

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

In committee in continuation:

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before we commence, a bit of housekeeping. Apparently, the airconditioners are playing up a little. The crew is working on it as quickly as possible. If it becomes unbearable, we might break a little earlier. However, at this stage I am planning to have a break at about 11 am after the output sessions.

I ask that all witnesses state their name and title, and address everything through the Chair. I ask all members and ministers to address their questions and answers back through the Chair.

MINISTER LAWRIE'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: With that, I welcome the minister and invite her to introduce the officials accompanying her and, if she wishes, to make an opening statement for the portfolio responsibilities of which she has carriage and exist within the Department of Health and Community Services.

Ms LAWRIE: Mr Deputy Chairman, I would like to introduce my Chief Executive Officer, Mr Robert Griew. With us is the Assistant Secretary of Community Services, Rose Rhodes; and our Director of Family and Community Services, Jenny Scott.

As the Minister for Family and Community Services, I will be taking questions on all output groups that relate to Family and Community Services, Aged and Disability Services and Mental Health Services. I will also be taking questions on Alcohol and Other Drug Services from the Public Health Services output.

The budget papers demonstrate that, since 2001, the government has increased the Family and Community Services budget by 98%, from \$88m to \$176m. These extra resources have been used to build the system and provide better health and community services for Territorians. Before I highlight some of the key areas of the budget for 2006-07 in my portfolio, I would like to reflect on our achievements.

In February of 2004, this government launched our vision and priority in Building Healthier Communities, a five-year framework setting the direction for Health and Community Services and providing the foundation for decision-making for our investment. Now we have reached the midway point to Building Healthier Communities. I want to bring to your attention the significant achievements that have been made to date. While there are many competing interests and, at times, overwhelming demands in this sector, this framework has been the touchstone to guide and monitor our activity and performance.

We have introduced the extensive Caring for Our Children reform agenda, leading to increased and improved services to children and families across the Territory. There is now a strong policy framework to guide staff and support the service structure to provide high-quality services for vulnerable children and their families.

We will introduce new legislation, the Care and Protection Of Young People Bill, this year, providing a solid foundation for the future. The strengthening of this program through significant additional funding has, in part, led to a higher community awareness of child abuse and harm, especially in our indigenous communities. The number of indigenous child abuse notifications has doubled, and so has the number of indigenous children taken into care. We have continued to invest in appropriate responses and interventions, where we now have more intensive family support services, a range of innovative early intervention programs, and new models of out of home care guided by the Out of Home Care Strategic Plan, 2006-10. Without this injection of funding and the commitment shown by this government, the child protection system of the previous government would have collapsed under the demands we now face.

Mental Health Services had significant growth in funding each year during our two terms of government, enabling very limited community mental health services to expand, particularly in our remote areas. We have provided an additional nine mental health workers specifically for remote areas since 2003-04, bringing the total of full-time remote mental health teams within the department to 22 people. In addition, funding has been provided to the Top End Division of General Practice and the Tiwi Health for mental health programs. We are now providing adolescent psychiatric services, regular specialist outreach services, better coordination of support for suicide prevention, prison in-reach services, and sub-acute community care packages.

I have initiated a comprehensive review of Disability Services, as I was fully aware of the difficulties faced by this sector for some time. The complexities of delivering disability services in the Territory have been met with innovation as we have introduced the Tri-State Disability Strategic Framework 2005-08, the first agreement to integrate and coordinate services for people with disabilities across the Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory borders.

We have also implemented a trans-disciplinary model of allied health services for remote areas, bringing services closer to people's homes. The introduction of the *Carers Recognition Act* and carers card is imminent and another significant commitment for this government. The implementation of the *Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act* is a leading piece of Australian legislation to guide the management of people affected by volatile substance misuse. The Senate inquiry into petrol sniffing is calling for all jurisdictions to take a legislative approach to this issue, benchmarking our act. This government has committed an additional \$10m over five years, and is now in the second year of its implementation with rehabilitation, treatment and counselling services becoming operational. The government is committed to tackling the harm caused by alcohol abuse and we provide treatment and rehabilitation services to complement the whole-of-government Alcohol Framework.

We have made huge progress in all these areas; however, we recognise there is still more to be done. Budget initiatives for 2006-07 show the directions we continue to take to pursue the improved health and wellbeing status of all Territorians. My colleague, the Minister for Health, has already advised this committee of the expected end-of-year budget result for the Department of Health and Community Services as a whole, as well as giving an overview of the department's budget construction in 2005-06 and 2006-07, which applies equally to my portfolio. Outputs within my portfolio have increased by \$9.9m, or 6% in 2005-06 and, in 2006-07, are projected to increase by \$8.5m or 5%.

Variations in service delivery for a highly complex department such as Health and Community Services are expected to cross all output groups and, often, the explanations for these variations are complex. Budgets for the various programs are adjusted throughout the year when additional funding is made available, or when one-off funding has ceased. The variations contributed are from sources other than the Northern Territory government. Adjustments are also made to reflect corporate overheads for the department.

Two of my output responsibilities are examples of reductions in output funding: support services for individuals and families in crisis was inflated in 2005-06 with the transfer of the Aboriginal Family Violence Program from the Department of Chief Minister to Family and Community Services. There will be a negative variation, \$410 000, in 2006-07, due in part to the cessation of related time limits of Australian government-funded programs.

Alcohol and Other Drugs also show a negative variation of \$918 000, resulting from the cessation that carried forward funds from the 2004-05 Australian government-funded programs, such as the National Illicit Drug Strategy and Remote Communities Volatile Substance Abuse. Many of the Commonwealth grants in this sector have not yet been replaced with other grants; however, they are highly likely to continue but as yet they have not been formalised and we are unable to include them in our budget.

I now highlight some of the Family and Community Services budget issues for 2006-07. There is an increase of \$1.7m to expand the capacity of specialist and foster care; an additional \$500 000 for not-for-profit children's services to purchase additional playground equipment; \$430 000 of new SAAP funds targeted to enable the development of family violence programs and activities in remote areas; \$500 000 for growth in HACC funded services; \$1m to implement the carer's card concessions; a continuation to implement initiatives of up to \$2m to support the implementation of the *Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act*; an additional \$560 000 for new alcohol treatment places referred through the Northern Territory alcohol court; and \$500 000 for community-based residential care services, with 24-hour support for people with mental illness and their carers. I look forward to questions from the committee.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Not on the general statement. There is no need for it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, I will ...

Mrs BRAHAM: If I could just ask one, Mr Deputy Chairman. You talked about federal funding grants being removed. Are you including the Family Planning clinic in that? I believe their funding from the federal government has been withdrawn.

Ms LAWRIE: I will refer that to my Chief Executive Officer.

Mr GRIEW: Robert Griew, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Health and Community Services. The Family Planning service is funded under the Public Health Outcome Funding Agreement from the Commonwealth. There have been issues relating to financial management for Family Planning. We are working with Family Planning to overcome that, including having advanced some money to help them. That is not one of the grants from the Commonwealth that has fallen off; it is a question of us working with Family Planning to work through some issues that they have been facing.

Ms LAWRIE: That actually falls under minister Toyne's portfolio.

Mr GRIEW: Yes, sorry, it is also a Community Health output.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, we can get back to that.

Mr GRIEW: Yes, but that is the state of play. We could provide a briefing if the ministers are agreeable.

Mrs BRAHAM: In fact, the federal government has not withdrawn its funding?

Mr GRIEW: Yes.

Ms LAWRIE: No, as the Chief Executive Officer explained, there are issues with the service delivery itself, so the Northern Territory government is working with the organisation to get their issues dealt with.

Mrs BRAHAM: Perhaps I can speak to you later about that.

Ms LAWRIE: Certainly, the offer for a briefing was put forward, and I am happy to ensure that happens.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, I have a few questions about it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Member for Braitling?

Mrs BRAHAM: No.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Childcare, Early Childhood Development and Parent Support Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output Group 3.0, Family and Children's Services, Output 3.1, Childcare, Early Childhood Development and Parent Support Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Through you, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, you said that Family and Community Services' budget had increased by about 90% over the course of the last five years. Curiously – and while this might be a general statement, more than specific to this group – I see that your performance measures have shown very little increase in services that you provide. For instance, in subsidised childcare places over the last two years at least, the numbers have been around 3300. While you had anticipated it to be 3600 in last year's budget, you did not quite get to the 3600. You tell me that it is going to be only 3300. Where has the money gone, minister?

Ms LAWRIE: A very good question, member for Greatorex. I have to say, this is an area where there has been an underspend because the anticipated new childcare centres did not eventuate. Childcare, as you are aware, is the responsibility of the Commonwealth government, and it has been an absolute disgrace that the Commonwealth has walked away from the provision of childcare centres in regional and remote parts of the Northern Territory. The Commonwealth has a view that childcare is a business; that private operators will enter into the childcare market and set up new centres. This actually does not transfer to the context of the Northern Territory.

Quite specifically, even though the government has worked with Alcan on a business model for a childcare centre in Nhulunbuy to assist with the G3 expansion there, the Commonwealth would not put any capital dollars into the construction of a centre, and certainly no private operator was willing to build a centre at Nhulunbuy. Similarly, the case exists in Katherine as well where a very active group of parents and community-based childcare operators have put together a very good model for a children's precinct, including a childcare centre. No private operators are prepared to go into that model. The Commonwealth

government has walked away from its responsibility of childcare funding. That is where the underspend is, because we anticipated new centres, we funded for those new centres in terms of the subsidy - the new centres did not come along.

Mrs MILLER: Katherine does have a private childcare centre opening this week.

Dr LIM: It appears that the federal government was prepared to fund construction of childcare centres and neighbourhood centres in years past. I am wondering if the minister has been speaking with the federal minister to try to obtain more funding here to enable more construction of childcare centres. Also, whether this minister has encouraged Family Day Care, for instance, to take up childcare places? They were screaming out for this minister to help with funding assistance.

Ms LAWRIE: I have spoken to the previous federal minister who had responsibility in this area, Senator Patterson. I specifically drew her attention to the concerns of the Northern Territory. I have been seeking a meeting with her replacement, minister Brough, who has had other matters on his mind and has not wanted to meet with me yet to discuss childcare. I have met with Family Day Care. The problem for Family Day Care is finding the people able to provide family day care - that is quite a significant issue. There are, obviously, a lot of important regulations for the provision of family day care and that does provide some costs to potential family day care providers to establish themselves. There is a view that, for the federal government's policy direction of announcing some initiatives, its federal budget does not actually meet the need. That has been expressed by all states and territories, by parent groups, and by childcare providers. I am happy to pass this question to my executive officer to provide any additional information.

Mr GRIEW: The additional information I can provide to the committee is that I have met with a member of the executive of the Commonwealth department to pursue the minister's policy discussion with the Commonwealth government. The key issue, I guess, is a difference in position where the Commonwealth no longer provides capital funding in its childcare program. It is the subsidy program which is one of the significant barriers we are finding to the establishment of childcare centres in the Northern Territory. We had a good meeting and discussion, but there is an essential difference of policy perspective.

Dr LIM: The policy of not building more childcare centres, in fact, only occurred within the last few weeks. You are talking about your underspend of 2005-06 when the policy was to provide childcare centres. Obviously, there has been a mismatch between what you did last year and the federal government's policy this year. What happened there? Having also then identified that you have a major underspend, why did you not provide resources to improve or increase the capacity of people out there in the Territory to provide family day care? You could have capacity building among those people.

Ms LAWRIE: I thank the member for Greatorex for the question. Again, it is curious for him to say how quick the childcare policy has changed in the last few weeks. It is not the case. It has been changing since the 1990s. In fact, we have not been able to secure capital for childcare out of the Commonwealth for the past few years. The argument is not resolved through the states and territories and the Commonwealth over the Commonwealth walking away from its childcare responsibility. It is an absolute disgrace. It impedes economic development right across Australia, right across the nation. For the Commonwealth to say: 'Oh well, it is a private operator marketplace out there now and we are going to bail out of our responsibilities to childcare', is an absolute disgrace. I absolutely encourage the member for Greatorex to talk with his federal counterparts in Canberra, to get into their ear and say regional Australia needs the Commonwealth to continue to meet its commitment to provide capital for childcare centres. We need community-based centres. Yes, there is a role for private operators where they deem to come into the market. There is certainly, as we know, always higher demand than the provision of childcare services.

Family day care is, as I have said, a very important part of the provision of childcare. What parents need is a range of choices and options. They need community-based centres, they need family day care, and they need better tax incentives from the government to pay for their private childcare arrangements that can be either through family or direct employment. There is no one simple solution. Family Day Care is definitely a part of it. In talking to people who are funded in part by the Territory government and in part by the Commonwealth government to coordinate the provision of family day care, what they increasingly are saying to me is, due to the regulated nature of the childcare provision of services in this day and age, it is more and more difficult to secure family day care providers; people who are willing to make the modifications to their homes and to work and operate within a highly-regulated environment now - quite appropriately so; we cannot compromise the care of our children.

The provision of family day care is not as easy and simple as it used to be in years gone past; it is a highly regulated environment. Everything is done by those Family Day Care coordinators to try to secure

people to put their hand up to provide family day care. However, in many communities, the reality is there are very few people are: (a) willing to do it; or (b) have the financial capacity to make the modifications to their home to do it. I welcome the federal government to provide some funding incentives and tax cuts perhaps, or some actual capital dollars for private family day care providers to make the modifications necessary. You would see more entering the system in that way.

Dr LIM: Did the minister negotiate with private operators of childcare centres and demonstrate to them the inducements that the Northern Territory governments, of both persuasions, have provided to childcare operators because, as you well admit yourself, the Northern Territory governments, of all persuasions, have been the only governments, state or territory, that have provided the level of support for childcare places? Have you negotiated with any private operators to bring them in to the Territory?

Ms LAWRIE: The Territory government is going into childcare territory that no other jurisdiction at a state or territory level is doing. What we have done is facilitate private providers into the market where we can, through Children's Services section of the agency.

Specifically, for example, the Territory government put out an expression of interest for childcare providers in Nhulunbuy, and worked with Alcan to entice, if you like, private providers into that childcare market. In Palmerston, we have a very successful relationship with a number of private childcare providers, particularly looking at the availability of land, and have facilitated the availability of land in areas such as Palmerston. There is a working relationship between the agency and the major private provider in the Territory, which is ABC. There have been discussions between the government agency and private childcare providers consistently to try to encourage the provision of more private childcare.

Dr LIM: Moving on, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, in early childhood development and parent support, what services have you provided for the Well Baby Clinics?

Ms LAWRIE: Whilst my CEO is keen to provide information on that, I do have to point out that that is actually a portfolio responsibility of minister Toyne. In respect of the estimates process, I am not going to answer that question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, the minister has declined. Member for Greatorex, your next question?

Dr LIM: It is a pity; this is about Early Childhood Development and Parent Support Services.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The minister has just explained that it is not in her portfolio.

Dr LIM: No, I am making justification for why my question was important. The Palmerston health child clinic, for instance, has a baby drop-in centre. It is to support parents, it is to support a well child. I know that this government has cut back on the services. As the minister responsible for Family and Community Services, I would have thought that she would be the one out there fighting very hard to ensure that the services in the Palmerston drop-in centre continue at the level that people require.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the basis of the explanation by the member for Greatorex, minister, are you prepared to add any comments to what you said before?

Ms LAWRIE: It would be extraordinary for a minister to answer a question on another minister's responsibility.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, I accept that.

Dr LIM: The question then is: minister, did you lobby your colleague, the Health Minister, to ensure that services are maintained at the Palmerston clinic?

Ms LAWRIE: Again, I am not going to answer a question that is appropriate to another minister's output.

Dr LIM: The minister is responsible for early childhood development and parent support. Will she then tell me what she believes is her role in that output group?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have given you a fair bit of leniency. I will ask the minister to respond to that.

Ms LAWRIE: Certainly. My role is to ensure the provision of services that are under my portfolio responsibility. I work closely with the agency to ensure that occurs. I have every confidence in the office of Family and Children; the work they do is fantastic. We have a whole range of innovative services. If you want to get into the area where I actually have portfolio responsibility, I would be happy to discuss them.

Dr LIM: The minister has uttered a lot of words that say nothing about her job. What is her responsibility for early childhood development and parent support?

Ms LAWRIE: As the member for Greatorex is aware, we provide childcare subsidises; a one-off grant to improve playground equipment at childcare centres; and a range of what we call intervention services to support families in crisis - but that actually falls under another output group. I am sure we will get on to it so I can provide a full list of those.

Dr LIM: Minister, I read this out to you from page 114 of Budget Paper No 3:

Child Care, Early Childhood Development and Parent Support Services

Policy advice, quality promotion and financial assistance to children's day care for working parents and parents participating in other activities, for children's early learning and development activities, and for parenting information and education.

Is that not part of the role of the Well Baby Clinic at Palmerston?

Ms LAWRIE: Under that output group we fund fun buses, Parent Line, and information to parents, more of a preventive nature. However, as I have stated, Palmerston health clinic is actually the responsibility - the infant health clinic included – of the Minister for Health.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The minister has answered your question very clearly and, if you want to continue this line ...

Dr LIM: Obviously, the minister is not prepared to perform her function.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, that is not what she said. She said it was not her area of responsibility.

Ms LAWRIE: No, not at all, member for Greatorex.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I ask you to move on to the next question, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: No further questions for this output group.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Looking at Early Childhood Development, do you give grants to any associations such as the Toy Library or Tangentyere. Could you tell us what grants you have given?

Ms LAWRIE: Thank you, member for Braitling. Yes, we do have a quite intensive grants program. It is an area that I have shown particular interest in as minister. I know how important the provision of those grants to small organisations to deliver services at the community level are. For the specific information, I will pass on to my CEO.

Mrs BRAHAM: Would it be possible to have the list of grants tabled?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question, minister, to ...

Ms LAWRIE: I will just get the list first, Mr Chairman.

Mr GRIEW: Robert Griew, CEO. We can provide the committee with a list of the grants provided under that program. It is quite an extensive list of organisations. It would be probably better if we were to take that question on notice and then table the ...

Ms LAWRIE: We can run through some of them for you, if you would like.

Mr GRIEW: Or if you like, we can provide some.

Mrs BRAHAM: So you could table it any way, to save us running through?

Ms LAWRIE: I do not know if it is in a format detail.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to take that question on notice?

Mr GRIEW: We can take that question on notice and provide the table. It is just that it is mixed up with a whole lot of other data, so ...

Ms LAWRIE: Some of them, for example, are as I have mentioned. We fund Toy Libraries in centres throughout Australia, Parenting Puzzles Service for Darwin Family Day Care, parenting support services, relief staff schemes for early childhood associations, and a lot of training for early childhood intervention.

Mrs BRAHAM: What about the Yuendumu childcare centre? Do you make any contribution to that?

Ms LAWRIE: We are funding into the Safer Families at Tangentyere, and ...

Mr GRIEW: They receive their childcare subsidy as well.

Ms LAWRIE: We will get a format of a table specifically to grants in this area and provide that to you. I can either take it as a question on notice or provide it to you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, that will clarify it, because you do fund the Safer Family programs.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, will you take that question on notice?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, we will take it as a question on notice.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, for the purposes of Hansard, could I ask you to repeat the question?

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you give me a list of the grants that you have given to different organisations in the area of early childhood and childcare?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate it No 6.1.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, minister, can I talk about Family Planning now? Is this the area?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. This is Early Childhood Development.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, but it is family and parent support also.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That may come under parent support questions.

Ms LAWRIE: I want to restate what I have said earlier, that Family Planning is under the Public Health portfolio responsibilities of minister Toyne, which is why I indicated that the CEO would be happy to provide you with a brief. Clearly, you did not get a chance to ask that of minister Toyne previously.

Mrs BRAHAM: I thought it was under Family and Community Services.

Ms LAWRIE: No, it is not. It is under the Public Health output, which is the responsibility of minister Toyne.

Mrs BRAHAM: I just want to flag the fact that there is concern, in Alice Springs in particular, that pap smears will no longer be done at Family Planning. We are wondering where the register that has been there for about 30 years will go. Yes, I will take up the offer to have a briefing - particularly as we have the CEO of Health here, I thought it might have been appropriate for him to respond.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, but we are trying to get through Community Services, member for Braitling.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions, member for Braiting?

Mrs BRAHAM: No, Mr Deputy Chairman, that is okay.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Ms CARNEY: Well, just a point of clarification, Mr Deputy Chairman. Questions, page 114 Budget Paper No 3, the output group here is Family and Children's Services and its assistance to families, would that be under 3.2 or 3.3?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will seek clarification.

Ms CARNEY: I am suspecting 3.2, but it could be 3.1, so I just do not want to lose the opportunity to ask it.

Ms LAWRIE: We are currently on 3.2.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will seek clarification.

Ms LAWRIE: It is up to the Chair to tell us which output we are on.

Ms CARNEY: You are never backwards in coming forwards. So ...

Ms LAWRIE: I am not running the estimates process here, Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Chairman is. I respect his right.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I ask the minister, which output do you feel it comes under, if it comes under any output at all?

Ms LAWRIE: What, Family Planning? I have already clarified that it is Public Health.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, the question that the Leader of the Opposition raised?

Ms CARNEY: Have a look at the budget paper, output group Family and Children's Services. It says, '... assistance to families, individuals, communities to provide for the care ...'.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are we referring to Family Planning?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, we are just getting a clarification on that.

Ms CARNEY: My question is: is it output 3.1, 3.2 or 3.3?

Ms LAWRIE: All of the above.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so you do not care where I ask it?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is fine.

Ms CARNEY: In that case, I will ask it now. Very good, okay. Minister, although it is not replicated in the running program, if you like, for budget estimates, as I said, this output group says, '... assistance to families, individuals, communities to provide for the care and protection of children, young people ...' etcetera. It goes on to say: 'Services include: Children's Services, Family Support Services, Child Protection, Substitute Care, Adoption Services, Domestic Violence Services ...' and so on. I wanted to ask you some questions in relation to the Domestic Violence Services. That is the context.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, Domestic Violence is Output 3.2. We can either ask it as a general or go to 3.2.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are about to move on to 3.2.

Ms LAWRIE: We were just about to hit 3.2. Okay, let us move to 3.2.

Ms CARNEY: I do not really care where I ask it as long as I ask it, hence my ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. That concludes consideration of output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output Group 3.2, Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, my colleague ...

Dr LIM: Well, you have lost me there, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will come back to you if you like?

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, I am happy to ask the question. Minister, my questions are about domestic violence. On 22 June 2004, the Chief Minister said:

When you look at figures like the ones produced by the Office of Crime Prevention on the level of - and I would argue that it is not really domestic violence, it is assault.

She went on to say:

But just let me say that the issue of what we call domestic violence is one that needs to be tackled'.

Minister, the Domestic Violence Strategy provides a definition of domestic violence. This is a long question, but I will finish. The definition in the government's Domestic Violence Strategy, not an assault strategy, says:

Definitions of domestic violence include a wide range of physical, emotional or psychological, sexual, economic, social, spiritual or cultural violent and abusive behaviours which are instigated by an individual to control the victim and often leave the victim living in fear for themselves, their children, and for members of their family.

I have several questions. One is, do you think the Chief Minister understands domestic violence?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, the Chief Minister does understand domestic violence. The Chief Minister has been very supportive of improving our approach on tackling domestic violence. As the Leader of the Opposition would be aware, it has been a whole-of-government approach. It does not just involve the area for which I have responsibility. It involves reforms that have occurred in the provision of police services, the special domestic violence family units, as well as the justice system. I am quite happy to talk to the specifics of the support services for individuals and families in crisis, which is the Domestic and Family Violence Program for which Family and Community Services has responsibility.

Ms CARNEY: When the Chief Minister says she would argue that it is not really domestic violence, it is assault, would you not agree that that was in stark contrast to not only the title of the Domestic Violence Strategy falling within her department and affecting yours, particularly in relation to what is a standard and universal definition of domestic violence?

Ms LAWRIE: I know the Leader of the Opposition has an obsession with our Chief Minister, but we are actually here to talk about ...

Ms CARNEY: No, Paul Henderson ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, please!

Ms LAWRIE: We are actually here to scrutinise the budget of Family and Community Services. I recommend that we actually get on with that.

Ms CARNEY: In the budget papers, it refers to domestic violence. Your department's and this government's budget refers to domestic violence. Presumably, you are not suggesting that you are not putting any money into domestic violence services. Is that what you are suggesting?

Ms LAWRIE: \$5m.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, right. Therefore, it is more than appropriate that I ask you questions about domestic violence services and, indeed, the Domestic Violence Strategy.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is okay, but not to quote the Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: What input, if any, have you had into this Domestic Violence Strategy?

Ms LAWRIE: The Department of Family and Community Services received the operational aspects of the Domestic and Family Violence Strategy that had been coordinated through the Department of Chief Minister earlier this year. I am happy to go through and explain just what the Territory government is doing in terms of that. We have been working with the Australian government to co-fund and trial innovative approaches to breaking the cycle of violence, with programs ranging from accommodation to education and counselling, to offender programs, with a special focus on our indigenous communities. The Territory government independently funds programs addressing family violence in remote communities. There is an advisory council that is still sitting under the Department of the Chief Minister that provides policy advice.

The Aboriginal Family Violence operational responsibilities moved over from the Department of the Chief Minister to Family and Children's Services program, FACS, during the 2005-06 financial year. Some 38% of Territory SAAP funds in 2004-05 were allocated to domestic and family violence. Domestic and family violence was the main reason for seeking SAAP assistance in 36% of support periods in 2004-05. This compares with the national rate of 21%. Aboriginal women received 71% of support periods provided to women. Aboriginal women came into the urban centres from the remote areas. The Strong Family, Strong Community, Strong Futures program that is indigenous-designed, led and staffed, is currently training family support workers in the remote Tiwi Islands, Katherine East and Alice Springs west communities. This program is funded by the Northern Territory government. Strong Family workers use a strength-based approach to early intervention with local families at risk of violence, abuse and family breakdown.

The Territory and Australian government's Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Agreement provides an integrated family violence service in the Katherine/Borroloola region with the police, FACS and community partners. There is a program for family violence offenders now being rolled out to 12 remote communities. There is development and support of eight remote community patrols focused on preventing local violence; interventions for children exposed to family violence; a school-based counselling and anti-violence education for 12- to 15-year-olds; piloting a method to monitor and respond to changing levels of violence from remote communities; and enhanced accommodation for unaccompanied minors and families fleeing violence in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: Nicely read minister. I will ask the question again. Do you have, or have you had any input into the Northern Territory Domestic Violence Strategy?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is the second time you have asked the question. Minister, do you want to take it for a second time?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I am happy to have this discussion with the Leader of the Opposition. The strategy was developed in around 2002, so the Department of Health and Community Services had full and proper input, as appropriate, into the development of that strategy.

Ms CARNEY: As minister, have you had any input into that strategy?

Ms LAWRIE: I was not the minister at the time, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Ms CARNEY: I will take that as no. When you say the Domestic Violence Strategy was developed in 2002, that is actually not true is it?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to answer that minister? That is a comment not a question.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I am happy to answer that. The advice I have received is that that was devised in 2002. I am happy to refer to my CEO.

Mr GRIEW: I am advised that the current government's Domestic and Family Violence Strategy was released in 2002.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. The current government's Domestic Violence Strategy. Minister, you said the Domestic Violence Strategy was developed by your government in 2002. In fact, the Domestic Violence Strategy and domestic violence strategies have been ongoing from 1994. Correct?

Ms LAWRIE: Well, you can mince words but the ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, you should be precise.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Come on, hang on! Let the minister please answer the question.

Ms LAWRIE: That is fine, I will go on with this charade with the Leader of the Opposition for as long as she likes ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, you should be ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, hang on!

Ms LAWRIE: Quite clearly, I am referring to the Martin Labor government's Domestic Violence Strategy ...

Ms CARNEY: Right! Thank you.

Ms LAWRIE: ... which was developed and released in 2002. I had quite a bit of input into that as a backbencher, but not under my ministerial responsibilities which only occurred in 2005. Charles Darwin University is currently independently evaluating the Domestic Violence Strategy and I look forward to the results of that evaluation.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, do you know where the domestic violence figures are collated and contained in the Territory Crime Statistics that are published every quarter by the Office of Crime Prevention?

Ms LAWRIE: I point out to the Leader of the Opposition, I am here to answer questions pertaining to my portfolio responsibilities. She clearly knows, by the nature of the question, that is the responsibility of the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, do you not know where the domestic violence figures ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is that a statement or a question please?

Ms CARNEY: It is a question, Mr Deputy Chairman. Do you not know whether the domestic violence figures are, that come under your portfolio - here it is page 114 - are published in the Office of Crime Prevention statistics?

Ms LAWRIE: I will repeat that I am here to answer questions pertaining to my portfolio. The Leader of the Opposition can waste as much time as she likes roaming far and wide amongst other portfolio responsibilities ...

Ms CARNEY: The answer is no, okay.

Ms LAWRIE: No, they are your words, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, minister, for the record, the answer was that it lies under a different department. The answer was not no. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Where are the figures for domestic violence collected? Where can they be found?

Ms LAWRIE: I have already gone through the program figures in services that we provide under my portfolio responsibilities. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to find the crime prevention figures on domestic violence, she can look under the category of assaults in Justice.

Ms CARNEY: You obviously agree with the Chief Minister's definition of domestic violence; that is, assault, which is contrary to your own strategy ...

Ms LAWRIE: Do not put words in my mouth, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: ... which is a detailed definition of ...

Ms LAWRIE: Do not put words in my mouth.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, what is your question?

Ms CARNEY: There is no division on that front, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What is your question?

Ms CARNEY: My next question, Mr Deputy Chairman, is: how are the figures of domestic violence collated. Presumably, you would want those figures, because if you are putting in \$5m into domestic services you would want those figures?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, how are they collated?

Ms LAWRIE: It is a question that goes to the crime statistician's role. Again, it should have been directed to the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: You are responsible for the whole budget. I cannot remember what the whole budget allocation for your ministry is. However, domestic violence services is part of your responsibility. That much we agree on. You said that you were injecting \$5m into domestic violence services. Clearly, no government would just pick a figure and throw money. Clearly, the assessment of the allocation of \$5m is based on some sort of data. My question is: where can anyone find the figures of domestic violence?

Ms LAWRIE: I gave you the answer to that previously. Again, we can waste time in you trying to get me to answer on behalf of the Attorney-General. I respect the role of the Attorney-General. I will not be speaking on his behalf. I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that if she has any concerns about the level of my agency's input into domestic and family violence, across government, we work at both Cabinet level and IDC level across the very senior levels of government, with the other agencies involved in the Domestic Family Violence Strategy.

Ms CARNEY: Are you concerned that domestic violence figures are not published in the crime statistics?

Ms LAWRIE: Yet again, I refer the Leader of the Opposition's question to the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: Are you unable to answer that question? Does it not trouble you, minister ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That does not come under ...

Ms CARNEY: Hang on. Does it not trouble you that \$5m from your budget is going into services for which you apparently have no figures?

Ms LAWRIE: I, and the government, have access to all of the relevant data we need to be basing our funding decisions on. As I have explained to you, that is across agency discussions. It is down at both IDC level and at Cabinet level. I am very confident that the \$5m that we apportioned to our Domestic Family Violence Strategy that is delivered within Family and Community Services is appropriate and necessary. In fact, what the Territory government has been doing in the past few years has been putting, on the ground, more programs to support women and children in the terrible issue of domestic violence. We are doing that in partnership with the Australian government. That is quite appropriate. We will continue to do that work.

Ms CARNEY: You said in your answer that you, 'have all of the relevant data'. What is that data?

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

Ms LAWRIE: Again, I have already answered in terms of the data that our service provides. It was in the answer to a previous question.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, could you just repeat that. I missed it. The data that what provides?

Ms LAWRIE: The data that I went through. If you want ...

Ms CARNEY: The data that you went through?

Ms LAWRIE: ... I can go back through that for you in terms of percentages ...

Ms CARNEY: No, that is not data. That is a blurb.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on! Listen to the answer.

Ms LAWRIE: ... and the information that other agencies have that are pertinent to the formation and delivery of our Domestic Family Violence services, which includes other agencies, as you are very well aware, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you are being mischievously non-specific in relation to data. Can you answer this question? Does your government collect any figures about the rates of domestic violence in the Northern Territory?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, and you can ask that question of the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: So, the minister who has responsibility for Domestic Violence Services, to which \$5m of her budget is allocated, does not know the rates of domestic violence in the Northern Territory?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is not what the minister said. Minister, do you want to comment on that?

Ms CARNEY: Do you know about the Northern Territory Domestic Violence Data Collection Project?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. It is as I thought; it is definitely a question that goes to the Department of the Chief Minister's coordinator role – the policy role here. Again, I point out to the Leader of the Opposition, we can waste as much time as she likes, but the portfolio that I have carriage for is a robust and important portfolio, and it would be good to get on with questions relating to my portfolio.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is right.

Ms CARNEY: Indeed it is. I am sorry that you do not feel strongly about domestic violence ...

Ms LAWRIE: That is not true, Leader of the Opposition. That is not true.

Ms CARNEY: ... for which ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Sorry, ...

Ms LAWRIE: I feel very strongly about domestic violence.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please refrain from those sorts of comments, Leader of the Opposition, they are uncalled for.

Ms CARNEY: Can I refresh your memory? Go back to page 114 of the budget paper, that refers to Domestic Violence Services, to which you allocate \$5m. You said, minister, that the – it has changed its name recently, but I believe it is called the Domestic and Family Aboriginal Violence Advisory Council, the one chaired by Jane Lloyd. You said in an earlier answer that your department has had some involvement with that council, did you not?

Ms LAWRIE: I said that that actually falls under the Department of the Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry, okay. However, you said, in any event, that your department had had some input into the Domestic Violence Strategy?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, that is true.

Ms CARNEY: Here is the Domestic Violence Strategy, and it refers to the Northern Territory Domestic Violence Data Collection Project. How can you, on the one hand, say that your department has had input to

this strategy and, then on the other, say that you do not know anything about the data collection project and that I should refer my questions on that matter to the Attorney-General?

Ms LAWRIE: Leader of the Opposition, when an agency has views on a body of work being collected by another agency - in this case, when the Department of Health and Community Services, quite appropriately, has views on work being collected by the Department of the Chief Minister - we put those views forward.

Ms CARNEY: I am not sure that that really was an answer to my question, but I will bat on, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, do you have any idea of the rates of domestic violence in the Northern Territory?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I do, and in discussing domestic violence statistics, I refer you to the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: Your budget has allocated \$5m. You say that you feel very strongly about domestic violence, you provide services to families in crisis. Many families that have domestic violence would probably be described as families in crisis. In this output group, you also provide support services for individuals as well as families in crisis, yet, you are unable to say what the rates of domestic violence are in the Northern Territory. The Attorney-General may well be able to answer that question; the Chief Minister may well be able to answer that question; what I would like to know is, can you?

Ms LAWRIE: As I say, Mr Deputy Chairman, we could sit here and waste a lot of time. I do respect the roles of my colleagues, the other ministers and the responsibilities they have in this area, I will continue to respect that, irrespective of whether or not the Leader of the Opposition accepts that or not.

Ms CARNEY: When it comes to Budget Cabinet early next year, how will you make an assessment as to whether monies for domestic violence services are adequate?

Ms LAWRIE: As I normally make an assessment: I seek advice from my agency.

Ms CARNEY: Does your agency currently have details on the rates of domestic violence in the Northern Territory?

Ms LAWRIE: The agency is able to gather all relevant information it requires in providing advice to me.

Ms CARNEY: Has your agency been able to gather, for budget estimates, all of the relevant information that, clearly, you do not know?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, I know where this is leading. Do you want to take this question?

Ms LAWRIE: No, that is fine. The agency has before it all the information relevant to our portfolio responsibilities. We do not sit here with books for the Attorney-General or the Chief Minister; we are here to discuss our responsibility.

Ms CARNEY: So, minister, I take it from your answer, that you do not believe that you need to bring to budget estimates information relevant to your portfolio, specifically in relation to ...

Ms LAWRIE: That is actually not what I said.

Ms CARNEY: Did it not occur to you that, during budget estimates, given that there is a \$5m allocation to domestic violence, that you would not be asked questions about domestic violence or, indeed, the Domestic Violence Strategy?

Ms LAWRIE: Certainly, you have been asking questions; I knew you would ask questions. I have been providing answers, and providing specific work that we are doing. I could go on if you want and talk about some more of the key achievements that we have done if you are interested in that.

Ms CARNEY: No, I thank the minister. I prefer not to have government spin. My questions, as you and others will observe, have been actually quite specific ...

Ms LAWRIE: Specific to another minister's portfolio.

Ms CARNEY: ... and you have, disappointingly, been unable to answer them.

With the inquiry announced yesterday, do you know whether that inquiry will include a reassessment of the objectives and commitments under the Domestic Violence Strategy in the Northern Territory?

Ms LAWRIE: The Chief Minister has advised that she will be making specific announcements about the terms of reference of the inquiry in the coming days.

Ms CARNEY: So, I take it you do not know?

Ms LAWRIE: My answer is, the Chief Minister has said she will be giving advice regarding the terms of reference of that inquiry in the next coming days. I am not going to pre-empt the Chief Minister's announcement.

Ms CARNEY: Perhaps I will put this to you. Given the inquiry which, not unlike the 20-year plan, the details of which we have not received can I ask whether you would suggest, or prefer, or want, an assessment of the Domestic Violence Strategy to be part of that inquiry?

Ms LAWRIE: I have already advised, Leader of the Opposition, that Charles Darwin University is currently evaluating the strategy.

Ms CARNEY: Would you prefer, want or desire part of this inquiry, which will take six months, to look at the Domestic Violence Strategy and its objectives?

Ms LAWRIE: Could you speak more loudly, I have the flu, so I did not quite hear that.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could you repeat your question, please, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Do you have any view at all on whether the six-month inquiry announced yesterday - and you were there, so you cannot say: 'Oh, it is all the Chief Minister ...'

Ms LAWRIE: No, no! I am happily a part of it.

Ms CARNEY: Yes. Would you suggest that an assessment of the Domestic Violence Strategy be included as part of the review?

Ms LAWRIE: The discussions that I and other ministers are having with the Chief Minister in regard to the inquiry are discussions that are, quite appropriately, confidential at this stage. I am not going to divulge them to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: All right. Well, minister, I will assume that, not only do you not have a view as to whether the inquiry should include ...

Ms LAWRIE: Your assumptions are wrong again.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please do not assume things, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Well, I will ask the question like this: would it not be reasonable for the casual observer to assume that you do not have a view as to whether this inquiry should include an assessment or any form of revision of the Domestic Violence Strategy? Would it also not be reasonable for the casual observer to assume that you, in fact, whilst you have some responsibility for this area, know nothing about it?

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

Ms LAWRIE: I am happy to take that question. Leader of the Opposition, I do know a significant amount about domestic family violence ...

Ms CARNEY: Do you know the rates?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on! Let the minister answer the question.

Ms LAWRIE: I will not be discussing here today discussions that I am having with my Chief Minister and my other ministerial colleagues of the inquiry that the Chief Minister announced yesterday. She can fish all she likes.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister. I think your answer is abundantly clear. I have no further questions on that output.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mrs BRAHAM: I thought I was next!

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The minister responsible, Leader of the Opposition, took that position on this side of the House. I will get to you.

Dr LIM: Minister, I commented earlier about how your budget had increased by 90% over the last few years. Again, I see from performance measures on support services for individuals and families in crisis that the clients accessing crisis support services had remained rather static. With all that extra funding, what have you done with that money?

Ms LAWRIE: I am happy to go through the provision of women's shelters in all major centres. Youth and family crisis accommodation services in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs are funded under this output area. They are SAAP funded. There are domestic violence counselling services in all our main Territory towns, both Northern Territory and SAAP-funded. There are domestic violence community trainees in both Darwin and Alice Springs. There are Family and Community Services workers in Numbulwar, Bawinanga, Galiwinku, Tiwi Health that are Northern Territory funded. We have put in safe houses in Ali Curung and Borroloola. A new Certificate III course in Remote Family Violence Prevention and Early Intervention has been developed under the Strong Family Program we have here, in collaboration with Charles Darwin University. The first 15 students from the Tiwi Islands and the Yilli Rreung region outside Katherine will graduate later this year.

Ninety per cent of community members surveyed reported that Strong Family training and support had improved their ability to address local family violence issues; 50% felt they could now make a big difference in their communities, working with local families at risk. The program is now undergoing independent evaluation, as I said, by Charles Darwin University. In addition, there is a Peace at Home project that has developed a network of service providers to provide support to families in the Katherine region identified as being at risk for future involvement.

Dr LIM: From what you have just said, you are telling me is that you have more service providers and people undergoing training, yet, the number of clients that you service has not moved one iota.

Ms LAWRIE: No, that is not true.

Dr LIM: Surely, at the end of the day, your services are to be delivered to people who are in need because they are in crisis, and your service numbers have not changed.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you wish to comment.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, absolutely. In the performance measures, I am happy to pass over to the agency to discuss in detail with the member for Greatorex in a moment. However, what I will say to you, member for Greatorex, is that the Commonwealth government tried to reduce the funding to our SAAP-funded services. The Territory government fought that, along with the other states and territories. We put in additional funds into SAAP services, which provide the shelters for the women and children who are fleeing domestic violence. Go and talk to the SAAP providers and ask what kind of track record this government has. We are there, we are supportive, we are increasing funding to the services. We are putting in innovative funds as well to expand the reach programs and services we provide. I will pass on to my CEO to discuss the performance measures.

Mr GRIEW: These performance measures cover SAAP-funded services. The key issue of SAAP is, as the minister said, that the SAAP agreement, essentially, requires a substitution of Northern Territory funds for Commonwealth funds, as has happened in most other jurisdictions, not a significant nett growth as a result. There are other services provided under this output that do not fall into the SAAP program. The SAAP program, as you would be aware, has a long history and a lot of work has gone in by jurisdictional officers' working groups over several SAAP agreements now to improve and refine our data collection from SAAP services. One of the challenges now for us, having taken on more services - including services from the Department of the Chief Minister in the family violence area - is to develop equivalent sophistication in

our data gathering. As those services expand, so will clients. But the data that is in front of you is primarily SAAP program data where, as the minister said, we have, essentially, seen a substitution of Northern Territory funding for Commonwealth funding.

Dr LIM: Again, I refer you to the superscript 1 and 2 in Performance Measures.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What page is that?

Dr LIM: Page 114 of the budget paper. Normally, the annotations point to supported accommodation assistance program, but it talks also about crisis support, including accommodation, counselling, general advocacy, financial and employment assistance, etcetera. What I am hearing from your CEO is that it is now all supported accommodation services only. You cannot have it both ways. Which is the right way?

Ms LAWRIE: The services you have just described are all SAAP services. What the CEO did advise you was correct. SAAP services provide a range of services - counselling as well as accommodation services.

Dr LIM: So, these support services you provide are for 3100 clients who are living in supported accommodation receiving counselling?

Ms LAWRIE: Some live in supported accommodation, some live in supported accommodation and receive counselling, some receive counselling. It depends on the individual circumstances as to what aspect of SAAP services they are picking up at that time.

Dr LIM: Please provide a breakdown of the numbers of people who are supported in SAAP-funded premises. Can you provide me with a breakdown across the regions as to how many people you have living and where in the SAAP program?

Ms LAWRIE: At a given snapshot in time?

Dr LIM: Well, that is all it can be.

Ms LAWRIE: I will see if we have that information here.

Mr GRIEW: SAAP clients receive a range of clientele services - people stay for short periods in SAAP accommodation, and SAAP service providers provide services of different kinds. Therefore, a simple overnight census count is not an adequate measure of the performance of the non-government agencies applied to SAAP services, thus, the complexity in providing a snapshot. This data provides the number of clients accessing services over the course of a year. We could probably provide something like that, broken down by service provider agency or possibly by region, but we would have to compile that. That is probably the best summary measure.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: How do you wish to take that, as a question on notice?

Dr LIM: I do not know what is in there, but if you table the document I can look at it and can come back with another question if I need to once I have seen the papers.

Ms LAWRIE: The information that we have here is not collated in the way you framed your request, member for Grotorex. As we have explained, due to the nature of the SAAP-funded services, a snapshot is a difficult picture to present you with in any accuracy. We can provide it, as the CEO has offered. I can take it as a question on notice if you like and provide it at a later date, as the CEO has advised, with the number of clients and services.

Dr LIM: Take, for instance, you fund Red Shield, and in Braintree, talking about Alice Springs, the Northern Territory government is currently developing Stuart Lodge. How many beds are there altogether and how many people are occupying those beds? Surely, you have that sort of data readily at hand? You do not know what you are doing with the money?

Ms LAWRIE: No, no.. The SAAP-funded agencies certainly have data and, from time to time, we have data, particularly in the evaluation of services. We go through a cyclical evaluation of SAAP-funded services to ensure that we are getting good bang for the buck, obviously, for the taxpayer. Therefore, from time to time, we do have data. That is spread across the individual agencies, though at different points in time. Certainly, member for Grotorex, if you are looking for a good handle on how many clients access

which different types of SAAP-funded services, we will pull data out of the system for you. We do not have a collated table of data of that nature here with us. I am happy to take that as a question on notice.

Dr LIM: I am surprised that data is not readily available ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That being so, would you like take that on as a question on notice?

Dr LIM: I will in a minute, Mr Deputy Chairman, if I can address this question to the minister. With your funding through SAAP programs, would those agencies that receive financial assistance from the SAAP program have to report, or at least acquit their funding, and advise you, at least once a year if not more frequently, what they do with the money?

Ms LAWRIE: As the member for Greatorex knows, yes, of course, any agencies we fund need to acquit. As I said in my previous answer, we also evaluate those services. I am happy to get the CEO to talk to you now, specifically around the SAAP data collection that occurs within the agency.

Dr LIM: No, I do not need to ...

Ms LAWRIE: Well, you have been asking the question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on.

Dr LIM: I do not need to hear the description of how the data is collected. I am asking why you do not have it now?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to put the question on notice?

Dr LIM: Let us put the question on notice.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the record, for the purposes of Hansard, again I ask the member to restate your question.

Dr LIM: Minister, could you provide a breakdown of SAAP-funded accommodation places and clients that have been assisted by the SAAP-funded accommodation places?

Ms LAWRIE: Numbers of clients?

Dr LIM: Numbers of clients across the regions at the closed of 30 March 2006. That gives you ...

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I am happy to take that question on notice.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate to it No 6.2.

Dr LIM: In response to an earlier question, you said that your ...

Ms LAWRIE: Just a point of clarification. It will have to be as of 2005. It takes a year to go through. The data collection goes through the federal government then down to us. If you can accept the figures from 2005, we can get those to you.

Dr LIM: Are those figures in the 2005 annual report?

Ms LAWRIE: Not broken down as you have requested.

Dr LIM: Well, okay. I will accept that, because dated data is better than no data at all.

In response to an earlier question, you said that your department provides \$5m for Domestic Violence Services. Can you provide me with the number of clients that you have assisted with that funding?

Ms LAWRIE: I will refer that to my CEO. I point out again, we have the performance measures in there which give you an indication of the numbers of clients. Also, as we have explained in previous answers, that funding allocation of \$5m is not just about people in beds; it is about a range of different services. I refer to the CEO.

Mr GRIEW: We would have to give you the best data we can get from the range of different kinds of services about which that figure was derived. As I have tried to explain earlier, some of the services are part of the SAAP system and, therefore, they have quite good data collection. For other services, we are deriving that figure by taking a proportion of their client load and their effort. The data collection from all of those services is not as sophisticated as the SAAP data collection. We can take it on notice to provide the best estimates that we can, based on the sophistication of data of different parts of the service sector.

Dr LIM: All right, can I place my question on notice?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Will you take that question on notice, minister?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes.

Question on Notice

Dr LIM: Minister, will you be able to provide a breakdown of the number of clients that are supported through this program for domestic violence across the regions?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you happy to take that?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I will take that question on notice.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate to it No 6.3.

Dr LIM: I will leave it at that, thank you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, are you giving us an indication of what services are funded by that \$5m?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, obviously, providing a breakdown of clients you will get a description of the services as well.

Mrs BRAHAM: It is just a bit confusing what is going on. Can you tell me how much you provide to the women's shelter in Alice Springs?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, we will be able to. I will refer that to my CEO.

Mr GRIEW: The figure for that service would be just over \$400 000 - \$404 000 approximately.

Mrs BRAHAM: You are probably aware that quite often the women's shelter cannot cope with the demand. Do you have any plans to expand that service, or do you have any solutions to the way that that can be addressed?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. Part of the problem confronting the SAAP-funded services was the Commonwealth's decision to reduce its funding, which meant that the Territory government had to put additional funding in to cover that reduction in funding, which really did narrow down the opportunity for growth in SAAP-funded services. What is happening is some important discussions are occurring between me and the Minister for Housing around the role that we can take together in terms of supported accommodation across the Territory Housing stock. There is a focus on domestic family violence service provision within the innovative SAAP funding that we have. Those options are there for any organisation that can come forward with innovative models.

One of the reasons why the Commonwealth looked at reduction in funds was that they felt that the old SAAP-funded model of accommodation *per se* really did not get the outcomes the Commonwealth government was looking for. They felt that it kept, if you like, a scenario where people were not getting the life skills required to climb out of the circumstances that they found themselves in. That is the thrust of the

innovative dollars. Obviously, you cannot support people with life skill enhancement if they do not have a roof over their head. Certainly, the Territory government is looking at an innovative approach to the issue of how you provide a range of accommodation options through the transition periods of both short term, medium term and long term, that also provide for the opportunity of the life skills required for the families who have gone through some extremely tough and horrid times, with the aim of ensuring that they do not become victims again and back into the system.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have any plans to build shelters in remote communities?

Ms LAWRIE: Part of the debate around indigenous affairs and the Commonwealth Senate inquiry into petrol sniffing has recommendations that go specifically to the Commonwealth being required to build places of safety in communities. I fully commend that recommendation. It is something that I have been seeking for some time now. The Commonwealth had funded places of safety through ATSIC in the past. When the Commonwealth started to slash ATSIC funds, those places of safety were among the first few programs to be cut. I have been calling for some time now for the Commonwealth to revisit its responsibility on places of safety in our remote communities. I welcome the fact that a bipartisan Senate inquiry recommendation is that the Commonwealth provide, first of all, places of safety broadly but, also, secondly, quite specifically, places of safety for women and children in our indigenous communities. I welcome that Senate recommendation.

Mrs BRAHAM: Can you tell me how many staff are involved in servicing this area of domestic violence?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer that operational question to my CEO.

Mr GRIEW: The greatest number of staff who work in this area work in non-government services. A very small staff - I would have to seek further advice. Our services' staff support the grants program to those services. The other point I would like to make, of course, is that, across the agency there are staff in many of our services who deal day to day with the consequences.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you think there may be a need to put more emphasis and more staff in that area for monitoring what is happening with those grants?

Ms LAWRIE: As I said, I welcome the fact that Charles Darwin University is evaluating the Domestic Family Violence Strategy. That is an important step. Obviously, evaluation by a very credible, independent group of experts is critical in this area. What the government has done, as you heard the CEO say, is fund non-government organisations because we have found that services of this nature work best when they are community-based, community-driven, and community-supported. It is not an area that I would want to take back into government at all. I do not believe that is the appropriate role for government. Our role is quite clearly a coordinating, funding, and evaluation and monitoring role, and we undertake that.

Mrs BRAHAM: With all due respect, I suggest that you also have a role in monitoring the operation of that SAAP program. What I am referring to is, quite often, people in supported accommodation through a non-government organisation may not be getting the services they require, or that organisation may not be hands on.

Ms LAWRIE: I did say we had a monitoring role as well. I agree with you. We do have a monitoring role.

Mrs BRAHAM: But you do not have many staff to do it?

Ms LAWRIE: No. We do have staff to undertake that. We have about six staff across this area in government.

Mrs BRAHAM: Whereabouts?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer to the CEO.

Mr GRIEW: Our estimate is that, across policy, service development and monitoring, and supporting the Strong Family project, we have eight staff working in that broad area. We have three indigenous staff working in the Strong Family program, along with one policy staff member in the SAAP program and three service development officers. My estimate is that that is a sufficient complement for service monitoring

development in a sector of our size. We have a very primary aim here also to minimise the number of back office staff compared to the amount of fixed budget that ends up in service delivery.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes. I just have concerns that because the non-government agency has so many other duties, I suppose, to perform, perhaps some of these people in supported accommodation do not get the service or are not monitored as well as they should be. That is just a comment, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to reply to that comment, minister?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, the concerns being raised by the member for Braitling really do fit with the direction the Commonwealth has taken in its SAAP funding. What the Commonwealth is saying is that they do not want to rest on what has been done in the past; they want to see innovation in the delivery of services by the SAAP funding. That innovation really does go to the quality of the service as well as the life skills people acquire within the service with the support they receive. The concerns the member for Braitling have are concerns that are shared by both the Commonwealth and Territory governments. The Territory government has backed up its concern by tipping far more funding into this area than it has done previously.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is all for now.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? That being the case, then that concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 - Child Protection Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 3.3, Child Protection Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Obviously, we have been under the national and international spotlight for some month-and-a-half, if not longer. What I am concerned about is that there are many children who have been notified to your department for having suffered some form of harm, and you have not adequately resourced your department to ensure that every claim is investigated properly, and they are protected when harm is actually identified. How are you going to explain this to Territorians and to the world?

Ms LAWRIE: I welcome the member for Greatorex's question in this area, because tackling child abuse and neglect is absolutely a priority for the Martin government. After years and years of neglect under the CLP government, we have been building our child protection system, both in funding and resources. The 2001-02 budget for child protection was \$7.8m; it is up to \$32m in this budget of 2006-07. We have increased the number of child protection staff, with 51 new positions spread out across the Territory. They do a wonderful job in extremely difficult and emotional circumstances and we value their very important work.

The work done in reforming child protection in the Territory is borne out by the very sad and tragic statistics. The number of reports of indigenous child abuse has doubled, so has the number of indigenous kids we have taken into our care. Recent initiatives in our reform of child abuse include the establishment of a Territory-wide joint police/FACS task force and, as the Chief Minister announced yesterday, an inquiry to examine child protection issues. I have also asked Charlie King, who is the Chair of the Family and Community Services Advisory Council, to convene a series of workshops across the Territory to engage indigenous men in this very important debate. We need to do more. We need to encourage and assist people in speaking out, reporting any areas of neglect or abuse that they are aware of that is occurring in our community. We have not finished the reforms that we began back in 2003 - those reforms were critical.

Dr LIM: It is about time you stopped the blame game and look after what you have done in the last five years. I have said repeatedly that you have under-resourced your department, and it is this under-resourcing that is causing the problem. Consistently, and I go back to 2003-04, every year you estimated how many notifications you were going to receive and you have, obviously, demanded your department to investigate only half those cases. The figures are there. I have said it to you over and again, you are not providing enough resources. Would you not think there are many cases of child abuse that you do not look at?

Ms LAWRIE: What the member for Greatorex can well appreciate - and this is a tragic situation - is that we believe there is some child abuse that is not notified to either the police or to our agency of Family and Community Services. That is of significant concern to the Territory government. That is why we have

funded initiatives whereby we are going out to communities and saying: 'Do not accept, do not tolerate child abuse in your community'. Initiatives such as the *Shout It Out Loud* DVD that was produced by Warlpiri Media and has been distributed right throughout Central Australia, whereby a Territory government minister, my predecessor, is clearly saying, we do not accept, and nor should anyone in our community, accept the abuse or neglect of children. I encourage the member for Greatorex to have a look at that DVD. It is a very powerful message that has gone out to our communities.

I do want to point that, in the 2005-06 published budget, we allocated \$24.5m to this area of Child Protection Services. We spent \$26.8m. That is an additional \$2.2m over the 2005-06 financial year. For the 2006-07 budget that we are interrogating, we have allocated \$31.6m, an additional \$4.8m on top of 2005-06. For you to sit there and say that we are under-resourcing, when we are pouring extra millions of dollars into child protection, is an absolute joke - when you were in a Cabinet that had \$7.8m for child protection.

Dr LIM: I draw your attention to the figures on page 115 of Budget Paper No 3. If you want to pick up Budget Paper No 3 for the preceding years, you should feel free to do so. I ask you to compare those figures with your annual report figures on page 92 of Annual Report 2004-05. While the figures tend not to be particularly consistent, I demonstrate to you that you have consistently only investigated half the number of notifications of child harm. If you look at the numbers of children taken into care each year, minister, they have remained relatively static at about 450 to 470. There are a whole bunch of kids out there who are suffering child harm who are not investigated or not taken into care to protect them from all the abuse that is going on out there.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you wish to comment?

Ms LAWRIE: Absolutely, I am keen to comment. Member for Greatorex, you have deliberately misinterpreted, time and time again, publicly, this issue of investigations. Again, I will put it on the record. Every notification that occurs to Family and Children's Services is investigated. It is an issue of terminology. FACS's Child Protection Services describe all of those notifications as assessments. That is an investigation in any term, it is an assessment in the agency's term. Senior FACS staff do the intake and the assessments of those notifications. They make professional judgment over whether there is enough evidence to warrant going on to what the agency describes as investigation, which is about half of the notifications that come through. I am happy to refer again to my CEO to take you through that process so that, hopefully, once and for all, you finally get it.

Mr GRIEW: The process is - as the minister says with slightly different language and slightly different policy guidelines - essentially, the process across Australia in different jurisdictions. We all have intake functions in our Child Protection Services. Notifications are all noted. Some form of desk assessment is required to decide which need to go on to a full-blown investigation, and those investigations are assigned different categories, not unlike a triage system. They are then handed to the case workers who go and do the full-blown investigation. It is those full-blown investigations which are the statistics we report. There is no sense in which the agency does not take a notification to an investigation because of a resourcing issue; it is about the assessment of relevant priority.

Dr LIM: I draw your attention to this program, *Lateline*, of 22 June 2006, that is last night, where Dr Geoff Stewart was interviewed - was it last night or the night before?

Mrs BRAHAM: Night before.

Dr LIM: He said that he repeatedly notified the authorities about the patient and her baby. When he was interviewed he said: 'Yes, absolutely, there's mandatory reporting legislation ...', etcetera, and he repeatedly reported this case. What happened? 'Well, it was the classic brick wall scenario', he said. '... I would literally have stand-up arguments with people trying to insist that they play an active role in the situation at hand and often have to remind FACS of their responsibilities under the act'. What did he get? He got stonewalled, or brick-walled. Obviously, there are cases, minister. You have to admit that this is at least one case where the child was not investigated - not at all. How many more are there?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you wish to comment on that media report?

Ms LAWRIE: I am happy to take this question. I point out to the member for Greatorex - and please, in no way does this absolve the responsibility that the government has now to ensure that we are tackling child abuse - that I want to put that in context. The context is, on the advice I have received, that was in the period of 2002. The reason I am raising that is, it was prior to the significant reforms that were made in

child protection in 2003 by the Martin Labor government. That was during a period of time when I have said on the record, both publicly and in the Chamber, and my predecessor, minister Scrymgour, has said on the record, that the child protection system was on its knees. It was in collapse. It was in freefall because of the under-resourcing and underfunding that had occurred for decades. For a decade, under the CLP government, there were no new child protection workers ...

Ms CARNEY: Not true.

Ms LAWRIE: Absolutely in crisis, was the child protection system. We started to turn that around significantly from 2003. Therefore, for the period that the good doctor is referring to, I have grave concerns about how the child protection system was handling notifications at that time. In keeping with those concerns, I have sought for a full report on Mutitjulu, on notifications from my CEO. I refer the matter further to my CEO for comment now.

Mr GRIEW: The concerns that Dr Stewart raised on the *Lateline* program are, obviously, a matter of concern for us from a professional practice point of view. The management and staffing level and the reform process have all changed - essentially it is the same operation. As CEO, I do also want to say that the people then in the program in Central Australia included many absolutely top rate professional child protection workers. Obviously, we will look into the concerns that Dr Stewart raised in relation to that period of time and that particular client. Further to that, the minister has asked me that we look at our ongoing case handling of any of the cases that are raised at that time.

The relationship between Health Services and Child Protection Services is an issue that also goes across other jurisdictions. It is one where we constantly do need to work to ensure that we are clear, both within Health Services and within Child Protection Services, what the relevant responsibilities are, and to ensure that both sides are understanding each other and communicating clearly. On the face of it, there clearly are some concerns. However, it would be unfair to draw conclusions until we have had a chance to look at the case files, speak to the people handling the notifications at the time, and speak to Dr Stewart again. Then we will be coming back to the minister who, obviously, wants a full report, and also to see what lessons we need to learn.

Dr LIM: Would you agree that children with sexually-transmitted infections do not pick them up from toilet seats?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I would fully agree, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Would you agree, therefore, that every child with sexually-transmitted infections would have suffered sexual abuse?

Ms LAWRIE: It is an area that, of course, goes to the age of the child.

Dr LIM: The what?

Ms LAWRIE: There are very clear guidelines around the report requirement of sexually-transmitted infections. STIs must be notified to the Centre for Disease Control. The Centre for Disease Control categorises the reports for under 12, 13 and 14, and 14 and 15. Also within the guidelines, there is a discernment made between younger children and what we refer to as teenagers. Therefore, depending on which category you want to discuss, I will give you a quite clear and specific answer in terms of process. But no STIs are acceptable.

Dr LIM: Is every case fully investigated, including investigated by Family and Children Services?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, regarding the process following a notification of an STI and the way guidelines are proceeded with, I am happy to refer to my CEO.

Mr GRIEW: The guidelines are quite clear. The professional view here is that we regard all STIs in juveniles as a problem. The question for the clinical practitioner is: how is that problem best dealt with? With children up to and including the age of 13, there is no question from our point of view; it is absolutely clear that an STI is cause for a notification. In the case of adolescents over that age, 14, 15 and, indeed, 16 and 17-year-old age group, the clinician - and while we are talking here about it, it is usually a GP or a community nurse - has to make a judgment. There are indicators that we publish to the clinicians about how best to respond to that case.

If there is any doubt in a professional's mind that there could be a case of child abuse, exploitation or, indeed, neglect indicated by a diagnosis, then it is absolutely clear that they have a legal obligation to notify. In some cases, while the professional and, indeed, we parents and adults, may well judge that we are dealing here with inappropriate sexual activity in that 14- and 15-year-old age group, sometimes you will get a better outcome by the clinician engaging the family in firm clinical counselling, as I am sure, given your professional background, you would understand.

Dr LIM: Minister, what your CEO is saying is that the GP will decide what to notify and what not to notify?

Ms LAWRIE: No. Within a particular age group that that professional decision is made, but certainly 13 and under, they must notify. But for the 14-, 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds, a clinician will make a professional judgment call on whether there is consent involved in the sexual activity; whether they have the maturity to make a decision about sexual activity. Where there is any suspicion or doubt in the clinician's mind as to any potential abuse or neglect, they notify. The clinical decision and professional judgment is made on the basis of, fundamentally, you want to encourage teenagers to come forward to the clinic and receive treatment for their STIs. If teenagers participating in consensual sex, which you and I might not agree with them undertaking, feel that they will have the full force of FACS down on them and be removed from their families, they will start to not present for treatment. That is a terrible public health outcome.

Dr LIM: I find it very disturbing to hear that response from both you and the CEO. What is the legal age of consent?

Ms LAWRIE: Sixteen.

Dr LIM: Sixteen! And you are saying here in this room that any child under 16 having sexual intercourse is tolerated and accepted by you and your department?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, that is not what the minister said. Minister, would you like to respond?

Ms LAWRIE: Member for Greatorex, that is absolutely a misrepresentation of what I said. I said, whilst you and I do not agree with it - do not agree with sexual activity in teenagers ...

Dr LIM: Not, agree! It is illegal.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, please let the minister answer.

Ms LAWRIE: It is illegal under my government; it was illegal under your government. We accept that it is illegal. We do not agree with it, we do not condone it. However, there are public health issues here that public health clinicians ...

Dr LIM: You tolerate it!

Ms LAWRIE: Hang on! ... have to deal with. I want to call forward our Chief Medical Officer to explain the public health realities in dealing with the issue of STIs so that you understand the thinking of the clinicians in making a professional judgment.

Dr LIM: I understand ...

Ms LAWRIE: I refer to my CEO ...

Dr LIM: I am a clinician myself. I do not have to explain ...

Mr KNIGHT: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chairman!

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, there is a point of order.

Mr KNIGHT: The member for Greatorex well knows that he cannot interrupt the minister while she is trying to provide the answer ...

Dr LIM: Pull your head in.

Mr KNIGHT: I ask the member for Greatorex to restrain himself and allow the minister to answer the question uninterrupted.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That point of order is upheld. Minister, will you please continue with your answer.

Ms LAWRIE: Thank you, and as I said I am going to get ...

Dr LIM: I do not need to hear from the clinician ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you dissenting from my ruling, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, I am saying to you that I do not need to hear from a clinician. I full well know ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you dissenting my ruling?

Dr LIM: I think you are making a stupid ruling.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, there is a motion of dissent. Is that what you are doing?

Dr LIM: I am saying to you ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you moving a motion of dissent?

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, can I raise a point of order?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, there is a point of order before me at the moment. I am ruling on a point of order. I am asking you: are you dissenting my ruling?

Dr LIM: I think it is a stupid decision.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I believe that is unacceptable. I need some advice, Mr Secretary. I will not accept that. That is a dissent as far as I am concerned.

Ms LAWRIE: You do not have to be offensive to the Chair, Richard, because you are not happy with me.

Dr LIM: No, I am saying, I do not need to have a clinician telling another clinician - that is me - what it is all about.

Ms LAWRIE: Well, I think it is important.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have had advice and if you want to make a dissent then you have to do it in writing. If you continue with this challenging of the Chair, I will name you, member for Greatorex.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, I believe we have dealt with that. Now can I raise a separate point of order? You dealt with it yesterday in relation to another department and so you agreed with my point of order on that front. Over the course of the week, we have seen questions being asked and ministers, in some cases, answering them, and then ministers saying: 'I will refer to so and so'. We have been given, quite rightly, the opportunity to accept or decline that. My colleague elects to decline that invitation. When I put this to you a day or so ago, one of the reasons was in the interests of time. I ask, Mr Deputy Chairman, where the minister offers more information, it is our decision to elect whether or not we take it.

Ms LAWRIE: Speaking to that point of order ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, no. I did not say that yesterday. In fact, that is not quite true and you can go through *Hansard* and check that. You may be referring to the other Chairman. I certainly did not say that. The minister has a right to refer any aspect of her answer to a member of their staff in answering that question. There is no point of order. Minister, would you continue.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, speaking ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you challenging me?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I will dissent.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you like to move a motion of dissent?

Ms CARNEY: I move a motion of dissent ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could you please put that in writing.

Ms LAWRIE: You are wasting time now, Jodeen.

Ms CARNEY: ... if it is the case that ministers will give their answer and then flick to someone else it is not the information we seek.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, please put that in writing.

Ms LAWRIE: You do not want to hear the facts do you, Jodeen?

Ms CARNEY: Relax, you have answered the question. Now you are flicking it. We elect the ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, no.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister!

Ms CARNEY: ... it is as simple as that, Delia, and you know it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister! Leader of the Opposition!

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Deputy Chairman, relax, relax.

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, can we move on with questions?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Ms LAWRIE: I will now refer to my agency to explain in detail the process that is undertaken in the presentation of STIs in a juvenile. CEO, Robert Griew.

Mr GRIEW: I believe it is important, on behalf of the agency and the clinicians who work in it, that I stress that it is not the view of the agency in any way, shape or form that underage sex is okay. The issue before us entirely is: what is the most effective response to that? It is important, as he plays a professional role in defining these standards, that I ask the principal medical adviser to make a quick comment.

Dr WEERAMANTHRI: Dr Tarun Weeramanthri, Principal Medical Advisor and Chief Health Officer. I reiterate that the *Community Welfare Act*, as has already been pointed out, makes it mandatory that any suspicion of abuse be notified up to the age of 18 years, and that the law is quite clear that sexual activity under the age of 16 is illegal. I also point out that, though we find it undesirable - and that is presumably why we put it into our law - we also have to recognise, from a public health point of view, that under-age sex in Australia is common. The figures I have in my head is about one in five people under the age of 16 report that they have had sex. Those figures apply throughout Australia. Though it is undesirable, unfortunately it occurs.

There is a clinical point and a public health point I would like to make. We have already pointed out that, for children 13 years and under, we make the assumption that there is a likelihood or possibility of abuse and, therefore, encourage all our clinicians to notify sexually-transmitted diseases under the age of 14 - 13 years or under. A small audit we have done does show that all the cases we looked at were appropriately notified.

What we are dealing with now are sexually-transmitted infections that are presented to clinicians in children who are aged 14 and 15. Clinical skills are vital in assessing children presenting to health services at this age. It is quite possible that children may be making choices that we do not agree with, but choices nevertheless, and are having consensual sex at that age. What we have to look out for, as clinicians, is any sign that the sex is not consensual, and that includes sex with an older person, and any sense of

manipulation or distress in the child. It is a very serious and very difficult call to make. If we were to move to a situation where we automatically reported all such children - which could include any of our children, to be frank about this - we would automatically put out a signal to that group of people that would hinder their presentation to health services. That would be a disaster for those children themselves, because it would mean that many sexually-transmitted infections would remain untreated and not presented to health services. That would mean, potentially, the consequences of untreated sexually-transmitted infection, including infertility.

Which leads me to my second point, which is a public health point. If such a situation were to eventuate, there would also be no contact tracing of those children and their sexually-transmitted infections - as you know, that contact tracing is vital to the public health response to sexually-transmitted diseases - which would mean that the disease would spread uncontrolled in the community and, therefore, pose a risk to others, which is a public health problem.

I repeat, as a parent I would find such activity highly undesirable but, as a medical practitioner, clinical skills are absolutely vital to the assessment of the 14- and 15-year-old with a sexually-transmitted disease. We absolutely want to ensure that there is no suggestion of any abuse, but if we were to not take that nuanced approach and treat it as a serious, difficult issue, there would be tremendous cost to those individuals who would not present to our health services, and in the spread of diseases to other people.

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that your government is giving tacit approval. That is what it means. I am a father of two daughters ...

Mrs BRAHAM: What are you going to do, Richard, put them in gaol because it is illegal? Come on, be reasonable!

Dr LIM: The member for Braitling might be very reasonable and accept that her 14-year-old daughter could do that and be tolerant of it.

Mrs BRAHAM: So what are you going to do? Say it is illegal so you can put her in gaol?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, let the member for Greatorex finish his question, please.

Mrs BRAHAM: It happens, Richard!

Dr LIM: Minister, what I just heard is that your government tolerates this. As a father of two young women, I would be not only concerned, I would be very rotable - and every father out there would be very rotable that ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What is your question, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: Can you tell me the numbers of sexually-transmitted infections that occurred in young girls and children under 16 years of age?

Ms LAWRIE: Girls and boys? Both genders?

Dr LIM: Both genders.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, certainly. We have the sexually-transmitted infection data from the Centre for Disease Control who take the reports. I am happy to refer that for specific detail to my CEO, Robert Griew. I thank Dr Weeramanthri for his explanation, because it really is important to understand the public health consequences of decisions clinicians make.

Dr GRIEW: We have notifications data for four conditions here: chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis and trichomonas. If we add those together - and I can give you data for 2004 and 2005 - for the under 12 age group, there were nine notifications across those four conditions in 2004, and seven notifications in 2005. For the 12- and 13-year-old age group, there were 37 notifications in 2004, and 38 notifications in 2005. I make the point that, if you take a longer time frame, a snapshot over 10 years or so, in those two age clusters the numbers are fairly static. In the 14- and 15-year-old age group, in 2004 there were 250 notifications, and 206 notifications in 2005. In the 16- and 17-year-old age group, there were 406 notifications in 2004, and 471 in 2005. It is in that older adolescent group that we are seeing an increase over time.

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, I will hand over the rest of the questions to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, that is fine.

Ms CARNEY: Dr Lim has just received some sad family personal news, so he is leaving because of that. Minister, sorry, we have just been a little thrown. Can we have a break?

Ms LAWRIE: Can we have a break if it is appropriate?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think so, too. It might be better to cool the air a bit. I am actually going to give a 10 minute break to 10.30 am. I will reconvene proceedings at 10.30 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will resume the hearings. We are on Output 3.3 still. I also wish to advise members present that the Leader of the Opposition will be asking all questions on behalf of the shadow minister. Minister, you have some information for us?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, Mr Chairman. I have the answer to the question on notice No 6.1 which is the list of grants to different organisations in early childhood and childcare that I would like to table.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, people would appreciate that I was not prepared for this. I certainly was going to ask some questions. My colleague, being a doctor, does not have the clearest handwriting in the world. I am not sure that we will be able to give this area the justice or the effort it deserves. I ask that everyone understands. In any event, minister, I will do my best.

We were talking about STIs. I propose to move to some other areas. Largely, I will be finding my way as I go along. In Budget Paper No 3, page 115, there are a number of footnotes: 1 to 8. I would like to ask you some questions in relation to some of those footnotes. Let us start with footnote No 2. It says: 'All notifications are assessed to ensure that the report is valid before determining if an investigation is required'. Can you outline the nature of that assessment?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, certainly. As I explained in the answer to a previous question, the notifications come into what is called our intake team in the Child Protection Services. The intake team is staffed by senior child protection officers, the more experienced and qualified of our child protection officers, to make those assessments on the notifications. Regarding the actual specific process they follow, I will refer to the CEO, Mr Robert Griew.

Mr GRIEW: In that footnote, it refers both to validity and whether an investigation is required which, of course, requires two decision points, and the decision is made as to whether a full investigation is required. I may hand on to Jenny Scott, the Director of Family and Children's Services to explain the factors that are required for an intake officer to ascertain in order for those two judgments to be made.

Ms SCOTT: Jenny Scott, Director, Family and Children's Services. As Robert Griew has explained, there is the issue of validity and whether or not an investigation is required after assessment. In terms of validity, we receive calls to our intake team that are in relation to a number of issues, not all of which are about maltreatment of children. Some relate to families who are looking for referral to other services, sometimes people are inquiring about child support or family court matters, issues of that nature.

The first process that the intake staff go through is to speak with the notifier, or the person making the call and ascertain the issues that they have and what information they require. When that information is indicative of maltreatment or suspected maltreatment of a child, the staff then go into the process of assessing the information obtained. They look at issues of risk to the child, immanency of risk; other information that we might have about that child and their family; whether it has been a family notified to us before; the age of the child; the nature of the abuse being reported; who is making the report - a whole series of questions. They go through an initial danger assessment process, really, to help determine the category of investigation that is required.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Are there different people within a Family and Children's Services office - some do that initial assessment stage and then others do the investigation - or are they one and the same?

Ms LAWRIE: We have teams created within the Child Protection Services. The intake team is one team. We have separate case management and investigation teams. Again, I am happy to refer you to the director of the section for specific detail.

Ms SCOTT: The minister is correct. Certainly, in our largest offices in Darwin and Alice Springs, we have separation of intake and investigation. In the smaller offices, the more experienced staff do the intake. Often they are the same staff that do investigation; that is just by nature of the offices. The intake team is becoming part of our new Child Protection Task Force with the police so that we will have one point of information when that task force is co-located with that group.

Ms CARNEY: Is that the task force that was announced last week?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, that is right, that is the task force between police and Family and Children's Services to make a single point of entry on notifications of child abuse because, externally, family abuse has historically been handled by police, and internally, by Family and Children's Services with the support of police investigation capacity. The task force is about bringing the two points into a single point of entry, a single team of combined police and Family and Children's Services, to pursue those investigations.

Ms CARNEY: In the table provided on page 115, it lists the notifications of child harm and then, under that, it says 'child protection reports investigated'. I take it that means what it says. You have the estimate in the next year, 2500 notifications, and relevant people in each office deal with those notifications. Then you expect 1250 investigations. Correct?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, as you can see in the budget paper, the 2006-07 column is an estimate, as was the 2005-06 column. What we found, though, is that already those estimates probably are underestimating what we expect to be handling through the 2006-07 year. Part of the consequence of the national debate around child abuse is that, fortunately, it brings forward more people into notification. That has already had an impact on the estimated numbers and we expect that to continue through the year.

Ms CARNEY: In 2005-06, the notifications of harm is listed at 2400 and the number reported was 1200, which is half. Can you explain? That seems like a big figure. One thousand were not investigated, which clearly means that the initial assessment that took place, said: 'No, we do not need to go further'. That strikes me as a significant figure. Can you explain why that is and whether it is a resourcing issue?

Ms LAWRIE: No, not all. The Territory is among only a handful of jurisdictions that actually takes and report all notifications. Quite a few other jurisdictions do not register every call into FACS as a notification; the reason being, as the director has explained, some of those calls are in and around family law matters, and such things as how they get certain support from child services or childcare. There are a number of reports in at that early entry of notifications that are actually are not the nature of child abuse or child neglect investigations. Again, I am happy to refer to the Director of Family and ...

Ms CARNEY: No, that is fine, thank you. Then, the next line is the children in care during the year. I accept that initial notification would be for a number of reasons, so there is a filtering system, if you like, then there are 1200 reports for investigation. Then, it seems to me, a surprisingly small number of children are taken into care, in 2005-06, at 470. Let us say, 2400 reports and only 470 kids are taken into care. That means that an awful lot of reports are not substantiated.

Ms LAWRIE: Not necessarily.

Ms CARNEY: Why is that?

Ms LAWRIE: The accepted practice in child protection right across Australia is that taking children into care is a very serious step to take. It is done after an exhaustive investigation and done, if you like, as a means of last resort to protect the child. There are some cases where investigations occur and a professional decision is taken that it is not warranted to take the child into care; however, it is warranted to work with the family in crisis. In that area, the Northern Territory has moved to best practice in providing intensive family support services. To explain that in more detail, I refer to my CEO, Robert Griew.

Mr GRIEW: This is the hard area of child protection where there are no absolutely clear lines. Research since the 1960s has made it clear that there is a very big decision to make before you withdraw a child from a family - even a dysfunctional family. The aim of Child Protection Services is not, in fact, to remove children but, where possible, to maintain the family unit. Often, you are making a choice between two difficult paths and that is why the innovation of the intensive family support program is so important. That said, over the last three years we have been taking more children into care in quite large numbers, doubling the number of children in care. That is about making judgments more assertively that we need to take children into care at least for some period of time. However, the only acceptable outcome from a substantiated child abuse case is not the removal of a child – we then have to make a separate set of judgments about whether to take kids into care or whether to work with the family to restore family function, which may, of course, sometimes involve an adult leaving the situation.

Ms CARNEY: You said that you have doubled the number of children in need of care?

Mr GRIEW: No, coming into home care.

Ms LAWRIE: Coming into home care. We have doubled the number of children we have removed from their families and taken into foster care – it is actually the care of the minister. We have doubled the number of children removed from their families and taken into the out-of-home care system. In addition to that, we are putting in place what is called a specialist care team, who are child protection experts to work specifically with our most complex cases with children requiring care. That is an innovation that has proven to be very timely and very worthwhile. Reports I am receiving back from the foster carers who are working with the specialist care team is that it is a very useful service.

Ms CARNEY: I am a bit confused. Is it or is it not the case that the number of children who have been declared in need of care under the *Community Welfare Act* has doubled or not?

Mr GRIEW: Children in out-of-home care in 2000-01 was 164; 2004-05 was 324. That is the statistic to which I was referring. The number has continued to increase since then.

Ms CARNEY: Has not?

Mr GRIEW: Has continued to increase since then.

Ms CARNEY: Through the minister, out-of-home care is that - I think we are talking different languages. Is out-of-home care the same as children being declared, by a court, in need of care?

Mr GRIEW: Except for some emergency interim step that child protection officers make, that is the case. We cannot keep a child in care without a court order, obviously, though our officers are empowered to make some immediate intervention sometimes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. The overall number, you said, has increased from 164 to 300 and something?

Mr GRIEW: From 164 in 2000-01 to 324 in 2004-05. That number has continued to grow, but it does not happen to be on the table in front of me.

Ms CARNEY: Do I take it from that, that in the Northern Territory there are 324 children ...

Mr GRIEW: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: ... either in need of care or in out-of-home care in 2004-05?

Mr GRIEW: I am advised that the estimate for 2005-06 at the end of May was 399, which suggests that we are clearly heading for over 400 - 440 or so.

Ms CARNEY: Given the widespread abuse that occurs, particularly in remote communities, that figure does not actually seem very high.

Ms LAWRIE: The figure is high in the context of the number of children in care in the Territory doubling. In a few short years, there was a very high and rapid increase in the number of children in care. I expect the task force between police and FACS to be extremely effective. I expect, as a result of that, to be receiving more children into care. Partly what I have been doing is working with the Foster Care Association to try and recruit more carers. We have had our FACS officers out at shopping centres, for

example, promoting the need for more foster carers. There is no doubt that there is a correlation between the increasing numbers of children coming into care and the need for more foster carers in our system.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. What is the breakdown out of that figure of 399? How many are indigenous, and how many are non-indigenous?

Ms LAWRIE: I will get that figure for you. I refer to my CEO.

Mr GRIEW: Of the 399 children in care at the end of May 2006, 272 were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, 122 were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and five, we do not know - do not have the data.

Ms CARNEY: Out of those 272 Aboriginal children, how many were in the Top End and how many were in Central Australia?

Ms LAWRIE: We do not have the breakdown between the regions with us. I will be happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, Leader of the Opposition, would you please restate your question?

Ms CARNEY: Yes. Of the 272 Aboriginal children taken into care in 2005-06, how many were in Central Australia and how many were in the Top End?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you take that question on notice?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I take that question on notice. I can say that we have much higher rates of children coming into care in Central Australia than the Top End.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. For the purposes of Hansard I allocate that question No 6.4.

Ms CARNEY: This may well need to go on notice too, although I am a little surprised that the last question had to go on notice because I would have thought, in the circumstances, that you would have had that information with you. Of those 272 children, many of whom are in Central Australia, do you have a further breakdown of how many of those children are from remote communities in Central Australia?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I am happy to take that question on notice. We do not have a breakdown of how many were from remote communities as opposed to urban Central Australia. I am more than happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, for the purposes of Hansard would you please restate your question?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, of the 272 Aboriginal children taken into care in 2005-06, in addition to providing the regional breakdown in the foregoing question on notice, can you further provide details of how many of those children were from remote indigenous communities?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, you will take that question on notice?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I will.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I record that question as No 6.5.

Ms CARNEY: Is it possible to give an indicative figure, a percentage figure - some rough numbers for present purposes, given that this is what so many people are talking about?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I am happy to refer to the CEO for that.

Mr GRIEW: On the understanding that these would be indicative figures, there are about 120 children in care throughout Central Australia in operation at the moment, of whom probably about 80% would be indigenous. As to how many of those come from remote areas – do you want to hazard a guess? Okay, we will come back to you on that one.

Ms LAWRIE: I do not want to hazard a guess, it is important information.

Ms CARNEY: What we do know is that there are only 120 children in care in Central Australia and 80 ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Ninety-six - that is your percentage – there are 96 children.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Ninety-six indigenous children in Central Australia are in care ...

A member 96%.

Ms CARNEY: Whatever! Out of 120 children taken into care in Central Australia, 80% of them are indigenous, and we do not know how many of them are from remote communities ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, we do know, but we do not know here.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, okay. Given the inquiry announced yesterday by the Chief Minister, will it include an analysis of how many Aboriginal children from remote communities are in care, lined up with an assessment of how many should be?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, in an answer previously, I have indicated that I will not pre-empt the Chief Minister's announcement of the terms of reference of the inquiry.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I should also ask for figures for the Top End as well ...

Ms LAWRIE: Happy to provide them.

Ms CARNEY: ... for the regions for remote communities, so ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you formalise that please?

Ms LAWRIE: Happy to provide them. We will give it to you in the same table, just incorporate it in the previous question on notice is fine.

Ms CARNEY: Last week in parliament, we asked a great many questions about child abuse in its various forms, and provided some e-mails from two remote health workers. One of them, from memory, was concerned that a child presented to her clinic with an STI. She reported the matter and, six months later, that child came back. You finally answered that there would be an investigation into that matter. As minister, you would not be at all happy, would you, with a situation where a child presents at a remote community with an STI and then, six months later presents again, because that child would be presumably exposed to continued sexual abuse? Correct?

Ms LAWRIE: What I am happy to put on record here in that regard - and I assume you are referring to the Papunya case, Leader of the Opposition - is that my advice is that, following the first presentation of a child under 10 with an STI, at the time police did investigate that matter and found no evidence of any adult perpetrator of abuse. The point of the task force that the government has announced between police and FACS is to try and cut through the veil of silence and shame in our communities and get the essential evidence we need to proceed to prosecution.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. In your predecessor's ministerial statement in August 2004, she said many things, one of which was in relation to child sexual abuse: '... but at least what we can say is that it is no longer a case of out of sight, out of mind'. Is it your view that was not correct and that, in remote communities - particularly given the example to which I have referred, and there are many others - in fact, it is out of sight, out of mind in many remote communities?

Ms LAWRIE: I am not going to speak on behalf of all remote communities and residents of those communities and their views. What I will say is it has been my experience, since being minister of this portfolio, that the issue of child abuse is neither out of sight nor out of mind. There has been a vast amount of work done since the 2003 reforms in child protection to get the message out to remote communities that child abuse will not be tolerated in any form, in any way, and that this government is very serious about tackling child abuse in our communities. There are members of those remote communities who are spreading this message, and who are, as a response to that message, actively notifying of their concerns around children who are at risk. I congratulate people in those communities.

We have seen, certainly in recent reports, an increased notification from our clinic workers in the communities. That is important. FACS has established a remote model, which is an essential model. We needed it and FACS have put it in place. It is a protocol that includes DEET, police and FACS and looks at the fact that, in remote communities, many of the frontline staff who could detect potential child abuse and any concerns around the behaviour of children from which we illicit suspicion of child abuse, are often frontline community staff such as the remote health care nurses and the teachers in the schools. The importance of a strong protocol between the Department of Employment, Education and Training, FACS and police is essential, and that was designed specifically to target our remote indigenous communities.

Ms CARNEY: However, minister, you would accept, would you not, that if notifications increase and nothing happens - as was the case with the example we raised in parliament last week and, indeed, there are many other examples whether they have been on *Lateline* or not; there are plenty of examples - isn't the system flawed when a serious notification is not investigated, and little Aboriginal kids are running around indigenous remote communities being subjected to ongoing sexual abuse and sexually-transmitted infections?

Ms LAWRIE: The only place we differ in this, Leader of the Opposition, is your allegation that these matters are not investigated.

Ms CARNEY: Clearly, some have not been.

Ms LAWRIE: I have reports from police and from FACS that the matters you raised have been investigated. If you want to, at any occasion, bring forward any matter that you say has not been investigated, I will search through our records and request the information from police to see whether that has in fact been the case. However, all the matters that have been publicly raised by yourself or others have been matters that have been investigated.

Further to that, what I have asked my agency to do, quite specifically, is to hold an investigation into the Papunya notifications and what has occurred there and, quite separately, hold an investigation into the Mutitjulu notifications. That is appropriate.

Ms CARNEY: You said that you did not accept that some notifications are not being investigated. With respect, I do not know how you can say that, because there are examples. In fact, when we raised this in parliament last week, you did not have the answer. You came back at the end of Question Time ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, you did not ask me ...

Ms CARNEY: ... announcing that.

Ms LAWRIE: You did not ask me, I had the answer all along. If you had asked the question, I would have given you the answer.

Ms CARNEY: Why did you come back at the end of Question Time to give us the answer?

Ms LAWRIE: Because you did not ask me.

Ms CARNEY: Why did you ...

Ms LAWRIE: I am the minister with portfolio ...

Ms CARNEY: ... just rock up at the end of Question Time and say: 'There is something I would like to add'? I do not think so ...

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, no, hang on ...

Ms CARNEY: ...read the *Hansard*, there it is!

Ms LAWRIE: Okay, in the *Hansard* it will clearly show that you are asking the question of the Chief Minister. I am the minister with responsibility in this portfolio. I had the answer for you. What I did do, quite appropriately, which is the normal practice where an opposition question is being asked of a minister who does not have the portfolio coverage, for the minister with the portfolio coverage to stand up at the end of Question Time – that is the time when we are allowed to stand – and provide the answer. If you had asked me the question, you would have received the answer earlier in Question Time.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, do you recall being asked a question last week in Question Time?

Ms LAWRIE: Certainly not on the subject that I had to raise in an answer at the end of Question Time.

Ms CARNEY: Right. Well, you were actually asked a question about it. However, in the interests of time, I do not need to go there. Once again, I refer you to the *Parliamentary Record*. In any event, you said, as I believe you indicated earlier, that in relation to that matter you have asked your CEO to undertake an investigation within the agency to see whether there were any failures in the system. That is inquiry 1. Inquiry 2, in the same answer, is that you will ensure that this case currently under investigation becomes an investigation within the department to see how well the system works and whether, indeed, there is any way the system needs to be improved. Minister, how many investigations into investigations are currently being undertaken by you or within the department?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before you answer that, minister, could I ask when you are quoting a *Hansard* document if you could reference it so that we can

Ms CARNEY: *Hansard* 14th June.

Ms LAWRIE: You are misinterpreting what I said. There is one request from me for one investigation into the Papunya notifications - not two separate investigations. I know my agency is already under way with that. What I also said is that there is an active investigation under way in Papunya in response to a notification. That is the investigation by both police and FACS.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, so how many investigations are being undertaken at Papunya?

Ms LAWRIE: Separately, there is an investigation by police and FACS into the notification of suspected child abuse, stemming from a child with an STI. That is an investigation by the agencies, quite appropriately so. Separate to that, as the minister, I have requested an investigation by my CEO into the notifications at Papunya, and how those notifications were handled within our system, to test the strength of our system.

Ms CARNEY: You have also, as I understood in an earlier answer, asked for an investigation to be undertaken in Mutitjulu?

Ms LAWRIE: That is right.

Ms CARNEY: I have a couple of questions in relation to that. Firstly, in relation to the Papunya one, is it not the case that Family and Children's Services workers went out to Papunya after the allegations were contained in *The Age* newspaper?

Ms LAWRIE: I know you are very keen on your mate, Russell Skelton, and doing some conspiracy theories with him, but I have to say ...

Ms CARNEY: Oh look, I resent that, *The Age* is a pretty good newspaper.

Ms LAWRIE: ... that Family and Children's Services ...

Ms CARNEY: You do not like it ...

Ms LAWRIE: ... does not respond...

Ms CARNEY: ... because it has a go...

Ms LAWRIE: ... to what Russell Skelton is or is not writing in *The Age*. Family and Children's Services responds ...

Ms CARNEY: Let me put the question this way.

Ms LAWRIE: ... appropriately to notifications...

Ms CARNEY: Well, minister! I am amazed to hear you say that. 'Family and Children's Services responds appropriately to notifications', therefore minister, do I assume that, in the inquiry announced yesterday, there will be no inquiry in relation to FACS and how it does its job, because you say that FACS responds appropriately to notifications?

Ms LAWRIE: You can assume all you like about the inquiry the Chief Minister announced, and your assumptions may or may not be right when you see the terms of reference, Leader of the Opposition. What I will do at this point is very clearly refer to my CEO to explain to you the work that FACS does in response to notifications.

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you. I am asking quite specific questions. I know the work FACS in relation to investigations and I believe most people in the Northern Territory do.

Ms LAWRIE: So you do not want to hear it?

Ms CARNEY: What I am asking is about the work that Family and Children's Services does not do. That surely is the issue. Forget about *The Age* newspaper for a minute. Is it or is it not true that officers from FACS attended at Papunya some six months after the report about that six- or seven-year-old girl was made?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer that question to my CEO, Robert Griew.

Mr GRIEW: The initial report of a child with an STI that we assume is the basis of the discussion that has been raised in the newspaper articles was made in August last year to the police. Police and FACS cross-notified when these reports were made. Prior to the establishment of this task force, the methodology was that, with an allegation of extra-familial abuse police will investigate and, with intra-familial abuse, that FACS will lead the investigation. In any case, and increasingly with a number of very complex cases such as the Papunya cases, FACS and police work very closely together on these investigations. It is completely normative for police to lead an investigation, as they did in this case. We would not regard that as in some way being either left out or FACS not doing its job.

The problem with the approach that we were using prior to this task force is that, when your focus is on an investigation with the aim of prosecuting a perpetrator and the perpetrator is not found, or when it is an investigation for abuse within a family and that cannot be substantiated because of lack of preparedness to provide testimony, you do not have the close working relationship that you need to then most effectively pursue the protective needs of the child. That is the importance of what has been done in setting up this task force; not only that it will lead to more effective investigations and evidence taking and, hopefully, prosecutions, but also that the protective needs of kids will be more effectively met.

The case in Papunya discloses that, so I am making a frank statement to the committee that the task force that grew out of work we started in a couple of other communities will improve responses to situations like the Papunya response. Speaking for the agency, I absolutely reject the notion that the notification made was not followed up. It was followed up by police on both our behalf and then, subsequently, by FACS as well.

Ms CARNEY: I ask the question again. Is it or is it not true that FACS workers went to Papunya about this case some six months after it was notified to FACS?

Ms LAWRIE: Again, I refer to my CEO.

Mr GRIEW: FACS has been involved in this case the whole way along. It is not true that FACS's response or involvement in this case was stimulated by a newspaper article.

Ms CARNEY: That was not my question. My question - and I will ask it for a third time: is it or is it not true that FACS workers from Alice Springs went to Papunya to investigate this matter at Papunya some six months after it was notified to FACS?

Mr GRIEW: That is not the case.

Ms CARNEY: It is not the case? Have FACS workers been to Papunya in relation to this incident?

Mr GRIEW: FACS staff have been involved in this case from the start and have been to Papunya.

Ms CARNEY: Have they been to Papunya in relation to the matter about which we are referring?

Mr GRIEW: I have just confirmed with my Director of FACS, and it is absolutely the case that FACS had been in Papunya in relation to this notification long before the matter was covered in any press story.

Ms CARNEY: With respect, that was not my question. I made no reference to any media. My question was: did FACS workers from Alice Springs go to Papunya some six months after the initial notification was made? I would be very grateful if someone could answer it.

Mr GRIEW: I am assuming that implicit in your question is the implication that they had not been up until that point. The answer that I am trying to give you is that they had been well before six months.

Ms CARNEY: No, it is just a pretty garden variety, straightforward question.

Mr GRIEW: The answer to the question is what I have given before; that FACS staff had been in Papunya long before this matter arose.

Ms CARNEY: My question was specific - it was six months. I will move on, because I note the way the minister is keen to move away from this. I will put this question ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, no, spend as much time on it as you want.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, will it take another *Lateline* program into details of sexual and physical abuse at Papunya in order for you to fix up what are clearly some deficiencies in FACS to ensure that notifications are transformed into investigations?

Ms LAWRIE: You seem to have cloth ears, Leader of the Opposition, because we quite clearly - both I and the CEO - have explained to you the importance of the task force between police and FACS in the investigations. I will take you through that step again. Previous methodology on notifications of child abuse was that police investigated, on behalf of both agencies, alleged abuse by a perpetrator external to family, and that FACS led investigations of child abuse by alleged perpetrators within family.

The Papunya matter was a matter that was in the purvey of the police, in that the police led the investigation working with FACS. The importance of the task force is that those investigations are now joint investigations, with both police and FACS officers together, on the ground, undertaking the investigations. That is an important change in the system. Papunya and other remote communities will be the beneficiaries of this change. It will be more effective - that is the whole aim of this task force - in gathering evidence to (a) pursue prosecution of perpetrators, and (b) provide the appropriate protection for children.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks, minister. The task force to which you are referring was the one announced - what? - seven or eight days ago? Correct?

Ms LAWRIE: Announced, but I tell you what, it has been an evolutionary process. As minister for nearly 12 months now, I have seen a continuation of reforms within FACS which has included, as I said, importantly, a protocol between cross-government agencies, effectively to target our remote communities. There is also a specialist team of workers called a strategic team formed within FACS to work more closely with police. Arising out of that strategic approach between police and FACS has led to an improved working relationship between the two agencies. We were then able to take it the next step to a dedicated task force.

Ms CARNEY: So, the answer to the question, I think, was yes. That was the task force that was announced last week - the one with FACS and police officers? Is it the case that you would reject any suggestion made by anyone that this task force was created in response to the national debate about child abuse in indigenous communities?

Ms LAWRIE: You would be splitting hairs to say whether it was created in response to the debate. From where I sit as minister, and the cross-agency discussions that I am aware of, I have no doubt that the

strengthening between the strategic approach between FACS and police had moved significantly in the last two years to a point where a task force was absolutely the natural next step.

Ms CARNEY: Earlier, in another output area, I asked some questions about the Domestic Violence Strategy, which you either did not know about, or suggested that it did not fall within your bailiwick and I should ask someone else. Can I ask you whether you know anything about the Aboriginal and Family Violence Strategy?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, indeed. What I say to you, Leader of the Opposition, is that you were previously informed by me this morning about where the responsibilities lie between the Department of the Chief Minister, the Attorney-General and my agency. I will answer questions regarding my agency.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, I find it astounding and terribly disappointing for the Minister for Family and Community Services to say that, given (a) your job; (b) the national debate; (c) the figures; and (d) the plethora of task forces that we are seeing being created in recent times. In answer to an earlier question, we were talking about how many Aboriginal kids in Alice Springs have been taken into care. Those kids come from families that surely fall within your government's Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy? Why will you not take any questions at all in relation to your government's Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy?

Ms LAWRIE: It depends on the nature of the question you want to ask in relation to the strategy as to whether I have carriage of it or not.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so you would not answer any questions in relation to the Domestic Violence Strategy ...

Ms LAWRIE: That is not true.

Ms CARNEY: ... but you are a bit tempted in relation to the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy? Okay. I will ask a similar question that I asked earlier about the Domestic Violence Strategy. In the forthcoming inquiry that was announced yesterday, will it include any re-evaluation of the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy, do you think?

Ms LAWRIE: I repeat for the Leader of the Opposition, I will not pre-empt any announcements by the Chief Minister on the terms of reference of the inquiry.

Ms CARNEY: Have you seen the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I have.

Ms CARNEY: How long ago did you see it?

Ms LAWRIE: I could not give you a time frame.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I believe you said in your earlier answer in relation to the Domestic Violence Strategy that your government did some work on it in about 2002. Do you remember that part of the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy that said that Aboriginal family violence is a priority issue?

Ms LAWRIE: And your question is?

Ms CARNEY: That is the question.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. Where are you going with this, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: It does not matter where I am going with it, minister.

Ms LAWRIE: Does it have any relevance to the output at all?

Ms CARNEY: This is the bit where I ask, you answer. It is like a tennis match. Remember that bit.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, could you just reference – if you are asking a point on the minister's memory ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, sure. Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy, page 1, under the heading 'Aboriginal Northern Territorians'.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question again, sorry?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, are you aware that the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy, in 2002, said that Aboriginal Territorians have identified family violence as a priority issue, and that your government regarded it as a priority issue as well?

Ms LAWRIE: I point out that in the previous Output 3.2, I ran through a range of initiatives that the agency I have portfolio responsibility for is undertaking regarding Aboriginal family violence. There is a range of initiatives that I listed. The Leader of the Opposition may not have been in the room at that stage. I am happy to go back through them because they were in the previous output.

Further, on the issue of the role of our indigenous male leaders, to turn around the unacceptable levels of Aboriginal family violence, again I say - and I said it in my statement - that the Chair of the Family and Community Services Advisory Council, Mr Charlie King, is undertaking forums across the Territory, bringing together indigenous male leaders from their communities to address the issue of violence.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, when we commenced the hearings, I advised everyone present that we would go through output by output, and then after outputs were closed off that we would not revisit them.

Ms LAWRIE: Well, we are at the moment.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I would ask you then, if questions come back to outputs that have been closed off, please advise me, and not to return to them so we can get on through the business. Also, if questions for previous outputs are raised, please indicate that to the person who raised them and advise them as such, and we can move on. Please stick to the output.

Ms CARNEY: Of course, we can refer to a previous output?

Mr CHAIRMAN: If it was raised and you use that as a point, yes. As long as it is relevant to the output we are on.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, in the earlier output when I was asking you about the Domestic Violence Strategy, I asked whether you knew what the rates of domestic violence were in the Territory. You either did not, or referred me to someone else.

Ms LAWRIE: I referred you to the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: I am asking you in the context: do you know the rates of indigenous family violence in the Northern Territory, and do you have a breakdown region by region?

Ms LAWRIE: Again, I refer you to the Attorney-General who has the portfolio responsibility for the crime statistics.

Ms CARNEY: Would you be surprised to know that there are no domestic violence figures published in the crime statistics?

Ms LAWRIE: Leader of the Opposition, again I refer you to the Attorney-General. If we can discuss child protection because we are within that portfolio output, that would be good.

Ms CARNEY: Absolutely. You seem to have forgotten we are talking about child protection.

Ms LAWRIE: No, I have not.

Ms CARNEY: Your government has a strategy called the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy. If that is not about looking after kids and women, I do not know what is. With the greatest of respect, minister, I will keep asking you about this and other issues. It matters to a lot of people that you answer these questions. Your refusal to do so is astounding.

Ms LAWRIE: No, I am not refusing to do so. I am pointing out that Output 3.2 is the output that deals with families in crisis, which is where these particular strategies are appropriately discussed. The Chairman has pointed out to me as minister to advise where we were straying into an earlier output. I did that.

Ms CARNEY: Are you aware that your government's Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy has a number of items listed as priority actions?

Ms LAWRIE: Which item do you want to discuss?

Ms CARNEY: Please answer the question. Are you aware that your government's strategy on Aboriginal Family Violence lists a number of priority actions?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. Which item do you want to discuss?

Ms CARNEY: I want to know whether you knew anything about the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy. I am comforted that, notwithstanding what amounts to some level of belligerence on your part, you are inviting me to ask you questions in relation to it. One of the key issues in the context of child protection and the national debate and all of the task forces, inquiries and investigations is surely an assessment of what the rates of indigenous violence and sexual and physical abuse of children are? Might it not be a good idea to collect that information so that it can better assist government in responding to issues that are now being discussed all over this country?

Ms LAWRIE: There is certainly a lot of research that has occurred in the area. I am happy to refer the answer to my CEO of the Department of Health and Community Services, who can refer you to a published report that would be useful for you in this area.

Ms CARNEY: Does it have the rates? I guess that is the relevant question.

Ms LAWRIE: If you stop interjecting you might hear the answer.

Ms CARNEY: Well, does it have the rates or not?

Mr GRIEW: There was a publication put out in 2005 that contained assault rates, numbers of apprehended violence orders and the SAAP breakdowns as the minister outlined earlier, that compiles information in the area that you are talking about. That is a departmental publication. There is a similar report on the experiences of children and youth that is in press at the moment. We would be happy to provide the published report, when it is available, to the committee.

Ms CARNEY: Do you accept that there is a difference between assault and domestic violence, for instance?

Ms LAWRIE: If you are trying to go fishing yet again as to the collection of crime data by the Attorney-General, I refer you again to the Attorney-General. I agreed with your view on what is domestic violence, and we both know that domestic violence includes assault, just as there are assaults that are not domestic violence. Where on earth are you headed with this, other than to get a briefing from the Attorney-General as to how they take their crime statistics?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, with respect, I have a much greater understanding than you about the Territory crime statistics. You did not know that domestic violence figures are not contained ...

Ms LAWRIE: Not true.

Ms CARNEY: You did not! ... in the crime stats ...

Ms LAWRIE: Not true. I just would not answer another minister's question.

Ms CARNEY: I will put this to you, minister. Might it not be a good idea that the inquiry that the Chief Minister announced yesterday have, as one of its terms of reference, the objective to develop and publish rates of not only domestic violence but Aboriginal family violence and child abuse throughout the Northern Territory?

Ms LAWRIE: Yet again, I repeat to the Leader of the Opposition, I will not pre-empt the Chief Minister's announcement of the terms of reference of the inquiry.

Ms CARNEY: I believe lots of people would say that you should do it, and I ask that you consider it. Getting back to the inquiries that you mentioned in parliament last week ...

Ms LAWRIE: Investigations.

Ms CARNEY: Investigations. Will the outcomes of those investigations in relation to whether, as you said, there were failures in the system, be made public?

Ms LAWRIE: I will have to see the investigation first of all because, as you can appreciate, what is contained often in investigations into the area of child protection is confidential information. I would have to make a judgment based on what I see contained within that investigation as to whether it could be made public or not. I will not pre-empt and constrain my agency in that investigation. It is important that we get as much scrutiny into the facts as possible. I do not want them to feel fettered by the scrutiny of the facts and, further, I refer to my CEO, Robert Griew, at this point.

Mr GRIEW: I will clarify what I believe the Leader of the Opposition may have been after in relation to the Papunya case. We had staff in the community - police led the investigation. Staff will have talked to a number of clients in the community. There was one activity that the FACS office did plan in terms of a family support intervention with the family. We are assuming we know which the case is, and that did not happen for some time because the staff member who was responsible got sick. In that sense, there was a system breakdown here, and that relates to when I referred to one of the lessons learned in that case that relates to the establishment of the task force. When you do an investigation and the investigation leads to no prosecution, that model would work better with police and FACS working together, which is why the task force has been established. In answer to the question that was being directly asked: 'Were the FACS staff in there and talking to relevant people related to the case?', I will stand by the answer I gave earlier.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, I might be missing something. That was an answer to an earlier question, was it?

Mr GRIEW: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I am somewhat aghast, as I am sure many Territorians will be, that, in relation to the investigation that you talked about in parliament last week, 'you will see the results first in this open and transparent government'. My question is this: will the inquiry announced by the Chief Minister yesterday work on a similar premise; that is, have an inquiry, see what the results are first and then make a decision as to whether it becomes public?

Ms LAWRIE: No, the inquiry announced by the Chief Minister yesterday is very separate to an investigation into a department's processes – a very different matter altogether.

Ms CARNEY: You would be aware of the cynical view that governments only have inquiries and investigations when they know what the outcome is going to be. In light of your extraordinary comment that you will wait to see the outcome of one of your investigations before you decide to make it public, can you understand why Territorians and, in particular, indigenous Territorians, may feel very cynical about the inquiry that was released yesterday and, indeed, the outcomes of any other investigations that you, as minister, undertake in relation to your department?

Ms LAWRIE: Leader of the Opposition, I am used to your cynicism. I do not think that ...

Ms CARNEY: It is not my cynicism!

Ms LAWRIE: ... you can speak on behalf of all Territorians, quite frankly.

Ms CARNEY: It could be the cynicism of others.

Ms LAWRIE: I cannot believe the level of arrogance that makes you assume that you can speak on behalf of all Territorians.

Ms CARNEY: Get back in your box, with respect, and do not talk to me like that again. Minister, the fact is ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can we bring back the civility into the discussion?

Ms CARNEY: I will just make this point before I move on to something else, Mr Chairman. Minister, it is nothing short of incredible that, in relation to investigations into your department, that you say you will see what the outcomes are before you release it ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, I will consider the nature of the information contained ...

Ms CARNEY: ... and that is a very disturbing comment to make ...

Ms LAWRIE: I will consider the nature of the information contained within the investigation as to whether it is appropriate to make it public because, as we know, child protection has privacy and confidential aspects to it. I will not make a decision now, at an estimates hearing, to say to you: 'Oh yes, you can see everything'. That would then fetter the veracity of the investigation.

Ms CARNEY: You have already dropped yourself in it, minister. In relation to ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, I have not dropped myself into anything.

Ms CARNEY: ... the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy, you said that the Domestic Violence Strategy was going to be evaluated by Charles Darwin University ...

Ms LAWRIE: Is being.

Ms CARNEY: Is being evaluated. I have two questions in relation to that. One is, is the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy a part of that re-evaluation?

Ms LAWRIE: I prefer that you ask the Chief Minister that question. That evaluation is under the purvey of the Department of the Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: Do I take it that you do not know whether the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, no, you can take it that, yet again ...

Ms CARNEY: ... is going to be evaluated by the Charles Darwin University?

Ms LAWRIE: You can take that, yet again. I will not go straying into the portfolio responsibilities of other ministers, even if you wish to, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry, I understood that you were responsible for this portfolio, and that both domestic violence and Aboriginal family violence might be of some interest to you.

Ms LAWRIE: It is of great interest.

Ms CARNEY: Can you answer this question? Do you know whether the evaluation - we know, because you said of the Domestic Violence Strategy and possibly the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy, although I need to ask someone else - will be made public, or will you wait to see what the evaluation is before making it public?

Ms LAWRIE: The advice I have received is, yet again, that the evaluation is under the responsibility of the Department of the Chief Minister. You may refer your question to the appropriate minister which, in this instance, would be the Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: Just one final question in relation to it. Given that a large percentage of Aboriginal kids in the Northern Territory are taken into care, and that Aboriginal family violence, in all its forms - in fact, under the definition provided in the Domestic Violence Strategy, it is a universally accepted one - will you be having any input into the CDU evaluation?

Ms LAWRIE: What you have to understand is the agency has input into cross-agency discussions around strategies and outcomes of evaluations of those strategies. We certainly have been, consistently as an agency, providing our expertise and advice into the strategies. I am advised that we have also provided information into the evaluation.

Ms CARNEY: So, minister, now that you have been passed a note from the departmental officer, why on earth did you say, only minutes ago, that I cannot ask any more questions in relation to this, because I

should ask the Chief Minister and you will not stray into it, notwithstanding the fact that your own department is contributing to the re-evaluation?

Ms LAWRIE: No, it is quite appropriate - and do not put my words in my mouth, Leader of the Opposition ...

Ms CARNEY: That is what you said.

Ms LAWRIE: No, it is not what I said, check the *Hansard*, check the transcript, it is not what I said.

Ms CARNEY: You said, do not go there, it is ...

Ms LAWRIE: Listen! You asked a question, at least give me the courtesy of answering. Okay? That would be a really nice step in your demeanour.

Ms CARNEY: Just do it honestly, minister, do not make it up as you go along. We saw what happened to the Chief Minister. Someone will write a memo about you, you never know.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition!

Ms LAWRIE: Quite frankly, Leader of the Opposition, you are being offensive ...

Ms CARNEY: Answer the question, minister.

Ms LAWRIE: I have been answering honestly all morning. I will continue to answer honestly. What I have clearly said to you is that questions that pertain to another minister's portfolio, quite appropriately, should be put to the relevant minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I remind members of the committee of Standing Order 51, where 'no member may converse aloud or make any noise or disturbance which in the opinion of the Speaker is designed to interrupt or has the effect of interrupting a member speaking'. It works both ways. One person asks the question, the other one is given the courtesy of answering. I would appreciate it, for all those in attendance and all those listening in today, that if we could have quiet while one asks, the other one replies, we will get through this a lot better and the public will be the true winner. Please continue, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I add to that the public, in fact, will be the true winner, assuming that ministers will answer their questions properly.

You said, minister, that you would not provide any assistance in relation to the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy because it pertains to another portfolio; that is, the Chief Minister's. Your government often talks about a whole-of-government approach, and you clearly have a responsibility under the banner of Aboriginal family violence and, indeed, domestic violence. Why are you so reluctant to answer any questions about this strategy, and whether your department and you, as minister, will have any input into it?

Ms LAWRIE: I am not reluctant at all and I have answered the question. I have advised you that my department, very clearly, quite appropriately, does have input into the strategy and into evaluations of strategies in domestic violence. As I said in Output 3.2, the previous output, I outlined the programs and services that the agency I have responsibility for provides. You can stray off as far and wide as you want, but I am not straying with you, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: I want to get back to the investigations and the inquiry announced by the Chief Minister yesterday. You have said repeatedly that you are not going to pre-empt anything in relation to that inquiry. I know why that is the case, because they are still working on it upstairs. I want to put some points to you that your predecessor made in what was regarded by your government as a very important statement on child protection on 24 August 2004. I will give you a couple of quotes, and for *Hansard* purposes, Mr Chairman, I will indicate where I am quoting ...

Ms LAWRIE: Mr Chairman, can I request a copy of what the Leader of the Opposition is reading from?

Ms CARNEY: Well, it will not take long.

Ms LAWRIE: I am requesting a copy.

Ms CARNEY: You have not requested copies of anything else I have read from.

Ms LAWRIE: I am happy to now.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, if she wants copies of everything, we may as well give it, because she certainly does not know the Aboriginal ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, just the *Hansard*. I do not have the *Hansard* in front of me, that is all.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, let me just ask you a question, and you probably do not even need the paper in front of you. You have not asked for anything before. Let me put this to you ...

Ms LAWRIE: Mr Chairman, I have requested a copy of the *Hansard* from which the Leader of the Opposition is reading.

Ms CARNEY: I refer you to *Hansard* dated 24 August 2004. I am not under any obligation to table it, Mr Chairman, because it is the *Hansard* of the Northern Territory. You might have had it with you, given that we are talking about child protection. You spoke in the debate. Surely you have in your bundle of files the pivotal statement on child protection by the Labor government? You do not have it? I am sure you will remember it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, if we cannot get a photocopy of what the Leader of the Opposition is referring to, I am sure that we can get some of our very capable people around the table here to drag us out a copy if you so request it. Okay?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. I have requested that. It would be great.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will hold the session up for that time that it takes to get it here, or we can get that photocopied after you have finished reading it.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, I am ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am easy.

Ms CARNEY: ... wondering why she is such a chicken about being asked some questions in relation to ...

Ms LAWRIE: Settle down, Jodeen, settle down.

Ms CARNEY: ... comments that were made on the public record.

Ms LAWRIE: I am not chicken. Settle down.

Ms CARNEY: Well, I will do it without the bit of paper. Minister, on 24 August 2004, your predecessor – ah, here we go. You can have this, minister. Much of it has been extracted in the minister's statement, word for word. That may well be of great assistance.

Ms LAWRIE: Thank you.

Ms CARNEY: In fact, I think great slabs are repeated. Minister, your predecessor said that, after many years of research and investigation – we miraculously have another bit of paper. 'After many years of research and investigation into child abuse and neglect, we know quite a lot about it ...,' is what your predecessor said. She said – and it is in that statement: 'However, I am not just going to look at the problem. I am going to tackle the problem. I do not need more information before taking action. The easiest thing for me and the government to do would be to announce another review. I will not'.

My question is: yesterday, you and the Chief Minister announced an inquiry into sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. Was your predecessor wrong? If not, what has changed?

Ms LAWRIE: Not at all. My predecessor was not wrong. What my predecessor was saying very clearly back then is that the task before the government was to build capacity in child protection. That was the task that was before the government at the time that she made the statement. There would have been little point in holding a review into child protection at that stage because we knew the system did not have the

capacity to deal with child protection needs in the Territory. Quite appropriately, the work done by minister Scrymgour and the agency was to build capacity in child protection services over that time period to the point where we have arrived at today, which is significantly different child protection services delivered in the Northern Territory by the Department of Health and Community Services. It is quite appropriate, after having built capacity within the system, to hold the inquiry the Chief Minister has called for.

Ms CARNEY: It would not be a knee-jerk, political response, would it?

Ms LAWRIE: Is that a rhetorical question?

Ms CARNEY: It was a fair dinkum question.

Ms LAWRIE: Sorry?

Ms CARNEY: It is a fair dinkum question.

Ms LAWRIE: No, the Chief Minister quite clearly said, in announcing the inquiry yesterday, that she has very grave concerns around child abuse in the Territory. She feels it is appropriate to hold an inquiry to try to break through the veil of silence, fear and shame in our communities. What has happened is that the government has built capacity in the two areas important to child abuse, that is both police and FACS. What we have found is that we still need mechanisms to break through to the community, at the community level, to get them to come forward with the evidence we need to prosecute. The inquiry is an appropriate mechanism to pursue that.

Ms CARNEY: Is it not the case that the capacity clearly has not been built, notwithstanding your comments? If it had been built successfully by your government, as indicated by your predecessor, Marion Scrymgour, there will be no need for an inquiry? Surely, does that not follow?

Ms LAWRIE: I will never ever accept your logic, Leader of the Opposition. The capacity has been built, and I refer to my CEO to explain where the capacity has been built.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, I think that your ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, hang on a second ...

Ms CARNEY: No, you have answered my question. I do not need to repeat it, you have said no, you do not accept what I have said. Therefore, I am happy to move on to the next question, thank you.

Your predecessor, Marion Scrymgour, said in her statement in August 2005 that the department had in front of it 20 reports into or about understanding and addressing child abuse. She made it very clear, and she is on the *Parliamentary Record* as saying: 'We do not need another report. I am not going to just read reports I am going to tackle the problem'. She said: 'While information is important, what we need now is action'. Minister, do you accept that minister Scrymgour failed because it has now become necessary for the Chief Minister to announce an inquiry into sexual abuse in the Northern Territory, after the very issues that your predecessor dealt with in August 2004?

Ms LAWRIE: No, not at all. I do not agree with your comments, Leader of the Opposition. As I explained previously, the task that confronted by minister Scrymgour, my predecessor - very capably and ably pursued, I might add - was to build capacity within Child Protection Services in the Territory. She also, given the unique circumstances of her position, being a female indigenous minister in the government, very capably went out to communities and delivered an important message that child abuse is not tolerated and people need to come forward. What we have found is that there is still a reticence within communities to participate in the important evidence gathering required to prosecute child abuse. The inquiry, very clearly, is aimed at breaking through the continued veil of silence, fear and shame within some of our communities, held by some members within our communities. Minister Scrymgour reached out and touched significant strong women in our communities who have started to come forward. There are still more people in our communities in positions of knowledge and power who have to be reached. Hopefully, this inquiry will achieve that outcome.

Ms CARNEY: According to Marion Scrymgour, that was being worked on in August 2004, because she used, oddly enough, your wording, 'shame and fear'. She said that child abuse is cloaked in shame and fear and it creates mistrust; victims and their families would be scared of speaking out. I thought your government was working on that. What has being happening? Nothing?

Ms LAWRIE: We have been working on it, we will continue to work on it, and the inquiry is yet more work on it.

Ms CARNEY: Does it not follow, notwithstanding the political rhetoric, because of the fact that you now need to have an inquiry into sexual abuse in the Northern Territory, that your government has failed?

Ms LAWRIE: I absolutely object to your view that the government is about political rhetoric.

Ms CARNEY: Really?

Ms LAWRIE: Every member of the Martin Labor government cares deeply and passionately about the care and protection of our children right across our communities - be they urban, regional, or remote. We are a government that has signed up to quadrupling our child protection budgets and putting 51 new staff out in the area of Child Protection Services. We are a government that has taken the cross-agency approach necessary for effective child protection very seriously, implementing protocols across agencies. We have set up strategic teams within FACS to bring police and FACS together. We have initiated a task force directly to improve our ability to prosecute and pursue perpetrators of child abuse. We have announced an inquiry designed to break through the remaining hard nut to crack, which is some people - and I stress some people - within communities who will still not come forward and not feel strong enough or brave enough to put their name to a witness statement and evidence. Leader of the Opposition, that is not rhetoric, that is action and absolute intent to provide safe communities for our children.

Ms CARNEY: If you were to be believed - and you are not believed by me - in relation to your comments about all of the things you have done for child protection, an inquiry would not be necessary, would it?

Ms LAWRIE: That is your view.

Ms CARNEY: Right. That is a view many people hold. In your last answer, you said that the number of prosecutions for child abuse had gone up. What are the figures?

Ms LAWRIE: No, I did not say that in my last answer. Yet again, I said we are increasing our pursuit of prosecutions.

Ms CARNEY: Right. How many prosecutions were there for child abuse in the last 12 months?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer you to the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: Right. That is another one. You do not know many figures. Minister, you have used the expression 'build capacity' a lot. You have been 'building capacity'. Do you think that the women and, in particular, the children who are being sexually abused in remote communities in the Northern Territory, will be very grateful that you have 'built capacity'? Do you think that that will protect them today?

Ms LAWRIE: I will not answer the first part of your question, because I am not going to presume to speak for the victims of abuse. I find your insinuation in that question abhorrent. The second part of the question is, yes. Clearly, if you build capacity in a system to respond to need to put in place greater protections for children - which is what we do in this area of the portfolio - then clearly, yes, building capacity is going to have improved outcomes for those children.

Ms CARNEY: I will be sure to pass that on when I next see them. Getting back to the task force that you announced about a week or so ago. That task force was announced after much discussion within the Territory and around this country about child sexual abuse in remote communities in Central Australia, yet that task force is based in Darwin. Would it not be a good idea, since you are going down this road establishing a task force, to have them from Alice Springs?

Ms LAWRIE: There are officers of the task force based in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: But the task force itself is being run from Darwin? Correct?

Ms LAWRIE: There are very senior officers of the task force based in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: If I heard a media report in the last 24, 36 hours correctly, the task force is 'flying in' to Central Australia? Correct?

Ms LAWRIE: There are very senior members of the task force based in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, can I ask you these questions? I have nearly come to an end, and I am sure the member for Braintree will want to ask some questions. I have nearly finished. You referred to prosecution, so it is more than appropriate that I ask you this question. Do you understand what is meant by the expression 'victimless prosecutions'?

Ms LAWRIE: Leader of the Opposition, I refer you to the Attorney-General.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so you can talk in your answers about prosecutions, but when I ask you a question that has the word 'prosecution' in it, you will not answer. Let me tell you. Victimless prosecutions are used internationally ...

Ms LAWRIE: You are wasting your own time.

Ms CARNEY: It is important information, minister, and ...

Ms LAWRIE: Sure.

Ms CARNEY: ... if you will not listen to it, then I hope someone will.

Ms LAWRIE: Put it on record.

Ms CARNEY: Let me tell you about victimless prosecutions. Victimless prosecutions are used internationally, or in some countries, so that certain victims of crime are relieved of the trauma of giving evidence in court. It relies upon police using improved evidence-gathering techniques, and I believe you referred to something like that earlier. My question is: will you consider, in the inquiry announced by you and the Chief Minister yesterday, legislating for victimless prosecutions, which is sure to result in improved outcomes, relieving Aboriginal children and women of the burden of giving evidence against perpetrators, many of whom they know. Will you consider that for the inquiry?

Ms LAWRIE: I repeat, I will not pre-empt an announcement by the Chief Minister on the terms of reference of the inquiry.

Ms CARNEY: A similar question, and I have two left. Minister, you clearly have an input into this inquiry. I ask you this question: will you consider a term of reference for the inquiry that would look into removing violent men who are charged with offences, be they physical or sexual offences, from their communities while they await to be dealt with by a court?

Ms LAWRIE: I repeat, I will not pre-empt the terms of reference that will be announced by the Chief Minister for the inquiry.

Ms CARNEY: Finally - on the basis that someone is listening and someone might pick this up - will you ensure that a term of reference for the inquiry would be consideration of a government approach that would see government ceasing to do business with Aboriginal organisations where men who hold public office have been convicted of sexual or physical violence?

Ms LAWRIE: I repeat, I will not pre-empt any announcement by the Chief Minister on the terms of reference of the inquiry. I want to say that there are many tiers of government involved in this issue. I have not gone to the responsibility of the Commonwealth, nor the responsibilities of local government, nor the responsibilities of the community. The Northern Territory government absolutely accepts and takes on its roles and responsibilities, but we are part of three tiers of government and our community. We need to all work together to tackle child abuse.

Ms CARNEY: One final question I have forgotten to ask, Mr Chairman. Minister, will you be going to the national summit next week? If not, why not, and do you think it is a good idea for the Chief Minister to attend?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I will be attending.

Ms CARNEY: So, four of you! Everyone except your boss. Thank you, minister, that concludes my questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to Output 3.3, Child Protection Services?

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, I have to admit I have lost my train of thought a little. Minister, could you tell me how many staff are in the Department of Family and Community Services? Following on from that, how many of those staff are actually located in Alice Springs?

Ms LAWRIE: While we are getting that information for the member for Braitling, I have responses to two questions on notice. I have a response to Question on Notice 6.2, which I table, and a response to Question on Notice 6.4, which I table.

I refer the details of the staffing numbers to the CEO, Robert Griew. Are you asking for the whole-of-agency Family and Community Services, or just specifically the Children's Services section?

Mrs BRAHAM: I was going to break it down, but if you would give me the total and then break it down into Children's Services?

Mr GRIEW: Sorry, can I just clarify? You would like to know the Family and Children's Services staff complement in both the Top End and in Central Australia?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, the total, and then how many in Alice Springs.

Mr GRIEW: We have that information here, but it is broken down further than that, so somebody has to do some addition to give you that number. Maybe if we come back to you after the next question we will ...

Mrs BRAHAM: I am happy to have that information. Do you want to table it?

Ms LAWRIE: Do you want to read through what you have?

Mr GRIEW: Why don't we read it?

Ms LAWRIE: Read through what you have.

Mr GRIEW: We will refer you to Jenny Scott, who is the Director of Family and Children's Services.

Ms SCOTT: Our program is broken up into an area that looks after our policy and service development work. Some of those staff are located in the Top End and in Central Australia. There is also a group of staff who do training - again based in the both locations. Similarly, with childcare licensing. The complement for all of that is 59 positions, and they are both Top End and Central Australia. Then we have three regional areas: essentially, the Darwin urban area, and our sexual assault services complement is 95 positions; the Top End regional, which covers Katherine, East Arnhem and Darwin remote, the complement is 36 positions; and in Central Australia, 47.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many?

Ms SCOTT: Forty-seven.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many of those positions in Central Australia are dealing with the Child Protection Services?

Ms SCOTT: The 47 that I have talked about are all, in varying ways, to do with child protection and children in care. There are some managers within that, obviously, and a couple of administrative staff, but the bulk of those people work in child protection and out-of-home care.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are any of those people located in remote communities, or are they all based in Alice Springs?

Ms SCOTT: Those are all based in Alice Springs and in the Barkly.

Mr GRIEW: It should be clear, however, that the way in which child protection is structured there is a specific remote team and a specific urban team. Could I explain something here about child protection? We refer to child protection staff. The great bulk of those staff operate at the acute end of Child Protection Services. They are going in to do investigations when we reach that point of an investigation, and make

recommendations on court action or other follow-up action. We would not necessarily choose to locate that part of child protection in communities for very obvious reasons.

I want to make it clear that it is the view of the agency - my view - that it is the responsibility of all staff in the agency to play a role in protecting children. In many ways, child protection is down the bottom of the river and it is important that we do not ascribe bad outcomes for kids entirely to child protection staff. It is the responsibility of all of us. That is one of the things that was made very clear in the Caring for our Children agenda. I make this comment generally. We have a lot of staff in remote communities, in our clinics and other services who have a prevention role.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes. However, when people are trying to contact Family and Children's Services to alert to them to abuse or neglect in some way, it is often very hard to get a person in Alice Springs to respond to a call. It seems to me that quite often there is not enough staff there to actually react. Would you like to make a comment?

Ms LAWRIE: We have increased the number of staff in that Alice Springs office. I have figures here of the number of additional staff that we have put into Alice Springs just recently. We have put 15 additional staff into that Alice Springs office ...

Mrs BRAHAM: When was this?

Ms LAWRIE: Since July 2004. Within the last two years we have increased the Alice Springs staff numbers by 15. I am happy to refer to my CEO, Robert Griew, for the operational response.

Mr GRIEW: I go to regular meetings with all the people running community services' departments. One of the things that we all share as a challenge with a huge increase in activity across all jurisdictions is the number of appropriately qualified people there are in the market. It is very like staffing our hospitals and remote clinics with nurses. It is a real challenge for us getting and holding staff in a very difficult area of work. We often have young social workers coming to very difficult work. One of the things that has been done in the Central Australian office, which I believe is a cause for some pride in the Territory, is a particular emphasis on training local indigenous staff and supporting them through full tertiary training in social work. That is starting to bear fruit now as a program. However, it would be honest to say that is one of the hard slog areas of the work. The government has been very supportive in giving us positions and budget, going out and finding and competing with all the other Child Protection Services staff and growing our own locally is a continuing challenge.

Mrs BRAHAM: Would you believe that there may be a reason to change the approach to the way the department is operating, in the fact that the visibility of your staff out in remote community services seems to be very low and, in fact, they are reacting and not being proactive.

Ms LAWRIE: The issue of being proactive is an issue that I am very keen to engage the Commonwealth in. There is a very clear need for the Commonwealth to partner with the Northern Territory government in providing and extending welfare trained staff out into our remote areas. The Commonwealth funds quite a few of our remote health clinics. The NT government, of course, funds some remote health clinics. There is partnership of funding out into remote health service delivery between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory government. One of the proposals that I have been pursuing with the Commonwealth - and I have been trying to engage minister Brough in this - is to provide some Commonwealth funding to be able to extend our welfare workers out into our remote communities, so that, as you say, we can have some more proactive work.

Quite separate to that, we are providing innovative programs now. Peace at Home is one of the programs that goes out into the Katherine region. It is around putting welfare staff - FACS staff, if you like - out into our communities to try and do the preventative work with families in crisis. So very much your desire to see more of the preventative work is actually work that has been new work in the last 18 months, funded by the Territory government, sometimes funded in partnership with the Commonwealth. However, there needs to be more done in the preventative work in our remote communities and, clearly, there needs to be a partnership between the Territory government and the Commonwealth in delivering an extension of those services.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you tell me whether you have done any educational programs or marketing of your message to remote communities, perhaps via BRACS.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, *Shout It Out Loud* is a DVD that we funded Warlpiri Media to produce. It is an excellent DVD, which goes specifically to the issue of protecting our children. That DVD is being distributed amongst remote communities. It was put to the BRACS system. I will have to get some details for you, but the lead has been run on Imparja as well. It is a very specific awareness program campaign run through *Shout It Out Loud*.

Mrs BRAHAM: How often would you say it is actually shown in remote communities?

Ms LAWRIE: I could not give you that specific detail here, member for Braitling, but I am happy to provide the *Shout It Out Loud* DVD. I do not know whether you have seen a copy of it?

Mrs BRAHAM: I have a copy of it.

Ms LAWRIE: It is quite powerful. It is one of those feats, whereby our agency distributes the DVD, encourages the use of it, certainly encourages the use of it on BRACS, a very popular communication tool as you can appreciate. We hope that Imparja, who were very supportive initially, continue to show support for that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Perhaps it is time to reignite it. How many children in Alice Springs are actually in foster care?

Ms LAWRIE: We mentioned the figures earlier, indicative, it was about 120.

Mr GRIEW: One hundred and twenty for Central Australia. We did not have the breakdown between remote and ...

Ms LAWRIE: One hundred and twenty for Central Australia, and we provided that answer earlier. That is up from 50 two years ago.

Mrs BRAHAM: Of the indigenous ones, how many are indigenous foster care, and how many are in non-indigenous foster care?

Ms LAWRIE: I will refer this to my CEO, Robert Griew.

Mr GRIEW: In out-of-home care, we have 120 children in Central Australia, of whom 93 are in foster care, the rest are in kinship care. So, 93 in foster care. Your question in relation to the Aboriginal Placement Principle, we have the data here. It is on the same sheet. We set ourselves a target for compliance with the Aboriginal Placement Principle, and our current compliance with that is over two-thirds of indigenous kids in care are being placed in accordance with the principle since 2001.

Mrs BRAHAM: I take it there is difficulty in getting foster homes?

Ms LAWRIE: We have had terrific support from our foster carers. They have shown a willingness to take on increasing numbers of children into their care and a willingness to be very understanding about the fact that we have had a doubling of numbers of children coming into care. I have been on record as saying we could certainly do with a whole lot more foster carers. Part of what the government has done is fund and support the Foster Carers Association who we believe plays an important role in providing support to foster carers and helping the government recruit more foster carers.

Mrs BRAHAM: What percentage of your investigations are about sexual abuse, and what percentage are, in fact, not sexual abuse but, perhaps, neglect or physical or emotional abuse?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer that to my CEO, Robert Griew.

Mr GRIEW: We have figures here for both 2004-05 and 2005-06 year to date. In 2004-05, of reported abuse, 24% were reports for emotional abuse, 34% for neglect, 30% for physical abuse and 11% for sexual abuse. The numbers are slightly different in 2005-06, where it is not a full year's data, so I probably would leave it with the figures for the full year, which was 2004-05.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are you able to give us a copy of that data?

Mr GRIEW: Yes, we can do that. What we might do is just extract the bit of data for you and table it.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, that is fine. Could you tell me how many repeat attendances occur amongst the young children? What I am trying to get at is how many do you take into care and fix, and return to either home or to another situation and eventually come back?

Ms LAWRIE: Come back into care?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes. Repeatedly.

Mr GRIEW: That data is in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's compiled reports. Again, Jenny Scott will supply the right table for you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Good. While we are waiting for that, minister, what area will the largest amount of this \$31m, I believe you have, actually be spent – the break-up in the budget? Of that \$31m, what are the areas focused on?

Mr GRIEW: There are two large expenditures within that. One is in the child protection staffing complement, who are out there doing the work. The other is in payments related to the provision of out-of-home care.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do the expenses incurred in court costs come out of your budget?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes?

Mr GRIEW: Yes. For court attendance of FACS?

Ms LAWRIE: For FACS, yes.

Mr GRIEW: If there are other parties, obviously, they pay their own fees.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is what I meant.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, okay. Perhaps when that table has been found it could be tabled. Is that all right?

Ms LAWRIE: Sure.

Mr GRIEW: Yes, we have two tables we are finding now.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes. Mr Chairman, that will do for me for the moment, if you want to get on to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions in regard to Output Group 3.3? That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0. I would like to inform members of the committee and the minister that, as you know, the shadow minister has been called away suddenly on urgent family business. As such, I have been informed by the Leader of the Opposition that he will not be returning for the rest of this output group. He asks for your forgiveness that he is not able to interrogate these particular items as he would have liked. However, I am to pass on that, if he were here, it would have been a pretty good session.

Ms LAWRIE: I have no doubt about that, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: With that in mind - and by the way the committee agrees with the shadow minister's absence, so that is not a problem. We will go on and, as far as questions from the shadow minister, I would say not to anticipate any at this stage.

Ms LAWRIE: Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Having said that, the committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Aged and Disability Services ...

Ms LAWRIE: I want to thank my Director of Family and Children's Services, Jenny Scott.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – AGED AND DISABILITY SERVICES

Output 4.1 – Community Support Services for Frail Aged People and People with a Disability

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Aged and Disability Services, Output 4.1, Community Support Services for Frail Aged People and People with a Disability. Are there any questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Does that mean I go first?

Ms LAWRIE: You do. It is all yours, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, looking at Disability Services, the Territory Independence and Mobility Equipment Scheme. As you know, we have had some cases in Alice Springs where we have been waiting and waiting for people to get equipment. Quite often, we have been told that there is no money left within that budget. Could you tell me what your budget is for this particular area for equipment?

Ms LAWRIE: I want to correct what I believe to be a misnomer. What happens within the time scheme is that people are categorised in terms of priority. I guess the cases you may be referring to are lesser priorities than the priorities in which equipment is coming forward. The time scheme has been revamped to be a more effective scheme to meet the needs of people with a disability. I welcome to the table my Director of Aged and Disability, Mr Michael Woodhouse, and refer the question to him through the CEO, Mr Robert Griew.

Mr WOODHOUSE: Michael Woodhouse, Director of Aged and Disability. The expected expenditure until the end of April for the 2005-06 financial year was just over \$1.1m, and that is the cost purely on items of equipment rather than administration associated with that. The expected allocation for the 2006-07 financial year is \$1.44m. Again, that is a figure relating entirely to the cost of the purchase of equipment, not to administration.

Mrs BRAHAM: What will be the client contribution to equipment? Does it vary depending on the equipment, or is there a set percentage?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, it does. The client contribution does vary, depending also on the capacity of the client to contribute.

Mrs BRAHAM: I have been told it was 10% and it is going up to 50%. Could you clarify exactly what the client contribution is?

Ms LAWRIE: No, as I said, the client contribution varies depending on the capacity of the client to contribute to the purchase of equipment. To explain that process, I will refer the question to my agency.

Mr WOODHOUSE: The guidelines regarding the time scheme are clear about requesting client contributions where that is possible. The rate at which people contribute very much depends, as the minister has outlined, according to the individual's ability to pay. That will vary on a case-by-case basis, but we are also very clear that no individual will miss out on essential equipment based on their inability to pay.

Mrs BRAHAM: You could actually get two people getting a Gopher, but paying different amounts for it. Is that what you are saying?

Ms LAWRIE: Depending on their financial circumstances, yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: So a pensioner would not be expected to contribute very much?

Mr WOODHOUSE: There is a clear rule that we use for assessing financial hardship, which is following on from Centrelink tables. We use the same measures, if you like, of people's income and financial position and flow that on in determining someone's capacity to pay.

Mrs BRAHAM: The occupational therapist position in Alice Springs has been vacant for a long time. I believe there may have been one recently?

Ms LAWRIE: A very important question you raised, member for Braitling, is the difficulty in recruiting the allied health professionals, as we call the specialist positions, that deliver important aspects of our Aged and Disability Program. The area of improving our recruitment strategy is one I know the director has put a

lot of effort into, because we are competing with a shortage of allied health professionals right across Australia. We place them in the same critical professional category as doctors and nurses. It has got to the point now, with allied health professionals, where they are scarce, and we are competing nationally in a highly competitive market for them. We are having some successes in that and we are still pursuing the recruitment of our allied health professionals. I refer to Michael Woodhouse for specifics.

Mrs BRAHAM: Quite often, minister, the lack of an occupational therapist means that aged people cannot get assessment and this often puts them at risk. I wonder whether there is an alternative way of assessing someone, particularly in the senior level, who may want something such as a shower instead of a bath because they cannot climb in and out of a bath?

Ms LAWRIE: That alternative way is certainly a way the agency has embraced. We call it multidisciplinary team approach, and to explain that I will refer to Michael Woodhouse.

Mr WOODHOUSE: The profile for allied health staffing right across the Territory, including in Central Australia, has been stable from the 2004-05 financial year into the 2005-06 financial year. As the minister has outlined, it is an extremely competitive market at the moment in attempting to attract allied health workforce. They are an extremely mobile workforce. Certainly, there are fluctuations in the number of staff we have on the ground, but we are continuing to advertise and seek to fill our full profile. As the minister has highlighted, we keep a very close eye on needing to ascertain the relative urgency of contacts with the service and ensuring that we are able to prioritise those assessments which are critical.

Mrs BRAHAM: Who makes that assessment?

Mr WOODHOUSE: That is done on a day-to-day basis by our operational staff, including the senior managers in each of our regions in Aged and Disability.

Mrs BRAHAM: I know of one particular case where someone in public housing was told they would have to wait for an OT assessment. They have been waiting for months and months. An 80-year-old trying to climb in and out of the bath each day seems to me to be unacceptable. I am wondering how we could have fast-tracked that whole process.

Ms LAWRIE: I am happy to refer that specific operational issue to the agency.

Mr GRIEW: There is one other resource here that, *in extremis*, could be referred to, which is the hospital which has allied health staff as well. In a situation like that I know that the Aged and Disability staff work with the allied health staff in the hospital. I do not know the case of the gentleman concerned, but that is a future possibility were the member keen to want to refer that to the department.

Ms LAWRIE: If you want to give us the information, member for Braitling, we will follow that one up for you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. My feeling from my electorate is that the number of disability clients, or people, is increasing. Could you give me some indication of the numbers we have within the Territory and in the region at the moment?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, member for Braitling, disability is certainly increasing in numbers. People with a disability are increasing right across Australia, and the Territory is no different to that, through a range of reasons. In people with a psychiatric disability, there has been an improved awareness of those disabilities and an improved capacity for GPs and other frontline clinicians to identify a disability. Obviously, through the improved survival rates of car accidents we have increasing acquired disabilities, whether it is acquired brain injury, or physical disability or a combination of both. Through the improved mortality rates we are getting now, obviously, more children with a disability surviving and going on to lead as productive a life as possible. I am happy to refer ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Could I just add one to that. Some people are living longer.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. We have the emerging ageing disability cohort ...

Mrs BRAHAM: As they grow older they need more care.

Ms LAWRIE: That is a matter that has been at the forefront of discussions between the Commonwealth, the states and the territories because, whilst the Northern Territory has an emerging

ageing disability population, down south they are right in the midst of a large cohort that they have to have discussions about. I was discussing that issue very recently with representatives of ACROD, the service providers for people with a disability, talking to them about the work that is being done nationally to profile policies and delivery of services for ageing people with a disability. I am happy to refer to Michael Woodhouse or Robert Griew if they have anything to add.

Mr GRIEW: The Northern Territory has the fastest ageing population in Australia, you may be interested to know. We have a low number of aged people, but it is growing at the fastest rate of any jurisdiction. The other general comment one can make is that there are figures on this, but we have a higher per capita representation of people with disabilities in our population which reflects, basically, the socioeconomic status of the Territory's make-up.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have some indication of the numbers that we have in the Territory?

Mr GRIEW: We do not have that with us. There is some data. It is not perfect data, but we have some data which we could provide.

Mrs BRAHAM: Would you know how many people you are actually servicing?

Mr GRIEW: Yes, Michael knows that data.

Mr WOODHOUSE: A number of the reforms that have been brought in recently within the Aged and Disability program - particularly the introduction of trans-disciplinary practices in remote communities, as the minister has referred to - has seen a substantial increase in the number of people with disabilities, including a number of older people with levels of disability that we are seeing, to the tune of, as an indicative figure, in the area of 30%. That has been a substantial increase and an improvement in our services, particularly to remote communities. The other area where we have seen substantial increased call on services has been within the time scheme to which you earlier referred where - partly a snapshot data - I understand we have seen something in the order of a 25% increase from 2002-03 to 2004-05.

Mrs BRAHAM: The transport vouchers seem to be an issue at the moment, particularly the amount being allocated. I believe it is \$10 per voucher, and that hardly gets someone across town in a taxi. Have you considered increasing them?

Ms LAWRIE: There is a raft of reforms under way in the Northern Territory Taxi Subsidy Scheme, many of which are being implemented as of 1 July, and other reforms that we hope will follow through. Some of the reforms are due to change in technology. The scheme was independently reviewed. As a result of that review, we are implementing improvements such as ensuring that eligibility is only focused on people's ability to use public transport, simplifying the assessment process, creating a new category under the scheme for people who request very low use, and defining a process for determining financial hardship and for appealing decisions.

We are looking at further improvements to administration that we expect will reduce fraud within the scheme. This, as I said, is dependent on technology available within taxis. As you would be aware, my agency has been working with the transport agency around the potential introduction of lift fee for drivers as an incentive for drivers to pick up with people with a disability more frequently than they currently do. That would be on top of the already 50% licence fee concession on taxis. If we are able to move to a card system rather than the current voucher system, that would be a far more effective use of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme, because it is expected to reduce fraud within the scheme, and the capacity to improve the scheme would be based on considerations as to how successful we have been with that.

Mrs BRAHAM: With your new scheme, did you say there was an increase in the vouchers?

Ms LAWRIE: No, what I said is we will be able, hopefully, if we get to use the new scheme - and that is dependent a whole lot of technical issues that are still before government's consideration. What I anticipate and hope to see with the introduction of a card-based scheme - an accountable scheme, if you like - is over the space of a year, a reduction in fraud within the scheme. Obviously, that will free up revenue within the scheme. If that is successful then we can consider improvements to the scheme.

Mrs BRAHAM: Can you tell me how much you contribute to the Red Cross for aged services?

Ms LAWRIE: I am not sure whether we brought all of our HACC funding details with us. The Red Cross is one of the major providers of HACC services in the Territory. I know I am signing off the HACC

agreements. Many months ago I was pretty well astounded by how much we were funding Red Cross; they do a terrific service out there. I would be happy to take it as a question on notice and get that information to you.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, member for Braitling, would you please restate your question?

Mrs BRAHAM: Could I have how much funding the Red Cross receives, and for what services they provide?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, you will take that question on notice? For the purposes of Hansard I will allocate that question the No 6.6. Please continue, member for Braitling:

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you also provide funding for respite care?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, we do through service providers. Also, the Commonwealth provides funding for respite care. Both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments fund respite care.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have that amount? Could I add that to my question?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, sure. We do not normally have that, but we are able to go into our data and break that down for you and will provide it with the question you have already asked.

Mrs BRAHAM: Finally, do you have any plans to assist keeping aged people in their homes? That is a Commonwealth government notion. However, we do not have the nursing homes or the other homes in the Territory for them to move to, so we are seeing more and more people staying in their homes who need care.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, absolutely, member for Braitling. It is very much a part of this government's policy to assist people to live independently in the community with the appropriate assistance they require. That is very important to our ageing Territorians. I note that the Minister for Senior Territorians is doing some work in her agency on this particular issue. That will better inform some of the initiatives that we could see flowing through the system. I have to say that, already, the work done by our Aged Care Assessment Team directly assists elderly Territorians to stay living independently in the community.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions in regard to this output group? Member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Not in this output.

Ms LAWRIE: Mr Chairman, I have a response to another question on notice. I table the response to question on notice No 6.5.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Support for Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 4.2, Support for Senior Territorians Pensioner Concessions. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, on 1 July 2006, there are some changes to the Pensioner Concession Scheme. Is that correct? That is the travel section that I am referring to.

Ms LAWRIE: What you might be referring to is the 1 July 2006 carer's card that is coming in. No, there are no planned changes to the Pensioner Concession Scheme for 1 July 2006. 1 July is a date we will be introducing a carer's card, which is a similar concession scheme to the Pensioner Concession Scheme.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. On 1 July 2006, are there changes to the travel arrangements for pensioners?

Ms LAWRIE: No.

Mrs MILLER: There are not?

Ms LAWRIE: No.

Mrs MILLER: There will not be any changes where pensioners are able to give their travel allowance to a family member?

Ms LAWRIE: That was a previous change the government undertook. That is already in place.

Mrs MILLER: How is that being advertised to seniors? How are they being made aware of that?

Ms LAWRIE: There was quite significant provision of information out to senior Territorians. Everyone individually got a letter advising them of the changes to the scheme that had occurred, and the changes to the entitlements and that important one that people had been calling for, whereby they could use their entitlement to bring relatives up from interstate. People were notified individually. We sent information out to places where senior Territorians gather, and to our health clinics. We also distributed them amongst our electorate officers. I would be happy to provide you with any package of information in that regard, member for Katherine. The Council of the Ageing also participated in promoting very widely the changes to the Pensioner Concession Scheme.

Mrs MILLER: Given that answer, obviously, a fair bit of work has been done. How come I have so many people coming into my office who do not know about it?

Ms LAWRIE: I am happy to provide you with a package of information on the Pensioner Concession Scheme.

Mrs MILLER: Has there been an increase in uptake?

Ms LAWRIE: Significant increase in uptake since the changes, yes.

Mrs MILLER: Right. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regards to that output group?

Mrs BRAHAM: I am not sure where this comes under here. On a number of occasions we have had requests from our senior Territorians to use their fare entitlement intrastate. Again, could you give me an update on where we are at with that?

Ms LAWRIE: As you know, the Pensioner Concession Scheme provides concessions on interstate and overseas travel for seniors. Travel concessions are actually the most generous in the nation ...

Mrs BRAHAM: We agree with you there.

Ms LAWRIE: As you know, the government expanded the scheme to allow members to fly family and friends to the Territory. The intent of the Pensioner Concession Scheme is to encourage our seniors to retire in the Territory. We found it is working. Since our expansion of the scheme, more people are now retiring in the Territory. People aged 65 and over in the Northern Territory have increased by 24.5% from 1999 to 2006. People aged 55 and over have increased by 44% in the same period. With family and friends now eligible, most people, including those who do not travel interstate themselves, are able to fully utilise the concessions that are being provided to them.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you make exceptions? I had the case of a very elderly lady who is nearly 90, and her son is actually in Darwin. She cannot travel to Darwin. She has asked could her airfare be used for him to visit her because she cannot afford it.

Ms LAWRIE: It is outside the criteria of the scheme.

Mrs BRAHAM: Does the minister have exceptional powers on that matter?

Ms LAWRIE: No, I do not have exceptional powers, otherwise, I dare say, I would be using those every day because our seniors are very hard to resist.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, it is a little unfortunate, because it is a genuine case of someone who would really like to use it to bring her son to see her. It is one of those unfortunate times. We did a bit of research on transport concessions around Australia. Unfortunately, I cannot find it here. A lot of the other governments actually give pensioner concessions on bus and train travel.

Ms LAWRIE: The Northern Territory government does provide concessions on urban buses. We do not have ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Urban buses, but not ...

Ms LAWRIE: We do not have urban trains, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, I know. So, you have not been able to negotiate with the train service we do have, or the bus services that run intrastate, to provide concessions?

Ms LAWRIE: I have to say that both Great Southern Rail and the Northern Territory government have put to the Commonwealth that it is a bizarre anomaly that they do not subsidise travel from Alice Springs to Darwin, yet they subsidise travel from Adelaide to Alice Springs. The Commonwealth has responsibility for our national railways, so the responsibility to provide that subsidised travel is fairly and squarely the responsibility of the Commonwealth. They have more than \$11bn sitting in their surplus; it would not take much for them to fund a subsidy scheme from Alice Springs to Darwin as they currently subsidise from Adelaide to Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, in regard to self-funded retirees, is there any intention on the part of government to go with a private enterprise to build a self-funded retiree village in Alice Springs? I notice there was a petition in parliament the other day from people in Darwin. There is, obviously, limited space in our Old Timers Frontier Services Village. Is there any consideration of entering a private/public program?

Ms LAWRIE: Member for Braitling, I know you are passionate on this subject; I have heard you ask questions in the Chamber regularly of our Minister for Senior Territorians on this subject. You would be aware that this is actually outside of my portfolio responsibility. However, what I can do is reassure you that I am aware of discussions being held between minister Scrymgour and minister McAdam regarding the need to provide a whole range of choices of living for our senior Territorians.

Mrs BRAHAM: Well, I hope you do come up with something, because it would be a shame if we lose more people from the Territory for the simple reason they have nowhere safely to stay. Mr Chairman, that will do me for now.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Braitling. Are there any further questions in regard to that output group? In that case, that concludes our consideration of Output Group 4.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Output 5.1 - Mental Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 5.0, Mental Health Services, Output 5.1, Mental Health Services. Are there any questions? Shadow minister, who has rejoined us.

Dr LIM: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have a couple of quick questions. How is community-based mental health services and support provided?

Ms LAWRIE: The Northern Territory government funds non-government organisations to provide the community-based mental health support, as well as obviously providing services through our mental health officers; for example, at Tamarind Centre. I am happy to refer to the agency to specify any organisations that provide the community-based support; for example TeamHealth in the Top End, or MHACA in Central Australia, if there is anything specific you want there.

Dr LIM: It is more than that, minister. I am looking at Territorians with psychiatric problems, often requiring assistance and support after hours. What provision of services are there to support these people?

Ms LAWRIE: There are some new initiatives that have been introduced around the support of people in the community with a mental illness. I am happy to refer to the agency to give you specifics on those initiatives.

Dr LIM: Well, actually, I might come back and seek a full briefing on that, rather than go through that at the moment.

Ms LAWRIE: There is a raft of new ones, so I am happy to brief you on it.

Dr LIM: I will leave it at that, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions? Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: I have had quite a few people express a desire to have men's health addressed through mental health. Apparently, a few years ago there used to be a program running in the communities around Katherine - and I spoke to the person who was running those programs – where you used to be able to take men from communities out for two or three days and they would discuss the issues that were affecting them in mental health areas, etcetera. It did help those people and their families. Would you consider introducing a similar scheme to that where people with a skill could take men, particularly, out from communities to have these two or three day sessions?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, there are a couple of responses to your question, member for Katherine. I agree with you that there is enormous value in these programs and services. One aspect is that the Commonwealth has withdrawn funding from the remote mental health programs that they had funded in very recent years. They were new programs that they have now withdrawn funding from. The Territory government has put funding into those programs and services, and we currently have a service such as what you were describing. I am happy to refer to my agency.

Mr GRIEW: There may be two different things here. There was, at one point, some men's health activities that would go to communities. That is not under this output. It was more in the community health area. We made a judgment that that was not working terribly well. In the mental health area, I understand we do have a small program of men who travel around the regions and do work in that format with participants. We could provide you with further information on that if you wish.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I do wish, please. It has been expressed that there is a lot of concern about support for men's health in my community.

Mr GRIEW: In the first case, we should probably do a briefing for you from the right part of the department ...

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. What we will do is provide two different briefings, if you like. One would be on the basis of men's health programs that have come out of the acute side of the department – the public health side - and the second briefing we would provide you with is mental health initiatives.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to that output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 - PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES, Output 6.3 - Alcohol and Other Drugs Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 6.0, Public Health Services, Output 6.3, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes.

Ms LAWRIE: I have an answer to question on notice No 6.3. I table that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Please proceed, shadow minister.

Dr LIM: I put some questions to you on Alcohol and Other Drugs. I refer to the Dirty Ashtray award the Northern Territory government has recently received, including the criticisms that came with it from many

places, including AMA and Health Alliance. What evaluation of enforcement strategies is taking place in order to measure compliance and effectiveness in ensuring all staff have a smoke-free workplace?

Ms LAWRIE: The Chief Health Officer wrote to all licensed premises reminding them of their legal requirements under the act, and informing them of the commencement of compliance activities. Authorised officers have started to visit licensed premises. There are follow-up visits planned with each licensee, allowing time for any premise changes to be enacted. If, at subsequent visits, breaches are detected, infringement notices may be issued. Repeat offenders are at risk of court proceedings and loss of their tobacco retail licence. There has been the training of 30 Top End authorised compliance officers and 10 in Central Australia.

Dr LIM: In terms of the legislation, it is not clear and there are a lot of legal loopholes that allow a business operator to get around the issue of people smoking in the premises. It makes it very difficult for the inspectors to implement the legislation.

Ms LAWRIE: I just need clarification, member for Grotter. Are you saying in relation to a complete ban on smoking in clubs and pubs?

Dr LIM: The issue is that while your Chief Medical Officer has written to all premises and you have some staff checking the premises, I say to you that the legislation is not adequate. You have already given an undertaking that you will revise the legislation and nothing has happened. I am asking how you are going to implement it if the legislation allows many loopholes?

Ms LAWRIE: Well, I do not agree that the legislation allows lots of loopholes. I commend one of my predecessors for introducing the *Tobacco Control Act*. That has meant that the Northern Territory has caught up significantly with the work done to reduce smoking right across Australia. What we found in the review that we undertook of the work done in our tobacco reforms was that we had two key problem areas, which is the uptake of smoking by young people and the unacceptably high rates of smoking by our indigenous population. That is the focus, through 2006-07, of the work that will be undertaken by the Alcohol and Other Drugs program to look at minimising smoking, to prevent smoking uptake by young people, and to reduce smoking by our indigenous population. There are a range of strategies that are being put together to address these two key areas of concern. The enforcement of compliance in our pubs and clubs is a matter that is under way at the moment.

Dr LIM: You do not believe that there is any need to amend existing legislation and regulations?

Ms LAWRIE: No, absolutely. The Chief Minister and I are both on the record as saying that the legislation as we have it stands.

Dr LIM: How can a bar worker, for instance, or a waiter, claim his or her right to a smoke-free work environment, when he or she is required by the employer to provide a service to smokers in a smoking area?

Ms LAWRIE: Very clearly, there are still areas within our pubs and clubs where smoking can occur.

Dr LIM: Your legislation is so strong that you do not need to amend it, and this poor worker is going to be exposed to the smoking environment?

Ms LAWRIE: Member for Grotter, if it is CLP policy to introduce a complete ban on all pubs and clubs, I am very interested to hear that today. I have not heard that before.

Dr LIM: I am asking the question. I am not here to articulate CLP policy; I am asking you a question. Apart from the inspectors and your current legislation, which you feel is quite good, how are you going to address Aboriginal and youth uptake of tobacco?

Ms LAWRIE: Work has started in the agency to look at any initiatives that we can introduce to address these two key areas. Our research has shown we do have unacceptable rates, certainly the uptake by young people smoking and the incidence of smoking amongst our indigenous Territorians. I would be happy to refer to the leader of our Alcohol and Other Drugs program, Joe Townsend, to give you some examples of what can occur.

Dr LIM: You said that you are working on some strategies, or you have strategies to deal with indigenous and youth smoking?

Ms LAWRIE: No, what I have said is, we are creating strategies. The task of work that I have asked the agency to undertake in 2006-07 is to come up with strategies that target the incidence of smoking rates amongst our young people in uptake, as well as our indigenous Territorians. I know the agency has already started that work and if you want some examples of that ...

Dr LIM: You are tasking it only now, and ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, I tasked it some time ago.

Mr GRIEW: There are anti-tobacco interventions that people across the agency do every day. There are brief interventions with clients, counselling of clients, the Quitline. This is a new area for us, but is a particular ...

Dr LIM: Have you reduced smoking at all in the Territory, one iota?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer to my agency for the statistics.

Mr GRIEW: The general trend in the population of Australia is for a reduction in smoking. The particular challenge of the Territory is that the one population across Australia we are not making inroads, as we want to, is the Aboriginal population. That is true across all jurisdictions and it is specific ...

Dr LIM: The trend in Australia might be going downwards, but the Territory is not. In fact, it is going the other way.

Mr GRIEW: That is what I said. The problem the Territory faces is the Aboriginal population, which is the one population across Australia where we are not getting the progress that we want to.

Dr LIM: In fact, if my statistics are right, one in two Aboriginal persons smoke.

Ms LAWRIE: As we say, we clearly acknowledge we have unacceptably high rates of smoking amongst our indigenous population, which is why the Alcohol and Other Drugs program will be specifically targeting programs designed to reduce smoking in our indigenous population.

Dr LIM: Minister, I will show you this - and this is credentialed, Mr Chairman. It is called *The Economic case for further investment in Public Health: Tobacco Control, Preventable Chronic Disease and Hospital Costs*. December 2004, Northern Territory government. This report, in fact, details quite clearly what you need to do. This is almost two years old. What have you implemented out of this?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer to the agency to give you some examples of what we are doing.

Mr GRIEW: It being a two-year-old report, we probably need to see it to be specific in responding to the actions recommended.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes.

Dr LIM: This is the report from the Northern Territory government.

Mr GRIEW: I ask if ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex ...

Dr LIM: It is credentialed.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am not disputing any of it, I just ...

Ms LAWRIE: No, that is okay. Tarun will be able to fill you in on some details.

Dr WEERAMANTHRI: That report has actually not been approved for publication by the Health Gains Planning Unit. That is a draft report which you have in your hand.

Dr LIM: Well, draft or not, it is a report to the department. It is almost two years old. Why did you bother to commission a report, which you then do not act on at all, and it is still in draft form after two years, minister?

Ms LAWRIE: I refer again to the agency.

Dr WEERAMANTHRI: The Director of Health Gains Planning has problems with the methodology used in that report and does not feel that it is currently of sufficient standard to release it as a public report.

Dr LIM: So it has no status and you are going to dismiss this all together? In that regard then, minister, I pose this question to you: what other reviews have your agency done - and are you prepared to give me the list of reviews across all agencies that you are responsible for - that yet are publicly to be reported?

Ms LAWRIE: In terms of tobacco?

Dr LIM: Tobacco and the rest that you are responsible for in your agency.

Ms LAWRIE: Hang on, you are talking about the agency of Family and Community Services ...

Dr LIM: That is right.

Ms LAWRIE: What reviews we have done in the last 12 months?

Dr LIM: Yes. Mental Health.

Ms LAWRIE: So, Aged and Disability, Alcohol and Other Drugs program ...

Dr LIM: Child abuse, childcare.

Ms LAWRIE: Child abuse ...

Dr LIM: Will you accept that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Perhaps, shadow minister, that might be more appropriate into ...

Dr LIM: I thought, as we are talking about a review that now knows no status ...

Ms LAWRIE: He has gone over to the general output - are we going to move on to the general

Dr LIM: The thing is, we are talking about a review and, suddenly, I find a review that has all the trappings of a formal review now has no status. I am asking are you prepared to list everything else?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I seek a little clarification here from the minister and, with your assistance, shadow minister? It seems to me that you are asking for reviews across the whole of agency. While the particular one that you have fits into the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services, perhaps asking for whole-of-agency reviews might be better under Non-Output Specific Budget-related questions.

Ms LAWRIE: That is what I was pointing to, Mr Chairman. I agree with you that it fits under the Non-Output Specific Questions, that is all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please continue.

Dr LIM: So you are not going to accept that request?

Ms LAWRIE: When we get to the Non-Output Specific, make the request.

Dr LIM: Let me put this way then. Within this output group, will you provide me with any reviews that you have done that are going to be publicly reported?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, sure.

Mr GRIEW: I want to be clear that, if a report goes to the professionalism in our Health Gains Unit, if the director of that unit had any problems with the technical quality or completeness of a piece of work, it would be for good technical reason, and that would inhibit me from supporting any release of a document that had not actually been worked through technically. These documents are relied upon, and the status of our epidemiologists and health economists and the work that they publish for us depends on their directive in how to exercise proper quality control.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions in regard to that output?

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, I have a question. Are we doing 6.3?

Ms Lawrie: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry, I did not mean to catch you off-guard.

Mrs BRAHAM: I thought you would try to forget me.

Ms Lawrie: Never, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Does the government contribute any funding to the operation of CAAPU?

Ms LAWRIE: CAAPU is one of the rehabilitation services that falls under our various funding arrangements. We are currently working with another agency who are also working with CAAPU. Part of the emphasis of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Program in the last couple of years has been to improve the treatment outcomes of our rehabilitation services. I can see by the nodding of your head that you get the gist of what I am saying in relation to CAAPU. It is not the only service that we are working with to improve the treatment outcome. Yes, we will continue to fund CAAPU, as it is a rehabilitation provider. However, having said that, importantly, we are working with CAAPU to introduce the best practice models for rehabilitation.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am glad to hear that, minister. I hope you do actually audit what they are doing.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, we have audited all our services.

Mrs BRAHAM: DASA also. There are a number of people who go through DASA on the revolving door. In talking about rehabilitation services, do you have a policy whereby those people would be referred to CAAPU or to another rehabilitation centre?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes. There is a critically important difference between the sobering-up shelter and rehabilitation treatment services. The revolving door you refer to is what is referred to as sobering-up shelters. They are quite different in their nature, really, in what they provide to the rehabilitation and treatment services. We have an expert with us here who I would like to refer that to, to provide you with some explanation around that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could I just make a comment that I do not think they are different because, quite often, with the sobering-up shelter, I can identify the habitual drunks. There does not seem to be that ...

Ms LAWRIE: The referrals are important, absolutely, and referrals do occur. I am happy to ...

Mrs BRAHAM: But, under the new alcohol court, I thought that the referrals could be mandatory, not just voluntary.

Ms LAWRIE: Absolutely, yes. The antisocial behaviour legislation the government has introduced which, amongst other things, establishes alcohol courts, provides for the mandatory orders for alcohol rehabilitation through those courts, giving the magistrate the discretion to provide a mandatory order instead of a gaol term. If someone breaches that mandatory order, they then face gaol. At the moment, we have relied on a system of voluntary rehabilitation. We are about to enter into an involuntary rehabilitation system.

Mrs BRAHAM: I wanted to make a comment because the alcohol court ordering rehabilitation is when someone has offended, not just got drunk, whereas I am talking about the people who are habitual drunks and present to the sobering-up shelter, who do not go voluntarily and, at the moment, can opt out of rehabilitation.

Ms LAWRIE: I also make the point that most of the habitual drunks who go in and out of those sobering-up shelters are actually offenders. The research shows that. I will pass on to the agency to explain that information.

Ms TOWNSEND: Jo Townsend, Director of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Program. What you are describing are two slightly separate processes. It is true that sobering-up shelters operate by seeing the same clients repeatedly. However, in fact, the purpose of sobering-up shelters is to provide a safe place for

people who are intoxicated and, in that way, they reduce those people being in contact with police cells. They also provide an important antisocial behaviour function. It is also the case that people go in and out of treatment on a regular basis. There is a national statistic that says that about 20% of all treatment results in long-term outcomes. Treatment is described generally as a chronic and relapsing condition.

Going back to sobering-up shelters, there has been a bit of effort to try to improve the referral and outreach component of sobering-up shelters. That is an area that we will specifically focus on in the new financial year around the Alcohol Management Plan in Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: Will your rehabilitation courses be family oriented rather than just individual?

Ms LAWRIE: Some of our rehabilitation does provide for family, and that is an important part of an individual's rehabilitation. At what point the family is involved is dependent on the nature of the treatment that that individual is undergoing. However, yes, our services do cater, in some instances, to families. Member for Braitling, I have the information that I promised to give you. I am tabling the percentage of child abuse reports by reported abuse type.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you keep statistics on the number of people who go into the sobering-up shelter and the communities from which they come?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, we do. About 18 900 clients went through sobering-up shelters in the last financial year. I can break that down by regions. We can actually interrogate our data to find out where people come from. I can say that, in Central Australia, as you would expect, the majority of people in the sobering-up shelter are either Alice Springs residents, or they are coming from communities nearby to Alice Springs, such as Hermannsburg.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, perhaps I could have a briefing later on the volatile substance abuse implementation? Have there been any training courses for authorised people?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, there have been training courses for authorised people already undertaken. I would be very happy to provide you with a briefing on the volatile substance abuse implementation. I have signed off on compulsory treatment orders, and they have gone through the process. What we are being advised by the operators of both rehabilitation facilities, as well as organisations such as CAYLUS who go out on the ground and work with the communities, is that the use of compulsory treatments has actually prompted a lot of people to go voluntarily into treatment as well. I would be more than happy to give you a full and proper briefing on the success of that. Again, I note that the Senate inquiry into petrol sniffing has called for all jurisdictions to implement legislation like the Territory's.

Mrs BRAHAM: Regarding the comment by minister Abbott the other day that petrol sniffing had been solved at Papunya. Would you agree with me that he did not realise that it has been replaced by marijuana?

Ms LAWRIE: You have to acknowledge success if a success occurs. The roll-out of Opal as an effective tool against petrol sniffing is incredibly important and critical. In fact, the Territory government commends the Senate inquiry. They have said that the Commonwealth government needs to continue to roll out Opal to our communities, right across the region because, as we know, people move around. I include Alice Springs in that. Regarding the combination of the roll-out of Opal with the Territory's own volatile substance abuse legislation, early reports - and I am always nervous about saying this - provided to me from people on the ground who would know are saying that has wiped out petrol sniffing in communities such as Papunya.

Whilst that is absolutely a reason to celebrate, we all know that people who have substance abuse addictions shift their substance abuse addiction to another substance. That is work that my agency is very aware of, and we have already been working on our capacity to deal with changes in the uses of substances by addicts. I will say that the work done by the police in their substance abuse unit in Central Australia has also been incredibly effective.

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, I will leave it there.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Braitling. Are there any more questions in regard to that output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 6.0.

Members, the Clerk has provided me with a note from the Acting Speaker in regards to a dissent by the Leader of the Opposition earlier on in this session. The Acting Speaker has responded:

The Clerk has provided me with details of the dissent moved by the Leader of the Opposition to a ruling of the Chair in respect of the procedures for the giving of explanations by the minister and officers assisting the minister during the hearing of the Estimates Committee.

From the information provided to me, I consider this is a matter that goes to the management of internal procedural operations of the committee. In conducting its business, the Chair and members of the committee should be mindful of the provisions of paragraph 23, 24 and 25 relating to the giving of explanations by ministers and officers. Accordingly, I rule that, in this matter, the committee itself should make its own arrangements for the conduct of its business, pursuant to these provisions.

Dr LIM: Thank you for that determination, Mr Chairman. The fact that the Acting Chairman was replaced quite quickly after that tells you the story.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I want to put it on the record that the Acting Chairman was not replaced; he was due for a break.

Non-Output Specific Budget Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other non-output specific budget-related questions?

Dr LIM: Can I have all reviews across all agencies that are to be publicly reported under your responsibility?

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, I am happy to provide you with copies of reviews done by my agency of Family and Community Services that have been published.

Dr LIM: Can I also have any details of any communications unit you might have within your agency?

Ms LAWRIE: If you had asked that question of the Health Minister, you would get the answer, because I do not have a separate communications unit.

Dr LIM: Well, that communications unit obviously performs functions for you as the Minister for Family and Community Services.

Ms LAWRIE: Yes, you will get the same answer. Minister Toyne will have to provide that.

Dr LIM: Well, then let us have that. What media service do you have within your own office?

Ms LAWRIE: I have a media advisor.

Dr LIM: What is the budget for yourself, and also for the media unit at your agency?

Ms LAWRIE: As you would be aware, member for Greatorex, questions of ministerial budgets are directed to the Chief Minister.

I have an answer to a question on notice No 6.6 in terms of how much money the Red Cross receives and for what services. I am able to table that answer for the member for Braiting.

Mrs BRAHAM: Very prompt, I am most impressed.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other non-output specific budget-related questions? That being the case, I note from the schedule, minister, that you are now available to take questions on Output Group 4.0, Sport and Recreation, which sits in the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport.

Ms LAWRIE: How long have we got?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Three minutes and thirty seconds, minister.

Ms LAWRIE: I want to thank the officers of my agency of Family and Community Services for their appearance before the committee here today. I value their work, they are a highly professional team of staff.

SPORT AND RECREATION

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – SPORT AND RECREATION Output 4.1 – Participation and Development Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: If everyone is settled, I invite the minister to introduce officials accompanying her and, if she wishes, to make an opening statement.

Ms LAWRIE: My second area of responsibility is the portfolio of Sport and Recreation, for which I will be joined by Mr Mike Dillon, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport; Mr Steve Rossingh, the Executive Director of Corporate Services, who is responsible for financial management in the department; and Ms Julie Brimson who is the Acting Executive Director, Sport and Recreation.

Budget 2006-07 provides the opportunity to consolidate progress made over the past five years with the development of major sporting infrastructure; the delivery of high profile sporting events; provision of opportunities to participate in national sporting programs; and the opportunity for Territorians to represent the Territory at an elite level. I am pleased to say that grant funding will continue to support the ongoing grassroots development across the Territory, along with Sportsbiz, which has worked hard with organisations over the past 12 months. I am editing as I go.

The key focus for 2006-07 is to develop a strategy to expand sporting activities to remote communities as a means to contribute to our positive social outcomes and healthy lifestyles. Already, Gapuwiyak sports oval is one of the remote ovals which has benefited from an upgrade. We have plans for Bulman oval, Purkiss Reserve and remote communities to continue to be supported. Further, we are ensuring that our regional remote areas are looked after. I have commenced discussions with the federal government to explore options for funding in the critical area of facility development for our remote communities.

Another focus is the delivery of major sporting events in the Territory. The outcome of the department's efforts can be seen by the number of major sporting events over the past few years: the Commonwealth Bank Trophy Netball match, international cricket has been very popular in the past few years; and the Northern Territory Sports Awards, of course, providing our highest sport accolades in the Territory, recognising achievements of our athletes, officials, coaches, administrators and volunteers.

In addition to this, there is a contract for \$6.6m for construction of the new Darwin football stadium at Marrara; the delivery of ongoing National Basketball League matches in the Territory with the Perth Wildcats; funding for the Athletes as Role Models program rolling out across our remote communities; funding for the Alice Springs Masters Games and Arafura Games, two of the most high profile sporting events in the Territory and northern Australia; of course, money for the Hidden Valley Motor Sports Complex to continue to upgrade facilities there. Some \$13.3m in one-off capital grants has gone towards the Traeger Park upgrade in Alice Springs, the Palmerston Recreation Centre, The Alice Springs drag strip, the Parap skate park and, in addition, Tracy Village Social and Sports Club in the northern suburbs has benefited from the improvements in sporting infrastructure.

In summary, this has been a successful delivery of quality sport and recreation in the Territory, which is no easy feat for the department. The community needs have been met in delivering sport and recreation right across the Territory. I look forward to your questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There is some 15 seconds to go with this session. However, given that I want some time to chew my food, I am going to finish this. We will finish the session early.

Ms LAWRIE: Could we take one question, at least?

Mr CHAIRMAN: No. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for attending and also thank officers who provided advice to the minister today.

Mr MILLS: I have a number of questions here that I will put to you on notice. I acknowledge the hard work that departmental officers have done.

Ms LAWRIE: Absolutely.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That now concludes the Estimates Committee public hearings process.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Public Accounts Committee who formed the core membership of the Estimates Committee and for the overall manner in which these public hearings have been conducted.

I would also like to place on record a vote of appreciation from the committee to all other members who participated in the public hearing process.

Thank you also to the Legislative Assembly staff who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the whole process ran smoothly throughout the extended process of four days, with particular reference to the extremely hard working Table and Hansard areas.

With the finalisation of the scrutiny of ministerial portfolios, I thank both the ministers appearing before the committee and the officers attending the hearings. I now take this opportunity to place on the public record my appreciation of the effort put in by agency officers who have worked prior to the public hearings behind the scenes over many weeks, preparing briefing papers for their ministers use through the Estimates Committee questioning.

While I am on this issue, there were occasions throughout the public hearings where, for various reasons, a number of agencies were not required to appear before the committee. While it may be disappointing for the officers who had prepared the extensive briefing papers, I am aware that there is a level of professionalism within the public service which will ensure that the capture of the significant amount of data will not be lost but utilised in the compilation of the agencies' annual reports.

Without labouring the point, it might be timely to remind all participants in the estimates public hearings that they should not lose sight of the fact that the process of accumulating information, enabling briefing papers to be prepared, can also be seen as a tool, providing timely opportunity to thoroughly preview the core business and achievements of agencies as they work within budgets set out in the Appropriation Bill.

I now formally close the public hearings of the Estimates Committee for 2006-07. Thank you.

The committee adjourned.
