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Madam Speaker Purick took the Chair at 10 am.

VISITORS
Nightcliff Middle School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of two Year 8 classes from Nightcliff Middle School, accompanied by their teachers, Anthony Brereton, Hannah Motter, Chip Mohammed, Martin Tumuls and Terry Collins.

On behalf of honourable members, welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

Members: Hear, hear!

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BODY-WORN VIDEO AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EVIDENCE)
BILL
(Serial 10)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, before I start my speech, as local member I would like to acknowledge the fabulous Nightcliff Middle School. I look forward to catching up with them a little later this morning. Welcome to Parliament House.

Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

On 21 September 2016 the Northern Territory Coroner, His Honour Judge Greg Cavanagh, handed down his findings in the inquest into the deaths of two women, Ms Murphy and Ms McCormack.

Both women suffered years of domestic violence before their deaths.

Police were called to 45 domestic violence incidents involving Ms Murphy and her partner between 2003 and her murder in 2014. They were called to 32 incidents involving Ms McCormack and her partner between 2003 and her death in 2015.

Domestic and family violence is a shocking violation of trust.

In 2015 there were 2846 victims of assault per 100 000 residents in the Northern Territory, compared to a national average of 811.

Almost 60% of assaults are attributable to family violence.

Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory are 40 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of violent assaults, mostly committed by their partner and involving alcohol, than non-Aboriginal women.

The Labor government acknowledges that domestic and family violence is one of the biggest challenges to the wellbeing and safety of Territorians, and that a holistic and integrated approach to reduction and prevention is required.

The government is committed to increasing the safety of Territorians and holding perpetrators of domestic and family violence accountable for their actions.

The government has committed \$6m towards building a new Alice Springs Women's Shelter to support women and children who need to leave their homes and has also committed to establishing a remote women's safe house in Galiwinku.

We are consulting on specialised justice responses and supporting grassroots campaigns, such as Charlie King's No More campaign. That is something you, Madam Speaker, and every member of this parliament supported yesterday.

There are many threads feeding into the government's response to domestic and family violence. Underlying them all is the recognition that we need to break the silence, stand up and say no to domestic violence.

We need to empower those who are victims of domestic violence and hold the perpetrators accountable. The justice system has its part to play. We can improve procedures. We can improve outcomes.

In the inquest into the deaths of Ms Murphy and Ms McCormack the coroner made recommendations about how the justice system can be improved in dealing with domestic and family violence.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Body-worn Video and Domestic Violence Evidence) Bill 2016 directly responds to the first of those recommendations.

The coroner recommended, at paragraph 266 of his findings:

... that Police continue to pursue the use of body worn cameras and a change to the legislation so as to allow those matters captured on camera to be used as evidence-in-chief.

This recommendation and the bill I introduce to the Legislative Assembly today cover two separate but related issues.

One is the use of body-worn cameras, commonly referred to as body-worn video, to gather evidence in domestic violence and other situations, capturing the police officer's observations at the scene.

The second is the admission of an audiovisual recorded statement, made using that body-worn video as the evidence-in-chief of complainants in proceedings in domestic violence offences.

NT Police have been trialling the use of body-worn video since late 2014 and have recently ordered 820 devices to roll out their use throughout the Northern Territory.

Body-worn video operates essentially as a modern day equivalent of the police notebook, recording a contemporaneous account of police observations and events while on operational duties.

It can be used to record incidents taking place on Mitchell Street on a Saturday night and, equally, it can record what police observe when they attend a private premises in response to a domestic violence incident.

Body-worn video devices are not only able to be used to record evidence to set the scene but also, if the police detach them from their uniform shirts and place them on a stable surface, to make a high-quality recording of an interview with a person.

It is proposed that NT Police will use body-worn video devices to make recorded statements with complainants in domestic violence offence matters.

Police will be able to obtain their recorded statement immediately or very soon after an incident rather than making an arrangement for the complainant to attend later at a police station.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Body-worn Video and Domestic Violence Evidence) Bill establishes the necessary legislative framework for police to effectively use the technology of body-worn video devices to obtain evidence and facilitate the admission of recorded statements of complainants in domestic violence offence proceedings as their evidence-in-chief.

The procedure for taking a recorded statement at or soon after a domestic violence incident is designed to reduce the trauma of complainants involved in the court process.

Having to retell the traumatic incident from memory is challenging in itself, but the difficulties can be exacerbated in the domestic violence context due to the pressure often being exerted not to cooperate with police.

Recorded statements will relieve the complainant of having to retell their story in court.

The evidence is also likely to be more accurate than evidence given at a later date.

The recorded statement may contain footage that is quite emotionally raw.

Due to the sensitive nature of what may be contained in a recorded statement, to protect the privacy of the complainant and to minimise the risk of further traumatising her or him, provisions prohibiting possession of

the recorded statement by the defendant and an offence prohibiting publication of the statement are included.

Procedural fairness will, however, be accorded to the defendants, as they will be given access to the recorded statement and the statement will not be able to be admitted into evidence unless the defendant has been given a reasonable opportunity to see and hear it.

In addition, the complainant is still required to attend court for their statement to be admitted and to be available for cross-examination.

The government is confident that provisions strike the right balance between supporting complainants in domestic violence offence proceedings and ensuring the right to a fair trial for defendants.

The provisions regarding the admission of recorded statements are based on similar legislation introduced in New South Wales in 2015 and in the ACT in 2016. In both those jurisdictions the legislation is reported to be working well.

In particular, indicators show an increase in early guilty pleas.

Since the introduction of the legislation in the ACT in May 2016, of 150 recorded statements taken by police, 68 have resulted in early guilty pleas.

New South Wales Police have also reported an increase in early guilty pleas. These are the outcomes we want to see replicated in the Northern Territory.

I will now turn to the details of the bill.

Part 2 of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Body-worn Video and Domestic Violence Evidence) bill amends the *Evidence Act*.

Importantly, clause 5 amends the definition of 'vulnerable witness' in section 21A(1) to clarify that complainants in domestic violence proceedings are vulnerable witnesses.

The amendment removes the need for a court to determine that a complainant in such proceedings is a vulnerable witness and automatically gives the complainant access to the protections in Part 3 of the *Evidence Act*, unless the court orders otherwise, for example if facilities are not available.

The amendment is intended to improve the experience of giving evidence for complainants in domestic violence offence proceedings.

Clause 6 inserts a new Division 3A which creates a new procedure for complainants giving evidence-in-chief in domestic violence offence proceedings.

Recorded statements taken by police at or soon after a domestic violence incident will be able to be played in criminal proceedings as evidence-in-chief, or part of the evidence-in-chief, of the complainant.

Although the complainant will still be required to attend court for their statement to be tendered and to be available for cross-examination, the amendment to the definition of 'vulnerable witness' will mean they are able to give evidence with the protections available to a vulnerable witness.

New section 21G sets out the relevant definitions for the Part. Of note, the complainant must be an adult.

As the complainant may be in an emotional and possibly injured state when the recorded statements are taken, it is appropriate that statements only be taken from adults.

'Domestic violence' has the same meaning as section 5 of the *Domestic and Family Violence Act*, and 'domestic violence offence' has been given a wide meaning of an offence that involves domestic violence or an offence under section 120(1) of the *Domestic and Family Violence Act*—breach of a domestic violence order.

This approach, rather than defining by a list of prescribed offences, gives greater flexibility and is based on the approach taken by the ACT in its new *Family Violence Act*.

New section 21H provides that a recorded statement, taken in compliance with the requirements of new section 21J, is admissible as a complainant's evidence-in-chief.

Importantly, its admissibility is not dependent on the prosecution making an application for it to be admitted.

The court retains, however, a discretion to refuse to admit part of the statement if it is in the interests of justice to do so.

Admissibility is subject to compliance with the rules of evidence in the *Evidence (National Uniform Legislation) Act*.

For example, the recorded statement, or part of it, may be excluded if a police officer asks leading questions or if it contains hearsay.

To facilitate admissibility and to ensure that the court proceedings are not unnecessarily delayed by legal arguments about the admissibility, new section 21P provides that the statement can be edited if the parties agree.

The court may also order editing.

New section 21J sets out the requirements for admissibility, including that the statement be made as soon as practicable after the events mentioned in the statement occurred and be taken with the complainant's informed consent.

These factors distinguish a recorded statement under new Part 3A from those that may be under more limited circumstances pursuant to section 21B of the *Evidence Act*.

The aim is to capture a contemporaneous record of the complainant's version of events. The need for informed consent is important, as the complainant may be particularly vulnerable in the aftermath of a domestic violence incident.

New sections 21K, 21L and 21M deal with access to and service of the recorded statement. If the defendant is represented by a lawyer then the prosecution must provide the lawyer with a copy of the recorded statement, but if the defendant is not represented only an audio copy is to be provided.

As I have already mentioned, this limitation is to protect the complainant. However, the defendant is to be provided with the opportunity to view the recorded statement before the court hearing.

This addresses the need to ensure defendants know the case against them.

A failure to comply with the service and access requirements means the statement cannot be admitted unless the parties consent or, the defence having been given the opportunity to see the recording, it is otherwise in the interests of justice to admit it.

A further protection for complainants is afforded by the offence provision in new section 21Q, which carries a maximum penalty of 100 penalty units and/or 12 months imprisonment if a person publishes a recorded statement without the authority to do so.

Given the ease of uploading material to the Internet, this offence provides a necessary deterrent and safeguard. It is modelled on like offences in New South Wales and the ACT.

The government is confident that the reforms in new Part 3A and the amendment to the definition of 'vulnerable witness' in Part 3 provide appropriate supports for complainants who have to give evidence in domestic violence offence proceedings.

I turn now to Part 3 of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Body-worn Video and Domestic Violence Evidence) Bill.

Part 3 introduces amendments to the *Surveillance Devices Act*. These amendments are necessary to ensure that there can be no question about the legality of police using body-worn video devices to record their observations while on operational duties.

The government endorses and supports the use of body-worn video as an operational law enforcement tool. It is an important tool in modern policing to assist officers in keeping our community safe. It provides accurate and contemporary evidence of incidents.

NT Police report that its evidentiary value in other jurisdictions has been significant in encouraging early guilty pleas.

In addition, the capacity of body-worn video to record both the actions of alleged perpetrators and those of the police ensure public confidence in police actions.

Body-worn video is both an 'optical surveillance device' and a 'listening device' under the *Surveillance Devices Act*. The use of body-worn video to record police observations in public places is not an issue.

However, there is some risk that, in some circumstances, recording in a private place could amount to a breach of the prohibition on the use of a listening device or an optical surveillance device to record a 'private conversation' or a 'private activity' under sections 11 and 12 respectively of the *Surveillance Devices Act*.

The government does not want the good work of police in obtaining evidence through body-worn video to be jeopardised by this unintended consequence.

Accordingly, in an abundance of caution, sections 11 and 12 of the *Surveillance Devices Act* are amended to provide that, where the requirements of new section 14A are met, police will not be committing an offence by using body-worn video to make a recording of a private conversation or a private activity.

New section 14A provides that police must be acting in the exercise of their duty, the use of the body-worn video must be overt and they must either be in uniform or provide some evidence to the parties to the private conversation or private activity that the officer is a police officer.

These requirements simply accord with the current practice.

The use of information obtained from body-worn video will be safeguarded by providing that it is 'local protected information' under section 51 of the *Surveillance Devices Act*.

It is an offence to disclose local protected information except in the circumstances set out in section 53, namely law enforcement, education or training.

The bill demonstrates government's commitment to supporting domestic violence complainants giving evidence in criminal proceedings and, more generally, in supporting NT Police in obtaining the best evidence in performing their important job of keeping our community safe.

I commend the bill to honourable members and table a copy of the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT (MENTAL IMPAIRMENT AND UNFITNESS TO BE TRIED) BILL (Serial 11)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the bill is to address an anomaly in the Part IIA of the Criminal Code that has been identified by both the current and former Chief Justice of the Northern Territory Supreme Court.

Part IIA of the Criminal Code establishes the circumstances and procedures for determining whether an accused person was suffering from a mental impairment at the time of the commission of the offence and/or is unfit to stand trial.

It applies only in the Supreme Court. The court may find an accused not guilty because of mental impairment if, at the time of the offence, the accused was suffering from a mental impairment such that he

or she did not know the nature and quality of the conduct and he or she did not know that the conduct was wrong.

The court may find an accused person unfit to plead if, among other things, he or she is unable to understand the nature of the charge against him or her, is unable to plead to the charge, or is unable to understand the nature of the trial or follow the course of proceedings.

The questions of whether an accused is fit to stand trial and/or is not guilty because of mental impairment are for a jury to decide.

However, section 43H of the Criminal Code allows a judge, during a trial, to accept a plea and record a finding of not guilty of the offence because of mental impairment if the prosecution and defence both agree.

This can only happen during a trial, which means that either the issue of fitness to stand trial has not been raised or it has already been determined that the accused is fit to stand trial.

It is the judge who accepts the plea. The jury does not make the decision.

In a similar way, section 43T allows the prosecution and defence to agree, either before or during a trial, that an accused person is unfit to stand trial.

The court can then record a finding that the accused is unfit to stand trial, without a jury having to make this decision.

Once that finding is made, the judge must determine whether there is a reasonable prospect that the accused might, within 12 months, regain the necessary capacity to stand trial.

If the judge does not find that the accused may become fit to stand trial within 12 months, a special hearing must take place before a jury to determine whether the accused is not guilty, or is not guilty because of his or her mental impairment, or committed the offence charged or an available alternative offence.

A special hearing is conducted like a trial.

Although the prosecution and defence may agree that the accused is not guilty because of mental impairment, there is no power to dispense with the need for a special hearing. This creates an anomalous situation.

When an accused is fit to stand trial, a plea of not guilty because of mental impairment can be accepted if the prosecution and defence agree, but when an accused is not fit to stand trial, the issue of mental impairment needs to be determined by a jury at a special hearing.

Special hearings often proceed on the basis that the jury is provided with a document containing agreed facts, possibly together with psychiatric reports, and, after a brief address from counsel and instructions from the judge, a verdict is always returned as not guilty because of mental impairment.

This procedure, in cases where there is no contest, is an unnecessary strain on the court system, government resources and members of the public selected to serve on the jury.

The proposed amendments will provide the court with the discretion to forego the need for a special hearing, removing the need for a jury to determine mental impairment where mental impairment is not in dispute. In doing so, the bill relieves an unnecessary burden on the jury resource.

I will now explain the substantive clauses of the bill.

Clause 6 of the bill inserts new sections 43XA and 43XB into Part IIA of the Criminal Code.

New section 43XA permits a court to dispense with a special hearing.

Under section 43XA, where the prosecution and defence agree that mental impairment has been established before or during a special hearing, the court may accept a plea and record a finding of not guilty of the offence because of mental impairment.

New section 43XA is phrased as a discretionary provision. This has been done so that the court may still require the matter to progress by special hearing where the judge decides not to accept a plea under section 43XA.

For example, a court may consider that the evidence does not make out the offence or that it provides the accused with another viable offence, or there really is an issue as to whether the accused was mentally impaired.

New section 43XB requires the court, where it records a finding under section 43XA, to either declare that the accused person is liable to supervision under Division 5 of Part IIA of the Criminal Code or order that the accused is released unconditionally.

Section 43XB empowers the court to deal with an accused in the same way it currently can under section 43X(2), where an accused has been found not guilty because of mental impairment by a jury at a special hearing.

Consequently, section 43XB is phrased in the same way as section 43X(2).

Clause 7 of the bill amends section 43Y(1) of the Criminal Code.

This amendment allows the court to make interim orders where it has dispensed with a special hearing, found the accused not guilty because of mental impairment under section 43XA, and declared an accused liable to supervision under section 43XB(a).

This amendment allows the court to make interim orders in those circumstances, just like it can when it declares an accused liable to supervision after the accused has been found not guilty because of mental impairment, by a jury, at a special hearing.

Clause 8 of the bill amends section 43Z(a) of the Criminal Code to require the court to make a supervision order where an accused is declared liable for supervision under section 43XB(a).

Currently, section 43Z(a) requires the court to make a supervision order in prescribed circumstances, including where, under section 43X(2)(a), the court has declared an accused liable for supervision after having been found not guilty because of mental impairment, by a jury, at a special hearing.

This amendment ensures the court has an identical requirement to make a supervision order, where it has dispensed with the need for a special hearing under section 43XA, and has declared the accused liable for supervision under section 43XB(a).

Finally, clauses 4 and 5 of the bill make consequential amendments to section 43E and subsections (3) and (9) of section 43R of the Criminal Code.

Those amendments provide that section 43E, which deals with the standard of proof for the defence of mental impairment, and section 43R, which deals with the requirement for a special hearing where the accused is unfit to stand trial, are subject to new section 43XA.

Those amendments are necessary to clarify how sections 43E and 43R operate with regard to section 43XA.

Madam Speaker, those are the substantive clauses of the bill. I commend the bill to honourable members and table a copy of the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

**JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (AUSTRALIAN CRIME COMMISSION) BILL
(Serial 12)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

At its meeting on 5 November 2015, the Law, Crime and Community Safety Council agreed to take the necessary legislative and administrative steps within each jurisdiction to put into effect the proposed merger of CrimTrac and the Australian Crime Commission.

Ministers also agreed to a new intergovernmental agreement. The agreement was signed on 5 May 2016 by the Commonwealth Justice minister and on 29 July 2016 by the former Northern Territory minister for Police.

On 1 July 2016 CrimTrac was abolished. Its former functions became functions of the Australian Crime Commission following the commencement of the *Australian Crime Commission (National Policing Information Charges) Act 2016*.

Legislation reflecting these changes has been enacted in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

CrimTrac was a Commonwealth administrative agency. Its functions related to criminal intelligence of the kind shared between Commonwealth, state and territory police agencies.

CrimTrac is referenced in various Northern Territory Acts and Regulations, namely the *Criminal Records (Spent Convictions) Act*; the Criminal Records (Spent Convictions) Regulations; and the *Firearms Act*.

This bill removes those references and, where appropriate, replaces them with a reference to the Australian Crime Commission.

The bill also amends the *Australian Crime Commission (Northern Territory) Act*. The Australian Crime Commission is established by the Commonwealth's *Australian Crime Commission Act 2002* and by various state and territory Acts, such as the *Australian Crime Commission (Northern Territory) Act*.

The *Australian Crime Commission (Northern Territory) Act* is being amended to take account of the amendments made to the Commonwealth's *Australian Crime Commission Act 2002* concerning the former functions of CrimTrac and the number of members of the commission who make up the quorum for the commission's board.

This bill also provides for the updating of the references to the relevant Commonwealth court following the federal magistrates court being abolished and replaced by the Federal Circuit Court.

The *Police Administration Act* is being amended so that agreements made between CrimTrac and the Northern Territory concerning the sharing of DNA are deemed to be agreements with the Australian Crime Commission.

A similar amendment is contained in section 10 of the Commonwealth's *Australian Crime Commission (National Policing Information Charges) Act 2016*.

None of these amendments raise any significant policy issues.

New section 172 provides that an agreement under section 147A, relating to DNA information, between CrimTrac and the minister or the commissioner as in force immediately before 1 July 2016 is deemed from that date to have been an agreement with the Australian Crime Commission.

The bill amends the *Interpretation Act* so as to include definitions of the Australian Crime Commission, the Federal Circuit Court and the Federal Court.

These are drafting-related amendments identified in the course of the development of the legislation. This will simplify the long-term development of the statute book.

The bill also provides for minor statute law amendments to the Criminal Records (Spent Convictions) Regulations; the *Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Northern Territory) Act*; the *Competition Policy Reform (Northern Territory) Act*; and the *Jurisdiction of Courts (Cross-vesting) Act*.

As is probably obvious, this bill is of a housekeeping nature. It contains amendments that need to be made. The present time provides an opportunity to do so.

I commend the bill to honourable members and table a copy of the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

**LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 13)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The main purpose of this bill is to correct a potential loophole in the *Liquor Act* with respect to varying licensing conditions.

In 2015 this Assembly passed the *Gaming and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act*. That act had the effect of amending the *Liquor Act* to, amongst other things, insert section 32A(1A).

Both the explanatory statement and the second reading speech to that Act disclosed that section 32A(1A) was intended to capture both existing store licences and any new store licences granted or operative after the subsection commenced.

During the debate, the then Minister for Racing, Gaming and Licensing described the proposed effects of the act as follows, 'The amendment to the *Liquor Act* will enshrine in legislation successive government policy that stores and liquor merchants should not trade takeaway liquor on Sundays'.

It has become apparent to the government that there is a disjunct between the potential operation and intended operation of section 32A(1A).

Section 32A of the *Liquor Act* currently provides that a licensee may apply to the Director-General for a variation of the conditions of the licence held by the licensee.

There is, however, a restriction on this ability to seek variations in subsection (1A), which provides that an application cannot be made by the holder of a store licence for variation of conditions of the licence, where that variation would have the effect of permitting the sale of liquor for consumption away from the premises on a day on which it is not permitted under the licence as in force immediately before the commencement.

A practical example of this is where the holder of a store licence, which is not permitted under the Liquor Regulations to trade on a Sunday, applies to vary a condition of their licence which would then permit that holder to sell liquor on a Sunday.

Subsection (1A) currently prevents an application for varying conditions in those circumstances where the licence is in force before the commencement of that provision.

With the introduction of this bill I confirm our government's policy position with respect to restricting any applications to vary licences, including the type of licence, that would produce the same effect as that currently restricted in section 32A(1A).

A practical example of this is where a store licence holder applies to vary their type of licence, for example to vary a store licence to a tavern licence to enable that licence to trade on a Sunday where, previously, that store licence did not permit trading on a Sunday.

This bill amends section 32A to make it clear that the Director-General cannot vary the conditions of a store licence in a way that would either:

1. have the effect of permitting the sale of takeaway liquor for consumption away from the licenced premises on a day that is not permitted under the licence as in force prior to the application
2. where the variation of the store licence has the effect of changing the licence to a type of licence that would permit the sale of takeaway liquor from the licenced premises on a day which is not permitted under the licence as in force immediately before the application for variation.

This bill makes it clear that the restrictions apply to those licences in force both before and after the commencement of the changes, but it will not overturn an existing variation to a licence made before the commencement of the bill.

Furthermore, the restrictions are to apply to applications to vary whether made before or after commencement.

Any existing applications which have not been determined as of the date of commencement will be taken to have been rejected. Thus it is intended that the amendments apply retrospectively as well as prospectively.

We are serious when it comes to promoting and ensuring the responsible supply of alcohol to the community and we seek the cooperation of all licensees in this pursuit.

Given this commitment and following passage, the bill provides that it will commence on 30 November 2016, being the date of introduction of the bill in this House.

These amendments remove any opportunity for applications to be made to vary store licences to enable licensees to sell takeaway liquor on Sundays, which is currently not permitted under the Liquor Regulations.

I commend the bill to honourable members and table a copy of the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS **Pass Bill through All Stages – Liquor Act Amendment Bill (Serial 13)**

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I move that so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Liquor Amendment Bill 2016 (Serial 13) passing through all stages this meeting.

We are seeking to suspend standing orders in order to pass the proposed Liquor Amendment Bill on urgency, laying aside the standard 30 days that a bill is required to sit on the table before its passage.

This is something I do not bring into this House lightly, and I will now explain for members why this is a necessary course of action for the government. I will also listen intently to the points raised by other members during the debate and in closing the debate I hope I can address those and seek the support of this Chamber.

As I detailed in my second reading speech earlier this morning, this legislation seeks to correct a potential loophole in the *Liquor Act* with respect to varying licensing conditions. I make it quite clear I do not wish to play politics with this important policy area.

In April 2015 this Assembly passed the *Gaming and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act*. The changes made to the *Liquor Act* were intended to enshrine in legislation successive government policy that stores and liquor merchants should not trade takeaway liquor on Sundays, something that has been a long-standing bipartisan agreement.

However, the amendment which inserted section 32A(1A) into the *Liquor Act* contains a drafting error which, unfortunately, creates a loophole. If a store licence did not exist or was not effective on or before 1 July 2015, it is not caught by the restriction mandated by section 32A(1A).

As Attorney-General, with responsibility for Licensing NT, I became aware of the serious concerns relating to the operation of section 32A(1A), including through feedback from industry groups. I sought legal advice from the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, and the Solicitor-General for the Northern Territory, which confirmed that section 32A(1A) of the *Liquor Act* does not operate as intended and requires amendment.

Currently, almost all store licence holders have licences in effect from before 1 July 2015, which this change does not impact on as those licences were already in place. However, a handful of store licences have come into effect after 1 July 2015. As I understand, there are six.

This means a handful of store licences may not be operating under the same legislative restriction regarding Sunday trading as nearly all store licence holders in the Territory.

This loophole, if pursued by that handful of licence holders, would undermine our strong Sunday trading restrictions on takeaway alcohol, something every member in this House acknowledges that we need to

uphold in dealing with the issues of alcohol policy and the abuse of alcohol in the Northern Territory. This has been upheld by successive governments, Labor and CLP. It has been a bipartisan approach over many years.

It is, therefore, urgent that I address this issue. We must give certainty to Territory businesses and ensure that store licence holders operate on an equal playing field and are subject to the same rules and restrictions. Otherwise, we would have an approach that would potentially undermine alcohol policy in the Territory, simply by a minor drafting error in a piece of legislation.

I seek to debate this matter urgently tomorrow, with the support of members of this House. It is not a move I take lightly. On this side of the House we strongly believe that urgency should only be used for genuinely urgent changes to legislation; this is one of those situations.

The bill is required to be urgent in regard to the consequences that could potentially be pursued if we do not pass this legislation. Given that the loophole has been identified and is now known widely within the hospitality industry and business, we need to act now.

I ask that the Assembly recognises that we must make this position clear. We in this parliament do not support any watering down of the restrictions on Sunday trading regulations for takeaway alcohol. The Assembly has a long history of bipartisan support of restricting Sunday trading for takeaway liquor. In this respect I note the bipartisan consensus demonstrated last year, when the bill that caused this drafting error was debated in this House.

I quote from the second reading speech of the former Minister for Business, the former Member for Sanderson, Mr Peter Styles, when making changes in the *Gaming and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act 2015*:

... this bill will amend the Liquor Act to enshrine in legislation this government's policy about Sunday trade of takeaway liquor from stores. Since 1999 it has been successive governments' policy that stores could not trade takeaway liquor on Sundays. The amendments to the Liquor Act remove any ambiguity as to the hours of trade for stores to sell takeaway liquor.

It is very clear that there was no intention from the former government to allow changes to Sunday trading. The loophole appears to be a genuine error in the drafting of the legislation. It therefore requires us in this House to urgently correct this error.

I note, for the benefit of members opposite, that during debate on the *Gaming and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act 2015*, the opposition—as we were at the time—supported the government's position on Sunday trading. I was the shadow minister during that debate, and I voiced my support for the then government's intentions, specifically in relation to Sunday trading.

I quote from the debate in the House:

... the clean up on the liquor trading hours to remove any ambiguity around the Sunday trading, is also a good move.

Reflecting on the words of the minister and shadow minister at the time—restricting Sunday trading of takeaway alcohol was not a matter that divided the House at the time; it happened in an inadvertent drafting error.

We all know the challenges of alcohol abuse in the Northern Territory. As a government, we have outlined our reforms around alcohol policy based on our election commitment to bring back the Banned Drinker Register.

As Attorney-General, Minister for Justice and Minister for Health, I fully expect there to be strong debate in this Assembly throughout the term of our government on alcohol policy and, in due course, on the legislation we propose to bring into the Chamber to implement our election commitments.

I am sure we all agree that Territorians would expect nothing less from their elected members that we are reflecting on the debate at the time and the proposed amendment today. It is not about changing or reforming government alcohol policy, we are simply amending an unintended consequence. This is not about debating alcohol policy here and now; this is simply amending an unintended consequence. If you

take the time to reflect on the second reading speeches you will see there was no intention. It was just an inadvertent error.

We need to pass this bill tomorrow so we can make sure the licences that are caught in this loophole, and any licences issued going forward—until the House meets again in February—do not compromise the long-standing bipartisan agreement on Sunday trading restrictions. This bill is to ensure that Sunday trading policy—both ours and that of the former CLP government—is not undermined by a technical legal error in legislation that happened previously.

There will be a time for scrutiny and to contest alcohol policy and legislation, but the clear intention of this bill is to close a loophole. I urge all members to contribute to the debate this morning and I am happy to take any questions they may have.

By addressing this bill on urgency this Assembly can demonstrate that it is possible to work together to ensure the integrity of the current legislation and the strong Sunday trading restriction policy in the Northern Territory.

I acknowledge those members opposite who have, since this error was raised in the last week to 10 days, come for briefings at very short notice. I thank the shadow minister for alcohol policy and the Independent members for availing themselves of that.

As I said from the outset, I will listen intently to the debate this morning and in my closing debate will address any concerns. I have clearly outlined that this is simply closing an unintended drafting error which has had a huge potential consequence. We need to make sure we uphold those strong Sunday trading rules in the Territory.

Madam Speaker, I welcome the debate ahead and I seek the support of the Chamber to pass this bill tomorrow on urgency.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I thank the Attorney-General for bringing this motion on urgency.

The debate is limited specifically to the urgency motion. I thank her office and the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice for the briefing we were able to have yesterday, albeit at late notice; it was good. Thank you to the solicitor who provided the information through the minister's office as a follow up.

At the outset, the opposition is not supportive of the urgency motion. I want to highlight the three reasons we cannot support the bill being rushed through on urgency:

1. By putting it through on urgency we are not respecting the due process required of this parliament.
2. When you rush through legislation you are increasing the risk of making mistakes and later discovering unintended consequences of those errors.
3. There has not been any consultation and an opportunity to plan and roll it out in a way that takes Territorians with you.

At the heart of our objection to the urgency motion is consultation.

Consultation on Bills is very important and the parliament sets a 30-day time frame by which legislation sits on the table so people have the opportunity to provide feedback and comment. We always welcome additional proactive consultation. At a minimum, the 30-day period affords people an opportunity.

The Attorney-General has raised that there is a potential loophole as a result of a drafting error. We recognise that, but one thing being missed so far in this debate is the fact that, despite this, it is the law in operation in the Northern Territory.

Whilst the consequences of any potential loophole might be unintended, it is the law, and that means Territorians are operating within that legal framework. As they rightly should—it is the law. Operating within the parameters of the law is what is to be expected.

We closely looked, as an opposition, at the powers of the Director-General of Licensing, pursuant to sections 6 and 28 of the *Liquor Act*. It is very clear and easy to read in the act that the Director-General has

explicit and extensive powers in relation to whether or not they grant or amend licences and how they deal with applications coming through their door.

We have been advised by the minister that there is an application on foot as well as potential applications looking to be put forward to the Director-General. Essentially, by not passing this motion on urgency or affording it the proper time that ordinary bills would have by continuing along with the proper parliamentary process, it will allow an opportunity for the applicants and all Territorians to express their concerns and to be engaged in a process pertaining to why this legislation needs to be amended.

We need to remember, as members of parliament, that sometimes it is all well and good to discuss things in here but if it is not being transpired into the broader Northern Territory then we can leave people behind. If the legislation was put through the normal process and sat on the table for the 30 days then the government would have the opportunity to assess the impact on those people who are just undertaking the course of their business following the legal parameters that are in place. That way there will be an opportunity for a proper assessment for the impact and, most of all, procedural fairness. That is the crux of what we are saying today.

If the Bill is not passed on urgency there is opportunity for everyone involved and affected to be afforded procedural fairness and opportunity for consultation. The minister, in the press release that was issued, quoted from the Australian Hotels Association, and it is fair to say it would not be an unexpected position for the AHA to take.

We put in a call to the Australian Liquor Stores Association President, Faye Hartley, as just one of the stakeholders we thought of yesterday as this motion was put to us. Our call to her was the first she had heard of any amendments to the *Liquor Act*, and she was very surprised and disappointed that the government had not engaged her to discuss this, because she has worked with the government in other areas of alcohol policy, including the Banned Drinker Register. Faye Hartley felt that—she and the Liquor Stores Association are known to government and they are important stakeholders who have been left out of this conversation.

If it is passed on urgency then we are not letting Territorians know or understand why the amendment is taking place. We are missing the opportunity for procedural fairness and for people to engage in this issue, and for the government to take the opportunity to explain the impact as well as outline the policy objective and why this section needs to be addressed.

In the previous parliament, the test for urgency—there was a measure of hardship. Whilst the rules around urgency are a bit different in the 13th Assembly, we think it is a good benchmark, threshold and test for us as an opposition to use, especially when the majority government introduces Bills on urgency. You could introduce every bill on urgency if you really wanted to, so we feel the need for some very clear parameters under which a bill being introduced on urgency would be acceptable. Hardship is a good measure of that.

We do not feel that the Attorney-General has made out that measure of hardship, and that is because of the strong powers, set out under sections 6 and 28 of the *Liquor Act*, for the Director-General. It is important not to be alarmed; sometimes we have a floodgates fear, as it is called. Just because something is allowed does not mean we will have plenty of applications or approvals streaming through the door.

I want to reiterate that liquor outlets and retailers, whoever they might be, are operating within the current parameters of the law. It is no fault of theirs that there may or may not be a drafting error or potential loophole, despite the intention of the parliament.

We are calling on the government to be mindful that it needs to take people on the journey with it. We understand their concerns; that is just one issue. A separate issue is preserving and protecting the due processes of the parliament, which are age old and are there for a very important reason. Territorians need procedural fairness and the opportunity—there needs to be some level of hardship, a very significant detriment placed on Territorians in order to justify moving something on urgency, especially when you have such a large government, so you are ensuring that you are taking Territorians on the journey with you. The minister said in her contribution that they would seek the cooperation of licensees. We say cooperation would be afforded if the time was taken by the government to explain—just as you have set out for us today—to Territorians why you seek to amend the *Liquor Act*.

I will leave my contribution there. For those very clear reasons the opposition will not be supporting the urgency motion; I want to be clear on that. We feel the threshold has not been met. We feel that the

Director-General has very assertive powers and hardship has not been established by the government today.

Mr GUNNER (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, there has been, in this House, a bipartisan agreement—I extend that to the cross benches, which obviously change from term to term—about restricted trading on Sundays.

Mr Wood: Still there.

Mr GUNNER: Gerry is consistent, but other members of the cross bench have changed from term to term. There has essentially been agreement in this House about restriction on trade for the sale of alcohol on Sundays.

We have seen—and I believe it is unintentional—a mistake by the CLP that has changed bipartisan plus cross bench agreed policy on Sundays. The Attorney-General is seeking to fix that loophole and change the legislation back to meet what has been agreed policy now for many years.

The suggestion from the opposition that we should be consulting on what is and has been agreed policy by everyone for a very long time seems quite peculiar. That we need to consult about the mistakes made by the CLP, which will allow broader trading of alcohol on Sundays, and whether we should fix that mistake seems quite extraordinary.

I am surprised to see the opposition walk away from what has been an agreed position for a very long time about the restriction of alcohol trade on Sundays. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Liquor Stores Association of the NT. Its position, for a long time now, has been that you should open the floodgates and sell alcohol on Sundays. That has been considered over many years by both the ALP, the CLP and the crossbenchers in coming to what has been an agreed position for many years to have restricted trading on Sundays. It seems quite bizarre that they are moving away from that agreed policy.

We have agreed in this House, in many debates, over a very long time and in the early days of this term, on the hardship that is caused by the supply of alcohol. But we have heard from the opposition that we should not fix a loophole that creates the potential for greater supply of alcohol on Sundays.

Mr WOOD: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Relevance; the motion before us is to do with the reasons this should be passed on urgency.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nelson. Chief Minister, the motion is a suspension of standing orders; the policy debate will come later.

Mr GUNNER: Madam Speaker, I am responding to the points made by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition as to why the opposition is not supporting urgency—quite surprising points.

We recognise that this is a loophole that needs to be fixed to prevent the broadening of the sale of alcohol on Sundays. It was agreed in this House, even in the early days of this term, that the supply of alcohol on Sundays presents hardship, yet the opposition is not supporting urgency on that measure. It seems extraordinary that we are fixing up a mistake the CLP made, which I believe was unintentional and has changed policy that was mutually agreed by all parties around the restriction of trade on Sundays.

We support urgency; we support the ALP fixing what I believe was an unintentional CLP mistake. The degree to which it was unintentional is being changed. In response to the CLP's approach to not support urgency—maybe it was not an unintentional error. Maybe the CLP did make a change to its policy around Sunday trading and just did not tell anybody.

We support urgency and fixing the CLP's mistake, a mutually agreed policy by the ALP, CLP and crossbenchers around the restriction of trade on Sundays. That is why we are doing this on urgency. We are reverting back to what was a mutually agreed policy and dealing with the hardship that was agreed on by many in this House, and I am surprised to see the CLP walk away from that belief that supply of alcohol is a hardship.

I support the work the Attorney-General is doing and I am staggered by the position the CLP has taken.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, when matters come before us on urgency they can ramp up the heat in parliament from time to time. I have not always supported urgency Bills, but I agreed today to listen

to the debate. That is part of the reason you sit in this parliament. I am listening to the for and against arguments and am interested in the minister's response. I will then make up my mind.

Urgency is something I would hope is rarely used in parliament. One of the classic examples of when it should be used was when former minister for the Environment, Karl Hampton, introduced a bill which related to the release of sewage into the harbour. Power and Water had to have a licence. They found that their licence was illegal and if they did not fix it, more or less straight away, technically Power and Water would have been breaking the law. That was a clear matter of urgency. If it did not happen what would the effects have been? Power and Water would have been acting illegally and would have been prosecuted by the EPA.

In this case, if it is not passed today is there a likelihood that certain stores will apply to trade on Sunday? Have any stores put in an application to apply for Sunday trading? Will the Director-General of Licensing have the power to stop those applications from trading on Sunday? If so, under what powers does she have that right? Are those powers entirely hers to make a decision? Can she make a decision in support of a store trading on Sunday? Are there any applications for a liquor licence on Sunday from a store that would be heard before this legislation going through at the next sittings? If we delayed this to the next sittings is there a likelihood that a store could put forward an application and have it heard and approved before this went to the next sittings?

They are the questions I need answered. If I knew it was possible that a store would put an application to the Director-General of Licensing before the next sittings and there was—I am not pre-empting what the Director-General would say—a chance she could make a decision in favour of the store, then I would support this on urgency. If there was no likelihood of a liquor licence being granted to a store before the next sittings of parliament, then I would not support it on urgency simply because there would not be a need to do it. I would need some clarification of those matters.

I am happy to speak about Sunday trading; I was on the radio yesterday speaking about it. We will do that when the bill, I presume, comes back tomorrow and we can discuss its broader aspects.

The Member for Spillett is right to some extent; due process needs to be looked at. Whether I am always in agreement or not, due process is also urgency. It is not conducted outside of parliament; it is done within the walls of parliament. It is an issue of whether the process should be sped up or go through the normal length of time to discuss these issues.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nelson, your time has expired.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the members who contributed to the debate. I am very surprised at the CLP, so early in its term, walking away from this long-standing bipartisan agreement on Sunday trading. It is something we need to uphold; alcohol abuse is one of the biggest issues we are facing in the Northern Territory.

The questions raised by the Member for Nelson are the exact same questions that I asked when it was first brought to my attention. That is why we are seeking the urgency to pass this bill today.

I believe there are six licences that have been issued since 1 July 2015 and I understand there is currently an application to request a change of licence from merchant store to tavern, which would allow Sunday trading. There is potential for others to follow suit in the period before this parliament next meets. We are speaking about a long-standing bipartisan agreement on restricting Sunday trading so we can try to deal with the issue of alcohol abuse in the Northern Territory.

The loophole that was created was inadvertent. I do not blame the minister. In the second reading speech in May 2015, we spoke about upholding Sunday trading. That is why I find it surprising that the Member for Spillett indicated the opposition will walk away from that.

The department has advised me there are six licences that have been issued since that period in July. Those six licensees can all apply to the Director-General, who is independent of government. She simply interprets and upholds the law. We have strong advice that there is a loophole and the law needs to be changed as a matter of urgency. There are six potential licences that could change and one application in train.

Leaving this until February would potentially allow a long-standing agreement of restricting Sunday trading to change. It is extremely important that we close this loophole during this sittings. That is why the urgency

motion is important. Every question you asked was a question we asked as soon as we became aware of this issue.

In regard to the opposition raising the point of consultation, we have spoken with Alcohol Beverages Australia and the Australian Hotels Association. We all know Faye Hartley's clear point regarding Sunday trading. She has campaigned for years to have the Sunday trading restriction abolished. I do not think that point, which the opposition raised, is important.

Regarding the other points that were raised about this bill, the reason we do not need consultation for 30 days is we are not creating something new; we are simply closing a loophole. Anyone who applied for a licence before 1 July 2015 is not able to use this loophole to apply for a change. It is only those licences from 1 July 2015 until now. It is an inadvertent error—the power of one word in a bill. Nobody meant for it to happen. If you read the debate of May 2015 you will see it was not intended.

That error has serious consequences for the issue of alcohol licences in the Northern Territory. Licences that have been issued since 1 July 2015 do not have to uphold the same standard as the licences before that date. They are able to change their licence, which would allow Sunday trading. We already have one application in train, which is why we need to do this urgently in this House this week.

The points made by the CLP about not respecting due process and increasing the risk of mistakes—we are fixing a CLP mistake. It is not about consulting with Territorians about a change in a policy position. We are upholding a long-standing bipartisan policy position in the space of alcohol policy, especially being aware of the issues we face in the Northern Territory, which is so important.

We are operating within the legal framework parameters. This is what urgency is for. I remember, Member for Nelson, Power and Water's issue with sewage and when that came into the House.

Mr Wood: I hope the sewage did not come into the House—the way you said that.

Ms FYLES: For lack of better words.

I remember that case, when Minister Hampton had to bring that into the parliament. For me, during the last term, that was the bar I set for matters of urgency. What is the effect if we do not use an urgency motion? If we do not use urgency to pass this change and close this loophole we could have six licensees who ...

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Attorney-General, your time has expired.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION **Establishment of an Inquiry into Options for Political Reform**

Mr GUNNER (Chief Minister): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly appoints a person, under section 4A of the Northern Territory *Inquiries Act*, to inquire into and report on options for the reform of political funding and donations in the Northern Territory by no later than 12 months from today, including:

1. should there be a cap on how much parties can spend on a campaign, how it should be calculated and what other details should be considered
2. whether or not full or partial public funding of political parties and candidates should be provided
3. if a partial public funding scheme is considered preferable, recommendations as to a potential model, the basis upon which such funding is to be provided and whether a threshold for such funding should be adopted; consideration should extend to any legislative or regulatory amendments that would be required to affect such a model
4. what is the appropriate level to cap the value of political donations to parties, groups, candidates, elected members and third-party campaigners; what methodology should be used to determine that cap; and what measures can be put in place to ensure that any caps are effective
5. whether the current donations disclosure requirements are appropriate, including potential changes to the method, timing and publication of disclosures

6. what controls should apply to the making of political donations, including:
 - (i) whether or not particular entities or groups of donors should be excluded
 - (ii) any limitations, restrictions or caps on such political donations
7. whether there have been any breaches of the Northern Territory *Electoral Act* in relation to donations made to political parties in the Northern Territory over the last 10 years
8. any legislative or regulatory amendments that should be made to ensure that limits on political donations and disclosure requirements cannot be avoided through the use of third parties, associated entities or other means. To this end the inquiry will investigate:
 - (i) the structure of Foundation 51 and the scope of its activities
 - (ii) the relationship between Foundation 51 and the Northern Territory Government and its agencies, and any related conflicts of interest
 - (iii) the relationship between Foundation 51 and the Country Liberal Party, and any related conflicts of interest
 - (iv) the extent of direct and indirect financial and in-kind support provided by Foundation 51 to the Country Liberal Party, members of parliament and candidates for parliamentary elections
 - (v) the extent of breaches of the Northern Territory *Electoral Act* and any other Territory legislation by Foundation 51
 - (vi) the activities of Harold Nelson Holdings and its compliance with the Northern Territory *Electoral Act*
9. any other matters relevant to political funding and donations.

In the lead-up to the August general election I said that Territorians want and deserve a government they can trust. I am sure all honourable members will agree that the trust between a government and the people it serves is fundamental to our Territory democracy. However governments are not perfect; they make mistakes from time to time. A solid foundation of trust between the community, its parliamentary representatives and Cabinet ministers is a foundation stone for the Territory's future.

Before the election I released Territory Labor's detailed discussion paper on restoring integrity to government. In doing, I said:

Scrutiny, accountability and transparency is a crucial feature of a healthy democratic society, it protects against corruption and wrongdoing and produces better decision making and greater benefits to the community.

In the short time since coming to office the new Labor government has committed to implement the broad reform and accountability agenda essential to restoring trust with the community. The Attorney-General has already outlined our plans to deliver the ICAC we promised Territorians. New arrangements have been implemented to enhance transparency and accountability in relation to overseas travel. Yesterday the Assembly passed our amendments to the *Public Information Act* to put an end to taxpayer-funded political advertising.

Electoral reform is another key element of the trust and integrity agenda we took to the Territory people for their verdict. It is important that I remind honourable members about what we said in the pre-election discussion paper:

Territory Labor believes current electoral rules and processes contribute to the poor public perception of political parties and politicians. A Territory Labor Government will consider reforms to the electoral processes to restore public support and confidence in the system.

...

Labor believes it is time to have a public discussion in the Territory about the way elections are funded. Currently political candidates and political parties raise funds through the public to allow them to campaign for election. While there are some controls on this through the public declaration of donors, actions such as the creation of Foundation 51 that are designed to circumvent public disclosure rules, have undermined confidence in these provisions.

*A Territory Labor government will lead a public discussion around funding reform.
A Territory Labor Government will lead a public discussion around funding reform.*

...

Public funding of election campaigns including consideration of the current national arrangements under which public funding is allocated based on the number of votes received.

Capping individual political donations.

Lowering the threshold of reporting of donations.

I am happy to table our report, Restoring Integrity to Government. I think I have tabled it in the House before.

The motion I am asking the Assembly to support today is the first step in the electoral reform process. We promised to consider, if elected by Territorians—the new Labor government will deliver on that commitment. The policy options set out in our pre-election discussion paper have informed the terms of reference for the proposed inquiry. Why is this important? Because electoral legislation and administration lies at the heart of our democracy.

As all honourable members know, there are some fundamental elements for a democracy functioning in the public interest, including a universal franchise under which all eligible citizens have the opportunity to enrol and vote; fair electoral boundaries based on the principal of one vote, one value, drawn up by an independent distribution committee and free from political influence; free and fair elections conducted by impartial and independent electoral officials; an open and transparent reporting system for the disclosure of donations to political parties, candidates and associated entities; and the ability for independent investigation of our decision-makers.

These fundamental principles and foundation stones of our democracy underpin institutional arrangements in the Commonwealth and in our state and territory jurisdictions. In our jurisdiction, the last of the four principles I just mentioned has informed the donation disclosure provision set out in Part 10 in the *Electoral Act* for the Northern Territory. These measures were enacted over a decade ago, and that could justify a review of the relevant provisions. More significantly, events in the Territory in the last four years involving the CLP and Foundation 51 have crystallised the need for donation disclosure provisions to be strengthened, consistent with the community's expectation of the integrity of our democracy.

Territorians have placed their trust in this parliament to protect and improve the key institutions and administrative arrangements which underpin our democracy. We should not let them down. The community wants strong and enforceable political donation disclosure legislation. There is nothing wrong with political donations per se, provided they are made with no strings attached and are fully disclosed within the time lines set out in the act.

Deliberate and systemic breaches of the disclosure provisions are a direct attack on our democracy. There cannot be any doubt that Territorians want an open and transparent reporting regime for donations to political parties, candidates and associated entities. They want to be assured that deliberate breaches of electoral legislation will be thoroughly investigated. The community also expects that serious breaches of donation disclosure provisions will be prosecuted without fear or favour. This is one element of the duty this parliament owes to the community to maintain confidence in our democracy and its vital institutions.

The community will demand that any strengthened disclosure provisions arising from the inquiry foreshadowed in the motion before the Assembly will be implemented by an independent electoral commission, supported by other agencies when prima facie breaches of the act are identified.

Territorians expect that existing and new provisions on donation disclosure will apply to all political parties, candidates and associated entities without fear or favour. If the Assembly supports the motion, Territorians

will have a further opportunity to express their views on donation disclosure and the important related issues covered by the inquiry's terms of reference.

Shortly I will move on to the wider issues of electoral reform addressed by the motion to establish the inquiry. But before I do, the public's interest and inquiry's terms of reference demand I make reference to the activities of Foundation 51; it would be remiss of me not to do so.

The relationship between Foundation 51 and the CLP is a key element in the proposed terms of reference in relation to the disclosure of political donations. Its inclusion is driven by public interest considerations and the public's right to know about the full extent of the breaches of the *Electoral Act*, including those related to the activities of associated entities as defined in the act.

Both the CLP and Foundation 51 have committed clear and indisputable breaches of the law by failing to disclose donations, including in-kind support consistent with the requirements of the *Electoral Act*. The full extent of these breaches has never been disclosed. I am not referring to the occasional omissions and administrative mistakes made by all organisations from time to time.

Prima facie evidence already on the public record points to deliberate and systemic breaches of the act. It is not my purpose today to quote chapter and verse on the relationship between the CLP and Foundation 51; that will be a matter for the inquiry if its proposed terms of reference are endorsed by the Assembly. There are documents on the public record that have generated serious concerns about the probity of both organisations and their failure to comply with the disclosure provisions set out in the act.

Fundamentally, the former CLP government—party machine—and Foundation 51 betrayed the trust of Territorians. Honourable members will recall that a leaked email of 26 November 2012 from Foundation 51 Director, Graeme Lewis, to members of the CLP executive committee and the then CLP Chief Minister, Terry Mills, set out substantial financial in-kind support provided by Foundation 51 to the CLP over many years, commencing in 2008–09. Much of this financial support was never declared by the CLP or Foundation 51 within the mandated time frames for disclosure returns to be lodged with the Electoral Commission.

It is directly relevant to the terms of reference of the proposed inquiry that the email of 26 November 2012 states, inter alia:

Like you, I will be mortified if this information becomes widely known. It must be closely held for obvious reasons.

This revelation begs at least two compelling questions. What are the compelling reasons that require the financial information in the email to be closely held, and why would the Director of Foundation 51 be mortified if the information was to become widely known?

These questions have never been answered on the public record in the public interest. Despite subsequent denials by the CLP and Foundation 51 that there was no relationship between them, the Lewis email indicates expenditure of \$216 573 on activities associated with the 2012 NT general election. It also states that in the months to 31 August 2012 another \$200 000 was:

... spent on "polling \$110 000, consultants re the debt strategies and policies \$34 000, concept development \$34 160, plus travel, McGrath outgoings etc ...

...

Once again, the contributors were clearly aware, and did generally stipulate that the funds raised would be devoted to NT elections in 2012 or thereafter ...

These financial transactions should have been declared, within the stipulated time frames, under the donation disclosure provisions in the *Electoral Act*. Despite persistent denials by Foundation 51, executive members of the CLP and the then Chief Minister, Adam Giles, there has been a close and ongoing relationship between Foundation 51 and the CLP.

A subsequent email of 26 March 2014 to the CLP management committee members from Mr Lewis stated that he and former Chief Minister Adam Giles had discussed Foundation 51 on many occasions. The email also stated:

The Foundation has already contributed towards the activities of the Blain by-election. In retrospect—not clever in view of this current interrogation.

Those two emails taken together also beg another significant question: why did Foundation 51 and the CLP consistently deny the close and ongoing relationship between them, which is clearly evident on the public record?

It is not only members on this side of the House who have expressed concerns about the lack of accountability and transparency in the operations of Foundation 51. On 24 March 2014 the then CLP deputy Treasurer, Eli Melky, put the following questions to Foundation 51 Director, Graeme Lewis: what is the purpose of Foundation 51? What is the current balance of Foundation 51? When was the account established? What is the objective of the account? What disclosures are required to be made in line with current fiduciary requirements by law? What disclosures are required to be made in line with the AEC and NTEC regarding Foundation 51? Provide evidence of our compliance to AEC and NTEC regarding Foundation 51, if applicable. Has there ever been such an inquiry into this account and, if so, why hasn't this information been made available?

Like many disaffected and former members of the CLP, Mr Melky is still waiting for answers to his questions about Foundation 51.

There is one additional matter I am compelled to draw to the attention of honourable members, relevant to the terms of reference set out in the motion before this Assembly. Although the CLP government knew he was a member of the CLP executive and the Director of Foundation 51, it appointed Mr Lewis as Chair of the Land Development Corporation Advisory Board. This was a totally inappropriate appointment and a breach of Territorians' trust by the former CLP government. Under pressure from the media and following a subsequent email to Mr Lewis on 25 May 2014, CLP Chief Minister Adam Giles invited Mr Lewis to meet with him to discuss real or perceived conflicts of interest arising from his chairmanship of the LDC advisory committee.

When subsequently pressed to provide details of the meeting foreshadowed in the email, typically, Mr Giles refused to provide an answer.

I am happy to table a written question from the Member for Nightcliff to the then Chief Minister.

Following on from your invitation to Graeme Lewis of 25 May 2014 to discuss 'real or perceived conflicts of interest' arising from his chairmanship of the Land Development Corporation Advisory Board and directorship of Foundation 51:

- (a) on what date did the discussions take place*
- (b) were any real or perceived conflicts of interest identified*
- (c) did any agency chief executive officers express concerns to you about these perceived conflicts of interest*
- (d) if the answer to (c) above is yes, what concerns were expressed and by whom*
- (e) when did Mr Lewis resign his chairmanship of the Land Development Corporation Advisory Board*
- (f) did you or any Cabinet minister ask or attempt to persuade Graeme Lewis to resign as chair of the Land Development Advisory Board?*

While this question was about a meeting the Chief Minister asked to be held, his answer was:

With regards to questions relating to Mr Graeme Lewis and Foundation 51, I ask you to direct your enquiries to Mr Lewis.

There was no transparency from the then Chief Minister regarding these questions. These matters, and others involving the questionable relationship between the CLP and Foundation 51, demand investigation and clarification in the public interest. Simply put, the public has a right to know about the murky relationship between the CLP and Foundation 51, and their related financial arrangements.

The terms of reference for the proposed inquiry will facilitate answers about the full extent of the CLP-Foundation 51 nexus—a practical inquiry to inform practical reforms of our public political donation process.

This is a key consideration in the process of restoring integrity to government and being consistent with our commitment to do so. The relationship between Harold Nelson Holdings and the Labor Party is covered by the terms of reference and will be open to the inquiry to investigate the full extent of that relationship. They can go where they want to go.

I now turn to some of the wider electoral reform issues covered by the terms of reference.

Elections cost a lot of money for the electoral commission, political parties and candidates. In the case of the commission, costs are driven by mobile polling arrangements, advertising, the huge influx of temporary polling staff, printing, postal voting and a range of other election activities across the length and breadth of the Territory. These are fundamental tasks, essential to the proper conduct of Territory general elections.

We should not be compromised by inadequate funding. In the case of political parties there is no requirement under Territory electoral law for reporting income and expenditure in relation to specific general elections.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the major political parties expend excess of \$1m to fund general election political campaigns, largely to finance political advertising. Generally these campaigns are funded by a relatively small number of Territory-based donors, many of whom donate to more than one party and non-aligned candidates. Under Territory electoral legislation there is no cap on campaign expenditure and there is no public funding of political parties.

It is now timely to consider whether the current arrangement should remain in place or whether alternative measures could be implemented in the public interest to enhance the transparency of political donations and related reporting requirements. These options were outlined in our discussion paper on restoring integrity to government, which I have already mentioned, and I covered that in the terms of reference for the proposed inquiry.

These are very important public interest and policy issues. The key question is whether there is a better way to fund election campaigns and report on income and expenditure via political parties, candidates and associated entities. We have not formed the final view on these matters. The government's decision on the scope and detail of the liquor reform agenda will be informed by the report of the inquiry into political donations, which will be established if the Assembly supports the motion I have introduced.

The inquiry I have proposed will be essential to Labor's commitment to restoring integrity to government. An open and transparent reporting system for the disclosure of donations to political parties, candidates and associated entities is fundamental to public confidence in our democracy and related electoral legislation.

The time is right to consider broader issues, such as capping of electoral expenditure and public funding of political parties and candidates to enhance transparency in our electoral processes and related financial arrangements. The inquiry will provide the opportunity for input from the general public, political parties, independent candidates, honourable members of this Assembly and any other interested persons to contribute to this important public debate.

There will be time after the inquiry reports to develop and debate proposed amendments to the *Electoral Act* well in advance of the next general election. We will not adopt the misleading approach of the former CLP government. In August 2015 this Assembly passed a motion to establish an inquiry into political donations. Two months later the CLP killed off that inquiry. Recently the Leader of the Opposition apologised to Territorians for the chaos and dysfunction during the CLP's term of office.

He said:

... we let down Territorians in a way that was totally unacceptable ...

Today is an opportunity for a fresh start. I urge all members in this Chamber to support the inquiry into political donations. The inquiry we propose is another step in restoring integrity to government.

I commend the motion to all honourable members.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly thank the Chief Minister for introducing this motion to the parliament. In general terms, I completely support it.

When I first heard of Foundation 51 in this parliament, I thought to myself—and I said this on radio this morning—‘I am over 51; I wonder if I am supposed to be a member.’ Prior to hearing about it I had little knowledge of it.

I want to move an amendment to the motion, that we amend sections 8(i) and 8(ii) to include Harold Nelson Holdings, 8(iii) and 8(iv) to include Harold Nelson Holdings and the Labor Party, 8(v) to include Harold Nelson Holdings and (vi) to replace the words ‘Harold Nelson Holdings’ with the word ‘unions’.

The members opposite will say that Harold Nelson Holdings has nothing to hide ...

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, do you have a written amendment notice and are you speaking to the amendment?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes.

If they are happy and feel that Harold Nelson Holdings has nothing to hide, they should not be afraid of that amendment. In section 8(ii)—I will leave this to the government to look at—the wording is ‘the relationship between Foundation 51 and the Northern Territory Government’, and my amendment would be ‘Foundation 51, Harold Nelson Holdings and the Northern Territory Government’. If we allowed that to go through in its current form it would only be looking at the relationship between Foundation 51 and the current government.

I support the rest of the motion regarding reviewing how we fund political donations, whether they should be publicly funded or there are restrictions placed on who can contribute.

There is an issue in either New South Wales or Victoria with developers not being able to contribute to political parties, and some of those issues are in the public interest in the debate here.

In general terms I support the motion, and I recommend the amendments put forward.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I recall the debate on political donations on 20 August 2014 and I will speak about that motion. It said:

I move that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly establishes an inquiry under section 4A of the Inquiries Act to investigate all aspects of political donations in the NT in the interests of public transparency and accountability, with particular reference to:

- 1. all existing legislation and any other relevant legislation relating to political donations*
- 2. all donations to political parties and Independents in the NT over the last 20 years*
- 3. the role of politically allied companies, such as Harold Nelson Holdings and Foundation 51, and any other third parties to see if they are being used as fronts to avoid the disclosure of political donations*
- 4. the transparency and accountability of existing funding regimes*
- 5. other jurisdictions and their practices in relation to political donations*
- 6. other matters the board of inquiry may wish to pursue that would assist in improving the confidence of the public in relation to the transparency and full disclosure of political donations and possible effects on government policies and approvals.*

That was one of the rare occasions in this House when those on the opposition and cross benches were able to pass a motion which set up an inquiry into political donations. It was a refreshing thing to happen, even if it did happen accidentally. It happened, much to the embarrassment of the government at the time. The then Chief Minister promised he would go ahead with this motion. In fact, he spoke to the *NT News* on the Thursday or Friday before the Casuarina by-election.

He was asked if this motion would go ahead and he said yes. Then, on the Tuesday after the Casuarina by-election, the motion was passed to rescind the political donations inquiry. That was moved by the then Chief Minister.

I will not go into all the details of that murky time, but it was extremely disappointing to see a motion of this House overturned by the government members simply because it did not suit them.

I support the motion before us and its amendments. If you read what I said in the previous motion—to make sure neither political party is seen to be feathering its own nest by picking on one side more than the other, you need equal investigation into both Harold Nelson Holdings and Foundation 51. If you want a balanced inquiry you need to make sure the community supports it and knows it will be independent and able to look at all aspects of political donations. Otherwise there could be seen to be some bias in the way the inquiry is set up. That is the reason I support the comments included.

There are many recommendations that the inquiry, brought to us by the Chief Minister, should look at. It is interesting that the first one is whether there should be a cap on how much parties can spend on a campaign. I suggest that parties do not have any money at all and that we do what is done—I will show this booklet, which is the Northwest Territories, Canadian, *Candidates and Official Agents Guide*, which regards every person as equal, and each person has a maximum of \$30 000 to spend as a candidate, regardless of whether they are in a party or not. In this case, they do not have parties.

They have some other interesting things, such as a manager whose job it is to keep track of all the accounts. There is a combined maximum contribution from one person of \$1500. There is an exception to that rule related to transportation services, because Canada is a big place. That is a simple way to turn things around. That would mean that people standing against me are on an equal footing when it comes to contributions. You can still stand as a member of the Labor Party or the CLP, but you can only use \$30 000 to tell people that.

The advertising people might not be too happy about that; they have a great time when it comes to TV and newspaper advertising because parties have far more money to spend on some nice 30-second ads on telly, or some big, full-page advertisements in the paper, or miles and miles of letter dropping and mail-outs. But is that what it is about? Are we electing candidates? We think the system should be much more even when it comes to people having the right to stand against someone else—should they have to stand against a party, which has far more monetary backing than a person who has nothing like that, who simply thinks they would like to contribute to the Northern Territory by putting their hand up at an election.

If we are having an inquiry it should be looked at. It is not quite covered in here. The word 'parties' gets mentioned a fair bit. There may be a time we should rethink the way we structure electoral funding. That way we would not need a discussion about whether taxpayers should pay.

The cap is at \$30 000. That is a reasonable amount. There is no reliance on taxpayer-funded political campaigns. If you throw in the other things, for instance, who can donate—this is an issue I raised in the last sittings, but unfortunately some motions and legislation on the Notice Paper do not always see the light of day. That cap is to restrict who can give money. In New South Wales you are restricted from giving money if you are a developer. If you have an interest in tobacco, alcohol and gambling you cannot give a donation to a party. There are limitations on donations; I think the maximum is \$10 000.

There is an argument as to whether unions should give money to political parties. There are arguments for and against it. That should be part of the discussion. Do they have the same influence as the developers when it comes to donating to a political party? That is a fair discussion to have and I hope it comes into the inquiry. That is mentioned in clause 6.

Clause 7 says whether there have been any breaches of the Northern Territory *Electoral Act* in relation to donations made to political parties and candidates in the Northern Territory over the last 10 years. The motion I introduced to parliament in 2014 mentioned 20 years. One of the things the Chief Minister tried to say, when he was rescinding this motion was that it was an issues and a 20-year inquiry would be completely unworkable. The reason we were looking at a 20-year inquiry was to make sure both parties were covered. There were a number of years of Labor and the CLP. I did not want to be seen to have an inquiry that said we would only look at the period when the ALP was in power.

This motion says 10 years, so I suppose there has been at least one period where the CLP was in power. Maybe that is reasonable enough. One of the issues in the motion I put forward, which I am not sure is covered by this motion—it is broad enough in section 9, which says 'any other matters relevant to political

funding and donations’—is whether there has been a direct influence on any decisions by government based on the donations it has received.

Planning is one of the issues that comes to mind. Rezoning applications tend to look like—those people have been giving donations to one party over a period of time. I think the inquiry needs to see if there is any correlation between political donations and favours, you might say, in rezoning land. It may not be the case because people are, under our law, entitled to give money to political parties. Businesses and independent people are, but that is the area we need to look at. For that reason, in New South Wales they do not allow developers to give money, based on the concern that they could have too much influence on a government and the decisions it makes.

The four areas that government has looked at in NSW are the areas where changes to laws can make a lot of difference to the amount of money those companies make. It is important for us to look at that and make sure it has not happened, but also make sure it cannot happen in the future.

I will be interested in the inquiry. It has 12 months to come up with its recommendations. I am interested in who the government will get to do the inquiry. We had a good person doing the previous inquiry, but unfortunately our previous Auditor-General, Frank McGuinness, passed away. He was brought in to do half an inquiry. I felt sorry for him because the part of the inquiry he had to undertake was not the guts of the motion we had in parliament. It did not deal with the issues needing to be dealt with, which were around the role of the politically-allied companies Harold Nelson Holdings and Foundation 51, and any other third parties.

He did not have to look at that; he just looked at some issues relating to legislation in the Territory and other states. Unfortunately Frank passed away, but he did complete a report. I hope that report could be included in the inquiry, because it is still worthy, to see if we can improve the way we do things here.

I hope as many people as possible can put their two bob in, especially the public. After the last election many people were turned off by the amount of electioneering that was occurring, perhaps because we had the federal election relatively close to it.

A lot of people see a lot of the money being spent as a waste. People made up their mind before the election, and that could probably be seen by the number of people not voting. A considerable number of people were pre-polling; there was all this advertising going on when about one-third of people had already voted.

In the United States it is probably very similar; I do not know how many million people voted before the day of the election. I am not sure election advertising is such a great thing. I am not sure whether part of this inquiry could cover that. We have a bit of overkill in political advertising, and that shows me where the uneven field is for people wanting to stand for this Legislative Assembly. Political parties have that extra money. They have the extra money because they are connected with political parties federally and federal political parties receive dollar amounts for every vote they get. That does not happen to Independents as we do not have any connection with federal parties, so it is much harder for an Independent person to raise the sort of money that political parties are able to. That may come through in this inquiry.

I welcome the inquiry and the changes the Opposition Leader has proposed, and if the government does not support those amendments I think it needs to have a very good reason for that.

The Leader of the Opposition also raised what I think is a grammatical error, and it needs to be looked at because it does not make any sense. He said in section 8:

To this end the inquiry will investigate:

...

ii. *the relationship between Foundation 51 and the Northern Territory Government ...*

That is you. As it reads, that would need an amendment to make sense. Otherwise you will be looking at yourself. I presume they are speaking about the previous Northern Territory Government. If the government believes this inquiry will bring some good results then it needs to make sure it is fair and that it includes Harold Nelson Holdings.

I know about Harold Nelson Holdings, and I am not saying it has done anything wrong, but if you want to be seen to be independent, you need to add it in there and let the inquiry work out whether it is squeaky clean or not. That way no one will complain.

Madam Speaker, I support the motion the Chief Minister has presented and the Opposition Leader's amendments.

Mr MILLS (Blain): Madam Speaker, I welcome the decision of government to bring this forward. It is important, given the expectation of the community, to have its confidence rebuilt so we can move on.

All members would be well aware that the community is expecting a different approach, because the political process over the last 20 or more years has become less attractive to the general community. I provide the observation that the community will be watching to see how the government deals with this.

If government says it is about reform and it is seen to genuinely be about reform, it will receive increased support from the community. However, if government says it is about reform but it turns out to be a mask for a witch hunt, it will find not only disappointment, but some anger.

That is not to say there are not matters that need to be investigated; they do need to be investigated, just as a matter relating to planning was discussed previously, but I believe, for the community to move on, if there is an issue of underlying concern it needs to be brought to light so it can be resolved. For that reason, it is very wise that the amendment that has been offered by the opposition is accepted, because it would reassure the community that this is a matter that will be attended to with the interests of sorting out matters that may be of concern or could be used for mischief for the advancement of political agendas.

People are losing their appetite, but if they could see that it is about making sure it is equal, fair and honest—a new government taking a new approach—a break from the past and not a witch hunt, clearing up unresolved matters so we can move on, government would receive enormous support. It would receive my enthusiastic support and I would advocate as such in the broader community and my electorate.

I noticed that the presentation by the Chief Minister presented a greater temptation to dwell with unusual enthusiasm on a part of the supposed agenda. That troubled me slightly because I think the community needs to recover and move on. That does not mean it needs to go back and get to the truth—not for a witch hunt. The community would be very interested in matters such as how we can reform the way we deliberate and make decisions so we can occupy this parliament with those who have the full support and improved engagement of the broader community.

I commend the Member for Nelson for the ideas he presented to us for consideration. I trust they would receive the same level of enthusiasm—they should receive more enthusiastic support and consideration through the process of this motion. I have had the opportunity, through the presidential election in Indonesia, to be at the provincial level and the national level. I was pleasantly surprised at how a nation of 250 million was able to collectively make a very difficult decision, handle it well and keep the republic together when there were many opportunities—and many people agitating from the side—to create major disruption.

How did they manage that? They know the temperament, characteristics and personality of their community and they have adopted a system that best suits. Whilst many commentators seem to overlook Indonesia, most were deeply impressed with the capacity of this vast and diverse nation to be able to conduct a presidential election with maximum efficiency and minimum civil disorder.

I reflect on what we observed here in the electorate, as a former member of a party. I am very happy to be an Independent because I am completely over all that. I am over it because I am a citizen; I know how people feel and I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the way in which we were treating people when it came to elections—massive ads at colossal and obscene expenditure and treating people like fools when they simply want to be engaged honestly and directly, people to people, particularly in a small and well-connected community like the Northern Territory.

Coming back to Indonesia I was surprised to find, with the variety of political parties—12 or more—strongly supported in the community, they decided on a set day on the lead-up to election that was the only day a particular party could campaign on. That was their day. No other party could campaign on that day so public rallies occurred on set days. There was a schedule when certain parties could have their public rallies and so on. That was so there would not be conflict. It is a nice way of doing it and it worked well.

What I found most interesting was in the week leading up to the vote, seven days prior to, there was a law that not one skerrick of advertising was to remain in view anywhere in the community. It was the obligation of every party that had put up advertising material to remove it completely from one end of the archipelago to the other. They managed to do that because there were serious penalties. You could be disqualified, I assume. They got rid of everything; not a skerrick remained.

When it came to polling day, there was the biggest decision. Would it be General Prabowo or Joko Widodo, the people's champion?

I thought there would be movement on the streets, but I woke up on that day to find it incredibly quiet. People simply gathered with their families and walked down to the polling booth, which happened to be in some municipal area. It was not far, always within walking distance of somebody.

They went quietly and lodged their vote, and with their thumb print they checked off on the roll. There was no fuss whatsoever. It was a quiet day of deliberation. They had the opportunity to be impressed and influenced by all the noise of weeks before. The day itself was marked by quietness. That evening the results started to come through. Two-hundred-and-fifty million people managed to come to a collective decision. It was divisive but supported.

I gave them some advice: the one way to more efficiently deal with the removal of advertising material in the streets, in the lead-up, was to require the other party to take responsibility for removing their opponent's material. They would then be doubly motivated. If it was the CLP's responsibility—that is probably a bit unfair at the moment—to clear up the ALP's mess they would get it out of the way pretty quickly. All those posters would be gone and, Tony, yours would be gone off that fence on Chung Wah Terrace; it would be gone in a flash.

Nonetheless, they managed to clean up the place. There was a move in the right direction here to quieten things down on election day. Such a gesture would be well worth considering, to respect people and the decision they will make. They have had the opportunity to be impressed; let them think about it and make a decision.

The Member for Nelson has spoken about many reforms already. I put something out during the campaign, but I only had a short window of opportunity, so I do not think it had much space. It is very similar to what the Member for Nelson said—we could do it modestly and respectfully and make a significant gesture of respect for the Territory community as they go about making a big decision, which is for us to occupy this place, and remove or significantly reduce the political agendas so we can amplify the decision that is to be made.

There is a bit more that I would like to say about Foundation 51 and the history of it, but I think that would be worth revisiting at another stage, if required. I have no concerns. It is important we have an honest look at all the matters that have been referred to.

I fully support the opposition's amendments; it is important and wise to do that so we can then look back, clarify any matters and move forward and set about putting up a new framework that Territorians could wholeheartedly support and know they have been properly considered in the process of.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

PETITIONS

Petition No 5 – Home Improvement Scheme Reinstatement

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I present a petition from 602 petitioners, praying that the Home Improvement Scheme be reinstated. The petition bears the Clerk's certificate that it conforms with the requirements of the standing orders.

Madams Speaker, I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read:

This petition of concerned residents of the Northern Territory draws to the attention of the House that the government's decision to scrap the Home Improvement Scheme over 2016 is unfair and unwise.

The \$20m scheme provided a \$2000 voucher to hard-working families and a direct cash flow to local businesses. We therefore ask the House to support jobs and assist 10 000 Territory families, tradies and local small businesses by immediately reinstating the home improvement scheme.

Petition No 6 – Home Improvement Scheme Reopening

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I present a petition from 436 petitioners, praying that the Home Improvement Scheme be reopened. The petition bears the Clerk's certificate that it conforms with the requirements of the standing orders.

Madams Speaker, I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read:

The Home Improvement Scheme attracted 1148 registered businesses, 7850 applications from homeowners and injected \$10m into the Territory economy in just three months. The petitioners ask that the Home Improvement Scheme be immediately reopened.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR Jodeen Carney

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I draw to your attention the presence in the Speaker's gallery of past Leader of the Opposition, Jodeen Carney, a former Member for Araluen. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION Long-Term Management of the Shoal Bay Coastline

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I move that the government, in consultation with the NT Land Corporation, develops a plan for the long-term management of the Shoal Bay coastline between Tree Point Conservation Area and the Gunn Point Peninsula that would eventuate into a formal conservation or marine park, and that the government build a permanent park ranger station at Gunn Point to make sure the beaches and hinterland adjacent to those beaches are protected from environmental damage as well as inappropriate behaviour from some visitors.

I realise that this is a local question, you might say, because it is in my electorate, but it is more than that. It is an area near Darwin that has a very sensitive coastline that is used by many people from Darwin, Palmerston, the rural area and interstate.

I brought this map along. If someone wants to find out where it is—this is an old map from 1990. I will table it later.

It is an area I have been involved in for many years, but governments of both persuasions have not bothered to spend time to ensure this area is well managed.

I will first talk about Tree Point. There are two areas and the first area is Tree Point. It is a small conservation reserve that protects the fragile coastal strip on the Shoal Bay Peninsula. It borders onto the Shoal Bay Coastal Reserve. I will read from the old Parks and Wildlife Commission fact sheet:

Tree Point Conservation Area protects a coastal strip of Shoal Bay on the Tree Point Peninsula and a large mangrove habitat with a tidal creek, which runs towards the Shoal Bay Coastal Reserve. The Conservation Area is fringed by coastal vine thicket and a swampy floodplain, which hosts a number of bird species at various times of the year.

Camping is not permitted, including on the beach. The Reserve is day use only and is a great spot for walking, bird watching or fishing. A small carpark is provided at the back of the beach near the entrance of the Reserve with easy walking access to the beach. There are no toilet facilities or drinking water available. There are private residences towards the southern end of the reserve. Please respect residents' rights to peace, quiet and privacy.

In bold lettering it says:

Driving on the beach is not permitted in Tree Point Conservation Area. Look for the large metal sign at the high tide line indicating the start of the Reserve.

There is a map which I can table later in the day.

The land to the north, which includes Gunn Point and Glyde Point, is owned by the NT Land Corporation. For people who do not know, it is most of the Glyde Point area and Gunn Point area at the top part of the peninsula. The peninsula is the closest point to the Tiwi Islands. That land is owned by the NT Land Corporation, which is a strange body.

I shall read a description from the Northern Territory Land Corporation:

The Northern Territory Land Corporation is a corporate body set up under the Northern Territory Land Corporation Act 1995 (NT). The long title of the Act is 'An Act to provide for the continuation of the Northern Territory Development Land Corporation as the Northern Territory Land Corporation to hold certain land in the Northern Territory, and for related purposes'. The function of the Corporation is to acquire, hold and dispose of interests in real property in accordance with the Act. The Corporation is not an agency of the Northern Territory Government.

It is a strange body that was set up by the government many years ago to avoid land being claimed under the Land Rights Act. It is a peculiar body in the sense that although it is not directly directed by the government, the chair of the corporation is appointed by the minister. It is one of those unique bodies in the Northern Territory. It is not easy to get in contact with. It has a small line in the *White Pages*, and I think it has an office in the old Department of Lands and Planning in Parap. It owns the northern part of Glyde Point and Gunn Point. Tree Point is owned by Parks and Wildlife.

For a number of years part of this land was used as the Gunn Point Prison Farm, which started in 1973 and was closed in 1996. Some of us think that was a mistake. There were reasons for it being closed, but when you consider the very large prison in Holtze, where we are looking at trying not to have people in one large prison but out doing work in the community—it is a pity the Gunn Point Prison Farm was closed. Maybe it should be looked at again.

Next to the prison was the proposed town of Murrumujuk, which has not yet eventuated, even though the government tried once. Due to opposition about the site, and after a Russian company showed an interest in building a rocket launching facility there, the government eventually dropped the idea.

The town could still be built one day and be in the new Darwin land use structure plan—I will get the name right; there are so many names around planning. It would be a town of about 15 000 to 25 000, but it never eventuated.

The site was also proposed for Woodside's Methanex plant, which also never eventuated. I had to laugh when I was researching this. Woodside's Methanex plant, which is about methanol, was the reason the then Chief Minister, Denis Burke, who made my favourite statement in parliament—I was the President of the Litchfield Council and I had criticised the idea of methanol plants going into the middle of the harbour. He said to me:

It is just totally irresponsible for the likes of ill-informed egg farmers who could not even survive as an egg farmer, going out there trying to say he understands the gas situation ...

That is the very reason there is a Latin motto on my media release; it says, '*Cessi foro gallinarum sed surgo*', which means 'once was a chicken farmer, but have risen again'.

All the time this has been happening, Darwin and rural residents, and interstate visitors, have continued to camp along the foreshore, especially during the Dry Season. For a long time there were no issues, but as more and more started to visit the place, there was more rubbish, hooning and erosion of the foreshore. The no drive area, which I mentioned when I read the fact sheet from the Tree Point Conservation Area, is now continually ignored by many motorists, even though that section of the beach is well sign posted.

Rubbish is collected by Brian from Leaders Creek Fishing Base, but there is no formal presence in the area except the occasional visit by a ranger to Tree Point reserve—I think that ranger comes from the Howard Springs reserve.

Driving on the beach is dangerous. That is not to say you cannot drive on the beach, but when it has gotten to the point of hooning it has caused some problems. I went back through some of the news items at the time which mentioned that an 18-year-old man flipped a quad bike while riding without any safety equipment on the beach at Gunn Point at about 4.50 pm. He fractured his shoulder and sustained head and back injuries. There was another case where a quad bike rider was killed.

The beach is beautiful and people like to use it, but there are people who drive to the point that people's lives—riders and others who use the beach—could be in danger. The sand dunes on Tree Point are extremely fragile and protected by a three-strand wire fence, which is easily damaged by vehicles. If the sea breaks through at that point there will be an island.

I have a picture here, which will not be much good to show people from a distance, but the distance between the mangroves and the sea is about 20 metres. If this water broke through from one side to the other because the sand dunes were damaged to a point where they were literally blown away, we would not have Tree Point; we would have Tree island. It is not far from happening.

Alongside the dunes there is a track which leads to two small freehold blocks. One is owned by some people in Howard Springs and the other is owned by a previous Administrator, Mr Anictomatis. They are small one-acre blocks—and there is the Tree Point Aboriginal land as well—and that is the only freehold land in the whole area.

Larrakia rangers have been working in that area for the last few years, trying to remove an infestation of flame trees. It has been an ongoing lot of work because once flame trees are established they are hard to get rid of because they keep regrowing from old seeds.

Erosion is caused by a multitude of unmanned tracks in the area leading down to the beach. Some tracks are only passable using four-wheel drive because of the erosion. Other tracks were put in years ago, when the government employed a contractor to look at the structure of cliffs. The contractor just bashed some excess tracks through the bush and drilled his hole, and those tracks are still being used today.

There are no facilities, such as toilets and showers, because there is no water. There were facilities years ago but they fell into disrepair. Camping is allowed, not so much on the Tree Point side—there is a little camping area there but not on the beach. Camping is allowed on the rest of the beach by visitors and locals, and they have been doing that for many years. Many Darwin people have used Gunn Point. There is no control of that area.

I have a picture of about 10 caravans parked near the mouth of Murrumujuk Creek. That is fine, but there is no control over how that affects the environment and where people go to the toilet. It is a bit like *Rafferty's Rules*. It is an attractive place, a beautiful beach, and it does not cost any money to go there.

There needs to be a strategy, both in the short and long term, to manage these two beautiful areas. The only way that will happen is for the Northern Territory Land Corporation to give control of its section of the beach and foreshore to Parks and Wildlife with the promise this section of the beach will become a conservational marine park. That is not a new concept. The Darwin Regional Land Use Structure Plan 1990 shows this area, and others nearby, as proposed marine costal parks. The map still exists. It marks a large green area that was proposed, in 1990, to be part of a very large marine park, but nothing much happened.

There is another document called the Murrumujuk Land Use Concept Plan 1990. Under that plan it states that the foreshore adjacent to Murrumujuk would form a continuous costal park between the Howard Park estuary and Cape Hotham. The costal park would be managed by the conservation commission.

The Gunn Point Peninsula Land Use Structure Plan 1990—people seem to have forgotten we did a lot of planning in the old days—says, 'The whole of the coast within the plan area is included in a broad land use unit designated in this plan as the coastal park. The system extends continually between the estuaries of the Howard and Adelaide River and includes Malacca Swamp and Tree Point conservation reserve.

'The park includes elements which contribute significantly to the conservation recreation scientific and fisheries research of the Darwin region and will be managed and developed as an integrated system to balance competing and complimentary needs.'

Further on the plan talks about coastal management policy. It says, 'The Northern Territory Government has adopted a broad coastal management policy to enable an integrated approach to conservation and development in coastal areas.

'Specific objectives of the coastal management policy are: protection of the coast from physical and aesthetic deterioration through erosion, pollution and misuse, protection of areas of high conservation value by establishing marine and coastal parks and reserves, promotion of rehabilitation enhancement of damaged and degraded areas within the coastal zone.'

This was all spoken about way back in 1990. Mike Reed, our famous Minister for Conservation, said in a media release dated 4 June 1992, when he declared the concept of the Beagle Gulf Marine Park:

Conservation Minister Mike Reed says detailed planning work to establish a major marine park around Darwin and nearby coastal areas is now under way.

Mr Reed said the Conservation Commission was to begin interviews today for the position of coordinator/planner for the Beagle Gulf Marine Park.

He said the prime role of the coordinator/planner would be to consult the community, industry, local government and other individuals and groups about the proposed park.

The Territory government's intention to establish the Beagle Gulf Marine Park was announced by Mr Reed in November 1991.

...

Mr Reed said in setting up the new Territory marine park, the government had enlisted the support and technical expertise of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority through the national Ocean Rescue 2000 program.

He said a steering committee made up of representatives of government agencies affected by the park proposal and would be established to oversee its development.

The commission was presently working on finalising specific boundaries for the park area ...

'The proposed park is used for a range of purposes, including recreational and commercial fishing, tourism and other recreational activities', Mr Reed said.

'It also has significant conservation and heritage values.

He said, finally, because this covers both the harbour and the Murrumujuk and Gunn Point areas:

'In addition, the harbour will become a specially managed area, rather than a marine park, which recognises its management must provide for Darwin's future development.

In January 1993 a document called *Beagle Gulf Marine Park: Gunn Point Peninsula Boundary Proposal* was released by the Conservation Commission. This was part of a bigger picture covering most of the peninsula, with the exception of the prison farm, and included a proposed ranger station at Leaders Creek to support an increase in visitors to Leaders Creek and Gunn Point beach. This document also documented the problems of erosion, rubbish, car dumping, illegal dwellings et cetera.

What I am asking today is not new. You can see from all the documents here that previous governments, even going back to 1990, considered this place to be an area worthy of protection. It is not specifically an issue because it is in my electorate—obviously I know about it because I travel there every now and then. It is about the need to protect an important section of our Northern Territory coastline from any further degradation and set in place a plan to rehabilitate areas that have been damaged, and then develop a total management plan for the area. This area is used by many people outside my electorate as well as interstate visitors.

Unfortunately it is the uncontrolled use that has caused environmental damage as well as an increase in antisocial behaviour. In the meantime, if we are to reduce any more damage to the environment and reduce antisocial behaviour, we need a presence at Gunn Point in the form of a ranger station which, at the

very least, could be staffed on the weekend and full-time during the holidays. The presence of that person would make a great deal of difference in protecting the area from reckless and damaging behaviour.

None of this is relevant unless the Northern Territory Government agrees to the idea of a park along the coastline, and the NT Land Corporation agrees to relinquish control of some of that land to Parks and Wildlife.

I want to explain a bit about the ranger station. There was the proposed town of Murrumujuk, which is still theoretically on the cards. There is also a large groundwater tank and a water tank on a tower, which were built for Murrumujuk. It feeds water only to the Tree Point Aboriginal community, as far as I know. That would be a perfect site for a good-quality demountable for a ranger station. It has a security fence, it is on the main road, electricity is provided and it is close to the beach.

The problem is that we have two owners of the land. There is the Tree Point area, which is managed, but unfortunately it is not managed full time. I went there two months ago with the Scouts. You can see cars coming down the beach where it clearly says 'no vehicles on this beach'. It is Conservation Commission land, but no one cares. There is a very small line of sand dunes, not very high, with a fence on top to stop people driving over them, but people still do. If you break that very sensitive area it is likely you will end up with an island after a big storm rather than a peninsula. It is very narrow; probably less than 20 metres. It is not very wide at high tide.

We have the issue of a piece of land that nobody seems to want to do anything about. The NT Land Corp will say, 'We have no money. We do not employ people. We might pay Brian from Leaders Creek to pick up the rubbish'. If you go there and see the amount of erosion and the scattering of people parked here, there and everywhere—it is fine, but where are the toilets?

The government, NT Land Corp, Parks and Wildlife and the Larrakia people—I should not omit them from these discussions—need to sit down and develop a plan on how we can go forward, because if we do not do something about it now it will deteriorate more and cost more money to repair.

There are good reasons for developing this. One of my complaints recently has been the deferment of Gunn Point Road. I was not happy because we have an opportunity for a place near Darwin to be developed in such a way to attract more people and business. The NT Land Corp was looking at building a caravan park there. A few years back it put negotiations in place with a local group of people in my area to build a caravan park off the beach.

I do not know what happened but it did not eventuate. There is potential to develop even a small-scale tourist facility there. Leaders Creek is a great place. A lot of people use Leaders Creek and Salt Water Arm. The road is accessible all year round. It gets a bit sloppy and corrugated. I say 'accessible', but you sometimes want a four-wheel drive tank because it shakes, but there are other parts of the road which are in quite good condition.

This is not just about managing this park; it is about an opportunity for small business to develop this part of the Northern Territory as a place where things can grow, and maybe jobs can come out of it as well. We will set up a process which will make sure this section of land is protected.

This motion has been on the Notice Paper for some time. I do not know if the government has had any discussions with NT Land Corp, but when I announced this I got a phone call from those at NT Land Corp. They said they were having a board meeting and would be interested to know what was being talked about. I sent this motion to them, but I have not heard anything back. It should not be new to them because I have raised this issue on a number of occasions.

It seems as though it will go into the too-hard basket. There may be issues about land—native title and land rights. If the land is taken from NT Land Corp and given to Parks and Wildlife—are there some issues I do not know about in relation to land tenure and whether there can be a claim on the land? I do not know.

I thought NT Land Corp could lease the land to Parks and Wildlife and give it the power to operate that area. I see that as a sensible way to do it, but, at the moment, we simply have two pieces of land. One is so small it hardly gets attention from the rangers—that is not to say they do not do a good job, but they only visit every now and then from Howard Springs—and the other is an area where the NT Land Corp says it does not have the money or the facilities to do anything. It maintains many parcels of land across the Northern Territory, which might add up to a fairly large parcel of land when you put them all together.

NT Land Corp seems to be, to some extent, a holder of land. When an opportunity comes along to develop it, then there are negotiations. I am not talking about private development in this case. I am talking about the government managing that beach and, if there is room for private development, then you would go from there.

For many people it sounds like a parochial local issue, but for me it is not. It is important that we look after our coastline, which can be destroyed very easily because it is very fragile. In years gone by not many people would cause a problem as they enjoyed the beauty of Shoal Bay and the beach and went there with their families to enjoy it on a long weekend, but there is now a movement of people who want to use it for recreational purposes, such as quad bikes and land yachts. There are issues surrounding that are appropriate. I may be wrong; I am not sure if turtles come up onto the beach to lay their eggs. They are some of the issues I presume Parks and Wildlife would know about.

I had some other pictures here of Tree Point and the camping on the beach, all the things that still happen, but now is the time we have to say, 'It is fine, but there has to be some control'. I put it to the government in a positive positive way and I hope I get a positive response. We will see how it goes from there.

Ms MOSS (Environment and Natural Resources): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to respond to the motion put forward by the Member for Nelson. I think you are a well-informed chicken farmer.

I thank you for raising the motion. Proper and considered management and protection of the Territory's coastline is a commitment that we took to the election and we are actively working to achieve that. I do not see it as a parochial local issue. I see it as intended, which is an important part of the conversation about the management of our coastlines.

I wholly support the intention of this motion regarding the protection of our coastlines. You have outlined a number of issues that we need to have a deeper look at. However, we will not support the motion as it stands. There are some very specific elements of the motion to consider, such as the second half of the first point—'working with the NT Land Corporation would eventuate into a formal conservation or marine park'—and the conversation about the permanent park ranger station.

I will go through the reasons in more detail, but from the outset we are very happy to continue talking to the Member for Nelson and any other members about this important issue.

We are focused on ensuring that coastal and marine management is undertaken in a strategic way in collaboration with the community. I will be taking on board the perspective put forward by the Member for Nelson, and others, in this debate. Thank you for bringing this important motion to this House. You are lucky as a local member to have such a beautiful natural asset in your back yard.

We intend to develop and deliver a plan for protecting and managing the whole of the Territory's coastline. To ensure we are doing this effectively we will include all stakeholders in the planning, development and decision-making process. I am more than happy to include other members of this parliament in this process, noting your important roles as representatives of your community.

It is crucial that we effectively manage and protect our environment and abundant natural resources so future generations can continue to benefit from them. They are the lifeblood of our Territory lifestyle and we must continue to respect and care for our unique and important assets by maintaining a healthy ecosystem and protecting biodiversity.

The Territory's coastline is part of what makes our part of the world so unique, but it will only remain unique if we ensure we are protecting its natural assets. We have to be timely about the way we manage these resources, particularly with issues like erosion and antisocial behaviour, which has been raised in the debate already.

As development proceeds in the Territory there are increasing pressures on our coastal and marine environments, and the risks of environmental degradation are growing. To ensure our coasts are well protected we need good governance as well as embedded, sustainable management practices and strong protective measures that are tailored to the Territory.

This can only be achieved through a coordinated and consultative approach; that is what we are committed to doing. The government will ensure the Territory's precious and unique marine environment is better protected. We will do this by developing an overarching coastal and marine strategy that will seek to

balance the ongoing protection of our coastal and marine environment with the economic benefits that can come from development activity along our coasts and in our waters.

I hope the Member for Nelson also engages in that process because this is important to consider in the preparation for that strategy. It will commence operation in 2018 and the commitment has been warmly welcomed by key stakeholders; I am pleased to continue meeting with them to speak about issues such as the ones being raised today, so we can consider those and make sure we are acting appropriately.

I welcome hearing the views of members of this House in developing the strategy, in which many of us have a stake. I turn specifically to the part of the Member for Nelson's motion about the permanent park ranger station at Gunn Point to better ensure the beaches and hinterland are protected from environmental damage as well as inappropriate behaviour from some visitors.

There is no doubt or argument that there are impressive environmental values in the area; that has been broadly recognised. It is also clear that there has been, over many years, a significant increase in the number of visitors to the area and, consequently, the need to manage the pressures and impact of those increases.

I am interested to see those photographs. My eyesight is not great from across the Chamber, but I would be more than happy to receive the photographs the Member for Nelson used during his motion this afternoon.

For those who are not familiar with the Tree Point Conservation Area, it is an area managed by the Department of Tourism and Culture. Gunn Point is freehold land and is owned by the Northern Territory Land Corporation. It is important to note that there are three other freehold lots in the area. The first two are owned by private residents and the third is owned by Durduga Tree Point Aboriginal Corporation. These properties adjoin the Tree Point Conservation Area, and any future planning and development would require consultation with those landholders. Registered sacred sites and sites of cultural significance exist in the area and are an important consideration.

Tree Point Conservation Area is routinely patrolled by rangers at Howard Springs Nature Park, and, where possible, the rangers are joined by members of the Northern Territory Police during long weekends and school holidays to address antisocial behaviour and driving on the beach, which is prohibited, as the Member for Nelson pointed out. If members hear of or see particular times when this happens, please feed that through to us and we will make sure we work with you towards a suitable response. It is prohibited, but I know it happens in a number of places. I hope we continue the dialogue on that issue.

I am happy to inform the Member for Nelson that, as part of our 2016–17 works program, a new two-kilometre fence line, a demarcation pole and a car park gate with a turnaround area are all scheduled for completion. This is to limit driving on the beach and access to private residences. I am happy to keep the Member for Nelson and others informed as that reaches completion.

Also of note, there has been extensive community consultation during the development of other local plans, and any changes to the plan at Shoal Bay will require extensive consultation to ensure everything is adequately considered.

While the costs of building, staffing and operating a new ranger station at Gunn Point have not been accurately assessed, it would cost a substantial amount of money to adequately construct a ranger station. We need to do this with consideration and planning of the needs and priorities in the whole NT context. I am more than happy to take that on board, as others have put forward views in regard to their area and the parks they frequent. I am happy to consider that.

We came to the election with a clear agenda to develop environmental and other policy based on evidence and in close consultation with the community, and we are committed to doing that.

I have asked my department to continue to monitor the activity at Gunn Point and advise me of any concerns in relation to the environmental management or negative impacts of people's activities in the area. I think there will be more from today's debate that we will take away and investigate. If there are things you have not put on the record today that you want to make sure are considered, please feel free. I have an open door and I want to hear about it.

I will now take the time to highlight other key government commitments that relate to the intent of this motion. We are reinstating the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee, which will see a return to a

community-driven approach to managing Darwin Harbour. The first task of that committee will be to develop advice on a community-led integrated plan of management for Darwin Harbour, specifically a plan to protect vital habitats such as mangroves, which are threatened by climate change.

As I have said before, we have fulfilled an election commitment of providing \$200 000 to Charles Darwin University for urgent mangrove research to better understand the threats posed by climate change and possible adaptation strategies to alleviate that impact.

I was recently in Sydney for a meeting of Environment ministers and was very pleased to tell other jurisdictions and our Commonwealth counterparts about that funding priority for us. We have seen mangrove die-back and we want to ensure that future policy is evidence based and that we are protecting the habitat that is vital to not only our environment and coastlines, but to many people's lifestyles and livelihoods. CDU tells us that our investment has the potential to leverage further funding nationally for this important research, which is fantastic.

We are also investing \$400 000 into a comprehensive plan of management for Limmen Bight Marine Park, which is one of the two declared marine parks in the Northern Territory. We will ensure there is adequate funding provided to conduct a comprehensive consultation process in undertaking that important work. That consultation process with key stakeholders, including traditional owners, will begin in coming months. We will complete the plan of management for Limmen Bight Marine Park to deliver sensible science-based management arrangements in close consultation with stakeholders by the end of 2019.

The end result will be a framework for sustainable fisheries management, a ban on sea-bed mining, a best-practice monitoring and evaluation framework, and a model for the development of tourism and local job opportunities. I have already met with a number of representatives with an interest in proactive coastal and marine protection. I hope that comes out of this motion today.

I have previously, on a number of occasions, outlined in the House the vital role our Indigenous rangers play in the conservation and natural resource management in the Northern Territory. I am happy to investigate more opportunities for us to grow that initiative as well. Outside of their critical land and sea management activities, ranger groups deliver a range of other benefits to their communities, including employment, increased access to country and incentives for education and training.

We have made a number of commitments, including capital grants for ranger groups so they can buy vehicles and equipment that will assist them to carry out their work. It also includes \$8m over four years for a land management and conservation fund to improve conservation practices on Aboriginal land and sea country and to support Aboriginal ranger groups.

Consultation will be undertaken with key stakeholders, including land councils, the Australian Government, the Indigenous Land Corporation, the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, or NAILSMA, and NTG agencies to ensure the program delivers the best possible outcomes.

I want to take a moment to recognise and commend the work of our 40-plus ranger groups in the Territory, who do this incredible and necessary work.

There are some very explicit parts of this motion, but I support the intent. We support the call for greater conservation of our coastal and marine strategies. We will take on board all the issues you have raised today and extend that invitation for further meetings. Let us progress this conversation about what is occurring.

When it comes to environment protection it is important for us to implement changes in a coordinated way, based on appropriate science and consultation with the community and stakeholders. This approach will underpin development of an overarching coastal and marine strategy for the Territory's unique and precious coastline.

The strategy will be supported by the reinstatement of the Darwin Harbor Advisory Committee in the finalisation plan of management for the important Limmen Bight Marine Park. How we manage specific sections of our coastline will be considered within our overarching management strategy.

I thank the Member for Nelson for his important motion. I am learning more about those issues and have received a lot of information. I am familiar with the antisocial behaviour issues that have been occurring. We need to make sure we have a proper response to those activities. It is unacceptable and it encroaches on others' enjoyment.

While the government does not support the motion, for the reason of it being so explicit in some regards, we will continue to listen to the community and its representatives about the protection of our coastal marine environments.

I look forward to providing updates as we progress with the development of our coastal and marine management strategy and our roll-out of increased resources for Indigenous rangers for the sustainable management of our Territory's invaluable land and sea resources.

I will keep you updated of those opportunities to be part of that process, making sure we are taking into account all these issues you have raised.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I agree with the minister for the Environment. I agree that everything in the member's motion is valid. I would probably vote in support of it, but I think there is a bigger picture. It would be good if it was expanded on.

We talk about Gunn Point and Tree Point, and I know the area very well. When I was living in Howard Springs, many years ago, I used to go crabbing. The fellow I went with, Bruce Baker, taught me an expression: trust no one and you will never be disappointed. He and I went crabbing quite often on the Howard River. We would shoot across to Tree Point; that was one of our favourite spots. I was in Howard Springs for 10 or 11 years and I saw the gradual degradation there. I agree with the Member for Nelson that something needs to be done.

The minister raised one of the key issues regarding places like that, that is, antisocial behaviour, which includes noise. We talk about people on quad bikes and similar vehicles who go to these beaches and cause a lot of problems.

I will talk about some other areas in my electorate. Tree Point is very close to the Member for Nelson's heart; it is in his electorate, which is terrific. When the minister said they went to the election with a strong mandate, saying they would protect the total coastline of the Northern Territory, I took heart in that.

For the last four years I continually had problems brought to my attention by the residents of Dundee. I can remember having discussions with them when I was first elected about the bridges. It meant there was increased access to places like Dundee. I said to them at the time, 'You should be very careful what you wish for'. The government should think about that as well.

As soon as you improve access you get more people there. The Member for Nelson is very much on about Gunn Point Road, but in this instance I think he should be very careful what he wishes for, because you could end up with a bigger problem at Tree Point. I think the government needs to look at that from two angles. You need to do something at Tree Point and introduce some conservation before you start building roads.

The people of Dundee then complained; they have a similar problem in two spots. One is on the beach. In front of all the houses at the beautiful Dundee Beach—everyone bought their nice house on the edge. You get a terrific view, but on the weekends the hooligans go up and down on quad bikes and it ruins it for everyone.

I am not sure that introducing a conservation zone there would overcome that problem, but something needs to be done to control that issue. It is compounded at Dundee because there is a strip of land between the water and the houses that is owned by the developer.

The previous Member for Karama, Delia Lawrie, when she was a minister, signed a new agreement locking that land to that developer for the next 10 years. That is an issue that needs to be looked at. I may have the number of years wrong; it may be five years, but a long lease was signed.

Because it is private land it means the police do not have any jurisdiction on it. That area should be conserved—the police cannot do anything on that strip of land. That is not exactly the same as Tree Point, but a similar situation.

The other thing at Dundee is the Finnis River Station and access to an area called Stingray Head, which is the mouth of the Finnis River. People of Dundee have always been able to get from Fog Bay Road through Finnis River Station, along the edge of the coastline and to Stingray Head for fishing. That is typically locals who do not have boats. It is land-based fishing that the minister for Primary Industry has said they will progress. He needs to listen to this one.

At the Finnis River Station, Paul and his brother have a lot of problems with piggers and people on quad bikes cutting fences and shooting stock, and they have gotten to the point where they want to restrict access.

The previous executive officer of AFANT went to a meeting at Dundee, where I was as well. AFANT tried to help solve the problem. The big issue was that they would not solve it unless people were members of AFANT. It was a bit like needing to become a union member or something. It was not a satisfactory solution for the people at Dundee, and they felt that something else had to be done.

When I was the minister I offered to see if I could get some funds to supply fencing material to the owners of Finnis River Station so they could fence it to try to stop people from getting in, shooting stock, pigging and doing what they wanted, but still enable the people of Dundee to get out there and fish.

That is another area that needs to be looked at. I am not suggesting that we make it a conservation zone, but we need to put some controls in there. In his motion the Member for Nelson talked about putting a ranger station there. In some instances that is what they need. The people of Dundee do not feel that they need an ongoing police presence, but a ranger presence may help.

More recently—this is a potential problem—some of the coastline was settled as part of the Kenbi land claim, which got rid of the Blue Mud Bay issue of passing the first sand dune, which means people can now camp around the coastline at Wagait and Mandorah, up to just past the first coastline. My ongoing concern is that a similar problem could arise in the Kenbi area. I am not only talking about the bit we see from this side of the harbour; there is also the other side around into Bynoe Harbour. Much of that is Aboriginal land, but some of these people do not seem to have any respect for Aboriginal land, as the member pointed out. The lack of respect for Aboriginal land extends to areas at Daly River and all the way to Wadeye.

I was touching on a slightly different subject there, but the Kenbi matter also needs to be looked at. When the government says it is looking at all the coastline it has to go inside places like Bynoe Harbour. There is a stack of issues at the mouth of the Daly in places like Bulgul. Once you start to close areas like Tree Point and Dundee to a lot of people, they just go further afield. It is a bit like people collecting wood out of Canberra. I think they are almost at Gundagai before they find wood for their fires.

It is a big problem, and not just in the sense that it is an environmental issue that needs addressing. There is the issue of antisocial behaviour that we need to take into account. It is not good enough to say it will be a conservation zone. It needs to be policed in some fashion. Whether that is done by rangers from Parks and Wildlife, by Indigenous rangers, or whether Indigenous rangers are given some more powers in some of these areas are issues we need to consider.

Casuarina Coastal Reserve is an area where I have not heard of any antisocial behaviour in the sense of quad bikes or other vehicles being used there, but I am sure that happens on occasion.

These problems do not just exist on coastal areas. Our property at Acacia Hills adjoins a 200-acre conservation zone, which the Member for Nelson was very involved in and put aside when he was involved with Litchfield Council. That is in the high catchment area of the Elizabeth River. As soon as the rains start, as they have now, there are people there on their quad bikes hooning through because they can spray mud everywhere. While you may be wanting to have a nice, quiet ale late in the afternoon, watching the sunset, all you have is the roar of the quad bikes back and forth. These are the things people who live near beaches are putting up with, as well as them causing environmental damage to the areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the motion is a very good one. I would prefer it to be expanded to cover more areas than just Tree Point. I will support the motion, even though I believe it should be extended.

Mr VOWLES (Primary Industry and Resources): Mr Deputy Speaker, I take the opportunity to thank the Member for Nelson for proposing this motion. I will tell him up front that we are not supporting this motion. It has a lot of merit and good intent, but we cannot support it as it is. I will make a small contribution in my capacity as minister for Primary Industry, with fisheries included in that.

I thank the member for his ongoing passion and concern for the health and viability of our coastlines, as well as the safety and comfort of Territory families. I respect that the Member for Nelson is such a passionate advocate for such issues, because he has been here a long time. The Shoal Bay and Gunn Point coastline has been a popular destination for Territorians for the purpose of leisure, especially recreational fishing, for many decades. That is what my contribution this afternoon will focus on, as a minister with a stake in fisheries.

It is such an iconic area and many Darwin residents go there a lot. During the school holidays, which are coming up, you will see the area become very popular. It is also very popular on weekends. I used to go there many years ago, but do not go there anymore because of the antisocial behaviour. The safety of my family, like many things over the years—you are a bit more aware and you move into being a parent and looking for fun, safe things for your children to do.

Over the years there have been some terrible accidents there. It is sad that some people have such lack of respect for our environment and for the other people there, and sometimes the lack of respect for their own safety. The minister for the Environment and the Opposition Leader have already mentioned the antisocial behaviour there. It is not only due to alcohol; it is noise from quad bikes or motocross bikes. Sometimes it is a mixture of both, which is a cocktail of trouble.

Having said that, it should also be noted that it is recreation—a place of fun for people who do the right thing. I do not think the Territory should go further into being a nanny state by closing this or that to people who want to have fun and do the right thing. We tend to do that as a society across the Territory, the country and the world. We make decisions based on people doing the wrong thing when the majority of people are doing the right thing.

I acknowledge that people go to Shoal Bay and Gunn Point coastline and indulge in great family traditions. It is just sad that there are some idiots who do not do that.

I am committed to strong action on environmental protection. As with my mining portfolio, I need to balance my responsibilities as fisheries minister to advocate sensible access to recreational fishers where possible.

The Michael Gunner government has a strong commitment to evidence-based policy and effective community consultation. These two principles are what must drive decisions on access to coastal areas and fisheries. We must be careful not to exclude sensible recreation users from the area. It is important we consider this resource from a social and environmental perspective.

Territory Labor is committed, as part of a science-based, consulted approach to policy development, to developing a coastal and marine strategy, as the minister for the Environment has already alluded to. As stated, the Michael Gunner government will deliver on this commitment. The coastal and marine strategy will be the guide for all decisions relating to potential future coastal parks and reserves. It is important we take the time to be methodical and get it right the first time.

It must be recognised that the NT Water Police and fisheries staff work closely with the Larrakia rangers to carry out extension activities relating to fisheries compliance, monitoring and research on the Shoal Bay coastline. It is important work.

I am proud to say that in May 2016 three Larrakia rangers received training in, and successfully passed, their Certificate II in Fisheries Compliance Support. Three other Larrakia rangers have been trained in and passed fisheries compliance courses, and two additional Larrakia rangers completed certificate in measuring and analysis. From 1 January appropriately trained and experienced marine rangers will be eligible to be appointed as fishery inspectors. This will lead to an increase in compliance capacity across the entire Territory.

I am advised that Tree Point Conservation Area is patrolled by NT Parks and Wildlife rangers based at Howard Springs, who are often joined by police on long weekends and during school holidays, when a lot of people are there. I am advised the establishment of a ranger station would cost around \$3m to \$4m, with an annual reporting cost of \$300 000 to \$400 000. More work is required to justify this significant expense. We will be working with the Member for Nelson on that. Maybe there is a different model that he has mentioned, but something needs to happen there. We want all Territorians who are doing the right thing to enjoy that area; those who are not doing the right thing should be pulled up on that.

Until the government has worked through and developed the promised coastal and marine strategy, it would be unwise to focus on a single piece of the Territory coastline, as the coastal and marine strategy is the framework under which such decisions will be made.

As the Fisheries minister, I will engage in this process heavily and work closely with the minister for the Environment. For the reasons outlined by my colleague, the minister for the Environment, I support the Member for Nelson's intent, but cannot support the motion as it stands.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all members for their contributions. I did not expect the government to support the motion; it is not the end of the world for me. It is an opportunity, as I always think General Business Day is, to raise issues. My concern about the response, and one of the key areas that was missed in all this discussion, is that there has been no discussion with NT Land Corp.

This beach is 90% owned by NT Land Corp and 10% owned by the conservation commission. The real emphasis I was trying to put here is that the government needs to speak to NT Land Corp. Regardless of a 2018 plan, it needs to speak to NT Land Corp right now and say, 'What can we do as two distinct bodies in the short term', which I mentioned in my talk, 'to stop any more damage?'

You do not need a 2018 plan or an almighty Northern Territory coastal plan. You need common sense. You need to look at what damage is being done and say, 'How can we do some temporary work here to repair it?' Do we build a single road down to the beach and fence off the rest of the area? Do we put in a ranger station? Not a \$3m ranger station! You can buy a demountable for probably \$200 000, air conditioned, and one end could be an office while the other end could be a bedroom and kitchen.

It can still be kept secure if it is set up in the same compound as the water tower. I am not saying it has to be a full-time station at this stage, although it would be good if that happened later on. You could put a ranger out there on the long weekends. The Member for Johnston said that people go there on the weekends. That is when the ranger would be there.

At the moment, 90% of that land is not managed. No one has control over it except the police. I am not sure the police want to go there and book the quad bike drivers too often. You are not supposed to drive on that land because you are not registered. You cannot register a quad bike unless you only drive it 15 kilometres per hour. Technically, most people who drive there are driving on Crown land or NT Land Corp land, and they can be booked, but I do not necessarily think that is the way to go.

I was hoping the government would say it could do something in the short term. I am not asking you to spend a trillion dollars. I am just telling government to talk to NT Land Corp and Parks and Wildlife, and see if they can get together to manage the area. At the moment it is not managed.

I read out reports from 1990, 1992 and 1993 which repeat everything I said about there being erosion, rubbish and antisocial behaviour. But there is a beautiful piece of coastline with a cliff line that is fragile and needs some protection. People can say this is my issue—and I understand the issue with the Dundee Beach area. If you want to get me going on Dundee Beach it will not take long, knowing it is an area that should not have been developed as it has been. It is an area that was developed without any infrastructure, into which lots of money was poured, which originally was not meant to be developed. That is another issue, and that is why we ended up with a piece of coastline that is not being managed.

In the case of the Gunn Point region, I simply want the government to be more proactive. Do I stand here in six months' time and say, 'Here we go again'. Do I wait until 2018 and see if we have another 12 months of consultation?

The broad coastal plan is fantastic, but you have to remember that most of the Northern Territory coastline is in pretty good condition. There are areas near Limmen National Park where there have been mangroves, and we do not know the reason for that, but the coast of the Northern Territory is 99% in good nick. The only time it starts to get into trouble is when there is a population build-up. You have a population build-up in Darwin; you try to protect the mangroves; sometimes the developers want to use the mangroves for development et cetera. There is then industrial pressure on that area as well as port pressure. That is expected.

That is what is happening at Gunn Point; it is experiencing visitation pressure. The Member for Daly said, 'Don't fix up the road because that will only increase the number of people'. The people will still come, but we are just making the road safer because it is bad news. Plenty of people still go there; the road just needs a permanent upgrade.

In combination with that, you start to develop that area so it is managed and has opportunities for small business—it could be a little shop. You could go to Leaders Creek, but on the other side of the peninsula you could have a shop and a caravan park. There is an opportunity to develop business.

I support a coastal plan, but I sometimes feel—I said this about the early childhood development plan: do not reinvent the wheel. I know when a piece of coastline is stuffed. You need a four-wheel drive to drive to the beach because there is so much erosion and it is very difficult to get to; there is something wrong.

When I see tracks going over the cliffs, which are very fragile, I say, 'Hey, they should not be there'. They should be blocked off and rehabilitated. If we do not want to see people driving onto the beach at the Tree Point reserve when they should not be, we need to do something about it.

You can hide behind big plans, but sometimes you miss the opportunity to do something now. The Member for Johnston said, 'We have estimated the cost of a ranger station at \$3m'. Who were you talking to? Was it some architect in Sydney who studied proper ranger station design, modelled on a world-class design in Canada? 'You must have it here! You cannot have a demountable.' Apparently it will cause some sort of mental strain on the rangers if they live in a demountable. For \$200 000 it would be a pretty good demountable. Go and get a house from the 11 Mile and do it up. There is a pile of them sitting there. Get one of those and put it out there. If we had a facility there we could manage the area.

I will not go on forever. It is disappointing that there was no mention of the NT Land Corp because the government members are the only ones who can talk to them. I can say hello and bring a box of chocolates and wish them a happy day, but if you want serious discussion it has to be between the government and NT Land Corp if we are to develop it.

I hope someone in the government takes the time to go there, have a look, and do a quick evaluation of what the issues are, and perhaps do an intermediate budget to see if there is some work we could do there which would give some protection to the area. That would be reasonable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all members who have contributed, but I am not sure I have achieved anything, to be honest. I have made note of it and the government has said, 'Thank you very much'. The Member for Daly used it as leverage to tell us about his back yard at Dundee Beach and Finnis River Station.

If I was to ask what came out of this in relation to the issue—not much is concrete until after we develop the coastal plan and that could be at least two years away. In that time we will have a facility that is continuing to deteriorate. Thank you, anyway, for your contributions.

Motion not agreed to.

MOTION

Home Improvement Scheme

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that this Assembly calls on the Territory government to listen to Territorians and immediately reinstate the Home Improvement Scheme.

Yesterday the Chief Minister stood in this place and insulted every Territory homeowner. He implied that they were not taxpayers, that they did not pay tax and were a lot of self-serving deplorables.

Chief Minister, I say this to you on behalf of all homeowners, who are also taxpayers: you have forgotten about us, but we will not forget about you at the next election. I will give the Chief Minister some advice from my many years: be aware of pride before the fall.

The message is echoed in today's excellent piece in the *NT News* about the Home Improvement Scheme. Tradies have put aside their pride and are reaching out to charitable organisations for food and assistance as work reaches an all-time low. The Chief Minister should know the statistics. It is his Department of Business which collects the data from the Home Improvement Scheme. The voucher scheme is low on red tape and high on impact.

It is clear from the overwhelming public support, evidenced by the petition tabled in this place today, that the previous Country Liberal government's Home Improvement Scheme, the tradies scheme, was an effective and efficient tool to support local jobs and businesses.

The silent majority, the homeowners of the Northern Territory, are getting a raw deal under this Labor government. They always get a raw deal under Labor. The Chief Minister is now guilty of exactly the same policy arrogance he railed against. Chief Minister, you can rail against scrapping successful policies in opposition but you are doing exactly that when in government.

Why does Labor continue to overlook the hard-pressed homeowners? Is it a question of economics, social arrangement, philosophy or prejudice? What we know for sure is that, by any objective measure, the Country Liberals' Home Improvement Scheme was an unparalleled success.

How successful was the Home Improvement Scheme? The Labor government scrapped the Country Liberals' Home Improvement Scheme, then turned off the tap to well over 1000 registered small businesses. In its place Labor created the first home buyer renovation scheme, a poor imitation.

Let us look at the numbers between the successful, economy-boosting, job-creating scheme of the Country Liberals, compared with Labor's broken imitation: 5392 successful applications versus 29; \$9.3m versus \$290 000. How can Labor justify the embarrassment of 29 successful applications to a handful of first home buyers versus 5392 Territory families? Yes, they are homeowners. It would seem to me there is a case of misplaced pride. Chief Minister, your so-called fast-tracked projects are not creating jobs today.

David Malone from Master Builders NT has left the door wide open for you by saying:

... we absolutely agree that there is no better time than right now to inject funds into the economy.

When will the Chief Minister stop being so outright arrogant and start listening to Territorians? The Master Builders Association, along with 1056 small business owners and other concerned Territorians, has called on the government to reinstate the scheme.

The Country Liberals' Home Improvement Scheme had 7850 applications—5392 successful applications by the time it was axed by this Labor government on 3 October 2016. As of 22 August, five days before the Territory election and well before the Gunner government shut down the scheme, the Home Improvement Scheme had generated an estimated value of \$14.843m.

Our scheme, which was open to all Territory families, was a success. The selective Gunner plan is an underwhelming squib. Labor's plan for first home buyers' renovations does nothing to support local jobs or hard-working Territory families. It targets a small sector and does not match dollars; therefore, there is a loss to the economy.

Why did Labor axe a scheme that was clearly working? Why favour a small group of first home buyers—an estimated maximum of 700—over all other Territory families? How can Labor justify the embarrassment of 5392 versus 29 successful applications?

Another argument the Chief Minister likes to use is that all his initiatives are about population retention and growing the Territory population. There is no better way to keep a person in the Territory than to keep them in a job. The Home Improvement Scheme, or the tradies voucher scheme, kept good local businesses in business. The Home Improvement Scheme helped homeowners upgrade their living standards. It supported jobs and growth across the Northern Territory. It was an efficient way to leverage government monies to bring latent demand for upgrades in residential real estate stock.

What an investment for the taxpayer and the Northern Territory Government. For every dollar the government paid out in vouchers, it was attracting another \$4.50 out of family homeowners. It was improving the living and social amenities of thousands of Territorians. The wealth effect was real and the spending tap was clearly turned off.

In contrast with the Labor government's free money scheme there are two massive drawbacks: \$100 000 of free money does not bring in any additional money. It is not a smart investment; it does not leverage the government's investment in any way. I heard the Chief Minister say, 'We need to be responsible with taxpayers' money'. It only applies to a few; how is that value for taxpayers' money, as the Chief Minister said in an answer to a question yesterday?

We Country Liberals believe that good policy is good politics. We also believe that the silent majority must be listened to and that everyone should get a fair go, not special treatment for a few because aspirations are a good thing.

Wanting to improve your home, make things better in your neighbourhood and help your local tradie are undoubtedly good things. Wanting is good, and it should be supported with strategic, efficient and clever government policies and programs.

Let me take this opportunity to restate the resounding success of the previous Country Liberal government in managing the economy. We had a plan to build a safe, secure Territory and a strong, prosperous economy. No government did more to reduce debt and deficit than the previous Country Liberal government did over the last four years.

In the lead-up to the 2012 election Territory Labor was spending its way to \$5.5bn of net debt. The previous Labor government had no hesitation in making future generations of Territorians pay for their reckless ways. Never was there a cost-benefit analysis of any major project. Why would there be? Labor knew it could just put it on the corporate credit card. The Country Liberals had a plan and a vision for the Territory and continue to.

Labor speaks about building confidence, delivering certainty and creating jobs. Where there should have been certainty, Labor has delivered uncertainty and inaction. The only jobs Labor has created are assistant ministers for the Labor back bench—not real jobs, just gammon titles.

Although Labor talks a good game of openness and accountability, there was nothing open about the \$450 000 extra public holiday impost on taxpayers for the public service and costs for struggling small businesses are unknown. It was not even part of Labor's pre-election costings.

We Country Liberals strongly believe it is all about jobs. The policy setting and the signals sent to business should say we want to make it easy to create jobs in the Northern Territory. The Country Liberals believe in a bigger Territory. A bigger Territory is a better Territory with a brighter future. People will come to the Territory if there is an opportunity to do a bit better in life and move up. The Home Improvement Scheme is emblematic of the suite of aspirational policies the Country Liberal Party has in its plan for the Northern Territory.

Let us look at the facts surrounding the very successful Home Improvement Scheme and what it is about. It is about incentivising Territorians to upgrade the stock of residential real estate, which would have a net positive effect on wealth in the Territory, which would in turn drive spending, investment, growth and jobs. It is about realising that 70% of the wealth is held in residential real estate. It is about 10 000 families that could have benefited versus Labor's maximum 550 to 700 per year. It is about opportunity for all, not just the few.

I take this opportunity to correct the Chief Minister on his erroneous statement yesterday that homeowners do not create jobs or benefit the Territory. What about the thousands of Territory homeowners who support small businesses when they upgrade their louvre windows or protect their neighbours by getting drains cleaned and debris moved? What about the thousands of homeowners who pay stamp duty to the Territory government? Property is big business, creating thousands of jobs.

Chief Minister, one investment, like a voucher, can set in train a virtuous cycle. A church or a bowling club is something a Territorian uses once or twice a week on average, but their home they use every day. Consult with Territorians; listen to common sense. Our initiative saw home owner-occupiers receive vouchers of up to \$2000 to go towards home improvements undertaken by using Territory local small businesses.

Other families in the economy depend on a job and spend that income on food, petrol and electricity. The vouchers were deliberately low in value because they were about the bigger picture. We all need to look at the big picture. It was a catalyst for increasing small-scale renovation and maintenance activities, keeping the work flowing and keeping Territorians in jobs.

It was a win/win for Territorians because it also enabled Territory homeowners to get cracking on those improvements they had been meaning to do, bringing them forward. If you want to do a \$5000 job and you only have \$3000, you could get \$2000 and do it today, not wait for 12 months when you have saved the other \$2000.

The tradies scheme demonstrates that the previous Country Liberal government understood wealth creation and aspiration, which shows that we believe in and support small business, which employs most of the people in the Territory. We know small business is the backbone of our economy. We are making sure we look after them. Speaking of looking after, how about the delicious irony of this government scrapping the Home Improvement Scheme that was enabling homeowners to go green through rooftop solar at the fastest rate in the Territory's history. Yes, green—solar panels on the roof. Talk about a missed opportunity!

This Labor government is committed to 50% renewables by 2030. That is not leaning towards those renewable targets, is it? You just chopped a stack out. How ironic that Labor would cut a scheme that was setting us up in renewable technologies. The Home Improvement Scheme went far beyond putting marble countertops in Marrara. Its reach benefited all Territorians. Eco-friendly and green initiatives, such as rainwater tanks in the rural area, would have benefited from the Country Liberals' Home Improvement

Scheme. I was a bit late applying for mine, otherwise I would have another rain tank sitting there while we are getting rained on at the moment. A lost opportunity is exactly what we have here today.

Brown and grey water separation systems in Katherine or Alice Springs would have benefited from the Country Liberals' Home Improvement Scheme. For those people who do not know the difference, that is toilet water compared to shower water.

Access ramps and elderly mobility aids in Wadeye and Wulagi would have benefited from the Country Liberals' Home Improvement Scheme. How sad! It is sad because this government was elected with a massive majority and overwhelming mandate based on a ticket of trust and openness, yet there was no openness or consultation before scrapping the popular and successful Home Improvement Scheme. Under our plan, up to 10 000 home owner-occupiers, including first home buyers, were eligible. We included the first home buyers. They could apply for it. You just chopped off everyone else.

Under Labor's idea only 500 first home buyers will receive any benefit. That is just \$5m worth going to tradies and Territory small businesses, compared to the former government's \$20m—directly invested—and the expected flow-on effect to the economy was estimated at \$67m. Harvey Norman will get a lot—about \$2000 out of every \$10 000 that we give to first home buyers. Labor should ask tradies if they would prefer 10 000 clients or 500; they should also ask Territory mums and dads and pensioners living in their own homes if they could use up to \$2000 to go towards improving their homes and properties.

We want to see the greatest possible benefit achieved for local tradies, small businesses and home owner-occupiers. The fact we received 156 signatories to the petition in less than a week indicates that people are fully supporting it. The article in the *NT News* highlights the fact that the people the media talk to fully support it.

In this debate it is important to also hear the voice of real Territorians and listen to what they have to say. We listen. The Member for Barkly said there are four ears and they are all open.

Here is some of the feedback I have been provided with from my listening exercise.

Ashleigh Cowham of Alice Springs said, 'This has been a very valuable scheme that has created huge opportunity to many local businesses. It would be a real shame that it was not utilised to continue bringing in such large support to small local businesses, families who otherwise could not make upgrades that are seriously needed and to keep the money circulating.'

Ari Syrimi of Darwin CBD said, 'Small business is screaming for help right now. CPI in the last two quarters is the lowest over 10 years. While government spending on infrastructure and other projects is good it usually only helps a select few big businesses. This scheme truly helps a multitude of small businesses and sole traders who are struggling, and will continue to struggle for at least the next 12 months, and in turn puts money back into the general economy.'

Michael Brook of Parap said, 'I think it was a great scheme, giving all varieties of trades a share in works, whereas homebuyer schemes generally would be spent on stamp duty. It is also great for the homeowner who needs jobs done but could never quite afford it, such as large tree removal.'

That includes safety, fences, security and so forth. He may have been referring to the greening—the solar panels we put on the roof and the tanks we put out the back to collect the rainwater. With all the water problems in the rural area it was a great scheme.

Bruce Clifford of Alice Springs, a pensioner, said, 'I was too late for this scheme'. That must be something that happens with older people. 'I missed it completely. So much home electrical maintenance needed.'

Melissa Krollig in Humpty Doo said, 'As business owners we were starting to struggle before the Home Improvement Scheme, and we noticed an increase in work as soon as it commenced. I support the scheme to be reintroduced.'

Darcy Franklin of Stuart Park said, 'The Home Improvement Scheme was working fantastically. Darwin is about to fall into a big economic hole after INPEX and we need cost-efficient schemes like this to keep things happening for tradesmen and blue-collar workers. I am also a Labor voter, but they have made a mistake by scrapping it. The new scheme is targeted to a very small group of first home buyers. Not enough to make a difference.'

I could go on, but neither the Territory nor I have the luxury of time. Our Territory is on a road to a jobs cliff. The Country Liberals have a plan for jobs and growth. Hope, reward and opportunity for all Territorians, not just a select few, is what we are about.

Finally, I will touch on the current Facility and Capital Equipment Program, or FACE, through sport and recreation. That system gives out \$100 000 in grants to sporting and recreational organisations. Is the immediate work stimulus package the same pot of money? Under the FACE program, participants are required to contribute 20% of the total cost of the project. Is the Immediate Works Stimulus Package a poor imitation of another successful program?

I will call on all members in this place to do what is right by the Territory and support this motion to bring back the widely successful and strategic Home Improvement Scheme. I will touch back on that sport and recreation grant that is available on the Internet site. People can find it. It is \$100 000—a scheme that is already established—available to sport and recreation clubs. Why did the government not increase the amount allocated to it? Why did we start a whole new scheme?

We scrapped a perfectly good scheme in the tradies scheme. We introduced a new system, that was very selective, for first home buyers. We then introduced a new scheme of \$100 000 to sporting clubs and non-profit organisations. We already had a sporting and active recreation grant program. The funding program was for facilities and capital equipment; it enabled clubs to access up to \$100 000.

Why have we introduced another \$100 000 scheme? We already had one with rules around it—applications filled out; the department looking at it; available online. The last round closed at the end of September. They will not make any announcements until December. We are now in November. If you copied their rules, yours would not have money available until the end of February. I think the minister said that was the case, but I could stand corrected on that.

Why would we introduce a whole new scheme? This one is perfectly good; it is not broken. Can the minister tell us if it will be scrapped? If so why? If this one requires sporting organisations and recreational clubs to put in 20%, why would they go to this one? They will have to wait and go to the new one. They will save themselves \$20 000 in every \$100 000. Mathematics will tell you that.

I want to know what they are doing with this scheme. Why did they not just expand the scheme for sporting and recreation clubs? It would have been a terrific scheme. It already induces the extra 20%. For every \$100 000 they will get another \$20 000. Your scheme is just \$100 000. I do not know which recreational clubs or non-profit organisations will have a spare \$100 000 sitting around to match the second \$100 000. I am not sure where it will come from.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I commend this motion to the House and I hope many other members of this House have the courage to stand up for the homeowners in their electorates.

Ms MANISON (Treasurer): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for presenting this motion to the parliament. It is an important debate regarding the challenges in the economy and ways in which government can look at economic stimulus, supporting jobs and business. It is a timely, important debate and it is good to have it in the General Business section of parliament.

There was one point in the Leader of the Opposition's speech where he said we had not been clear and transparent about our intentions with the Home Improvement Scheme. In response to the budget in May, we made it very clear that this would not be our priority for economic stimulus. We had much debate in this House regarding that in the lead-up to the election and there was further debate in public forums. We took a very public position and were very clear that the continuation of the scheme was not our priority in regard to value for money and effectiveness in the long term for economic stimulus. I wanted to be clear and up front about that.

We have different views on the best way to support jobs and the economy. Since changing government and coming into this role—we heard this loud and clear in opposition. The previous government had to respond very rapidly with a stimulus package and undertook a lot of work around schools, which included other infrastructure stimulus across the Territory. After we were told, 'We are on track and everything is fine', eventually the government finally submitted to the fact that we were experiencing a slowing economy.

It was something we had to deal with and the previous government responded with economic stimulus, which we supported because we recognise that in times like this, when there are challenging conditions and declining private investment, that is when a government needs to step in and ensure its investment in

the economy and infrastructure is there—especially in a place like the Northern Territory—to support jobs. We agree; stimulus is required at the moment, but we have different views on what is an effective stimulus program. We also have very different views with regard to the Home Improvement Scheme.

We were very clear when we came to government that we did not want to put any handbrakes on the economy, because we had heard of the challenges and people wanted to have confidence that if they put their trust in a Labor government it would do everything it could to ensure there was still support for jobs and money flowing through the economy, and that we were making sound infrastructure investments to support jobs. We are committed to that.

With the Home Improvement Scheme, we made sure there was a transition period. We were very conscious of that. We did not want to make the same mistakes that we saw in 2012, for example, with the scrapping of BDR overnight, with nothing to replace it. We also saw the chaos and issues with antisocial behaviour that immediately stemmed from that. We did not want to see a repeat of that situation. We needed to be responsible, so we looked at a way to transition from the Home Improvement Scheme to our new home renovation grant. We did that by ensuring that when the scheme opened, at the start of September, we continued taking applications for the Home Improvement Scheme through that month to make sure there was a transition period. People were well aware of that so they could get their applications in and access that scheme, and people did.

You have to question the effectiveness of the scheme and how it is going now, but it is also important that people are aware the scheme is still ongoing. People have applied and had their applications granted, and they have access to the \$2000 vouchers. That has been signed off and is ready to go. However, many people have not expended that money; they have not used the grant they received. Looking at the pipeline of work, there is still months of work to come. Of the \$12.6m worth of vouchers issued through the scheme, \$7.8m of those have been claimed by business and spent in the economy. There is still \$5m outstanding that has not been expended.

To those people who have been successful in obtaining the grant, please go out and use it. You have it there. You know we have the scheme, so if you have that grant, use it. Even with the Home Improvement Scheme still being very active in the community there is still \$5m waiting to be expended with local business.

There are some real challenges, but we know the Home Improvement Scheme money will still continue. We have \$5m more to flow through the Territory economy. That is still there, waiting to be spent across the Northern Territory in the next few months.

We have had over 100 successful applicants to the first home owner concessions, which is, effectively, access to another \$1m worth of work in the community. We have heard loud and clear feedback about people's concerns regarding the economy, businesses concerns from key sectors that we have been listening to. You can see it by looking at the economic indicators and figures as well. You just need to doorknock in your electorate and you will hear that the economy is slowing and people are concerned.

It is really important for government to support jobs, and that is why we made a very deliberate decision to fast-track some of our election commitments, to make sure we had the right balance in the infrastructure program going forward—good, meaty construction jobs that would support business as well as delivering important long-term infrastructure to the Northern Territory. That is another important point of difference; it is about overall long-term gain.

We have fast-tracked about \$20m worth of work, which will support jobs and the economy and deliver some long-term gain for the Territory. In addition to that we have brought forward another \$22m worth of stimulus work. We believe we will get long-term gain out of these investments. For example, there is \$10m for community grants targeting non-profit community organisations. That includes fabulous places like the multicultural facilities across the Territory. They are wonderful facilities where communities come together. Many are shared by different groups and used for all sorts of reasons. They do not tend to be exclusively used. In the true spirit of multiculturalism in the NT, these communities share their facilities and maximise their benefit.

It was wonderful to visit the Greek Orthodox community on Sunday and look at the hall there, which is a very special and unique piece of community infrastructure in Darwin. We have a community hall sitting in the Darwin CBD. We talk about reinvigorating the Darwin CBD and giving it a bit more life and activity—and what a fabulous place that community hall is.

In the true style of what you would expect of the Greek community, it is very open to sharing that facility with other parts of the community. But significant work needs to go into that facility because it is a very old hall. That is an example where we will achieve significant long-term gain to the broader Territory community, as well as supporting local jobs and injecting local stimulus into the economy. We have a wonderful facility in our Darwin CBD that other groups can access and hold community events. That is exactly the type of infrastructure we will support, which will see a long-term gain.

When you go to many of the churches in the Territory you will see there is always something that can be upgraded. They are not the newest places around, but they do support members of the community by keeping people together and creating a place of worship, as well as creating a place of support for one another. They are very important parts of the Northern Territory.

Not-for-profit organisations, NGOs, sporting groups—it is very important that we support good sporting infrastructure in the Territory. Again, this comes back to what we see as short-term stimulus, which is required, as well as looking at the long-term, broader gain to the Territory community.

We also looked at public housing. There is no doubt public housing stock is ageing across the Territory. The waiting lists are long. If you need to get into public housing, generally life is pretty tough. We want to be able to conduct important minor new works and repairs and maintenance, and enable tradies to access that work. This is about the Darwin and Palmerston region, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. It is about getting out to all those centres to support businesses to do that important work.

A total of \$5m for steel manufacturing will support local businesses that are finding it increasingly tough. There is competition from China when it comes to steel manufacturing and steel products. We have spoken with many steel manufacturers that worked with the previous government, which expressed their concerns to us in opposition with regard to the challenges and the struggles they were facing. They were often outbid by interstate companies, often for government contracts, which was frustrating for them. This was another reason we looked at changing the Buy Local policy and strengthening it further. The former government made some well-intended changes, but unfortunately the implementation did not go far enough. We have made sure we have strengthened them.

This important work in steel manufacturing will deliver some fantastic infrastructure in Territory parks, and facilities for sporting groups around the Northern Territory. It will also make sure we are injecting local stimulus to the steel manufacturing sector, because once we lose the manufacturing base it will be hard to get it back. It is important we keep those businesses running and get value for money in getting better-quality shelters, recreational areas and transport infrastructure, such as bus shelters. The community will ultimately benefit from those types of things.

When people wait for public transport, particularly here in the north where we get big rains in the Wet Season, it is important they have access to bus shelter infrastructure. That is another benefit.

It was lovely to announce today the \$2m to support remote health clinics—jobs that need to be done right across the Northern Territory to further enhance remote health clinics. They need works done and we can fast-track them in this financial year. It is for people working in communities in the very important health clinics that provide vital services to those communities. It was targeted as supporting local jobs, local business and the economy.

We were up front about our position on the changes to the Home Improvement Scheme. We have been having this debate since May. We still have \$5m waiting to be spent on the vouchers. That will continue to support jobs. We also have our home renovation grant. We are also fast-tracking some significant construction projects in the Northern Territory.

The government must invest in infrastructure. We have made deliberate decisions about where the infrastructure stimulus should go. We felt that the Home Improvement Scheme was a short-term gain. We put together stimulus measures which deliver a far greater outcome to the Territory in the long term as well as injecting important support for local jobs and local business in the short term.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this debate forward. It is wonderful that we are having these debates. It is making people acutely aware of the need for government stimulus and the importance of infrastructure investment across the Northern Territory. It also reminds people about the importance of supporting local tradies and local jobs, and spending your money locally and supporting local business where you can. That is a really important message, especially as we get closer to Christmas. Retail spending is there to do. Go to the shops, get out of your home, go to Casuarina and spend your money

there. Do not go online. It is those types of measures that make sure Territorians are supporting Territorians.

We have been very up front about our views on the Home Improvement Scheme and why we feel that the changes we made deliver important short-term stimulus, but also the long-term gains we need to see in the Northern Territory. It is about long-term value for money and making sure those investments continue to benefit the community for many years to come.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank the opposition for bringing forward the motion today; however, we have been clear that we transitioned out of the Home Improvement Scheme, so we will not support the motion. We have replaced it with other significant initiatives and stimulus measures that we feel are the best value for money for the Northern Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I support the opposition's motion, calling on the government to bring back the \$2000 home improvement voucher. Over the last couple of weeks we have seen a mounting campaign by Territorians, calling on this government to bring back the scheme. It was a much-needed injection of money into our economy. It stimulated jobs and spending, and it was very well received by tradies and ordinary Territorians in our electorates.

As a result of the mounting campaign, we have received signatures from 1056 petitioners, made up of tradies, householders and ordinary Territorians, who recognise that we needed to mount a strong campaign against this government and send a strong message, calling on the government not to play politics on this issue or say, 'Our policy is better than yours, so too bad, so sad. On your bike and go home.'

We want the government to recognise that whilst it may have gone to the election and said, 'We will get rid of the tradie voucher and replace it with something else', the tradie voucher is still very much needed. It has a place in the Territory's economy right now. The government should swallow its pride and do the right thing by Territorians and bring it back. This is just a matter of flicking a switch for the government; it does not have to do much to continue the immediate stimulus that the tradie voucher scheme created. It would literally just have to tell the department to continue on with the scheme and things would start to flow once again.

As part of the campaign that the community has amped up in the last two weeks—we thank the community for coming on board and telling us this is an important issue to them. We are merely a mouthpiece for Territorians, tradies and families who are struggling and can see the value of this scheme and the need to bring it back. We are very pleased to work in conjunction with the community on this campaign to government. It has come to a head today by this motion and by our tabling of the petition in parliament earlier this afternoon.

In the media we have seen that there are businesses crying out for help. It takes a lot of guts to come forward and put your face on the television or your name on the radio and say to the broader Northern Territory, 'Our business is struggling; our business did really well under this scheme. The tradie scheme helped our business. It helped us get out of a really tough time. We might have had to close our doors if it was not for this scheme.' It takes a lot of guts to say those things and to put your name, face and business in the spotlight for the greater good.

A lot of businesses have done that over the last couple of weeks; they have taken that brave step in order to show leadership and personalise this debate by putting faces to the names, saying to the government, 'Here we are. We are crying out. We are not being too proud to say we are struggling and need a hand.' Why are you being too proud to bring back the scheme?

The government could take a leaf out of tradies' books, tradies who have come forward over the last few weeks, by swallowing its pride and acknowledging that the scheme has its place and that Territorians want it brought back.

As recently as this morning the newspaper headline was 'Gunner is the Grinch stealing Christmas'. I could not have said it better myself. It is just remarkable that this government continues to stand in the House—we have asked numerous questions of the Chief Minister, and other ministers, over numerous days of parliamentary sittings. We have asked them to stop, think, reconsider, hear the calls of our community and understand the dollar value of this scheme in the community. Yet the government continues to shut its eyes, put its fingers in its ears or pretend this is not the case.

Today in Question Time a minister—I cannot remember who—said the apparent evidence showed there was no value in the scheme. I do not know if the government read the paper today, but I read that nearly \$15m was injected into our economy in the short time the scheme was in place. There was an output of less than \$5m. That is not a bad return on investment. I think my colleague, the Opposition Leader, said in his contribution that for every dollar spent of government money \$4.50 was matched by the private sector. That is fantastic; it is exactly what we need.

We heard so many stories when I sat at the Coolalinga markets on Saturday morning and the Oasis shopping centre on Sunday. There were so many people saying, 'Is the scheme coming back? We want the scheme to come back!' It was excellent. We brought forward those works that we would not have otherwise done. There are all these projects they want to do, but they are expensive and there are other things for them to consider, such as all the usual family expenses. But this scheme gave people the incentive; it drove people to make the most of an opportunity and spend money.

I recall one lady telling me how fantastic the scheme was. Her family bit the bullet and said, 'Right, we have the impetus we need so now is the time we can redo the driveway'. That was a \$12 000 job, so it was \$10 000 of their money matched with \$2000 government money, which meant \$12 000 out the door and into the community. It is a valuable scheme, which saw that kind of money being leveraged. We saw government money, which is so precious and finite, being leveraged in the community and increasing the amount of money going out the door. At a minimum it was one for one, up to \$2000. At a minimum you were getting that value.

Many people have spoken to me whilst manning our petition in various places, and I have been speaking to people and making contact with tradies. People were completing much bigger projects, so the injection into the economy was far greater.

Over the last couple of days since the weekend, the government has slowly dripped out its \$22m stimulus package. I loathe calling it a stimulus package, because it is not. That is not playing politics; it just is not a stimulus package. You had a stimulus package that was working and you scrapped it. Okay, you said you would scrap it and you went ahead and did that—fine. But then you saw the detriment to the community and you cannot recognise that, so you dig your heels in and decide not to bring it back. Instead you come up with some other bizarre way to spend taxpayers' money but not leverage it or get the best out of that money.

When you talk scheme for scheme—this government promised it would scrap the tradie voucher and replace it with a \$10 000 tradie voucher which is only for first home owners. That was the extent of the stimulus package you wanted to introduce. You clearly realise that has fallen well short of the mark and there is a very small pool of first home buyers and, therefore, a very small group of people who will avail themselves of the \$10 000 tradies package this government has proposed. It is not leveraged money; it is just a grant. 'Here is your \$10 000. Congratulations on your new home.' That is all well and good, but that lack of dollar matching sees a real opportunity lost. The government promised it would do that and it has.

The government must have recognised—and this is the only reason I can see for the government bringing forward this new, off-the-cuff \$22m package—the tradie voucher was doing a great job. The government's scheme for first home buyers was not cutting the mustard. It needed something else. Instead of reverting back to a scheme that was already in place and recognising all the work that had been done—think about the hours involved in developing it, processing it and getting it into working order. People were familiar with it, but all that work has been pushed to the side and, instead, the government came up with a new scheme of \$22m broken up into all sorts of bits and bobs.

The first part of the \$10m made up of \$100 000 grants for community organisations—my colleague already drew the government's attention to it. It did not take much scratching on the surface to realise there are other grant programs in place that do the same thing. I am sure community organisations welcome this. It is wonderful that they are getting this opportunity to invest in their clubs and their facilities—there is no doubt about that—but it is limited. Only 100 organisations can take part. Only so many tradies can be contracted to do those works. Importantly, none of this money flows until next year, when there is an urgent need for it now. The dollar-for-dollar component does not kick in until after \$100 000.

It is not rocket science to realise that community organisations do not have hundreds of thousands of dollars sitting in their bank account for a rainy day. They work very hard. These are the people running fundraisers and sausage sizzles to keep their beautiful community organisations vibrant and alive. How many of them will be able to go over the \$100 000 initial grant cap? That remains to be seen.

This is just a grant scheme. It does not attract additional expenditure and therefore limits and restricts the amount of money going out of the door. By the same logic, if that \$10m had been put into reviving the tradie scheme—from \$5m we saw nearly \$15m back in the economy—logic says that for \$10m it would put \$30m dollars into the economy. This is enormous. Under the government's proposals, the \$10m is \$10m, and that is it. It is restricted; it will only go so far and it is a great shame that an opportunity was missed for the government to put \$30m into the economy instead of just \$10m. Territorians would have welcomed it. They want the opportunity to do these projects around their homes. It is great for neighbourhoods and families.

Another portion of this \$22m package the government announced was \$5m specifically for urban housing. We have asked many questions on this in parliament and we are not getting any answers. One question is whether additional contractors, tradies, will be able to access this \$5m. Territory Housing already has panel contractors. There are a certain number of contractors who do a certain amount of work. Are they the only ones who can avail themselves of this \$5m? There is no detail around this, and it is limited. It will have a certain impact. It is a missed opportunity because it is not matched; it is government money fixing government housing. That is fine and there is nothing wrong with that, but there are repairs and maintenance budgets for those works. To call it a stimulus package is a huge stretch.

Going back to the tradies, in the paper today there was Stephen and Mark, who are tilers, were calling for the scheme to come back. We heard from the Master Builders Association, which said an opportunity has been missed. They see the value in the tradie scheme but want it to go even further. The government could have taken the tradie scheme model, idea and concept, knowing it works effectively, and turned it up a notch, going even further with it. That was not even put on the table by this government; it did not even look at it. We also heard from Bobby from the Total Group about how it saved that business—and now the phone calls have stopped.

The lack of consultation regarding a number of announcements from this government is astonishing. For a government that said it would be open, accountable and transparent, and would consult and listen to Territorians—we have seen two part-public holidays slammed down the throats of Territorians at a huge detriment to business. This digging in of the heels and holding on to the pride of not backflipping shows a lack of understanding of what Territorians are saying. It shows a lack of consultation.

We have been standing in public spaces and listening to all forms of feedback from Territorians on this issue, but this government is digging its heels in and not listening to Territorians. It is going one step further; the dismissive nature of people like the Chief Minister and the way in which they respond to our concerns on the tradie voucher have been incredibly disappointing. The lack of statesmanship around how this issue has been dealt with, and the way Territorians have been laughed at in this Chamber, is disappointing.

We as, an opposition, were criticised in Question Time for asking the government to create jobs and support and create benefits to the taxpayer. We were laughed down in this Chamber. Then the Chief Minister said:

How do we get a responsible and sensible benefit to the taxpayer?

The Opposition Leader and I know how we get a responsible and sensible benefit to the taxpayer, as do 1056 petitioners and the broader Territory community, but, for some reason, this government does not understand. The government thinks that by creating limited works packages which are not dollar matched, it can create a stimulus in our economy. The government is wrong.

It is shameful of this government to laugh at and ridicule Territorians by saying they are deriving some sort of improper benefit from the tradie voucher scheme because they are getting repairs done to their own home. That is ludicrous.

We look forward to this government responding to our petition. Territorians are interested in this government's response. It is not too late. We know you have rolled out your scheme for first home buyers. We know you have done a patch up job with your \$22m stimulus package, but it is not too late. You know your stimulus package will not kick in until next year; you know tradies are hurting now; you know the lead-up to Christmas is a slow season; and you know what the Northern Territory is like.

It is not too late. I look forward to hearing the contributions of other members in this parliament, especially government backbenchers, on how this might affect their electorates. We have not heard much by way of government contribution to this debate to date. It is an important issue to engage in, and Territorians expect

their local members to represent their local interests. I look forward to hearing from backbenchers in this debate, and I urge the government to consider this motion.

The Treasurer said she would not support the motion, but I urge her to reconsider. It is not too late; you can support this motion. You can flick the switch back on and see work flowing out to tradies. You can give Territorians an early Christmas present by bringing back the \$2000 Home Improvement Scheme.

I say to the Chief Minister, his Cabinet and his backbenchers, you do not have to be the Grinch stealing Christmas. Bring back the \$2000 tradie voucher and tell Territorians you are listening, you hear their concerns and you will give a true stimulus to our economy over the coming months.

Mr MILLS (Blain): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, my understanding of this program is that it meets the needs right now. I heard a couple of comments, whilst the honourable member was speaking, that now you are consulting. Whatever!

It is obvious; if you want to deliver the most effective support to the point of need, this is the vehicle you should employ. You will probably kill two birds with one stone—to deal with the growing perception that this administration is very pleasant, nice and well intentioned, but you are starting to fall in the view of people, because the honeymoon will pass. Certain images will be lodged in people's minds.

I have been here for the start of other administrations. I cannot reflect on the last one because I was more directly involved and it was fairly dramatic. I saw the demise of the CLP, which lost connection after a very long period of time, 27 years or so. Then, in came this brand-new era. It was so exciting that the air even smelled different. The sense of excitement lasted for some time, but then people got over the honeymoon and began to focus on things that mattered to them directly. They then wondered what the government's response to that specific problem was. As the pain and discomfort of daily life in the Territory began to increase, so did their criticism of government. It was difficult for government at that point.

Contained in this is an opportunity for recognition of the current problem in its earliest stages. I honestly believe it will get far worse. I am concerned about how things are developing in the Territory. I bet there are some *Hollowmen* types on the fifth floor saying, 'There he goes, talking about law and order because it is a good old drum to beat'. I honestly mean this; I am concerned about our community and how society is developing. It is under extreme pressure. You have just seen what happened, surprisingly, in the US. When ordinary people are fed up and start to speak up, unexpected changes occur.

I believe this new administration will face some unrecognised challenges going forward, not too far away. It takes a while before the community starts to register that significant change is occurring. Once it occurs, just like a tide begins to move, it moves rapidly.

Here is an opportunity to respond in a way that deals with the idea that is forming. Your first landmark decision—you only have one chance at a first impression and you have already registered that one chance. You have already spent it through the first significant decision you made. It has already lodged into people's mind and a certain idea of this government is formed. That is, the creation of the part-day public holidays.

I found what occurred in that debate astonishing. The Chief Minister almost reverted to the form of argument that was so distasteful in the previous Assembly, where you start appealing to strong words like 'fairness' and saying, 'You are heartless', and asking questions like, 'Why do you hate the workers?' It is an immature debate, which showed me there is already a certain sense of defensiveness in the position. People pick that up.

That concerned me because it is a first impression. It sent a signal to the community, which is already feeling the change in economic prospects. People need hope. We can already see increased demand on Foodbank and other social services at this point. That is a clear indication that families are under pressure now, and I believe that will increase. On top of that, we have a government that started quite timidly and made one bold decision, which sent a very clear signal that did not convey the sense that it recognises that there are economic challenges in the Territory in a broader context. It is a decision that could be argued in emotional terms, but it could not be sustained in a rational way because the argument was implausible.

'This decision will increase the population of the Northern Territory'—I could not draw those two points together, as much I tried. I am trying to be fair, but it did not do it for me. Speaking to local people about consulting—little things like this sort of program. By the way, the previous government got a lot wrong. You all agree with that; your maiden speeches were full of it and every speech subsequent to it has referred to

that, but there are some things the previous government got right. Programs like this are very important. Delivering targeted amounts at the point of need so people can make their own decisions on how that is acquitted and add their own funding makes an enormous difference. That is why I support this.

I can see past the politics. I know it would be discomforting to acknowledge that this is a pretty good scheme, but the community would respect you for it because they are already experiencing challenging times. There were good programs, and this is one of them. This develops help at the grassroots level, where it is most appreciated, especially at this time.

I am sure you have noticed what was reported today. I am quite close to Foodbank. That is a very clear measure of the pressures being faced at the home front.

Ms Lawler: Thank goodness they are being funded and supported.

Mr MILLS: I pick up on the interjection, which I find quite disturbing. You are to be applauded for the support to Foodbank, and I worked as best I could behind the scenes to provide some support and guidance for that organisation. I spoke to the now Chief Minister—and I applaud the Labor Party for its support. It is not about you; it is about the organisation and the service it provides, that is, providing food for families who need food.

Ms Lawler: If they did not get their funding they may not have been here.

Mr MILLS: I totally agree with you, but it is not about you and how well you have done in supporting them. You should have done it; you did it, and good on you. The point is, Foodbank is providing food for people who are hungry and the number of those people is increasing.

Ms Lawler: We know that; it is why we funded them.

Mr MILLS: Unbelievable. You have done very well; congratulations. The program is a response to the growing economic pressures of families; that is what this is about. The program also promotes grassroots support. That is why, in this economic context, it is important that this type of program is supported. That is why I support this motion.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I rise to join in the debate about the former CLP government's \$2000 Home Improvement Scheme. Part of me thinks a new government should have the opportunity to introduce new schemes that suit its agenda. That is quite reasonable.

I think the CLP \$2000 Home Improvement Scheme was brilliant at the time. I was not part of the CLP government when it introduced this. It was brought in very quickly, probably a response, in part, to the election, but it was also a response to a declining economy. It recognised that average people living throughout the Northern Territory had homes that required maintenance.

That was a big tick. It was an acknowledgement of people's need to upgrade, improve and spend some money on their home. More than anything, it was about stimulating the economy and keeping tradies in work. I remember the Chief Minister at the time talking about how, with the decline of INPEX, there would be a lot of tradies out of work and heading down south because they were destined to lose their jobs at INPEX. The former CLP government wanted to capture the people who would imminently leave and needed something to keep them in the Territory.

It was a great idea: 'Let us stop them from going. Let us provide this stimulus package, this very generous scheme in which all those tradies could register and apply to provide the work.' People could then get on board and upgrade their homes. The *NT News* has reported today that more than 1000 tradies and small businesses had registered, and more than 3000 homeowners had applied for vouchers, with the average voucher value being \$1755. The other brilliant thing was that every dollar was matched up to \$2000. Every dollar contributed by the government was matched by a dollar from the person having the work undertaken. It was brilliant. I would not have said that at the time, but history is history; it is what it is. I can look back objectively and say it was a great scheme.

It certainly helped people in Alice Springs. I personally know many people who got on board quickly and used that money. A friend of mine, a single woman living in a unit in Alice Springs, quickly got on board and had some work undertaken that she never would have been able to afford. There were many good stories around, not just from people who could afford to have the work undertaken themselves, but people who

were struggling. These schemes should target the strugglers, the people who would not normally be able to afford thousands of dollars' worth of upgrades to their home.

I welcome the idea that this could come back, not only because of my former connection to the CLP, but objectively, because it was so well received and successful. It value-added and it appealed to a lot of people throughout the Northern Territory. It ticked all the boxes for me as a scheme that truly worked and was very popular, as the opposition members have told us this afternoon.

But we have a new Gunner Labor government, which has its own way of approaching the economy of the Northern Territory. It has its own ideas about how to stimulate the economy. I hope the government has not rejected the CLP \$2000 Home Improvement Scheme just because it is a CLP scheme. I hope it has rejected it because it believes that what it has put on the table is better.

I am encouraged by the announcement made by the Treasurer last week, the \$22m stimulus, which has some interesting features. I am pleased the government is focusing on community organisations. That is a great idea. I know a lot of community organisations, particularly churches throughout Alice Springs, which are doing it tough. Their congregations have shrunk considerably over the last 30 years, and upgrading, maintaining and repairing their churches and facilities is a struggle. I read that and thought it was good news. I am happy with it. I am happy that many people will benefit from having these community organisations upgraded.

The Gunner \$10 000 contribution to first home owners was announced before the election. At the time I thought, 'Wow! We have gone from one extreme to the other.' We have gone from having no first home owner grant available for existing homeowners under the CLP government to a generous \$26 000 stamp duty relief for first home owners buying existing homes, plus a \$10 000 home improvement allocation for every first home buyer who buys an existing home.

I do not know if \$10 000 is necessary. I think it is very generous and kind, and it allows people who were struggling to buy their first home to immediately upgrade—put in a new kitchen or bathroom, do a paint job, whatever is required. It is very generous. I am not criticising it, but as a former Treasurer I would have probably put less on the table, knowing that dollars are scarce. But it is a great scheme. I am sure Territorians who are buying their first home will enjoy that wonderful opportunity to upgrade their home.

The government has been a little unclear on what its agenda, theme and direction is around committing to infrastructure projects and spending. In the first sittings we heard the Treasurer say she would not make any announcements on new infrastructure spending until after the economic summits. I think there is some confusion in the community about where this government is going with its financial and economic agenda. It is not clear. It seems to be a bit all over the place, but it is only three months into the job, so those problems will iron out over time in regard to the left hand telling the right hand what to do and forming a very clear agenda and direction for the government.

We heard from the Treasurer that there would be no new infrastructure announcements made until after the economic summits. I am not even sure that the dates for the economic summits have been set, which is a little bewildering. When I checked the website three weeks ago there were definitely no dates for those economic summits on the website. Three weeks is a long time. Perhaps the dates are up now; I do not know.

We heard some announcements last week on infrastructure priorities. The government decided to reprioritise some of the legacy infrastructure projects it inherited from the former CLP government. I am on the public record now, several times, stating that it was not good news for Central Australia. A total of \$27m worth of infrastructure projects for Central Australia were deferred. When I say deferred I mean there was no date given as to when they will be referred to. They were simply put on the deferred projects list.

I will ultimately table these lists from Treasury, outlining the new and brought-forward infrastructure projects as well as the deferred projects that were announced last week. I do not know if these lists have already been tabled, but I will do that, perhaps after my speech because I would like to refer to them.

A total of \$27m of infrastructure projects for Alice Springs were deferred out of a total of almost \$141m. That was very bad news for Central Australia last week. Some of the decisions on projects to be referred were of great concern. The one that concerns me the most is the storm rectification works in Alice Springs, the \$11m that has been deferred out of the Central Australia Health Service budget. Taking money out of health which has been allocated to repair storm damaged buildings in Alice Springs really concerns me. I

questioned the Health minister and the Chief Minister on this in parliament last week because it disturbs me. The answers I received were very vague and unclear.

I have put a written question to the Minister for Health, via the Legislative Assembly, asking for specific details. The people of Central Australia need to know exactly what storm damage to the health buildings in Central Australia will not be repaired because of this deferment of \$11m worth of works, and how that compromises the delivery of health services in Central Australia. Are there occupational health and safety issues? Are there work safety issues? Buildings that are damaged by a storm need to be repaired as soon as possible.

You cannot leave public buildings in a state of disrepair indefinitely. That is what this government has decided during its short term in government. Central Australia Health Service buildings are a very low priority and government will just shelve that work and not get to it in the foreseeable future. Nowhere on the forward estimates, nowhere over the next four years, has this work been rescheduled. I find that decision bewildering and cause for concern. When you put it in the context of other decisions that have been made, it is very difficult to see where this government is going, particularly in regard to funding for Central Australia and Alice Springs.

There were some other remarkable decisions made around deferment. We had \$11.5m deferred from the upgrade of Maryvale Road, as well as the \$2.7m which was for the upgrade to the Ross Park Primary School. In just three months we have seen this government take \$27m away, which was money for education, health and roads in Central Australia.

You give with one hand and you take with the other. I get that; it is how government is. How these decisions have been derived is of great concern to me, particularly when you look at the projects that have been prioritised. Of these projects, two are in Alice Springs. One is the Alice Springs Women's Shelter, which is fantastic. I am a great supporter of that and I am very pleased to see \$6m prioritised to it. The other is \$7m for the Alice Springs youth facility, which is a new initiative.

Where has our \$27m gone? There was a total of \$40m, and if you take away the \$13m for the Alice Springs Women's Shelter and the Alice Springs youth facility, the balance in \$27m, which has gone towards building a free car park at the Royal Darwin Hospital. Nowhere in the Western world would you have a government paying for a free car park and not think about any form of revenue generation. It is extraordinary. I think that needs to be revisited. Nowhere are car parks built with zero being charged for the use of them. Car parking is big business right around the world, as I said in parliament last week, yet this government will charge nothing for a multimillion-dollar car park at the Royal Darwin Hospital. I question the need for it.

When I was Health minister two years ago we made sure we created enough car parks to meet the needs at RDH. Given the fact Palmerston hospital is due to open in the next 18 months to two years, it will take a lot of pressure off the Royal Darwin Hospital. As the years go by, with Palmerston extending, the pressure on RDH will decrease and more people will use the Palmerston hospital. You will have a huge, expensive car park at the cost of lots of other projects in the Territory, which is not required.

These are the decisions of the new government. We have just seen the start of what it is on about in regard to its economic and financial agenda. In recent years we saw the big infrastructure spend on schools under the CLP government, which was a reaction to a downturn in the economy. Schools across the Territory benefited from a big spend; hundreds of thousands of dollars were dished out to schools in the Northern Territory, which was a good thing. We have heard that the Labor government will give \$300 000 to every school in the Northern Territory.

Mr Wood: It was Labor's stimulus plan.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I pick up the interjection from the Member for Nelson. He says it was a Labor plan. I am not talking about Building the Education Revolution; I am talking about the infrastructure spend a couple of years ago that directly benefited a number of schools in my electorate.

The Gunner government has come up with its \$300 000 funding allocation to schools to allocate at their discretion, I assume. This government is flip-flopping. I am having trouble working out exactly what its economic agenda is.

It would be remiss of me to not talk about an announcement made last week by the Member for Braitling. She provided information to the *NT News* and the *Centralian Advocate* telling Alice Springs that it would

receive \$120m of project funding over the next two years, which was entirely incorrect. It turns out a question I put to the Treasurer on notice last week was responded to by the Treasurer's office on Friday afternoon. They contacted me and said, 'You are absolutely right, Robyn. There has been a mistake. It is not \$120m; it is \$76m worth of funding.' That is a huge error.

This does not instil much confidence in the people of Alice Springs, who watch this stuff. Making a mistake of \$44m is inexcusable and I am waiting to see this announcement publicly corrected by the Member for Braitling in the *Centralian Advocate* and the *NT News*, because it is misleading. It is of deep concern to people when they read things that are untrue.

Mr HIGGINS: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! I request an extension of time for the member, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It has been an interesting time over the last six weeks since we have been back in parliament.

I seek leave to table the information provided to me on Friday afternoon by the Treasurer. I asked for an itemised list of the breakdown of the \$120m that the Member for Braitling announced last week, and it graphically demonstrates that it is far from \$120m. Instead of \$70m for Braitling it totals \$36m, and instead of \$50m for Araluen it totals \$39m.

Leave granted.

Mrs LAMBLEY: As an Independent member of this Chamber, all I ask is that Central Australia always be considered generously in whatever decisions are made by this government. As an Independent you can sit on the fence to some extent and be honest and objective about what is best for your constituents. You do not have to toe any party lines.

Although the CLP's Home Improvement Scheme was a success—it was clever and it hit the mark—I acknowledge that the Gunner government has a different agenda and can decide how to proceed in stimulating the economy.

Only time will tell how effective the Labor schemes will be. I will give it the benefit of time and allow these programs to roll out, and I will reserve my judgement until then.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not always agree with everything the Member for Araluen says, especially being a parochial Top Ender. If you have lived in the rural area you know what it is like not to be looked after.

I support the car park at RDH. It will be commercial, and the way to make it commercial is to allow commercial facilities within it. I saw, in the paper, a design of a building where the car park will have other facilities attached to it. It is not just a car park; the building is used for other purposes. It can be done. While there are enough parking spaces now, people have to walk from miles away to get to RDH. A multistorey car park will allow people to park closer to the hospital, and that is a good thing.

The motion before us is that:

... this Assembly calls on the Territory government to listen to Territorians and immediately reinstate the Home Improvement Scheme.

I will only give this partial support. I will not give it my full blessing because there are a couple of issues that need to be carefully looked at. This was brought into parliament because the previous government did nothing for small to medium business. I stood in this parliament and talked about the steel fabricators and other businesses which did not get support from that government. Big contracts were tendered and then subcontracted to people from interstate, and very few people in the local area benefited from that. There were few benefits. Then there was the issue of big contractors not paying little contractors on time and they struggled.

There is no doubt at the moment that businesses in the Top End and the Darwin area especially—I cannot speak for Alice Springs—are really struggling. That is part of the reason I was passionate when saying you need to go to the Fair Work Commission about something that affects small business. I heard some people

who run a cafe say to me, 'We will not employ people that night'. Others say, 'It will give people more money in their pocket'. No, it will not, because they will not be employed that night as the family will work, or they will close down.

I am not arguing that there is no case for an increase in the wages, but it was done the wrong way. Consultation has been spoken about a lot today, but there was no good consultation in relation to that. Business is struggling.

When the government decided to do this, it knew it was in trouble. Peter Styles was the minister and he made a statement on this six months before the election; they knew they were in deep trouble. If you hand out \$2000 to people you will be popular. You will get lots of people signing petitions. It is like, 'Here, have some bags of lollies. Aren't we good? Do you want some more? Sign this petition.' And they will. I can understand that.

I have no doubt it stimulated the economy. Do you know what I think most people used the \$2000 for in my area? Putting in electric gates. I was talking to a bloke the other day and asked, 'What are you doing?' He said the \$2000 stimulus helped them put in an electric gate on their rural block. Good idea. But is that the role of government?

The way to deal with this is, if the government stimulus package is not ready to roll out and start to make a difference now, when we know businesses are struggling, to bring this back for the time being, just for a short period. I do not think it is the right way to go. The government's way is the better way; that is, you put money into government or non-government facilities, such as housing, halls, churches and schools. That is where you stimulate the economy. That is the good way.

The other method, whilst it is good—and someone said it is for the strugglers. Some of the strugglers could not find the extra \$2000 and it would not have helped them. The people who put a nice electric fence in obviously had a lot more than \$2000 to do that, because that is not cheap. They had money already. This gave them a little bonus to help them along and they saved \$2000. I am not sure they would not have put the electric fence in. It might have been just enough to do it. I agree; it helped small businesses and the people who put up a new fence or gate.

Sometimes we have to step back in this job and say it is popular and then we will feel good, and people will love us because we have given them \$2000 to help them achieve things, but is that the way the government should spend public money? The idea that government is bringing in, in the form of a \$5m stimulus package for the steel industry—by the way, I heard the comments from the Chief Minister yesterday about the so-called 'steelies', who are steel fabricators or suppliers. They are not steel manufacturers. I do not know of any steel manufacturing in the Territory. We have to be careful that we do not get mixed up with the wrong people.

Mr Higgins: He is stealing my words.

Mr WOOD: Did I not recognise that you said that?

Mr Higgins: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I was not trying to plagiarise you, Leader of the Opposition. I thought it was a good point.

There will be money for bus shelters—I have bus shelters around my part of the world. They came from the previous government. I am not sure why they turned up in one of my streets. There are three buses in the morning and three buses at night, and we now have two bus shelters. Then people complained about bus shelters out the front of their house. You would never have thought bus shelters would cause me so much heartache.

We have crocodile traps, shade shelters on the Larapinta Trail, picnic tables and barbecues—that is all part of the stimulus, which is good. There is also the \$22m work stimulus package, which I presume will go into community groups and not-for-profit organisations. The advantage of that is that tradies will still pick up the work, which is what we are all about, but in the long term you are investing in public facilities rather than private facilities.

It is probably a philosophical issue; should government be handing out \$2000 to private owners or would it be better, more correct, to achieve the same outcomes in the way government is proposing—public housing, NGOs, schools and hospitals. That is why I only partially support this motion.

If these packages are not producing anything I would not be opposed to the old package being extended a bit. When yours kicks in, drop the old one off and continue on.

I am concerned because this is the hardest time of year. Christmas is coming up. I would hate to see people struggling. They already are, but I would hate to see them struggling even more because there is no work. I was speaking to a friend of mine who has some friends who are quantity surveyors. He said, 'We always use quantity surveyors to find out if there are some projects in the pipeline, but they have no projects.'

They could ring them up and say, 'Do you have something coming up?', and the builder would at least know this might be a chance to get some work, but he said these quantity surveyors have no work.

There are real issues; I am not denying that. I think it is good that the government has looked at packages in smaller form. I have said before that we should cut some of the bigger contracts into smaller contracts, which might not be as efficient, but it means you can share some of the benefits around smaller businesses. I like that idea. You are not only targeting one big company.

While we are on this issue—the Member for Araluen deviated a bit—I want the government to at least investigate whether subbies are getting paid on time. I thought we had projections on subbies, but I receive reports that even small suppliers supply something and are expected to pay their people in 30 days. The big suppliers do not pay the subbies for 60 days, which means the subbies have to hang in there and get a bit of extra money from the bank—an overdraft—just to pay their bills because they are waiting for the big company, which will not pay until the 60 days are up.

Governments are supposed to pay within 30 days. There was a promise years ago that they would all pay their bills within 30 days. If companies are struggling we need to make sure they are being paid for the work.

I understand where the CLP is coming from. After all, it was their idea. I am very clear in my mind that it was brought in because the government was told repeatedly that things were crook. They must have brainstormed and said this was the way to do it. I have also spoken to people and there is a concern that the government topping up funds for private homes is probably not the right way to go about it. It might appeal to people because it is like giving people free money. They say, 'That is fantastic', and get little jobs done around the house. Tradies then get employed, and that is fantastic. I think it is getting to a philosophical point over whether it is better to follow a similar process—do it, but do it for facilities that are there for the benefit of the wider community more so than the individual.

That is where my views differ from what the opposition is talking about. If a compromise is possible, a way to keep that project going up until your projects kick in—you can see that contractors are picking up the work, then phase the program out and let it go. Then you will not have a break in the work, which can be a worry.

The Minister for Education said yesterday that the government is providing \$300 000 to every Territory school for upgrades and refurbishments. She then said:

The timing of the first round application process aligns with school planning for 2017. Expressions of interest have been called for from schools, with the projects ready to be tendered from the beginning of next financial year.

That is another seven months. I think that is a good one to bring forward—\$300 000 for good projects.

I remember Building the Education Revolution. I know there was criticism from down south and I am not sticking up for that. Especially in the first round, where schools had a fair say in what they wanted and who would do the job, it was probably one of the best things to happen. There is some infrastructure in my area, such as coverage over basketball courts and shade areas, which has made a real improvement.

There are new classrooms at Howard Spring. If you take Middle Point out of the equation Howard Springs is the oldest primary school in the rural area. They have been able to replace some substandard buildings that needed to be replaced.

That is why I think you should bring that package forward. Start putting out the tenders in the middle of the Wet Season so they are ready to go as soon as the rain finishes. The trouble with a lot of our contracts is they get let out before the Wet Season starts, which I think is something wrong with our system, not so

much in Central Australia, but certainly in the Top End, where contractors are fixing roads in the Wet Season. I think that is a dopey idea as half the road gets washed away in a big storm.

I said I would give it partial support, but I think there is a way around it. The government needs to make sure we do not have a gap between finalising the CLP's Home Improvement Scheme and the new scheme, which I think is good. That gap has to be closed so we do not have people without work over the Christmas period.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank those who have contributed to this debate. Almost every member on this side spoke to it, but I was disappointed that only one member on the other side spoke.

The Treasurer is a good speaker, and some of the other members of this parliament need to watch her performance and learn from it. She is a good speaker. A lot of people do not stand up and speak on these matters. I can understand ministers not wanting to stand up, but it should be an opportunity for the backbenchers to have something to say.

I learned early in my last term that GBD means General Business Day; it is not an opposition business day. Rather than interjecting, people should be able to contribute. It is a great opportunity for those people to watch someone like the Treasurer stand up and speak. I am not saying you need to stand up and agree with us, but stand up for your constituents. Have something to say about their thoughts on the issues that are put up here on General Business Day.

One of the first times I spoke on General Business Day was during debate on a motion on the gas pipeline. I do not know if the people who were in parliament at the time remember, but just about every person in parliament spoke on it. A few manipulated the time with it, and I was not happy with that, but it was then agreed to by every person in this parliament. Everyone took the time to participate.

It is a great opportunity for some of the backbenchers to let their constituents know they are listening to what they are saying and standing up for them. The constituents should be at the forefront of your thinking. Everyone in this place should be speaking up, so I hope that in the new year everyone in this House contributes. By all means, stand up and criticise whatever motion we put forward. It is a House of debate. People have different views, but we are all here for the same reason, which is for the benefit of the Territory.

The issue of this motion and the call to bring back this scheme is not a call to scrap what has been introduced by the government. The government, admittedly, has a mandate; that is obvious, and it can do that. I first did an interview on this a couple of weeks ago and someone asked, 'What will you do? Scrap the other schemes? How long will you keep this one going?' It is exactly what the Member for Nelson said: there is a gap that needs filling. The scheme should be reintroduced to fill that gap.

It may be after Christmas that your schemes are up and running and working properly. There will always be glitches with them; I will not be critical of that. There will always be glitches in new grant schemes, and someone trying to find a loophole. This system has many of those glitches ironed out and there is a great opportunity to go ahead with it.

When your stimulus is kicking in, by all means stop this one. But you need to make sure people are not leaving the Territory or going out of business. We heard the Member for Blain say that we have many more people going to places like Foodbank and other NGOs, and that is a sign that these people are struggling. When we first sent an email out about this, I received responses from the registered businesses, pointing out that they were hurting. We are not saying you have ruined the economy now that these people are out of work; it is not that at all. We are asking you to let us try to help these people. We want to keep people here and for the population to grow.

It is not just about helping the tradies; mums and dads are also struggling. Some of them can take the opportunity to do things like putting in water tanks. That implies that you will not run out of water and need to buy water during the Dry Season.

The Member for Nelson mentioned electric gates. They are pretty important. When I get home and it is bucketing down with rain, I do not want to have to open the gate in the dark when there is lightning around; I much prefer having an electric gate.

The Member for Nelson said the \$2000 is government money going somewhere. There is still \$2000 in the \$10 000 grant for first home buyers, which can be spent on white goods. They are made of steel. We do not make them up here; they are made in China.

That is \$2000 we are spending which is going down south. Do not get me wrong, it helps those first home buyers, but we have to put things into perspective. It is money being given to everyone; it is available to everyone to help the mums and dads as well as small businesses. When we talk about helping steel fabricators—there is a benefit that flows through. We are not saying that our scheme is better than yours. All of them stimulate the economy in some way, but it is a matter of timing. It is a bit like the \$100 000 scheme. I am not too sure how that will be administered, but I made the point that there is already a scheme—a mechanism—in place. I do not think it was a Country Liberal scheme—I do not know who introduced it—but it has been there for a while, and that is the Facility and Capital Equipment grant.

That mechanism is already in place. It would have been very easy to add some of the stimulus money to that rather than introduce a completely new scheme. That could have been something that stimulated the economy straight away.

The Treasurer is a good orator in parliament; she can twist a few things around. We do not need to confuse the people who are getting the stamp duty rebate as first home buyers with all the other people. We are not saying that scheme should be scrapped. The previous government had a scheme that said it had to be new houses. That was early in the piece when we needed more housing and more land release, and that was a way of stimulating it. The timing of stopping that was probably wrong; maybe it should have been swapped to existing houses a bit earlier. I know the impact in Alice Springs was greater than people had realised. It was a different situation that arose between the Top End and Central Australia.

The other thing that often happens is that you do not always look back. You learn from your mistakes, but you look forward. One of the things I have seen in this parliament over the last couple of weeks is when people cannot look forward, or do not know where they are going. They want to look back and pick on things that have happened in here before, reiterating them again and again. That does not achieve anything. It is not doing what the people put us in here for.

The people voted you in to make decisions. The people have already spoken about what happened to the previous government. They spoke about you four years before that, and they spoke about the previous Country Liberal government 12 years before that. It has happened. You need to look forward and stop using that as an excuse. You need to stand up for your policies on a policy basis. If you do not think your policies are good enough to be able to stand up there and defend them on merit, do not bother speaking at all. People are getting well and truly over the rhetoric.

Tradies are spending a lot of time trying to get jobs and quotes to compete with each other. This is what we want to put a stop to at the moment. We want to get some stimulus into the economy.

One thing I will promise to the Chief Minister is this: if this system is reintroduced, under whatever name he wants, at no point will I stand up and say, 'I told you so'. I will not do it. But if things go wrong, I will stand up and say, 'I told you so'.

I want to deviate a bit to the car park issue. When it was announced it reminded me of something. Again, I applaud the government—stimulate the economy. I have doubts about where we do it and the timing of it. I am not saying there should not be something done about the car parking arrangements there, but when that announcement was made a lot of my constituents raised an issue with me: why does someone living in Adelaide River, who needs to go to the hospital, not have any public transport? They have to drive themselves to Darwin Hospital at their own expense. Yes, they have to park their car, which will be free, and then drive themselves home. We are providing a car park for many people in Darwin who already have access to a free bus system. They are asking me if the priorities are wrong.

If you had to choose between providing a free car park to people at Darwin hospital, compared to the people of Adelaide River, Batchelor, Daly River, Dundee or Wagait, who have to pay for fuel to get to Darwin to go to the hospital—why are we providing free car parking to the people in Darwin? Could there not be a charge to people in Darwin to help subsidise the transport for people from the regions? That is a question they have put to me on the issue.

I know it is a priority choice and a difficult choice that the government has to make. The Treasurer will have pressure put on her all the time. 'My electorate is more important than his electorate. This project is better than that.' When she gets to do her Treasury evaluations, or arguments, you have no friends in Cabinet, I

can tell you. The Member for Barkly would agree with that. He is the only person who has been in Cabinet before, and I am sure he would agree that you do not have any friends in Cabinet when it comes to money.

As I said earlier, during the debate on the Member for Nelson's motion regarding Tree Point, I had a friend who said to me, 'Never trust anyone and you will never be disappointed'. I give that advice to all Cabinet members. When you go into Cabinet and talk about money, do not trust anyone and you will never be disappointed.

I thank everyone who spoke on this. I encourage the backbenchers on the other side to get involved on General Business Day in future. It is an opportunity, rather than heckling from the sides, to say what you have to say. It is good practice and it involves you in debate. People might tell you that adjournment speeches are terrific because no one will respond to you, so that is always good; you get a victory. Adjournments are not motions that need to be approved. It is good.

You have the numbers and will always be on the winning side, so that is a plus. I encourage you all to participate in future. Think about it over Christmas. You can get some elocution lessons and we can all work together.

I thank everyone for their participation and I commend the motion to the House.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes 4

Noes 16

Mrs Finocchiaro
Mr Guyula
Mr Higgins
Mr Mills

Mr Costa
Ms Fyles
Mr Gunner
Mr Kirby
Mr Lawler
Mr McCarthy
Mr McConnell
Ms Manison
Ms Moss
Ms Nelson
Mr Paech
Mr Sievers
Ms Uibo
Mr Vowles
Ms Wakefield
Mrs Worden

Motion not agreed to.

MOTION **Government Employee Housing**

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 81, I rise, at the request of the Member for Daly, to move that this Assembly calls on the Northern Territory Government to explain:

- how the new entitlement of government employee housing for local recruits will be rolled out
- what the eligibility requirements will be and how will these entitlements will be managed
- what benefit will flow to local recruits who are unable to be provided with government employee housing in the short, medium and long term
- what impact this will have on current enterprise bargaining agreements and how these impacts will be managed.

This is an important motion and it is very appropriate for it to be debated in the parliament at this time. As an opposition, one of our primary roles is to scrutinise the government and hold it to account. We will do this on behalf of the electorate and at this stage of the parliament to ensure that government is delivering on the policies it detailed during the recent Territory election.

This is about promise versus delivery. The Labor Party made a number of very significant promises during the election and Territorians took those promises very seriously. There is no more significant promise than Labor's commitment to tackle the housing deficit in remote communities.

This promise commits \$1.1bn worth of Territory funds toward this initiative over the next 10 years. That it is a noble and good commitment. Governments on both sides have sustained a commitment to addressing housing needs in remote communities over many years. The merits of the commitment and the principles that sit behind it are not in question. Indeed this entire parliament, in its various forms over the years, has examined this issue very closely.

I am sure the Member for Nelson will have something to say on the role of the Council of Territory Co-operation in looking closely at this issue. He has advocated on issues in relation to remote housing over many years. The merits and principles are not in question. The opposition has some concerns, though, as has the community, about the difference between what this government says and what it does.

On this particular policy there is a very high degree of expectation, and people are waiting and watching to see what actually becomes of it and what gets rolled out. To address these concerns, the opposition has sought information from the minister on a regular basis regarding the implementation of this policy, questions around what is happening, when it is happening, how it is happening and so on.

To date we have not been provided with a single detail, not one new piece of information about the implementation of this significant election promise. We have asked questions during Question Time. We have brought motions before this House for debate and we have sought briefings, but the minister has continuously referred to the rhetoric contained in the Labor election promise. He has told stories and tried to distract with talk about plans for plans for plans.

This is not acceptable for a minister. It is not good enough to stand up here and say, 'Trust me; I've got this.' We expect something better, and the parliament and the community, rightfully, expect something better.

The minister has talked about engagement. He has said, 'We are engaging with people to ensure we get this right.' We do not have a problem with that. Community engagement is essential. It is vitally important that people are brought along for the journey in implementing new policies, but it is also important for governments to set a clear direction and be up front with the electorate about how they will deliver.

We are talking about spending over \$100m of Territory funds next year. The electorate expects a level of confidence about how government is spending money to ensure value is achieved on behalf of the taxpayer.

The Chief Minister waxed lyrical on this point yesterday. He said that we have to get a benefit to the taxpayer when we spend money. We support this principle unequivocally. The amount of money being spent on improving remote housing is not in question. But we have seen Labor governments, time and again, point to the amount of money they spend, with little care or concern applied to the demonstrated value attached to that spending.

What is the benefit? Does this match the amount of money spent? Are there more efficient ways to spend that money? Has this money achieved the objectives you set out to achieve? We will not let this matter go. The minister and the government should expect a great deal of scrutiny on the implementation of this policy, because that is our job and that is what the electorate expects of us.

I would be surprised if the government and the minister are not already being scrutinised by their own backbench on this policy, its direction and implementation. I look forward to contributions from the Labor government's bush members, who undoubtedly have volumes to speak on this topic.

The issue of remote housing is the number one issue for the communities in the electorates of Stuart, Arafura, Arnhem and Namatjira. I would be surprised if those members are not already pressuring their Cabinet colleagues by saying, 'What is happening? What will the communities in my electorate get? When does the work start?'

Let me reflect on the minister's recent announcement about bringing money forward to support the Room to Breathe program. This announcement was made 10 days ago on the premise of providing economic stimulus. It was about getting money out the door this year. When asked today for the most simple of

details about this announcement, the minister was unable to respond. He could not answer the question. That in itself is a real problem. It is a genuine issue of concern.

On one hand the minister was telling us to wait. 'Just wait while we work through some of the finer details of this program.' Yet, on the other hand, he was announcing the importance of spending \$10m right now, this financial year. When he was asked how that money would be spent and what it would deliver, he could not answer that question. Frankly, this does not pass muster.

How can the Treasurer have confidence that money allocated to deliver a so-called stimulus will even be spent this year if the minister has no clue how he will spend it? He could not say which communities the money would be spent in, when the contracts will be let or how many new bedrooms would be constructed. This is 10 days after the announcement was made. The electorate expects better than hollow announcements. It expects delivery. It expects government to have a plan and follow through on it.

This brings me to the specific content of the motion before us this evening. This is about one element of the government's remote housing policy. It is about the promise to deliver and expand a government employee housing program that is accessible to locally recruited remote government employees.

I will read from Labor's election document that summarises this commitment:

Labor believes that Territorians living in remote communities who train to work and are employed locally by Government should be rewarded with access to the Government Employee Housing program, starting where the needs and overcrowding are greatest. We understand the additional pressure this will place on the program but it is imperative that Government recognise and reward people for this achievement.

Labor recognises that this will need to be managed carefully to ensure that there is housing available to bring in outside employees where necessary. Allocation of housing for local recruits and government workers recruited from outside of the local community will be a matter that will be jointly administered by the Government and local people and will balance the need for external employees to have housing and to support government employees who are local recruits.

The expansion of the Government Employee Housing program to accommodate this additional pressure will be accompanied by a thorough assessment of the type of housing that can be quickly put into place that satisfies all EBA requirements.

The government has been in for close to 100 days, which is over three months. It must have turned its mind to the challenges of implementing this policy, and it must have a plan for how it will be rolled out. We are reasonably asking the minister and the government to make an informed contribution to this motion and to provide some detail about how the new entitlement of government employee housing for local recruits will be rolled out. We have also asked what the eligibility requirements will be and how these entitlements will be managed. This is relevant not only for those local recruits who will be provided with housing, but also for those who will be waiting for many, many years to come.

What benefit will flow to local recruits who are unable to be provided with government employee housing in the short, medium and long term? Importantly, what impact will this new entitlement have on current Enterprise Bargaining Agreements, and how will these impacts be managed? These are live questions in the minds of people living in remote communities across the Territory. What will this government promise mean for me?

This is not a new issue. The issue of government employee housing for local employees has been a long-running sore in remote communities, a decades-old issue and an important matter of fairness and equity.

I want to reiterate the point that the opposition supports the resolution of this matter. Travel to a remote community anywhere in the Territory and you will discover an Aboriginal Community Police Officer, or a local nurse or teacher, living in overcrowded public housing while their outside colleagues are living in houses with a much higher level of amenity. It is a highly sensitive issue, and a highly-visible disparity in the terms of entitlements, and the opposition supports the government's intent in addressing this issue. But the government needs to start demonstrating that it has the serious intent to back up its promises by making headway in terms of implementation.

As far as the opposition is aware, it is currently costing an average of around \$750 000 to deliver a government employee house in a remote community, depending on location and the size of the house. I

am happy for the minister to provide an update on the details of the costs, but I do not see there being too much of a variance at this stage.

Given that these will be new houses, it is likely there will be land servicing costs on top of construction costs. The government has committed \$20m to support this program. According to our estimates, in a best-case scenario the government is likely to construct about 25 houses a year.

The minister said in Question Time that there were 716 local recruits across 96 communities. If the government manages to construct its 25 houses next year, that leaves 691 local recruits left without access to this new entitlement. Of course, that is assuming that the number of local recruits does not grow. We hope the number of local employees in remote communities grows. Even if the number of local recruits only grew by 3.5% per year, the number of new houses would not keep pace with the number of new employees to the effect that there would be no dent in the number of local recruits who do not have access to government employee housing.

How will this new entitlement be managed between those employees who begin to get access to government employee housing and those who do not? Will some type of financial benefit be provided to those employees who are left waiting? Surely they would be entitled to something or else the issues of fairness and equity I referred to earlier would seem to increase and not decrease.

I hope the Minister for Public Employment does something more than begin to look at these issues, which is what he seemed to infer in Question Time yesterday. The minister said that not all of the 716 would be eligible for government employee housing. This sounded a lot like a back-down on Labor's position, which it took to government. It sounded as if he was already trying to step away from that very significant promise during the election. Exactly what eligibility criteria will be applied to this new entitlement? Who will make the cut and who will miss out, and on what grounds? These are the questions Territorians are asking.

Let us not forget the Labor Party said:

Labor believes that Territorians living in remote communities who train to work and are employed locally by Government should be rewarded with access to the Government Employee Housing program ...

This was their promise. It is what they turned up to communities and land council meetings trying to sell. This is what they committed to delivering. It is important that the government does not breach trust on this, because people in those communities will not let you get away with it. They will remember; they always do.

I encourage the Minister for Housing and Community Development, who is also the Minister for Public Employment, to take this motion very seriously and detail these plans, and put some flesh on the bones. We are so interested in the detail. Do not talk to us; talk to the 716 local recruits who are still waiting on the details. How will the new entitlement of government employee housing for local recruits be rolled out? What will the eligibility requirements be? How will these entitlements be managed? What benefits will flow to local recruits who are unable to be provided with government employee housing in the short, medium and long term? What impact will this have on current enterprise bargaining agreements? How will these impacts be managed?

I look forward to the contribution from the minister, as well as other members of the government and the cross bench. This issue is so important to communities in their electorates.

Mr McCARTHY (Housing and Community Development): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to address the Leader of the Opposition's motion regarding government employee housing for locally recruited public servants.

The Leader of the Opposition's motion calls on the Northern Territory Government to explain how the new entitlement of government employee housing for local recruits will be rolled out; what the eligibility requirements will be and how these entitlements will be managed; what benefit will flow to local recruits who are unable to be provided with government employee housing in the short, medium and long term; what impact this will have on current enterprise bargaining agreements; and how these impacts will be managed.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for this motion. For too long, locally recruited public servants in remote communities have not had equal access to government employee housing, creating inequality and putting

further pressure on remote housing and overcrowding. This inequity needs to be addressed and that is the aim of the policy.

As stated in our policy, we are committed to an expanded government employee housing program that is accessible by locally recruited remote government employees, with access governed by transparent criteria based on an annual assessment of priority needs. Labor will provide \$20m per year, additionally, to support this initiative.

Labor believes that Territorians living in remote communities who train to work and are employed locally by government, should be rewarded with access to the government employee housing program, starting where the needs and overcrowding are greatest. We understand the additional pressure this will place on the program, but it is imperative that government recognises and rewards people for this achievement.

Labor recognises that this will need to be managed carefully to ensure there is housing available to bring in outside employees where necessary. Allocation of housing for local recruits and government workers recruited from outside the local community will be a matter that will be jointly administered by the government and the local people, and will balance the need for external employees to have housing and support government employees who are local recruits. The expansion of the government employee housing program to accommodate this additional pressure will be accompanied by a thorough assessment of the type of housing that can be quickly put into place that satisfies all EBA requirements.

The Gunner Labor government is strongly committed to working with the community. The provision of government employee housing for locally recruited government employees is part of our 10-year, \$1.1bn remote housing investment program. The initiative will provide \$200m from 2017–18 to 2026–27 to deliver additional government employee housing for locally-recruited government employees. This program is about levelling the playing field.

Community residents who have gained qualifications and want to work for the government in their communities should have the same access to government employee housing as people from outside who move to the community to work for government. As at 6 October 2016 there were 716 Indigenous Northern Territory Public Sector employees residing in 96 communities, homelands and parks across the Northern Territory. These employees work for 14 government departments. Of these employees 79%, or 566, are employed by the Departments of Health and Education. This data has been generated centrally and requires ratification by agencies to ensure a more accurate and up-to-date profile, particularly understanding the housing needs for individual employees and matching that to the housing stock available. This work is now under way.

While the figures provided are the total number of remote Indigenous employees, not all employees will be eligible for government employee housing. Determining an employee's eligibility will be subject to Chief Executive Officer approval from the employing agency, and requirements set by the Commissioner for Public Employment. Generally, eligibility for employee entitlements is developed by the Commissioner for Public Employment. Under this initiative, such criteria will be developed in consultation with the Housing department and agency CEOs, as well as unions. Eligibility will align with existing criteria as much as possible, while taking into account the needs of individual employees and their communities.

It is essential to consider the mix of current government employee housing and public housing in a community, to make sure the use of remote housing is maximised through matching eligible government employees to the right sized dwelling. This approach will ensure value for money by building new houses through our remote housing investment program, or upgrading existing houses through our Room to Breathe program to ensure the housing mix for government employees meets local needs and demands.

It is important to consult with communities, agencies and unions to determine whether the current government employee housing guidelines are appropriate, and whether changes need to be made to ensure the amenity of the dwellings is appropriate for local community residents. Planning is under way to inform where construction will commence in 2017–18.

To answer the Opposition Leader's question on how the new entitlement of government employee housing for local recruits will be rolled out, it will be rolled out over 10 years, based on eligibility, need and fairness, and in consultation with communities. I want to see it acknowledge the long-serving, hard-working public servants who have worked in their community for years. This is critical policy change for the Northern Territory. There is discrimination in the current system that needs to be addressed. Until now a teacher from out of town going to a remote community would be eligible for housing, but not a teacher from that community.

This has never been a policy before, and because of that we have a shortage of stock. It will take time to address, but this is a good policy that recognises the locally-recruited public servants who serve their community.

We are currently looking into an equitable solution for those employees who are eligible, but are unable to be provided with government employee housing in the short, medium and long term, as asked in the Leader of the Opposition's motion.

The motion also asks what impact this will have on current enterprise bargaining agreements and how these impacts will be managed. There will need to be some work on relevant enterprise agreements. We will follow the usual processes, consult with relevant people and organisations, and work towards the next enterprise agreement. I am advised that this entitlement could be managed with a bylaw, if necessary, as a short-term solution.

Addressing housing for local recruits will contribute to addressing the severe overcrowding experienced in public housing across almost all remote communities. Providing houses for local recruits is not a separate issue to our 10-year remote housing program; it is an integral part of it. I would again like to bring the Leader of the Opposition's attention back to the remote engagement strategy that was launched by the previous government. The Leader of the Opposition was clear in previous debate that credit should be given where credit is due.

I have given credit to the previous government a number of times, particularly the department which was responsible for initiating and engaging in this very important research that has delivered a very important message for any parliamentarian or government official who wants to work effectively with regional, remote and urban Indigenous communities. This is a great resource. Whoever is advising the Leader of the Opposition needs to consult this document. It is becoming clear to me that the Leader of the Opposition is getting some very bad advice in this area. He may want to revisit a resource that was produced under the previous government.

I will quote one small area of this resource. Under the section on timing on page nine, the document states:

Avoid rushing—allow time and flexibility to build relationships and enable maximum participation.

Allow time for community members and other stakeholders to understand and provide input into the project, opportunity or issue.

It may be difficult for the Country Liberal Party opposition to understand this. It may be difficult for them to accept. This policy direction is a complete change. It is not only underpinned by significant investment, but it is about seriously, honestly and openly engaging with communities on a place-by-place basis to build the capacity, create the sustainability and avoid the problems of the past that will, essentially, solve our critical demands and pressure points in remote housing.

We went to the election with a policy to deliver government employee housing to local recruits. It is important that we deliver on this, but it is also important that we get the delivery right in the wider context of our overall remote housing policy. As the minister, I will not pre-empt decisions that will be made about housing in remote communities, but I will reaffirm to this House that we will deliver government employee housing over 10 years, and it will be based on eligibility, need and fairness, and, most importantly, it will be done in consultation with communities to make sure we get it right.

I want this commitment to incentivise more qualified people to take up roles in their own community. This is an important part of Labor's plan. I hope to see local businesses in remote communities win competitive tenders to deliver such housing into the future. The pressure on housing from overcrowding and poor maintenance needs to be addressed urgently. Consultation will be ongoing so community-driven housing models can be established and strengthened. Over 10 years we will see a wholesale change in the way housing is delivered, managed and maintained in remote communities.

We are committed to addressing the deficit in remote housing, and government employee housing is an important aspect of this. The Leader of the Opposition may have sought more detail; however, I will not jump the gun.

I am looking forward to reporting to the House on the roll-out of this program and other remote housing programs, giving detail in each and every critical step along the way when it is available. In this parliament,

for Territorians, I look forward to giving periodic updates and, given the interest from those opposite, I look forward to those debates.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank the opposition for raising this motion.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I also thank the Opposition Leader for bringing on this motion tonight. It is a very important motion about the details of the new government employee housing program, which has been flagged in this parliament.

I feel confident the details will be provided by the government as they become available. For me, it is important where this housing will be allocated and when. As a former Minister for Health and Education, and minister responsible for child protection, I remember travelling extensively through the Northern Territory during those few years. Time and time again I was alerted to the need for an increased supply of employee housing or upgrades of housing. There are certain Aboriginal communities that come to mind when I think about this topic.

The former government was tasked with being Community Champions for different communities for a period. I was tasked to being the Community Champion for Wadeye. At that time, a small suburb of houses was built there which were, for the most part, designated employee housing. The whole community was very proud of this housing. It was very much a local exercise. Local builders, tradesmen and products were used to build the houses, and they were filled immediately. As soon as they were ready for occupancy they were taken over and enjoyed by staff employed by various organisations, including the Northern Territory Government.

There is never enough staff accommodation in our Aboriginal communities. I am by no means an expert on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, but as a minister my attention was always drawn to the fact there was never enough; there was always a deficit.

Another place I recall very clearly was Papunya. The staff quarters attached to the health clinic there were substandard. They were not what you would expect anyone to stay in if they were visiting Papunya as a health professional. I am not sure if they have been upgraded—this was a few years ago—but I remember being told those quarters were flooded due to the creek rising, which did not happen very often. Time and time again I was told stories of overcrowding in staff quarters. People would visit communities and stay within the limited accommodation available, often staying with people who were living on the community. All sorts of arrangements are in place and currently exercised around the accommodation of staff in the Northern Territory because of their employment by the Northern Territory Government, and those arrangements are completely inadequate.

I commend the new Northern Territory Government for tackling this issue. It has been a low priority over the last couple of terms of this parliament. Money seems to be spent on lots of other necessities before it is allocated to staff accommodation. This is definitely good news. I feel confident the government will put in place the details around how the new entitlement of government employee housing for local recruits will be rolled out. It will be a fair system; I do not see why it would not be.

The other scenario that was often brought to my attention is that Aboriginal workers working in their communities were not eligible for Northern Territory Government employee accommodation. That was usually because there was none available, but they were often at the bottom of the list in regard to eligibility. It was expected that those people live in other accommodation on the community rather than government-provided accommodation. That is a big problem because a lot of Aboriginal workers on communities are working long hours in demanding positions, and they are living in homes which are often overcrowded.

Debate suspended.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Ms MOSS (Casuarina): Mr Deputy Speaker, at the end of what has been a very big year, there are a number of people I want to thank and some reflections I want to make on the year that was.

I am happy to make this kind of reflection for the third time in this Chamber. First and foremost, I want to say a massive thank you and Merry Christmas, and I hope everybody has a very safe and happy festive season, to the people of Casuarina. It remains the biggest honour of my life, and probably will be for the rest of my days, to be their representative in parliament and continue to hear their voices, stories and perspectives. It is an honour and I look forward to spending much more time in the electorate over the Christmas break, once we get out of parliament for the last sittings of the year. It is always a joy.

We are almost at the end of the school term. I am very fortunate to have some fantastic schools in my electorate: Nakara Primary School, Henbury Primary School and Dripstone Middle School. I had two other schools in my electorate, which have moved this year to the electorate of Johnston: Alawa Primary School and Namarluk School.

To those school bodies and teachers, I hope that in between lesson planning for the new year, which many teachers will be undertaking in the not-too-distant future, you get some down time. We really appreciate the work of our teachers, school bodies and support staff throughout the year to nurture our greatest asset in the Territory, which is our kids. They grow children's enthusiasm for learning, so I place on the record my thanks to principals Britany Roestenburg; Caroline Edwards, who recently was recognised at the NT Business Women's Awards for her incredible work at Henbury; Peter Swan; Sandy Cartwright at Alawa, who has endless amounts of energy; and Lorraine Hodgson at Namarluk Primary School. Thank you and your leadership teams for the work you have put in throughout the year. You have a thankless job sometimes, but we appreciate the work you do for our kids.

Secondly, I thank my departments. Public servants, I hope you get some time off over the Christmas break with your families. Thank you for all the work you do every day in implementing policy and providing important services to Territorians.

I also want to reflect on the important role of our non-government organisations, particularly at this time of year. Many of those people will be working over this Christmas break. We have spoken about this a lot in these sittings. They will be working, looking after our most vulnerable Territorians, on the end of phones, in crisis accommodation and in a range of other services. They will be making sure people are fed—organisations like the Salvation Army—and putting smiles on kids' faces across the Territory. We appreciate the work you do at a time that can be difficult for many families.

I was recently honoured to attend the opening of the Kmart Wishing Tree Appeal, where the Salvation Army partners with Kmart every year. We are looking to bust the target of 2500 gifts for Territory families through that appeal this year. The tree is in the Casuarina store. I hope more people go and put some presents under the tree. They do such incredible work. Often families who are doing it tough at this time of year are looking at how they can put a meal on the table, and the last thing they are thinking about is how they will get presents for the kids. The Salvos do a really great thing and the community gets behind it to spread some cheer at Christmas. For me, Christmas is about community. Giving is a great part of Christmas but at the end of the day it is about letting other people know we are thinking about them, and that is a great part of the Wishing Tree Appeal.

I attended some Christmas carols at Marrara Christian School and I was really pleased with it. Then I could put on some Mariah Carey in the car, or a bit of Bubl  —for those who are into that. It was a fantastic event.

To my colleagues in the Chamber, it has been a massive year for all of us, and that is a shared experience. Not one of us would think this year has been easy, and it is a courageous thing for anyone to put up their hand to be a representative in this Chamber. To everybody who ran as a candidate, and to everybody in this Chamber, I hope you and your families have a wonderful and safe Christmas. I look forward to the year ahead and continuing to debate some important issues for Territorians.

I also take this opportunity, at the end of a busy year, to thank the most important people in my life: my family. To my mum and Barry, and my brother, Brendan, thank you so much for cooking us meals and helping to keep us sustained during not only campaign time, but the rest of the time when we are exceptionally busy. Spending time with family is all the more important in this job, when it gets put into perspective how important those relationships are.

We have had a tough year as a family. There have been some health issues in the background. I remember estimates and campaign time earlier this year, questioning the former Minister for Children and Families, the former Member for Port Darwin, knowing my mum was going in for major heart surgery in Adelaide, which turned out to be a triple heart bypass. That was a stressful time. She is recovering well—all

good. Those things in life give you some perspective on the importance of your relationships and your family. I will never stop being grateful for the support they provide to me in this job.

My thanks goes to Jake and my two beautiful little fur babies, Munchkin and Peanut, for keeping life normal at home. We can all agree that one of the most important things in this crazy world we embark on is going home to have a normal life with your family. Some of you have proper kids, I have fur kids ...

Mrs Finocchiaro: Stick to the fur kids.

Ms MOSS: I will stick to the fur kids. I am really happy with the fur kids.

It is my partner Jake's birthday tomorrow and we will be here celebrating for him. Happy birthday to him.

It has been a huge year for each and every one of us. I am very proud to serve in this Chamber with you. I also make mention of probably the biggest thing we all have to be proud of in this Assembly, which I continually have reflected on over the last 12 months. The number of women in this Chamber deserves to be applauded and we deserve to continue to remind parliaments across the country of what we are doing here. For us I think it is just very normal, but I think it is also a brilliant thing. I think it is inspiring for young women to look at our parliament in the Northern Territory and see that we are gender balanced. This is a career path that a young woman can embark on in the Territory. We have achieved that. It is not being trailblazed simply everywhere; it is being trailblazed here.

We have a female Deputy Chief Minister and we have a female Deputy Leader of the Opposition. We have a fairly even split here in the Chamber. I am very grateful to be surrounded by strong women in this parliament and out of it. Keep up the good work, ladies. I wanted to put that on the record as a spectacular achievement of this parliament. I hope that we can keep it up in many areas across the Northern Territory in our various organisations and on our boards, because women deserve to be heard and we have plenty to contribute. I recognise that the women in this Chamber have done a lot of work outside of this Chamber in that regard as well.

Keep it up, and I wish everybody the happiest of Christmases with your family and friends.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to do the traditional thanks and electorate wrap up, and to give everyone my Christmas wishes.

It has been a very long and full-on year. It has been so busy that it feels like Christmas was just a week ago. It is amazing that we are nearly at December. The year has absolutely flown by. Most of it was taken up with the election, which is a high-energy, intense period of anyone's life. Those of us in the Chamber were so fortunate to make it out the other end. To that extent, I want to give my sincere thanks to the good people of Spillett. It is a privilege and an honour to represent them.

Last term I was the Member for Drysdale. In the electorate redistribution my electorate was split and I was preselected for the seat of Spillett. Whilst it was very sad to say goodbye to the good people of Drysdale, whom I was so fortunate to represent last term, it was a big hello to the people of Spillett, and it has been such a wonderful opportunity to represent them for the last few months. I look forward to the things we can achieve together in the remainder of this year and into the new year.

I thank my family. Being a member of parliament is not a nine-to-five job. It can be a very strange job at times. My poor daughter has been waving at the roadside and sitting at mobile offices on the side of major highways. She appears regularly at high-level meetings and in parliament. She has to do all sorts of strange things that other one-year-old girls do not have to do. I hope it will prove to give her a richer life and a different offering than the more traditional settings for raising a child.

It is such an honour and a privilege and I would not change one day of it. Finding a balance between spending time with your loved ones and immersing yourself in your electorate can sometimes be a challenge. It is certainly an enjoyable one. To my parents and parents-in-law, who provide endless support to Sam, Isla and me, thank you very much. Sam and Isla, you are a tremendous source of energy and pride, and you ground me every day. It is wonderful to have you in my life. The support that you give to allow me the opportunity and the time to be the best Member for Spillett that I can be is always very much appreciated.

I also thank Territorians more broadly. We had the election in August and I am now on this side of the Chamber with one colleague, Gary Higgins. The message Territorians sent in August is not lost on either of

us. We have spoken many times about it. Embarking on this new role and undertaking this new opportunity to contribute in parliament as the Deputy Opposition Leader is very humbling. I am really embracing this experience.

I am looking forward to getting around the Territory a lot more now that I have to branch out past my electorate and consider areas that are impacting all Territorians. It is a big task. At times people have raised the question whether or not the Opposition Leader and I are capable of being an effective opposition with just the two of us. Over the last two parliamentary sittings, I am sure the government will agree, we have put up a very good fight on behalf of Territorians, keeping the government to account. We will continue to do that over the course of this term.

I thank all the staff in the Opposition Leader's office; you are a tremendous source of support for both of us. It has been wonderful working with you. Most of you I have not worked with before, but we have a great, strong group of people. We all get along really well and feel like we are kicking genuine goals for Territorians. Thank you to the hard-working staff in the Opposition Leader's office. You are valuable and your time and energy does not go unnoticed.

I also extend thanks to our electorate staff. My Electorate Officer, Angie, has been with me since the beginning. It feels like a lifetime, going into our fifth year. Angie is wonderful and she cares about our electorate so very deeply, to her core. You cannot fake true passion, dedication and commitment to your electorate. Angie, I thank you for continuing this journey with me and supporting the community as profoundly as you do.

There are many new members of parliament as a result of the election just a few months ago. Most of you I do not know, but that is exciting as well. We will get to know one another over the next four years. Whilst we engage in robust debate from time to time—more often than not, I should say—there is no reason, once those points are made, that friendships cannot be forged outside the realms of debate, as they have been for time immemorial. Welcome to this parliament; I hope you get the rich experience out of it that I did in my first term.

I wish everyone in the electorate of Spillett well over the Christmas and New Year period. School students are finishing up soon; I hope you enjoy the rest of the term and have a wonderful and safe break over Christmas. That extends to everyone in my electorate.

I wish everyone in the Chamber, all the Legislative Assembly staff and everyone involved in keeping this show on the road a very safe and Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I hope you spend time with your loved ones, or do whatever it is you love doing. It might be not spending time with your loved ones; that is a matter for you. I hope you get to do something you genuinely enjoy, that gives you peace of mind and is something you can reflect on in time to come as an enjoyable period.

I wish everyone a very safe Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Braitling): Mr Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity to acknowledge some of the contributions of young Territorians and the youth sector, who make the Territory a truly wonderful place.

Our government is committed to giving Territorians a voice and rights, and understanding their needs and aspirations whilst encouraging them to be future leaders and empowered citizens.

First, let me praise the Chief Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians. The round table is now in its 19th year and has provided a positive pathway for so many of today's change-makers. We have two past members of the round table in the Chamber. The Member for Casuarina, Lauren Moss, participated in the Round Table in 2010 and 2011, and the Member for Karama, Ngaree Ah Kit, in 2004.

Over the last 19 years the youth round table has contributed many important developments in the Territory. In 2004, when the Member for Karama was on the youth round table, members were consulted on the Darwin waterfront development plans; the review of the Juvenile Justice Act, as it was then known; the secondary schools education review; and the proposed *Care and Protection of Children Act*.

In 2004 the round table also formed the Katherine skate park committee—which the Member for Katherine might be interested to know—through the local council, and got the council to commit to land for a skate park. It was fantastic work.

In 2010 and 2011 Lauren Moss was on the round table. She participated in consultation on the Territory 2030 Strategic Plan, the youth policy framework review, the youth suicide inquiry and the Tobacco Control Advisory Committee. She also took part in some significant work on the issue of eating disorders, which is still an important issue. It is great that we have people with such diverse interests in this Chamber today.

The broad range of projects and the people who were part of that process shows that youths need to have a voice in a breadth of issues. The aim of the round table is to empower young people from all over the Territory to engage in their communities and homelands, and provide recommendations to government to improve young people's lives.

Since this year's round table, members have been involved in a broad range of programs and initiatives. They have participated in a ridesharing steering committee, which will be an important service for young people. They have attended the social cohesion forum with the Australian Government. As part of a nationwide forum, a consultant met with round table members to obtain an insight into young Territorians' perspectives on social cohesion. That forum explored the issues, challenges and antisocial behaviours that could threaten social cohesion. These are important issues for young people to turn their minds to.

The 2016 members organised and participated in National Youth Week events across the NT, including the Alice Springs pool party, which was a great success; the couch surfing event in Darwin, which I am looking forward to attending this year because I see vision of it every year and it looks like fun; and the Gove's Got Talent competition, and I am sure Gove had plenty of talent.

Members also consulted with the Electoral Commissioner regarding the upcoming NT election and ways of encouraging more young people to enrol to vote, which is a significant issue in the Northern Territory that we need to continue to work on.

A highlight for the 2016 members was discussing, with the Northern Australia Development Office, ways of keeping young people living and working in the NT, which is an issue that we need to continue to work on. We have talked about that many times in this House.

This Sunday the Round Table will be presenting their year-long projects and recommendations to the members of Cabinet and chief executive officers of the NT Government. This year's project themes are youth mental health; education in schools; financial literacy and life skills education; a diversionary hospitality model in east Arnhem; social enterprise housing for young people experiencing homelessness; and youth support services in Tennant Creek.

To the 2016 members, your year of dedication to improving the lives of your peers has been one well spent, and I thank you for your desire and for committing your time to help others. I acknowledge that these issues are not easy to share and not always easy for government to address. Your year-long projects are often based on your personal and family experiences, as well as problems that you have seen affect your peers and people you care about in the wider community.

I thank the members of the round table for their contribution. Good luck in finalising your presentations. I am sure there might be some last-minute work happening at the moment. I ask you all to reflect and remind yourself of what inspired you to join the round table in the first place. We, as a newly-elected Labor government are here to listen and I am looking forward to reading all of those projects.

I would also like to briefly touch on my announcement on 11 November of the 2017 National Youth Week Ambassadors. It is the first time the opportunity to be a youth week ambassador has been expanded through different regions of the Territory, which shows we are governing for the whole of the Territory, which is especially important for kids in regional areas. The newly-appointed ambassadors will provide a youth perspective on the planning and promotion of National Youth Week, which runs from 31 March to 9 April.

I thank all the applicants across the Northern Territory. Please continue to be involved if you were not successful. I really want to congratulate the five successful ambassadors and I look forward to working with them: Mark Munnich, a Darwin, rural and Palmerston ambassador; Jessie Spargo, a Darwin, rural and Palmerston ambassador; Nooria Muradi, the Central Australian ambassador from Alice Springs, whom I look forward to working closely with; Natasha May, the Barkly ambassador from Tennant Creek; and Leicolhn McKellar, the east/west Arnhem region ambassador from Gove.

I look forward to spending time with those ambassadors and I look forward to Youth Week.

Mr KIRBY (Port Darwin): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to speak about Larrakeyah Primary School, one of the fabulous schools in Darwin, and to pay some Christmas wishes to everybody.

I have had the pleasure of visiting a number of schools in and around Port Darwin. I went to the distance learning facility at Bullocky Point one afternoon. If anyone is ever invited there I encourage you to have a look. They do some fantastic things there. How they are able to teach people over such vast distances is an amazing feat. They are rightfully proud of the brand-new facility there.

The professionalism and attitude of the teachers at these establishments is absolutely fantastic. Larrakeyah Primary School is a great example of all that you would want a learning environment to be. As with every school over the last few years they have had to tighten the belt and knuckle down to make sure every possible opportunity is presented to the students in these tight economic times. Larrakeyah Primary School is located in the beautiful, leafy suburb of Larrakeyah, but it is far from a quiet and leafy expanse. A few hundred kids go there, and it is quite challenged for space. At the moment, while some developments are going on, it is sharing its oval with construction equipment and construction fencing, which makes their playtime fairly awkward, but they get through it very well.

Every ounce of available land and play space is being utilised at Larrakeyah. It is barely keeping up with the new student enrolments, which grow every year. As with most schools in the Top End, multicultural classrooms are the norm. It is delightful to watch young children of Asian descent giving a welcome to country or acknowledgement of country. It always warms my heart when visiting these schools. They do it so proudly and it is a lovely thing.

The high-density housing through the city of Darwin is an attractive option for many families coming from neighbouring shores. They are very well represented at the school. There is no sign of new enrolments slowing up over the next few years at Larrakeyah. They are already planning for where the school needs to be in two or three years' time, and they know they will be tight for space and classrooms. A couple of new classrooms are being built, so they are working around having some of their play space taken up amongst construction works and equipment, as I mentioned. They are looking forward to having some new IT spaces for people to utilise, and the play areas and oval back to being fully functioning in the not-too-distant future.

They are trying desperately not to lose any of the programs they have been successful with over the last few years. The extra space that those rooms will provide will be of great interest to us all. I have been afforded a tour of the school by Principal Fathma Mauger, who is rightfully proud of the entire school fraternity. I was able to attend a whole-school assembly and the last school board meeting for the year, where the chair, Phillipa Tziolis, is standing down after a number of years of faithful service. She is looking forward to handing over the reins and making sure the school keeps progressing in the right direction.

The staff are particularly proud of some after-school sports programs they have been running. They took the time to explain to me that, with the multicultural nature of the school, they have had significant buy-in from students trying sports they would not normally try. That has flowed over to those children going home and encouraging their parents to enrol them in weekend sport because they have tried it at school and have liked it. It is drawing the parents out of their normal socioeconomic groups and they are now mixing with other people. It is a fantastic result and a great testament to the community engagement of the school in general.

I attended the fete earlier in the year. You could see the family and community engagement on display there as well, with parents helping with most of the events on the day. The school concert was also extremely well attended. I believe they ended up making a small profit from running that because it is so well attended.

Like many schools, Larrakeyah will face its fair share of challenges over the next few years, not the least being space struggles. It is wedged firmly up against the Larrakeyah Barracks, and that leaves very little room for expansion. The only way it can go is up. With the barracks undergoing massive upgrades over the next few years there will be an elevated level of traffic. With school kids, traffic, drop-offs and busy parents, the upgrades occurring there, along with the ensuing traffic and pedestrian concerns, will be at the forefront of everyone's minds. We will do all we can. I will work with the board and all levels of council and governance to make sure the entire school area is as safe as it possibly can be for parents and students alike.

I recognise the hard-working staff and students at this fantastic school. I look forward to working closely with all at Larrakeyah Primary School to get the best possible outcomes for them over the next few years. I especially wish them a happy and safe Christmas and New Year break.

I take the same opportunity, as others have, to congratulate everyone in the Chamber, to wish everyone a happy and safe New Year and thank everyone for their support. I thank my family, friends, colleagues and campaign assistants, who helped me through this pretty long, very eventful and, at times, trying year.

I reiterate to the people of Port Darwin how proud I am to be representing them and I wish them, and all Territorians, a very safe and happy Christmas break. I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Ms NELSON (Katherine): Mr Deputy Speaker, as we head towards the end-of-year assemblies and awards ceremonies in schools, I want to take a few moments to acknowledge the students in Katherine who have contributed in positive ways to their school community.

I will start with the Katherine School of the Air. Jack Bowman has been successful in being selected for the NT school sports cross-country squad to compete early in 2017. Jack has been representing the Rivers region in a range of sporting activities. After participating in the NT school sport athletic championships, Jack is celebrating a second place in the cross-country, third place in discus, fifth in 100 metre and 500 metre races, and sixth in shot-put and 800 metre. All these achievements qualified Jack to compete in the NT school sports cross-country squad.

Hunter Buntine; Sofia—I cannot even try to pronounce her surname as I will embarrass myself, I am sorry; Hayden Doherty; Shae Ford; Jesse Miller and Pippa Ford won first prize in the Write a Book in a Day competition for the NT and QLD division. The children had to work together in a group over the air and come up with an idea and storyline, then write, illustrate and publish a 2500-word book in eight hours. There are some other very significant awards the children have won, but as they do not know of these awards, and I definitely do not want to spoil the surprise for them, I will not reveal them. But I will say congratulations to them now.

Our Clyde Fenton boys' cricket team is about to head to Melbourne to represent Katherine in the national Milo cricket competition. Nyokah James, Tarkyn Tallon Rosas and Jasmine Glass travelled to Perth to represent the NT in touch football. Sienna Johnson travelled to Darwin to represent the NT in athletics. Dawn Ellen-Batken is about to travel to Queensland to represent the NT in tennis.

A few weeks ago I attended the Katherine High School Year 12 graduation ceremony, and I want to acknowledge the following students who received awards: English pathways, Justin Holt; integrated learning, Ffion Watkinson; physical education, Jess Budarick; scientific studies, Shaye Enright; outdoor education, Shae's twin brother, Luke Enright; community studies, Dwayne Turner and Jess Osbourne; health, Shaelee Tonkin-Reeves; mathematical applications, Taylah Locke; the principal's award was given to Emily Baylis; the Caltex all-rounder was Shaelee Tonkin-Reeves; dux was Hayley Lye; top Indigenous female, Hayley Ross; top Indigenous male, Dwayne Turner; top sportsman was awarded to two students, Jess Budarick and Matt Jackson; and top sportswoman went to Tiahne Munn.

Katherine High School also won the Palmerston netball tournament and the Katherine netball tournament in Semester 1.

Bryn Pickering was NT runner up for the Simpson Prize for 2016. Ayesha Kay and Treb Garcia received the Aspire awards.

As we speak, the Stars Foundation at Katherine High School is having its award ceremony, and I offer my congratulations to the two students who are being presented with the star of the year award. The Stars Foundation aims to support and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women to make active choices towards realising their full potential in all aspects of their development and wellbeing. The foundation is based around four focus areas of wellbeing, healthy lifestyles, education, training and employment, and community involvement.

Using these focus areas each student develops their own individual stars plan, enabling staff to tailor activities towards personal goals and individual needs. The Stars program provides full-time mentors for children at school and addresses the different socialisation, community expectations and life experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women as well as their needs and challenges.

The broad range of experiences and activities offered and the rich, respectful relationships that the mentors develop with the girls are the key to the success of this program. Many of the benefits of youth mentoring correlate with the teaching skills that aim to foster resilience and wellbeing, leading to increased social connection, community participation and self-confidence.

At the Stars Foundation end-of-year presentation evening, which is happening right now, two students from Katherine High School are being recognised for their efforts and continuing involvement in the program. The star of the year award is given to the students who have continually shown the Stars values of respect, honesty, commitment and pride. The middle years star of the year award recipient is Year 9 student, Chenille Cameron. Chenille is an outgoing and vibrant Stars student who commits to her school attendance and studies. She has participated in Stars interschool football and basketball carnivals. She is not afraid to have a go and always tries her very best. Chenille is a great friend to her peers and younger students, and is honest and shows respect towards staff at Katherine High School.

The senior years star of the year award recipient is Chloe Girdler. Throughout the year Chloe has encouraged her fellow peers to complete their school work to the best of their ability. She has encouraged others to engage in all extracurricular activities offered by the Stars Foundation whilst also being an amazing role model for our younger year levels. Chloe's constant enthusiasm, her great work ethic and respectfulness towards staff and students make her the perfect recipient for this award this year.

I offer my congratulations to Chloe and Chenille, and to their families and friends who have supported them throughout this year. I also offer my congratulations to the committed teachers and support staff who have worked tirelessly to deliver the Stars Foundation program at Katherine High School. That includes Jess Corvino, program manager for middle years; Tamara Rosas, program officer; Rosae Blacksmith, program officer; and Sophie Dreher, program manager for senior years. Sophie has been with Stars since it was the Stronger Smarter Sisters Committee.

Well done to all of you. Congratulations; it has been a wonderful year for you and I look forward to seeing what you do next year. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to condemn the comments made by Senator Pauline Hanson yesterday. I was feeling unwell this afternoon and I decided it was important to come back into this Chamber to condemn these comments, which, in my opinion, are disgusting.

I am proudly from a 'rainbow' family. My mother is Aboriginal. She is a Nundhirribala lady from Numbulwar, and an Anindilyakwa lady from Groote. My father is a second-born generation Australian. His heritage is Estonian, South African and Irish. I am proudly of mixed descent and I acknowledge both heritages of my family: my Aboriginal side and my immigrant side.

This year 22 December will mark the 45th anniversary of my parents' marriage. They were married in 1971 at a time when a black woman and a white man did not necessarily get married. They have come through adversity to become strong role models for me, my sister and my nieces. To hear comments like Senator Hanson's yesterday alarms me as a young Indigenous person in Australia.

I remember Pauline Hanson from when I was in grades six and seven in primary school. I remember having the first political conversations in primary school. I came from a multicultural classroom. As the Member for Port Darwin mentioned, it is great to see multicultural classrooms in Australia and in the Northern Territory. I am proud to be a product of one of those multicultural classrooms.

I went to the primary schools of Batchelor and Malak. There were many colours, shades, cultural backgrounds and languages that made up my primary school and high school classes. I remember my first political conversations with my classmates about this strange lady called Pauline Hanson, who talked about different things, but mostly we recognised that what she was saying was not right. I remember this very distinctly in these younger grades, and now she has resurfaced, as we know, as a Senator in the Australian Parliament. Hearing these comments is quite alarming, as I mentioned before.

To come into 2016 and hear comments such as this is almost like Ms Hanson is recycling her thoughts from 20-odd years ago because she cannot think of anything else to say. It is disappointing to see that she is stuck in this mentality of degrading people based on their race, culture, faith, religious background and beliefs.

The important thing, which is the case with Ms Hanson, is a very limited lived experience. I am almost in a position to feel pity for Ms Hanson for not having such a rich and diverse experience in growing up in

Australia, this beautiful country we all love, compared to someone like me, who has had a rich experience of growing up with many people of different backgrounds and accepting people for who they are as human beings, not based on the colour of their skin or religious or language background.

According to the reports on ABC, some of the points made by Ms Hanson in the interview with Mr Andrew Bolt on *The Bolt Report*, which, thankfully, I do not watch because I would not want to give it the ratings, showed her ignorance about what defines being Aboriginal. It was shocking and it openly exposes Ms Hanson as the small-minded and ill-educated person she is.

There are federal guidelines for what defines an Aboriginal person. These are someone of Aboriginal descent, someone who identifies as Aboriginal and someone who is accepted as Aboriginal in the community in which they live. You must have all three of these elements to define being Aboriginal. That is only based on paper, let alone the emotional attachment to identity and the family heritage people have in their personal experiences and lives.

An ongoing issue in Australia is the underlying space which often is not an open dialogue. This is the space which breeds racism, and that comes to identity and the expectation for people to fit within boxes and within somebody else's definition of identity.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia have experienced generations of trauma—transgenerational stress. They have experienced transgenerational poverty. This has come from the history of our country. It is very important to acknowledge it, especially when we look at the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country, the big movement for Closing the Gap, and acknowledge that Aboriginal people, men and women, die at a greater rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts in Australia. It is an extreme shame and we need to acknowledge it to work together and make resolutions that will be long term, looking after each other as human beings and fellow Australians, especially here, as fellow Territorians.

Ms Hanson's comment, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me', in her primary school years—I remember that saying from when I was in primary school as well. What she fails to acknowledge is that ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality are not things that can be changed. That is why when people are vilified in any of those areas it becomes extremely personal. It can be traumatic. It can create complete turmoil within somebody's internal identity and the way they present themselves or interact with other people.

Identity is something that people define individually, they define as family, and they define in communities and the wider public. Identity is something that is important for each person. Someone cannot tell another individual how their identity is defined. I completely disagree with Ms Hanson's comments.

It would be interesting if I was to vilify redheads and say that redheads cannot be—sorry, Member for Port Darwin; I do like redheads. It might not be something that means a lot to me, but it might mean something to somebody else. Thinking about the way somebody's comments reflect on an individual is very important if we are looking at collaboration and respect in our community, and treating human beings as they should be treated, with dignity and respect.

The discussion about amending section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act* is of high concern. I want to point out some of the wording in section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*:

1. *It is unlawful for a person to do an act, otherwise than in private, if:*
 - (a) *the act is reasonably likely, in all the circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people; and*
 - (b) *the act is done because of the race, colour or national or ethnic origin of the other person or of some or all of the people in the group.*

There has been much conversation about this act, and I think it is important that we fight to keep that in place. It was put in place over 20 years ago, and it is very important to protect vulnerable people in our country and the Territory to make sure they are respected and dignified. Those people who might not be able to speak for themselves will be protected by keeping section 18C as is.

I condemn the words of Senator Pauline Hanson and I look forward to debating what she said in further detail.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Arnhem, your time has expired.

Mr McCARTHY (Barkly): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish a Merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year to all the Legislative Assembly staff who operate this wonderful parliament.

That goes to the Table Office, Hansard and all the Legislative Assembly staff in what is a fantastic, professional workplace that we all get to share and enjoy, and where we get things done.

It is good to be back. It is always a pleasure and an honour to work in this workplace with such dedicated Territorians who make sure our democracy flourishes.

I also mention the Barkly electorate office staff, particularly Dawn McCarthy, Coral Franklin, Stephen McVay and Brian Wollogorang, who teamed together and have created an exceptional group of supporters and administrators in total support of Barkly constituents at a critical time when Ktima moved on to a great creative communications job in local government. It was coming into the election year, so it was very important that we kept the electorate office on an even keel. It is a very safe thing to do when you are surrounded by great Territorians who are supportive of the values you bring to the job for your constituency. Thank you very much to the electorate office team.

A special mention goes to Brian—for all the incredible work you have done in Borroloola and the gulf country since you have been in the part-time position. I have encouraged you to train up, and Dawn has been doing a great job of that. We enjoy those training exercises together; you are growing and flourishing in the role of a support colleague.

To all the colleagues in parliament, especially my colleagues in the new Michael Gunner Labor government—an outstanding, diverse team—it is great to get to know you all. We have locked in for the long haul. We have a lot of work to do and we have a huge responsibility. It is wonderful to see this team shaping up—the policies that are now being articulated, the election commitments that will be delivered, and, essentially, good governance for the Northern Territory in this new Assembly.

A special mention also goes to the Chief Minister. Thank you for acknowledging me in a ministerial appointment and tasking me with some extremely important roles as part of the Labor team that will deliver for Territorians.

I acknowledge the ministerial office with Chris Grace and his team in suite one. It is a pleasure to be back in suite one after a four-year absence in the wilderness. We are back and we have a great team. Chris, you and all those people who have supported you have done an incredible job in setting up suite one and now we are making our presence felt in the Territory, working for and with Territorians, side by side. Thank you, guys, and I look forward to great times ahead and delivering as a good team for the Territory constituency.

To the Barkly sub-branch of the Australian Labor Party, thank you once again. In the time I have been a local member the branch has grown from strength to strength. It is another example of great people and great diversity. We often have robust debates, and the sub-branch has grown considerably in numbers, voice and strength. The Australian Labor Party NT conference in 2016 was probably one of the highlights in that growth so far. I heard at the last meeting that you are planning to make yourself heard again at the next conference.

Well done, everyone, and thanks for the great commitment. It is not just about the support of the local member, it is about the support of Labor values and the Northern Territory branch of the Australian Labor Party.

To all the Barkly constituents who re-elected me for a third term, I thank you. Once again, I promise to serve to the best of my ability. You will see some incredible election commitments delivered; I think that is what you supported. You looked at our commitments going in to the election and you liked what you saw, and you could see that they represented a good range of social, cultural, economic, justice and regional development.

It will be a good time, but you will have to share me with the greater workings of government. We did this from 2008 to 2012 and we will do it again. I will not be on the ground in Tennant Creek or the electorate as much, but part of your faith in me was to be a strong voice in government, not only in the portfolio delivery areas, but right across the board for you good folk of the Barkly and for Territory brothers and sisters as well.

The importance of family goes all the way to making sure you can deliver in this extremely challenging job. It was a pleasure to be able to attend a gathering of the clan this year. It was my big brother's 60th birthday and it was great to see all the extended family, my siblings and the new generation of McCarthys together. It gave me and the members of my immediate family real strength to know that we are still together and that we share important values and strong emotion all through our lives. Now we are seeing the third generation of our family's kids coming through with great stories and great achievements. It was a powerful event. Coming off the back of the election and returning to government, it resonated over the couple of days that we got to spend together.

I will make a special mention of a couple of family members. Thomas McCarthy took Joseph McCarthy under his wing in the campaign this year. They once again covered the Gulf Country. You guys were sensational. Of all the possible things that could be said and were said, amongst the amazing tales of adventure and challenges, and the serious controversies we endured, a really important comment came from Joseph. He said to his mother and father that he thanks them for raising him in the Northern Territory and for making sure he understood Territorians in all shapes and sizes across all regional and remote areas, and all the great colour and culture of the Northern Territory.

That was a powerful comment, Joseph. Your mother and I have talked about it a number of times. As parents that is a powerful way to acknowledge the hard work we put in and the great results in your growth and development. You are doing it really tough now in that place called Byron Bay.

Last of all I acknowledge Dawn McCarthy, my wife. Not only does she cover a lot of ground in terms of professional support, family support and community support, she is a very generous person in terms of her volunteering and community support. She now has taken on William, a new member of the family. It was great to see Kerry, mum, and William together. I only got to see it on Facebook, but, Dawn, you are doing an exceptional job with mum and bub.

We are seeing a reinforcement of this government's policies. William is hitting all the normal growth and development targets of an infant. It is just a treasure to see that in front of your eyes—the way you are putting it together with mum. I am looking forward to the future, Kerry, and being able to continue to be an important part of your life and William's life into the future.

Well done, Dawn. It is just another layer to your incredible personality, character and commitment, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. As you know, here we go again, but we will enjoy every step of the road.

Ms MANISON (Wanguri): Mr Deputy Speaker, what a lovely adjournment to follow on from by my colleague, the Member for Barkly. It makes me feel so proud of the amazingly diverse team that I get to share the honour of serving in this parliament with.

I pay thanks to my many helpers and supporters who enable me to do this job that I love so much. First and foremost, I have to thank the wonderful Jenny Djerkurra and Chris Grace. Chris is no longer my Electorate Officer as he is now with Minister McCarthy, but Jenny is still with me, thankfully. They have been the best support you could ever have in an electorate office. I call them the 'dream team'.

The dream team is not necessarily together in the one office anymore, but at least it is still part of the greater Labor cause. I could never thank them enough for the time they give and the sacrifice they make to support me in this job, and for being such wonderful and well-loved members of the Wanguri community. Thank you to Chris, and thank you to Jenny and her partner, Syd Stirling. Thank you also to Jodie for all the time you let them give me.

I thank my family, my wonderful husband, Scott, and my son, Aiden. We have another big year coming up with another baby, and that will be a wonderful thing to share together. All the time that you allow me to go to work, and the never-ending support and love, lots of hugs and happy smiles—particularly when I see Aiden after a long day. It is always so wonderful to know I have a happy life when I go home because I have such wonderful people in my family.

My mother and father, Rose and Gary, do so much to help me. This year they have stepped up even further with the campaign, followed by my life as a minister. They go far above and beyond what most parents probably do for their adult children and I am eternally grateful for their never-ending love and support and everything they do for me in my home life so I can put 100% into my work life. Thank you.

My brother, Luke, and his new wife, Tatyana, are always there to help. It is wonderful to have you in the family now, Tatyana. I am looking forward to having a new cousin for Aiden in March.

To Kit and Ian McNeill; Jess and James Herraman; Clara; Alice; Beau and Bec and the kids, thank you all so much for being wonderful family and for always being there to support me.

I have a wonderful new ministerial office and a great team of people who I feel so lucky to have helping me and working with me. To have one of my former bosses, Richard O'Leary, return to be my chief of staff is an absolute delight. Jamie Gallagher, a man of experience, knowledge, support, advice and wisdom—it is wonderful to have him there. Lesley Major is the best media adviser I have ever worked with, and to have her as my media adviser makes me very happy.

I would like to introduce Matt Ellis, Kirsten McComiskie, and Phil Naylor to the team. Welcome. It is great to have you on the fifth floor and I am looking forward to working with you all. It is delightful to have Lauren Copley-Orrock with me. She worked with the Legislative Assembly previously, and to have her on the team as my executive assistant is marvellous because she is a wealth of experience and knowledge in this building.

Rowan is on board as a trainee. Hayley Comley, what a superstar she is. Lands and planning is a complex space, but I always feel so supported by her; she is a gem. I am delighted she found her way into my office as a DLO. As soon as I got hold of her I made it known to the CEO that I am not letting go of her. She is staying; she is a good one. Thank you, Hayley.

To the people who helped set up the ministerial office in the interim: Bec, Inga, Kaitlin and Duncan, thank you. To the Chief Executives: Andrew Kirkman, Jodie Ryan, David Braines-Mead, Craig Graham, and Rachel Bacon and Salli Cohen in the Department of the Chief Minister. You have been wonderful, professional public servants and great guidance and support. Thank you for your ongoing effort and hard work.

To the staff of the Legislative Assembly, who are so fabulous at what they do—they have had a big year too. The staff at Hansard, who always have to listen to us; the security staff, who do their job very well and take good care of us all; and, of course, the cleaners who always do a marvellous job—Merry Christmas to you all and thank you again for another year of all your hard work.

To the Labor Cas branch members and my supporters, many of whom worked on my campaign and are not members of the Labor Party, but come in time and again because they believe in me and support me, thank you for your work this year.

To my fabulous electorate, the people I do not get to spend much time with every day, I love it when I do get out to Hibiscus and I can say hello to you all and catch up.

To the Hibiscus crew: Nelson, AJ, Rampor and the team; Joan from Strawberry Fields; Tracy, Renee and the girls at Lime Hair; Laura and the management of Hibiscus; George and Gary at Q Framing; Lim at the chemist and all his staff; Joe and Pat at Brumby's; Matthew and his mother and family at the Chinese shop; Robyn at the newsagent; Tania at Hibiscus Beauty; Fernando and Melissa at Lenard's; Derek Hart and the team at Elders; and Paul and Sarah at Dolly's.

Charlie at the checkouts, who I must thank every year because he is a legend of Leanyer, is there to make sure everybody gets in and out of the checkout. He says hello and knows everybody. He is a fabulous guy, as is the whole team at Woollies. Gabby and Laurie, the cleaners, do a fabulous job.

Hege Burns, the Officer in Charge at Casuarina, always has time for us and is such a wonderful asset to the Territory police force. She really does a wonderful job, ensuring strong community policing. We always feel very well supported by her in the professional job she does. Thank you, Hege, for always having time to pick up the phone and have a chat when there are problems.

Chris Grim and James Wallace from Defence Housing Australia—there were a few complex issues with Muirhead because it is not quite owned by council and not quite owned by DHA. It is interesting, as a new suburb with teething issues, but they always endeavour to help and listen to me as we work through the community issues as they come up. Overall, Muirhead is looking fabulous; well done.

To Anne Tonkin at Leanyer school and Karen Urquhart, the very capable Chair of the Leanyer School Council; Karen Koehler and her staff at Good Shepherd Lutheran College's St Andrews campus in

Leanyer; Principal Jen Coad and Chair Rick Wallace at Wanguri school; Principal Simon Duffy and assistant principal Paula Sellars at Holy Spirit School; Peter Swan, Principal at Dripstone; and Paul Mathews at Casuarina Senior College—you are all doing a wonderful job educating our kids and we are extremely grateful that the children of the Wanguri electorate have amazing schools to attend. From the start to the finish of their education, you will get a top-class education from those schools because they are amazing staff and great schools. Thank you for your work.

My ladies at Murraya Children's Centre, the most fabulous childcare centre—the early learning journey can begin at Murraya if people send their children there. What a wonderful place. To Charanie and the team in the toddler room, who take such wonderful care of my son—I can always walk away as she gives him a cuddle in the morning and it makes me feel very reassured. He is always very happy to see Charanie. To Choti, Sarita, Matty, Kendall, Jenny—and congratulations, Jenny, on your new bub—Tara, Emma, Ashley, Kylie and all of the ladies at Murraya Children's Centre, you do such a wonderful job of nurturing, taking care of, having fun with and helping educate our kids. It makes it so much easier to go to work when we know that they are having such a great time when they are at childcare. Thank you, ladies, you are very professional and wonderful early childhood educators.

At the Tracy Village Club, President Garry Ross and the staff are always fantastic to work with. It is a wonderful community club there. The Muirhead residents association does a great job of ensuring we have a really vibrant community in Muirhead and plenty of community activity. Thank you for your work.

The Buddhist Society members are wonderful supporters of the community and are always opening their doors to anybody who would like to join them. It is wonderful.

The Holy Spirit Church and St Martin De Porres Church communities are great supporters of the Catholic community.

The Islamic Society of Darwin and the Darwin mosque—I always love spending time with you there. You give wonderful support to so many people.

To the Uniting Church community and the Dreambuilders Church community, thanks for all the work you do in supporting people.

The Leanyer seniors and the Tambling Terrace seniors—you are fabulous people. I love catching up with you. I look forward to delivering Christmas cake and cards to you very soon, on a very hot build-up day, I am sure.

To my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, I am looking forward to working with you all over the next three-and-a-half years. I wish you all very well after what was an incredibly busy year of a lot of hard work. Mind you, we have another three-and-a-half busy years ahead. It will be a pleasure to serve in this place with you. It has been an honour to stand in this place with you. I wish you and your families well for the Christmas season, and for a productive, hard-working 2017, when we will do some amazing things for Territorians.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.