and, because of the cost and lack of services, many of them are only going to Ayers Rock before exiting through Sydney or other east coast ports. In discussions that I held in Sydney prior to departing overseas, a group of some 20 wholesalers advised me that they were reorganising completely their itineraries and programs.

Traditionally, whether we like it or not, most tourists have 4 major images of Australia: Ayers Rock, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Opera House and the Barrier Reef. Most visitors to Australia spend 2 nights in Sydney, transfer to Ayers Rock, then to the Barrier Reef and then exit. Anybody who has tried to obtain a room in Sydney during the last 6 months will realise that he will be required to pay between \$190 and \$240 per night for a room. That cost is having a major impact on the visitors into Sydney. The planes are full and an extra 7 services are booked into Australia. I think Qantas recently leased 2 jumbo jets overseas. That means that the pressure on Sydney will become unbearable.

For 6 months of next year, it will not be possible to get near Brisbane because of Expo. All of the itineraries are being redeveloped so that there will only be 1 night in Sydney. That means that places such as Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Alice Springs and Darwin will benefit. That is one small aspect of the reason why I believe that the target of 1.1 million visitors to the Northern Territory by 1991 will be achieved.

In addition to that, we have not experienced a full year of traffic on the newly-sealed south road. We have not yet had finalised the possibility of 1 or 2 international flights into Darwin in 1988. As a result of negotiations being undertaken by the Minister for Transport and Works, there is a very strong chance of more flights, particularly since Qantas and Singapore Airlines have reached agreement on extra services into Australia.

One thing that I found outstanding in my visit overseas, both in America and major countries in Europe, was the staggeringly high profile of the Northern Territory as compared to the rest of Australia. We promote and market the Northern Territory overseas as 'Australia's Northern Territory'. Thus, we definitely identify with Australia. We are not very parochial as yet. Unless one goes overseas and talks to people, it is difficult to grasp the full impact of the 'Crocodile Dundee' film. In every briefing that I had with tour operators and the press, what was on their minds was 'Crocodile Dundee'. I believe that, once 'Crocodile Dundee II' hits the market, we will have another rush. Let us hope that, in the interim period, most of the infrastructure that will obviously be needed to handle these people can be developed.

There is some hope on the horizon that finally the airport facilities within the Northern Territory will be recognised by the federal government as being a very important link in the national tourism network. One of the most important things that I found during my trip was the untapped potential of the east coast of America. Of some 20 wholesalers in Los Angeles, for example, nearly every one has transferred a subsidiary operation to New York and

Toronto, and that is seen as one of the fastest growing areas of tourism, particularly to Australia. The Northern Territory Tourist Commission is addressing that as a matter of priority. Unfortunately, Queensland, which happens to have unlimited dollars and resources, has approximately 16 people in the United States. The Northern Territory has 3 people to cater to 260 million people in America and 60 million people in Canada. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Northern Territory has a far higher profile than Queensland has. That must be vindication of the fine marketing efforts of the Northern Territory Tourist Commission. Certainly, operators in the Northern Territory are aware that there will be an ever-increasing number of tourists.

In conclusion, I will comment on the matter of the bed tax. My visit overseas convinced me how important it is that the Northern Territory government stick to its guns to ensure that the tax is introduced. Wherever I went in America and Europe, praise was heaped on the various governments and organisations that levied these charges on hotels. For example, Colorado raises some \$16m per annum from visitors and every cent goes into a trust fund and is spent on marketing Colorado. I think that our industry needs to become aware that the Northern Territory government has made this commitment, and that it is making this effort to promote the Northern Territory overseas and within Australia with remarkable success. It is only fair and proper that the industry realise that the efforts of the Northern Territory are limited in their funding, and that it should make a small contribution. When it realises that every cent raised through the tourism marketing duty will be spent on marketing the Northern Territory, I think it will see further success for tourism in the Northern Territory.

Prevocational Course in Katherine

Mr EDE to MINISTER for EDUCATION

Is it true that the 4 instructors from the Territory Training Centre Annex at Katherine will not have their contracts renewed at the end of the year and that this will mean the end of the very successful prevocational courses that have been run in Katherine? Of the 10 people completing the course this year, already 7 have jobs.

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I cannot give the honourable member a yes or no answer at this stage because I have made arrangements to meet the federal minister to discuss several matters in relation to federal funding of particularly successful programs which seem to have some financial problems in the rearrangement of the federal Department of Education and Training. I believe that we are only talking about administrative problems. Certainly, I shall be making the federal minister aware that we have a number of successful programs which have been supported by the Commonwealth.

At this stage, there seems to be a possibility that some courses have not been recommended even though they follow the stated line of the federal government and the Prime Minister indicated that there would be extra emphasis on training, especially in respect of Aboriginal people. The courses provided at the Katherine Rural College are excellent. They are rated by the industry as being first class. Every year, every person who has undertaken the course mentioned by the member for Stuart has managed to obtain employment. That indicates not only that the program is working successfully in terms of its educational value, but that it is providing the training that industry requires.

I am most hopeful that we can reach a successful arrangement with the federal government regarding the continued funding of such courses. There are a number of others that are in limbo at the moment because of the changes. However, I think we can sort the matter out. I assure the honourable member that I will be making personal representations in an effort to ensure that that course and a number of others continue to be funded. Quite often, the Northern Territory government is castigated for not being able to provide training opportunities in remote areas. We have programs that are far more successful than the programs that were finally put into place interstate and we must ensure that they continue.