

The Estimates Committee convened at 8 am.

MINISTER FYLES' PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE

Madam CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to day two of the 2017 estimates hearings. I acknowledge that we are gathered on the land of the Larrakia people, and I pay my respects to Larrakia elders, past and present.

I welcome you, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you this morning.

Ms FYLES: Madam Chair, I would like to introduce those sitting at the table with me: Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, Mr Greg Shanahan; Ms Meredith Day; and Ms Jacqueline Dowling.

Madam CHAIR: I invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy related questions before moving on to output-specific questions and finally non-output specific budget-related questions. I will invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on the output.

Attorney-General do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice?

Ms FYLES: The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice was formed following machinery of government changes on 31 August last year 2016. I will outline what those changes meant for this government agency.

The former Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, excluding the Domestic Violence Directorate and the Family Responsibility Program, includes NT Correctional Services, excluding youth justice and associated support staff, and NT WorkSafe and Licensing NT, excluding the alcohol policy unit. I thought it was important to outline to the committee those machinery of government changes that we made as an incoming government to provide services to Territorians.

The new Department of the Attorney-General and Justice focuses on delivering legal services to government, supporting government legislative programs, providing support to victims of crime and administering a strong, responsible and responsive justice system. In addition, the department promotes community safety through correctional interventions, regulates workplace health and safety, and administers the Territory's licensing regime for gaming, liquor, consumer racing and trading activities.

The department encompasses seven output groups. The first being Legal Services, which provides government with quality legal advice and representation policy development, supports victims of violent crime and conducts important research into the criminal justice system, a very important role within Legal Services. The department continues its work in the area of legislative reform, including court reform, criminal procedure, vulnerable witnesses, victims of crime and fines recovery. Legal Services also administers a number of grants, including continued funding to the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission. This will ensure that the commission can continue to provide appropriate and timely representation to Territorians who need it.

The Correctional Services output group provides a safe, secure and humane custodial service that targets reoffending and focus programs, education and training. Correctional Services is responsible for monitoring and supervising community-based offenders to ensure compliance with the orders of the courts and the Parole Board of the Northern Territory. In addition, Correctional Services provides secretariat support to the Parole Board and related administrative duties.

Budget 2017–18 provides \$2.1m in funding support to the COMMIT program, and \$2.1m in funding to the expansion of electronic monitoring. As I noted, during the machinery of government changes youth justice and youth-related services transferred from this agency and are now the responsibility of Territory Families with the exception of the Youth Court, which still sits with us.

I ask that all questions that relate to Output 1.4, Youth Justice, including youth detention under the Territory Families portfolio, are directed to Minister Wakefield. The Court And Tribunal Support Services output group provides administrative support services to enable delivery of justice to the Territory community by courts and tribunals. We saw recently the new Alice Springs Supreme Court facility opened.

Budget 2017–18 allocates \$3m in capital funding for upgrades to the domestic violence court facilities in Alice Springs, and that is important to ensure that the courts operate and meet the government's strategies and objectives, community expectations and the needs of judiciary. This is a focused court to provide services to try to tackle the scourge of domestic violence. Additional resources have been provided to the lower courts and NTCAT. NTCAT will have expanded responsibilities in relation to the Banned Drinker Register program.

It is also important to note that while the CEO is responsible under the *Financial Management Act* and the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act* for the administration of the department, many arms are independent in their delivery of functions and a virtue of statutory appointment. It is very important to note that.

The Director of Public Prosecutions is one such statutory office, and the DPP continues to provide an independent public prosecution service to the Territory and support witnesses and victims throughout the criminal justice process.

The Independent Offices output group, which includes a range of independent statutory bodies, continues the important role of protecting the community's legal rights and property interests, and providing important legislative drafting services to progress government legislation reform.

I note that Output 5.6, Health and Community Services Complaints Commission, comes under my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Health, and questions for that should be directed to me at that point in the schedule.

In relation to Output 5.7, Children's Commissioner, the Minister for Territory Families has overall responsibility for the *Care and Protection of Children Act*. However, as Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, I am responsible for Part 3.3 of the act relating to the prevention of child deaths.

The Regulatory Services group consists of Licensing NT, which is Output 6.1, and WorkSafe, which is Output 6.2. Licensing NT administers the Territory's licensing regimes, which includes gaming, liquor, racing, consumer and trading activities. Community harm is minimised through targeted compliance activity in high-risk areas, and administration of funding support for gambling-related research projects, particularly to community not-for-profit groups.

One of the key budget items for 2017-18 is the ongoing funding to reactivate and operate the Banned Drinker Register in the Northern Territory.

NT WorkSafe ensures that businesses and workers meet their responsibilities under the law in regard to workplace health and safety. NT WorkSafe also provides assistance to businesses and workers to meet their obligations and responsibilities.

The Corporate and Governance output group continues to deliver high-quality support services to the agency as a whole with a continued focus on reducing red tape and streamlining services, but providing ongoing support.

We received a number of written questions. I can inform the committee that those questions have been put back through the process and are publicly available.

There are a number of independent statutory officers—I have mentioned the Health Complaints Commissioner—here today if you have questions. They include the Consumer Affairs Commissioner, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, the Information and Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner, the Registrar-General, the Public Trustee and the Children's Commissioner. We also have the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. For Regulatory Services the Licensing NT and NT WorkSafe directors are also here.

Thank you for the opportunity to outline some of the changes happening within the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any questions on the Attorney-General's statement?

Mr PAECH: Not so much a question, but I am mindful that the independent officers are here and I have questions for the Consumer Affairs Commission, the Anti-Discrimination Commission and the Information and Public Disclosures Commission.

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017-18 as they relate to the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice.

Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Ms UIBO: My question relates to a couple of specific things I am interested in from the electorate of Arnhem. From the allocated \$1.62m, what amount will be spent on the court services provided specifically in the communities of Beswick and Ngkurr?

Ms FYLES: Thank you for your question. The cost of providing services to those communities is through the regular circuit court visits to our communities. The Local Courts visit communities five times each year. The Barunga circuit is by vehicle and costs about \$800 per annum while the other courts charter to Ngkurr, and I am advised that the cost is around \$23 000 per annum.

Those amounts do not include the salaries of the judges and court staff. It is obviously important that we provide these services across the Territory and make sure the community understands justice and making that work in the Northern Territory. They are the costs for you. I am not sure if you have any further questions or if CE has anything.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister. To clarify, that is the running costs? As you said, it does not include the salaries of the personnel supporting that circuit.

Ms FYLES: No, those personnel would provide support whether the court was run in Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs, Beswick or Barunga.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, my next question to the minister relates to the Community Justice Centre. I worked for the Community Justice Centre a couple of years ago, so I am interested to see how they are travelling. They offer free dispute resolution services in the form of mediation and, as I understand, correctional centre conferencing, which I was a part of when I was working there.

I would like to know what the allocated \$460 000, specifically to cover the CJC, is for?

Ms FYLES: It is very important that all of us, as elected members, engage with the Community Justice Centre and refer members of our community there. They offer free dispute resolution services in the form of mediation and correctional centre conferencing. In the budget there is an allocation of \$460 000. It has always been sufficient. The Community Justice Centre has a new director and it is possible that a reprioritising of services may occur over the next 12 months. I always welcome the opportunity to discuss such matters with the new director, and feedback from the community is important.

Ms UIBO: Minister, how many staff are currently employed by your department within the CJC?

Ms FYLES: There are three staff members: the director; a mediation officer; and an intake officer. Was there another part of your question I missed?

Ms UIBO: No, you have alluded to my next question, which was whether the funds were sufficient for the work the CJC does, considering they cover the whole of the Northern Territory?

Ms FYLES: I am advised that is a reasonable amount. Obviously we would be working together with the new director. From my experience as a local member, I know it is an important service in trying to make sure matters can be resolved without being involved in our justice system.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy. Are there any questions from the public?

Mr PEACH: Yes. Attorney-General, I have some questions here from a victim of crime. What percentage of the total proposed Northern Territory budget is allocated to the direct care, support, compensation and assistance to victims of crime?

Ms FYLES: It is very important in the justice system to make sure we put victims of crime first. As a government, we try to do that. It is about making sure people are adequately resourced, for example police—making sure they get 120 additional police officers and police station resources that have been committed. It is about making sure we follow through on the significant youth justice reforms that are currently being delivered. They need to continue to be focused on.

It is also important that we look at giving children the best start in life. That is something I am passionate about, particularly as the Health minister.

In Budget 2017–18 there are a number of resources that relate directly to victims of crime. There are victims of crime compensation payments, which include medical assessment. As of 31 March, there was \$1m and in the total budget there is \$2.23m if required. The Safe at Home program funding allocated to Victims of Crime NT provides support such as cleaning up for victims of home break-ins. There is a total budget of \$949 000 for that.

There is also a counselling scheme for victims of crime. That is allocated to Anglicare NT. There is a budget allocation of \$347 000 for the year.

Victims of crime also receive 5% of Sentenced to a Job salaries, which is currently at around \$120 000. There are a number of mechanisms to support victims of crime with regard to compensation and resources. Within government we also have the Crimes Victims Services Unit and the Crimes Victim Advisory Committee, which are working to ensure government does a better job in supporting victims of crime. I have met with them.

We also fund the operations of Victims of Crime NT and then there are also associated witness services through the DPP. There are a number of measures, but for me as a minister, it is about working with victims of crime to understand the full impact and to make sure, as a government, that when we deliver services they help those who have been unfortunate to encounter crime, and that we try to help them get their lives back on track.

Mr PAECH: What percentage of the total proposed budget is allocated to the direct care, support, rehabilitation or diversion of perpetrators of crime, including youth perpetrators?

Ms FYLES: That is a very broad question; rehabilitation programs and diversion come from a range of sectors within NT Correctional Services. The Commissioner for Northern Territory Correctional Services has joined me at the table, Mark Payne. NT Correctional Services is responsible for providing custodial and community-based supervision, programs, services and intervention for adult offenders. The total budget for NT Correctional Services is \$208m through 2017–18.

This includes a number of education and training programs to address offender behaviour, also programs to address cultural, health and other needs of individuals in prison. Within that there is also the budget of supervision of youth in the community by NT Correctional Services, which is \$848 000. The responsibility for youth-based supervision has transferred to Territory Families, so that specific budget allocation would need to be confirmed with that department, but that is what we are delivering in regard to NT Correctional Services.

Mr PAECH: Did any of this money get directed to victims of crime in the Northern Territory? Where did the government spend this money?

Ms FYLES: In relation to proceeds of crime the Territory has very strong legislation. I am advised it is some of the strongest legislation in Australia. From 16 July until the current period, \$1.3m has been forfeited to the Northern Territory Government.

Mr PAECH: \$1.3m?

Ms FYLES: Yes, \$1.37m, and that has been a combination of cash seized under the *Misuse of Drugs Act*, the *Criminal Property Forfeiture Act*, the *Police Administration Act* and the *Kava Management Act*.

Mr PAECH: Does the money that is seized go into general revenue?

Ms FYLES: Yes, I understand that money goes into general revenue. There is also approximately \$1.5m in restrained real property with a further three properties for which values have not yet been given. There are also two vehicles worth \$100 000 under restraint, so there are other elements to this as well. For the committee's information, there is a further unexplained wealth application of \$252 000.

Mr PAECH: Sorry, could you repeat that?

Ms FYLES: There are applications of \$252 000, which are afoot in the Local Court, of unexplained wealth, so there is the question of how that wealth was received—is that the proceeds of crime? There are a number of mechanisms this agency is looking at to make sure people who receive proceeds from crime do not keep those proceeds. I will just ask Meredith Day to provide a little additional information on that.

Ms DAY: My understanding is that approximately \$2m is under restraint, so there are matters that are in progress and money not yet forfeited.

Mr PAECH: \$2m?

Ms DAY: About \$2m under restraint.

Mr PAECH: There is no particular time on when that will become under constraint?

Ms DAY: Those matters need to run through the court process, so the time could vary from a very short period of time to a couple of years depending on how those matters go.

Ms FYLES: Just to clarify, the \$2m and other figures I spoke about earlier when answering the question—that is the calculation.

Mr PAECH: Thank you, Attorney-General. That concludes the questions from victims of crime. I have a few questions from Sam Bowden of Making Justice Work. In relation to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement election commitment, how many consultations, in which communities and over what period of time have consultations occurred?

Ms FYLES: I am proud to be part of a government committed to negotiating Aboriginal Justice Agreement, it is an election commitment we have under way. I am realistic this is a journey we need to get right. We need to understand what this means for our community. One of the first things we have done is create the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Unit, the ATSI Justice Unit, within the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. That was achieved in October last year, soon after coming to government. It is the first unit of its kind anywhere in Australia.

The ATSI Justice Unit will drive the delivery of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and implement the deliverables as identified. The ATSI Justice Unit will commence negotiations soon, and that will include community consultation. Consultations will occur in the Northern region first then the southern region. It will include remote areas. It is important that we have the remote parts of the Territory involved in this process.

The consultations will take over 12 months to complete, with a further six months across the entire Northern Territory to confirm that the contents of the draft Aboriginal Justice Agreement are workable and what community would like to see. We are ensuring it is being delivered in a culturally appropriate manner through interpreters and using cultural brokers. This process will allow several opportunities for Territorians to provide input in various formats to this formal development of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

To date there have been a number of consultations. The first layer started with the peak bodies: Northern Land Council; the Central Land Council; the Tiwi Islands Regional Council; the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the NT, or APONT; NAAJA; and key stakeholders across the NTG. I thank all those stakeholders who provided input. This is an exciting step forward. It is making sure in delivering justice in the Northern Territory that it is culturally appropriate through the context of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Mr PAECH: Quite often when consultation is done in a regional and remote setting it is just communities on the bitumen. I want to clarify that this consultation process will go into very remote places in the Northern Territory where we have seen a lack of consultation.

Ms FYLES: We are still working on the detailed plans with the reference group, but we want to get it right in regard to delivering an Aboriginal Justice Agreement for the Northern Territory. We need to get off the

bitumen and reach places that are not easy to get to. It is important to use interpreters and make sure we are culturally appropriate in those consultations. We are working through those elements. They are important to me and to the chief executive in delivering this program.

Ms UIBO: I have a follow up on that. Minister, how many staff in the unit are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?

Ms FYLES: My understanding is that four of the five, but I am happy to confirm that with you. We do not have that information.

Mr PAECH: There are two following questions from Making Justice Work. In relation to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, how many reference committee meetings have been resourced, and how will participation in the reference committee from people in remote areas be resourced to guide the department in the development of the agreement?

Ms FYLES: In addition to the ATSI Justice Unit the Aboriginal Justice Agreement reference committee was established early this year to govern the development and intended delivery of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. There are 15 members, consisting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people representing key peak bodies and stakeholders that represent Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory.

They have agreed on a terms of reference which dictates their role to dispense information and consult with stakeholders that fully engages Aboriginal people's views across the Northern Territory so that everybody has the opportunity to provide input. To complement the process of consultation for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement we will provide further opportunities for Territorians to contribute to that process.

Mr PAECH: What funding has been allocated and for what positions for the new domestic and family violence court in Alice Springs?

Ms FYLES: Domestic and family violence is unacceptable. The Northern Territory, we acknowledge, has unacceptably high rates of it and we, as a community, need to call it out and turn it around. We need to work with grassroots campaigns to make sure when we deliver justice services and court services that we understand the unique context of domestic and family violence.

Budget 2017–18 delivers \$3m in capital funding which creates the new domestic and family violence court in Alice Springs. Having a successful domestic and family violence court requires consultation with key stakeholders to make sure we get that model right. I have been involved in discussions with stakeholders, as the agency has.

We are working with the Alice Springs Local Court and non-government organisations that provide support, as well as service providers, police and government agencies to make sure we are all on the same page.

The proposed model does not require new legislation for the establishment of a standalone court with new staff, but the proposed model includes specialised domestic and family violence training for court staff, judges, prosecutors and defence lawyers; the development of improved court process and procedures to deal with domestic and family violence matters more quickly; improved procedures for addressing related legal issues more efficiently, with a focus on victim safety; a common risk assessment tool to better assess risk to victims and their children; increased referral processes for offender treatment and counselling programs; and improvements in information sharing and collaboration across agencies to provide holistic case management to victims as well as improved services which support perpetrators to change their behaviour.

The Northern Territory is a very small community. A place like Alice Springs is extremely small, as the local member would know. This process is designed to make the journey as easy as possible for the victim and to make the perpetrators fully understand the consequences of their behaviour so that we can stop these statistics, which are unacceptably high in the Northern Territory.

This model will work with those key stakeholders. We will work with non-government organisations and it will be evidence based to provide a better model of justice delivery in the space of domestic and family violence. I hope that answers your question.

Mr PAECH: I have a number of other questions relating to corrections and corporate and governance.

Moving on to questions from members of the community regarding corrections, Making Justice Work through-care services for adults and children existing in prison and detention are critical. What funding has been allocated to through-care services in urban and remote regions of the Territory?

Ms FYLES: I believe that question would need to be answered in my capacity as Minister for Health, looking at those support services and through-care supports. Is it ok, Madam Chair, to refer to that question at that point in time?

Mr PAECH: Thank you. There is a similar question. What funding has been allocated to through-care services in urban and remote regions in the Territory for adults and children in the areas of mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment services? I am happy for that to be taken in the Health output areas.

Ms FYLES: That would be appreciated.

Madam CHAIR: No problem; we will defer those questions until the Health output areas.

Mr PAECH: The prisoner paid employment program has existed for around 10 years under several different names. Can you please advise how recidivism rates have changed over this time?

Ms FYLES: The overall results for those participating in the Sentenced to a Job program do not show a significant reduction in recidivism. However, the results are promising. I will take a moment to outline why I think it is an important area.

Sentenced to a Job participants transferred to community supervision were less likely to reoffend within 12 months compared to those just discharged from custody—39% as opposed to 65%. Sentenced to a Job participants who were released with employment were less likely to reoffend—41% as opposed to 61% of Sentenced to a Job participants not employed upon released. Sentenced to a Job participants are provided with training and work-readiness skills and the opportunity to change their social program.

It should be noted that Indigenous prisoners are more likely to reoffend than non-Indigenous prisoners—61% of Indigenous prisoners are likely to reoffend compared with 22% of non-Indigenous prisoners. The recidivism rate has dropped slightly since 2011–12. It is marginal, from 60.7% to 58.3%, but that is just one program it should be noted in terms of working to reduce those rates.

There are other factors which contribute negatively to recidivism rates, that is, post-release support, housing and access to illicit drugs.

The paid employment program is showing an effect in reduction, especially when it is coupled with Community Corrections post-release supervision. Prisoners who maintain employment post-release are in the best position to not reoffend. It is a difficult space, but we are committed to working toward that.

There are a number of statistics in the Northern Territory that we are not proud of, which we are looking at changing. That is why we are putting in place programs such as the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

As the minister responsible for corrections, I am looking at these figures and putting in place programs that will work.

Mr PAECH: Following on from that question, from the same person, what impact has any prisoner paid employment program had on crime?

Ms FYLES: It is a very difficult question to answer. Crimes are committed for various reasons. They are beyond the control of NT Correctional Services once somebody is released. We do not have any data specifically. Crime rates are incredibly complex and dependent on a number of factors and instances, and cannot be tied to one particular program.

We acknowledge in the Northern Territory that those rates are unacceptably high. What we can do to bring those down as a whole and see that flow-through effect ranges from a number of programs—through-care programs to education and training—whilst people are incarcerated to making sure they have those through-care plans when they leave.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to take those questions for through-care to Health. In Output 7.0 I have a question on Corporate and Governance. I have a few questions from Mr Chris Walsh, and I note that these questions will come up again across a number of portfolios.

Could you provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for chief executives in each agency from 1 July to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by chief executives from 1 July to 31 March 2017. Please list the number of times chief executives have visited that location over the last five years.

In the case of all international travel, please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip and the written report into what tax payers gained from the trip. If no report given to the department minister exists, please explain why.

I will stop there because there are another three parts to that.

Ms FYLES: I thank Mr Walsh for his very detailed question. We have seen trouble over a recent period of time with ministers travelling unacceptably. There is an element of travel in this role. We need to meet with key stakeholders and visit communities across the Northern Territory and at times there is a need for overseas travel. But when Territorians see continual trips without real reason—I can assure Territorians that when I want a holiday, I will book it and take it with my family.

Regarding work, I am very reluctant to travel, but at times it needs to be done. I just got back last week from Canberra. I met eight federal ministers in Canberra, so it is an important element. The same goes for the chief executives and executives with the department. My chief executive, sitting next to me, has not taken an overseas trip since 1 July last year.

We answered some elements of Mr Walsh's question in the written questions. He asked for another layer of detail, which we undertake to provide to the best of our ability, but it is quite complex. We have answered some of those questions partly and will continue to find the information for Mr Walsh. I assure Territorians today that travel at taxpayers' expense is something we do not book as if we are getting a bus down the street. It is something we genuinely think about – what are the outcomes, can we combine things and make sure the taxpayer dollar is spent wisely.

Mr PAECH: Can you please provide the total expenditure and itemise details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itineraries, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for public servants in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel?

Ms FYLES: Again, it is very complex information that is required. I undertake, as the minister, to provide as much of that as I can. The chief executive has assured me that travel within the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice is well considered. It is not something that we use. We make sure we are very conscious of using taxpayers' dollars.

We have talked about some of the programs such as delivering court services into remote parts of the Territory. Travel is important and it needs to be undertaken, but it is always considered regarding when we are travelling on taxpayers' dollars and whether we are getting the best value, and if it is really necessary.

Mr PAECH: In the case of international travel, please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and cost involved in each trip, and the written report into what taxpayers gained from the trip. If no report given to the department chief executive exists are you able to explain why?

Ms FYLES: For that specific time frame, or ...

Mr PAECH: No, the question does not provide a time frame. But I make the assumption it is following on from part (d) of the question, which was from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017.

Ms FYLES: I am advised the following three international trips have been undertaken: the Information and Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner attended an Asia Pacific Privacy Authorities Forum in Singapore and the cost incurred was \$2700; a member of the agency was able to travel to the NT Bar Association conference as a recipient of an award at a cost of about \$1500; and Justice Steven Southwood attended the Paroling Authorities International Conference in Vancouver at a cost of \$2700. Those are the three international trips I am advised of; I am happy to see if there is any information the agency does not have here today.

Mr PAECH: Please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by public servants from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 and please list the number of times public servants have visited that location over the last five years.

Ms FYLES: It is complex to provide that detail. Over the last five years we have seen significant machinery of government changes, the first being in 2012 and again at the end of last year. We would be happy to—if the question would be followed up with specifics. We are not trying to hide anything, but we need to make sure in regard to resources that we are conscious of the time and effort.

Territorians need explanations around travel and, as the minister going forward, I am happy to provide that and assure people we are not wasting taxpayer dollars. I am happy to follow that up, but it is a complex body of questioning going back five years looking at—I am sure there is a level of detail we will be able to provide Mr Walsh and I am sure he will follow that up with further questions.

Madam CHAIR: Attorney-General, I will place it as a question on notice and if we can list the undertaking that your department will provide whatever information it can at this stage.

Question on Notice No 3.1

Madam CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, can I get you to repeat your question for the record?

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, could you please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by public servants from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, and please list the number of times the public servant has visited that location over the last five years.

Ms FYLES: As I said, we will undertake to provide what detail we can.

Madam CHAIR: Excellent.

Mr PAECH: Madam Chair that concludes questions from members of the public.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Member for Namatjira. The question on notice has been allocated the number 3.1.

Question on Notice No 3.2

Madam CHAIR: I would like to backtrack to the Member for Arnhem's valuating question to the Attorney-General asking about the descent of the employees in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Unit. I will place that on the record as a question on notice as well.

Member for Arnhem, can I get you to repeat your question for the record, please?

Ms UIBO: Attorney General, in regard to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice unit, how many staff are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?

Ms FYLES: I accept that, thank you.

Madam CHAIR: That question on notice has been given the number 3.2.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Ms NELSON: Yes, Madam Chair, I have a quick question for the Attorney-General. This question is regarding the national partnership agreements in regard to funding. We have seen some significant budget cuts coming through the federal government. Can you elaborate a little on how that has affected the funding for community legal services in the Northern Territory?

Ms FYLES: Thank you for your question on an area that you are passionate about. The proposed cuts to community-based legal organisations were particularly concerning. Very early on in becoming minister I was aware of that and advocated strongly that it did not happen. It was talked about at the national MINCO meetings that I attended, and I lobbied Senator Nigel Scullion in the Territory on that.

I am pleased to note that recently some of the funding has been restored, although I understand there are some conditions in relation to the community legal sector. I am not sure of the specific details surrounding the Indigenous community and Aboriginal legal sector, but as Attorney-General for the Northern Territory—we need to work with our federal counterparts. I undertook that and have been doing that, meeting with the federal Attorney-General, George Brandis, and Senator Nigel Scullion last week. I continue to advocate that we need this funding provided by the federal government to support community-based legal organisations.

Ms NELSON: We know that some of the funding agreements will be at the end of this month. Can you elaborate a little on what strategies the government has in place? Do you counteract that?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure which specific agreements you are talking about. Are you talking about the Working Women's Centre?

Ms NELSON: Yes, I am talking about the national partnership agreements that we have we some of the community legal services and organisations like the NT Working Women's Centre.

Ms FYLES: The Working Women's Centre does not come through the national partnership agreement, so that is not in touch with the Territory government. We supported the Working Women's Centre with some interim funding. We think it is a very important and valuable community organisation, particularly in the space of supporting women to maintain their employment if they are a victim of domestic violence.

We all know the statistics that if somebody is employed they are far more likely to leave a volatile relationship. I note that I do not know the figures off the top of my head, but the Working Women's Centre was successful once the Northern Territory Government provided the interim funding. It received federal government funding to continue. I am happy to take specific questions on that.

Some funding agreements come through the Northern Territory Government; other funding agreements go directly to the community-based organisations, which we are aware of because we engage with them, but we might not be aware of the specific funding, and it does not flow through the Northern Territory budget.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – LEGAL SERVICES

Output 1.1 – Solicitor for the Northern Territory

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0, Legal Services, Output 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise in which output to ask questions about the role of traditional leadership in the courts?

Ms FYLES: I suggest that would be under Output Group 3.0, Court and Tribunal Support Services.

Mr GUYULA: Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Do you have any for Output 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise current rates of incarceration of Indigenous adults and juveniles in the NT and, due to the current anniversary of the 10-year intervention, could you also provide the same rates for 2007.

Ms FYLES: Could I suggest that we see if there are any questions on Output Group 1.0, Legal Services before we move on to 2.0, Correctional Services?

Madam CHAIR: We will go through Output 1.1 and then we will close it off and come to the next. Are there any questions on Output 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory?

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, could you advise us of the ongoing Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory and the work that is required from your department, in particular, in relation to this Royal Commission?

Ms FYLES: Across government we are continuing to work and cooperate with the Royal Commission. We recognise that the Northern Territory had a Youth Justice and Detention system that was clearly in crisis. I note that the Chief Minister, before the election last year, apologised on behalf of Territorians. We need to

make sure we have a strong system that protects and supports young people, but that they understand the consequences of their behaviour.

When the recommendations are handed down from the Royal Commission it is important that we get under way with that work. Since coming to government we have worked efficiently with the Royal Commission. We have made a number of changes in our government to turn things around in the space of youth justice and detention.

As everyone knows, we had significant machinery of government changes, which moved juvenile detention to Territory Families from Corrections. The best description was that those orphans of government, child protection and youth detention now sit with Territory Families, with a minister who is passionate and capable. She will be answering questions. We have invested significantly into youth justice overhaul with \$18.2m. We have also created a number of specialist positions within that space.

The Royal Commission has been a significant workload for this agency and the Solicitor for the Northern Territory. We acknowledge the Royal Commission; it is an important body of work. We undertake to implement its recommendations. We have been working cooperatively with it to date. The Solicitor for the Northern Territory has been involved in supporting agencies and staff, providing documents and supporting former ministers as appropriate. Does that answer your question?

Mr PAECH: Yes, thank you. Following on from that, is it safe to say there is a huge volume of work being done by the department to a monetary capacity but also an in-kind capacity.

Ms FYLES: I will ask Meredith Day to provide further explanation around the impact of the Royal Commission on the Northern Territory Government, noting that the Royal Commission is an important body of work. We are cooperating and working with it, but there has been an impact on this agency.

Ms DAY: The Royal Commission has been a significant piece of work for both the Solicitor for the Northern Territory and the Solicitor-General's office. The Solicitor-General was supported by two independent barristers employed from the private bar.

The Solicitor for the Northern Territory has a dedicated team of lawyers. There are currently six government lawyers employed in that team. From time to time there have been other numbers; it has had to surge up and down. We have also had to utilise staff from the wider Solicitor for the Northern Territory group. Our divisions of litigation, commercial and legal policy have done work in relation to processing documents and providing information. It was important for us to get that job done to assist the Royal Commission in as timely a manner as possible, and that means we chipped in the resources we need.

In more recent times we have employed solicitors from the private profession who work in our office with our in-house team. That is another surge-up capacity we have used. It has been particularly important to complete the important statements for the hearings that are starting to wind up in the Royal Commission. We anticipate the expenditure in relation to the Royal Commission will come to an end around the end of September, although the hearings will finish sooner than that. There will be a need to finalise the back office work.

Mr PAECH: Following on from that, the staff working to support the Royal Commission at the moment within the department will be absorbed back into their usual positions come the final report of the Royal Commission?

Ms DAY: Yes, as far as I know. There may be some contract staff there; I do not have that exact detail. Most staff there, certainly senior staff, have come from other positions within government, from within the Solicitor for the Northern Territory and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions those staff have jobs to go back to. The private practice solicitors go back to their firms.

Mr PAECH: I have nothing further on Output 1.1.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory.

Output 1.2 – Legal Policy

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Legal Policy. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Looking at the budget line, has there been a drop in legal policy funding and if not, can you help me understand that?

Ms FYLES: I do not know if I am the person to help you understand the budget. In regard to this budget line there has been a notional charging change with the Department of Corporate and Information Services, and I have seen this across both my portfolios in different areas. It is just a notional charging change.

Mr PAECH: Has the legal policy unit been working on developing the Northern Territory's commission against corruption?

Ms FYLES: Certainly. Restoring trust was a key election commitment that Territorians of all political persuasions want to see restored to their government. I thank the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. As well as providing valuable support to the Royal Commission, it has been significantly involved in a number of pieces of legislation and bodies of work. It is an enormous workload. I thank every staff member from that agency and across government that have been working on it.

In regard to delivering on the key election commitment of an independent commission against corruption, we are in the process of establishing that commission. Legal policy has been doing a tremendous amount of work on this front.

An important component was the whistle-blower protection in place for the Territory. That is in line with the Martin report recommendations.

In regard to an ICAC, a number of bodies of work have been done to date. When we came to government we accepted 50 of the 52 recommendations from the Martin report. The two recommendations we did not accept were in relation to the South Australian commissioner acting as the Northern Territory commissioner. We have built upon that body of work with an enormous amount of effort.

The whistle-blower protections went to public consultation in February this year, because the basis for all ICACs is to have strong whistle-blower protection so people can come forward and call things out.

We received extensive feedback from the legal profession, investigation and law enforcement agencies and from whistle-blowers themselves. That is now being incorporated into the ICAC legislation.

Mr PAECH: In short, your department is doing a significant volume of work on the independent commission against corruption?

Ms FYLES: Yes, and I was one sentence away from finishing. The legislation remains on track to be introduced to parliament in the second half of this year.

Mr PAECH: What are the major legal policy projects that are being considered for the upcoming year?

Ms FYLES: There are a number of important pieces of work. Legislation, especially in progressing key election commitments, has been brought forward in regard to bringing back the Banned Drinker Register and establishing an independent commission against corruption.

There is other work, including the transfer of jurisdictions of the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal, such as transfer of the functions of the Mental Health Review Tribunal; amendments to the *Information Act* to improve information-sharing across government; working on outcomes of the alcohol policy and legislation review, which I am sure will make changes to the *Liquor Act*; making sure we are looking at reforms in workers compensation and work health; and implementing better protection for members of our LGBTI community.

There are significant bodies of work which are key election commitments from this government and timely updates for the government as a whole.

Mr PAECH: I note that Budget 2107–18 continues funding to the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Could you give us an update on how the tribunal is progressing?

Ms FYLES: Since its inception NTCAT has provided services and proven to be effective, and it has been well received by NTCAT users. It offers a centralised system for making and reviewing a wide range of administrative decisions and civil disputes. Its processes and procedures aim to be quick, responsive and

cost effective. This is a body to review government decisions. For example, with the Banned Drinker Register the NTCAT will have a function in providing that review capacity.

It will also have additional caseloads, which will include the Mental Health Review Tribunal matters. In Darwin and Alice Springs we will make sure the budget allocation is reviewed so NTCAT can accommodate its case volumes, but it is an important services to Territorians in reviewing those administrative decisions.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 1.2?

Ms NELSON: Attorney-General, you just touched on social justice reform, and since the commissioner is here, can you touch on what this government is actually doing about some of the social justice reforms and if we are on track, particularly with the LGBTI community?

Ms FYLES: There are a number of aspects to your question. Some of that will come out in further questioning, for example the *Anti-Discrimination Act* review. I am not sure if you would like me to answer in this output area.

Ms NELSON: I will hold it until the correct output area.

Madam CHAIR: There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 1.2, Legal Policy.

Output 1.3 – Crime Victims Services Unit

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Crime Victims Services Unit. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: There is an extra \$500 000 for the Victims of Crime fund. Can you talk about the government's commitment to supporting victims of crime?

Ms FYLES: That specific increase in Budget 2017–18 of \$500 000 is restoring money that was cut by the previous government. Since becoming Attorney-General I have been made aware not only of that cut, but the CLP also started a review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act* in 2013, but it never followed through. I am of the understanding that that body of work is now lost; it is too outdated.

We want to get that right; we want to work with victims of crime and make sure we have legislation and support programs. That has been evidenced through the youth victim-offender conferencing, which to date has been successful.

We are making sure we restore the funding that was cut by the previous government. Sadly, that body of work through the review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act* in 2013 was never followed through, but we are making sure we put words into action.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 1.3?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.3, Crime Victims Services Unit.

Output 1.4 – Criminal Justice Research and Statistics

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.4, Criminal Justice Research and Statistics. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, I note that there is a small increase in Budget 2017–18 for the Criminal Justice Research and Statistics unit. I assume they will use these funds to look at and evaluate things such as the Banned Drinker Register. Can you explain why it is important and how it is different to how the CLP formed alcohol policy?

Ms FYLES: It is important work, and I thank the Criminal Justice Research and Statistics unit, which provides information not only to my agency but across government. We need to make sure we analyse data and get things right.

We have made it clear that the Banned Drinker Register will be evaluated. I have been working on that and we will make sure there is clear analysis outlined before it is reintroduced on 1 September so Territorians can see if it is working and in what areas.

I have been speaking with emergency department physicians regarding how we can use some of their work without becoming too burdensome in that space. We do not want to see what we saw under the previous government in alcohol policy, so it is important that the unit is well resourced to provide data not only to this agency but across government.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.4 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Output 2.1 – Custodial Services

Madam CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Correctional Services, Output 2.1, Custodial Services. I note that while the Minister for Territory Families has overall responsibility for Youth Justice under the *Youth Justice Act*, the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice is responsible for Part 4 of the act relating to the Youth Justice Court.

Are there any questions? Member for Nhulunbuy, I believe you had a question in this output?

Mr GUYULA: Minister, can you advise the current rates of incarceration of Indigenous adults and juveniles in the NT? Due to the current anniversary of the 10-year intervention, could you also provide the same rates for 2007?

Ms FYLES: Thank you for your question. It is important data. The historical data from the March quarter 2007 was 1849.3 per 100 000, and the current quarter was 2892.7 per 100 000, so that is an increase. That is the adult figures. I do not have the information on youth today, but I would be happy to take that on notice and provide that to you.

Question on Notice No 3.3

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, please restate the question for the record.

Mr GUYULA: Minister, can you advise the current rates of incarceration of Indigenous adults and juveniles in the NT? Due to the current anniversary of the 10-year intervention, could you also provide the same rates for 2007?

Madam CHAIR: Do you accept the question.

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Nhulunbuy of the minister has been allocated the number 3.3.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions on Output 2.1?

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, why has the government provided \$500 000 for investment in the community support work parties, and does it go far enough to meet the community demand for this program?

Ms FYLES: That additional funding was provided because it was a shortfall left by the previous government, which was very disappointing. This program is important, particularly for the members of parliament who represent urban electorates. The support that those work parties provide to seniors and people who are unable to care for their gardens across our community is important. It allows people to stay in their homes for longer periods, particularly here in the north in the Wet Season when, literally, the grass grows every day and it must be mowed.

That was a funding shortfall left by the previous government, something that I am committed to. I note that program is, again, at capacity. It is something I have raised with the commissioner and I am working on making sure it is not just a budget resource, but that those prisoners going out on work parties are classified to do so and we have the appropriate people interacting. It is a small way in which they can repay the community as a consequence of their behaviour. They also provide support to major events and councils, so it is an important program. That additional funding this year was to cover the shortfall left by the previous government.

Mr PAECH: Could you please provide information on the Northern Territory correctional industries' programs, such as Work Not Play, which is funded \$1.85m in the current budget, and incentives such as Sentenced to a Job?

Ms FYLES: The work placement, training and development offered by NT Correctional Services and other employers in the community helps prisoners gain crucial skills and real-world employment experience, and assists them in reintegrating into the community to hopefully go on to be law-abiding citizens and lead productive lives.

Correctional industries are structured to make prisoners work-ready. Participation rates in industries and employment depend on the availability of opportunities within the correctional facility and externally. Prisoners need to be eligible, it is not something they can simply put their hand up one day and participate; there needs to be security rating, health status and their previous behaviour and offending history is taken into account.

The overall numbers of eligible prisoners participating in commercial employment was 89%, and 77% of those eligible were to be employed by Sentenced to a Job. Those figures dropped in the March quarter, but I have been advised that approximately 80% of prisoners are currently participating in Sentenced to a Job either in voluntary or paid employment, and 80% of those are Indigenous. There is a budget allocation in 2017–19 of \$1.85m for the Work Not Play program, which provides basic skills, literacy, numeracy and work readiness opportunities for prisoners.

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, are you able to provide us with the current rate of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Ms FYLES: Those were the figures I read out earlier to the Member for Nhulunbuy. I gave the 2007 figure first and then the 10-year 2017 figure of 2892.7 prisoners per 100 000.

Mr PAECH: Per 100 000, is that right?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions?

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, can you help me understand the difference between an escape and an absconder, and what measure is being taken to minimise these future incidents?

Ms FYLES: I will hand to the commissioner to make sure I get the technical definition correct. I do have an understanding of the difference, but I will ask Mark Payne, Commissioner for NT Correctional Services to respond.

Mr PAYNE: The definition of 'prisoner escapes' is as follows: secure perimeter escape or escapes from within a secure prison facility or precinct regardless of whether there was a breach of a physical barrier. Open perimeter escapes are escapes from within an open prison facility regardless of whether there was a breach of a physical barrier.

Secure is more in line with, say, the Darwin or Alice Springs correctional centres; open perimeter is more in line with our work camps at Barkly or Batchelor. We also have what is classified as 'absconds' by prisoners. Absconds include where a prisoner may be on unescorted leave, that is, work release or day release, and a prisoner who fails to return or who is found at an unlawful location outside the permit. An abscond can also be while outside of a prison facility under custodial supervision, such as a work party while participating in events such as sporting events outside the perimeter, but not under one-to-one supervision.

It can also occur outside the perimeter of the centre but within the centre precinct, as in the case of the Darwin Correctional Precinct, which is quite large and occupies one area. It includes walk-offs from work camps. Those are the differences.

Mr PAECH: Commissioner Payne, in a setting such as Central Australia, if I was at the cottage facility at the Alice Springs Correctional Centre and I left that facility, would I be escaping?

Mr PAYNE: You would be an open perimeter escape, yes.

Mr PAECH: Thank you for clarifying. Attorney-General, while we are talking about the correctional centres can you provide detail on prison bus services for Alice Springs and Darwin correctional facilities.

Ms FYLES: The new correctional facility at Holtze, built by the previous Labor Government—we built a bus stop. It was the previous government and minister that did not feel it warranted a bus service. It is important to note, in relation to providing a bus service, that there are staff working there and people who visit. It is important to provide access, especially when you look at reintegrating prisoners into community. Evidence shows if people have a strong relationship with family members they are more likely to reintegrate successfully.

The Salvation Army began a charity trial to and from the correctional facility on 5 May. On 30 June last year we saw a contract awarded of \$27 500 to a six-month pilot period. There has been another additional grant from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to allow the bus service to continue. We are also planning the ongoing makeup of the bus service; is it better off being a regular passenger route or are we better off using a provider such as the Salvation Army which can provide additional support? That is in relation to the Darwin facility.

Alice Springs has a bus service; the Prison Fellowship is funded \$15 000 over a three-year period to provide bus transport to and from the Alice Springs correctional facility each Saturday and Sunday. I note there are costs for those wishing to use the services, but they are normal costs. We acknowledge both correctional facilities are far from Alice Springs and Darwin city centres, particularly for those traveling from remote areas with the additional burden of taxi fares to the facility.

We are ensuring access is provided, noting that there is evidence around reintegration with family members in relation to bus services.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.1, Custodial Services.

Output 2.2 – Community Corrections

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 2.2, Community Corrections. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, can you explain the significant increase in the budget allocation for electronic monitoring for the upcoming financial year and how this increase will benefit the community?

Ms FYLES: The total number of community based offenders on electronic monitoring has significantly increased each year since its implementation in the Northern Territory. The increase in funding is expansion of the trial and those eligible to utilise the program. Looking at the COMMIT program, in regard to providing for that program, further electronic monitoring is why there has been an increase in the budget.

Mr PAECH: When talking about the increase in the budget, is there an estimated capacity of individuals who will be able to take up this component within Community Corrections?

Ms FYLES: I will ask the commissioner to provide specific further detail.

Mr PAYNE: An element of money provided in the budget, \$3.1m, goes to the continuation of the contract for services, which is \$1.7m, and \$1.4m relates to staffing components associated with continuing the program.

In answer to your question specifically, the numbers have risen fairly dramatically since the time of introduction. In 2014–15 there were 78 people on the program or electronically monitored. In 2015–16 there was a total of 184, and we are currently, year to date, at 246.

The funding that has been provided allows us to continue to monitor those 246 beyond the financial year, but it also allows us to continue to expand that. At this stage we are looking at being able to monitor up to 300 in the future.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 2.2, Community Corrections.

Output 2.3 – Parole Board

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output 2.3, Parole Board. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.3 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – COURT AND TRIBUNAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Higher Courts

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output Group 3.0, Court and Tribunal Support Services, Output 3.1, Higher Courts. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise which community legal services will be funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services and where these services are based?

Ms FYLES: Similar to when I answered the question previously, the Indigenous funding agreements do not come through the Northern Territory Government, so we do not have those specific figures. The COAG funding for domestic violence under the national summit that was at the end of last year provides an additional \$1.394m for the Legal Aid Commission to provide programs in Darwin and Katherine. There was an additional \$450 000 for the women's safety package to extend that out for another year.

I will take the question on notice to come back to you to confirm the actual specifics. It is quite complex because some comes through us and some go straight to those organisations.

Question on Notice No 3.4

Madam CHAIR: Can you please restate the question for the record, Member for Nhulunbuy?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise which community legal services will be funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services and where these services are based?

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nhulunbuy of the Attorney-General has been allocated the number 3.4.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on that output?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise how much the Northern Territory Government budgeted for alternative dispute resolution services, which services receive these funds and where they are based?

Ms FYLES: There is \$460 000 for the Community Justice Centre funding. There is also Commonwealth funding to pilot family dispute resolution, but we do not know what component the Northern Territory will get of that. There would be a very small component under the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal. It comes under those elements and \$460 000 is for the Community Justice Centre.

Mr GUYULA: Last month several people from Milingimbi travelled to Ramingining by boat to attend court. Due to the tidal conditions and pick-up transport they were late in arriving and warrants had been issued by

the court. Could you advise what funds have been allocated in this budget and what action is being taken to enhance access to the courts to create equal access for everyone?

Ms FYLES: There is budget allocation for taking the courts to remote areas, providing access outside of the main centres. This is something specifically that the Aboriginal Justice Agreement will be involved with. Overcoming hurdles such as that, where people are genuinely trying to engage with the court process, making sure there are clear pathways—I assume from that justice agreement there will be recommendations for funding. I will be happy to provide you with a further update. I also encourage you to be involved in the body of work on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise of funds that will be provided to Indigenous leaders and elders to assist them to build safer, fairer and stronger communities?

Ms FYLES: I think that is a very broad question that steps away not just from my portfolio within justice, but steps into my other portfolio of Health, and broadens out into education and whole-of-government. This government is committed to working on that—in the area of early childhood we are making sure we give kids the best start in life, working through Nurse-Family Partnerships and Families as First Teachers and other important, intensive programs.

In healthcare, for example in my portfolio of Health—transitioning clinics to community control. We have 70 clinics across the Northern Territory, 20 of which are operated by community-based organisations, and we have a strong commitment to expanding that. We know that when Indigenous Territorians are in charge of their health we see better outcomes.

It is not something I can directly pin in this budget in regard to allocation, but very broadly across this budget we are committed to making sure we have Indigenous Territorians involved in taking charge of their future.

Mr GUYULA: I am not sure whether this one goes into this output, but could you advise which service body will be establishing a model to provide options of the role of traditional ATSI leaders into the Local Court system and decision-making process? How much has been budgeted for consultation across the NT with ATSI leadership?

Ms FYLES: There are a number of elements in answering your question. Obviously the ATSI unit we have established within government after coming to government last year and the consultations and body of work that will undertake is broader, looking to the Uluru convention and reflecting upon those national discussions. I know the Chief Minister is awaiting the report, which will be handed to the Prime Minister and the federal Leader of the Opposition. Then the Northern Territory Government will review that full body of work in that report.

The question is quite broad to answer that question, acknowledging the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the ATSI unit within this agency, but then also looking towards, more broadly, that recognition in the constitution.

Mr GUYULA: Thank you. That is all.

Mr PAECH: Following on from the Member for Nhulunbuy in relation to Output 3.1, Attorney-General, could you please tell us about the \$3m the Northern Territory Government is investing in Alice Springs to create the Northern Territory's first domestic and family violence court?

Ms FYLES: Yes, of course. I spoke about this earlier in answering questions. It is important that we work across government and service delivery. I was pleased to introduce legislation late last year that was recommended by Coroner Greg Cavanagh regarding body-worn cameras and encouraging the use of that footage.

The Alice Springs domestic violence court provides a whole-of-court approach to dealing with the issue of domestic and family violence, and focuses on victim safety and offender accountability. This funding will go towards making sure the physical layout of the court will be refurbished to address concerns such as the inability to separate perpetrators and offenders in the court space, the lack of separate access to court space for victims of domestic and family violence, currently there is no space for children and there is an absence of interview rooms—overcoming a number of difficulties in dealing with these issues.

This is a trial and something we are very committed to. We are looking at how this delivers to provide better services and greater accountability for perpetrators of domestic violence and support to those victims and what we can translate that to Territory-wide.

Madam CHAIR: If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 3.1

Output 3.2 – Lower Courts and Tribunals

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Lower Courts and Tribunals. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: I want to follow up on the improvements being made to Territory courts in an around the Katherine region and Tennant Creek. I believe they were part of the Northern Territory Government's economic stimulus?

Ms FYLES: Budget 2017–18 provides for a repairs and maintenance package worth \$6.5m to be spent throughout Territory courts. This is important because it provides better services for our staff to work in and it provides the general public with improved services through facility upgrades. Of this, \$2m was stimulus funding.

We acknowledge that the Northern Territory is going through tough economic times and, as a government, we are committed to supporting the economy and Territory businesses. We know we have a very bright future. We need to keep that workforce capacity here into the future.

Of that funding, \$1.7m is through our regions—for the Alice Springs lower court, the Katherine court and the Tennant Creek court—making sure we upgrade those facilities with repainting and general refurbishment to keep them adequately upgraded.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on that output?

That concludes consideration of Output 3.2, Lower Courts and Tribunals.

Output 3.3 – Fines Recovery Unit

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output 3.3, Fines Recovery Unit. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 3.3, Fines Recovery Unit.

Output 3.4 – Integrated Justice Information System

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output 3.4, Integrated Justice Information System. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 3.4, Integrated Justice Information System, and Output Group 3.0, Court and Tribunal Support Services.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS

Output 4.1 – Director of Public Prosecutions

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output Group 4.0, Director of Public Prosecutions, Output 4.1, Director of Public Prosecutions. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.1, Director of Public Prosecutions and Output Group 4.0, Director of Public Prosecutions.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – INDEPENDENT OFFICES

Output 5.1 – Consumer Affairs

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output Group 5.0, Independent Offices, Output 5.1, Consumer Affairs. Are there any questions?

Ms FYLES: Madam Chair, I have Sandy Otto, who is the Deputy Commissioner for Northern Territory Consumer Affairs, joining me at the table.

Mr PAECH: Consumer Affairs has been given additional funding in this budget. Can you tell us about the Territory-wide Aboriginal Consumer Affairs project they are using this funding for?

Ms FYLES: Consumer Affairs has undertaken Indigenous consumer awareness video projects, which are in their final stages. Eight videos will be produced to enhance, particularly for Indigenous Territorians, consumer awareness.

The videos have been produced with the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation, and they have employed Indigenous film and sound crews and actors from a range of remote communities. These videos will ensure Territorians are aware of their rights as consumers.

Consumer Affairs also undertakes a broad range of educational and compliance activities across the NT, regular activities on Facebook, talkback radio and press and television events. It is very important that Territorians are aware of their consumer rights, particularly in the remote context, and that we empower people with information so they do not fall victim of scams. We also have ongoing trader visits to encourage compliance with legislation and encourage the public to name and shame the traders that do not uphold Consumer Affairs—I am not sure if Sandy has anything to add.

Ms OTTO: One of the great things about this video project is the uptake of Indigenous people watching them on the YouTube channel. We have had nearly 20 000 views so far, and we have had calls to our call centre directly from Aboriginal people in communities who think they have been scammed.

Mr PAECH: Just following on from that, in the remote setting—I represent a remote electorate where telecommunications is an issue for a number of communities. Is there a format that is sent out to the community to play in remote shops and so forth on a USB or something of that nature?

Ms OTTO: Absolutely. Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation stores, outback stores, have rolling videos in the stores with our phone number. That is where most people get our number in order to call us.

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, I understand the government is developing a new website to inform Territorians about the current fuel prices across the Territory. I just want to get my head around how much the budget has allocated for this project and what the benefit will be for Territorians who visit that website.

Ms FYLES: The Territory Legislative Assembly passed legislation in May 2017 to establish MyFuel NT, and Budget 2017–18 allocated \$250 000 to provide for the maintenance of a website to administer and enforce this important legislation.

It is important to note that the local media drove a campaign some time ago around fuel prices. Evidence shows that consumers can make a difference. The aim of that legislation and the program is that people can see on an app or website what fuel prices are and they can make a decision whether to fuel up in town Palmerston, Casuarina, and likewise, when they are travelling in regional areas, they can make that decision to either fuel up in Katherine or hold on until a little further down the track.

It is providing consumers with that information off the back of that media campaign that highlighted fuel prices. It is an important program, and it is one of the recommendations of the ACCC in its report into the Darwin petrol market that was undertaken in November 2015. This scheme will be fully operational by 1 November; the legislation has passed the Assembly and we are working with fuel stations and companies to make sure they comply, and this budget allocation will provide for that.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output? That concludes consideration of Output 5.1, Consumer Affairs.

Output 5.2 — Anti-Discrimination Commission

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 5.2, Anti-Discrimination Commission. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, there is a decrease in funding for the Anti-Discrimination Commission from 2016–17 to 2017–18; can you explain why? I am curious to know if it is related to the alcohol mandatory treatment program winding back.

Ms FYLES: I would just like to acknowledge for the committee that Sally Sievers, our Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, has joined me at the table. I thank Sally and her team for their ongoing work in supporting Territorians.

You are correct; there has been a decrease in the funding and that is reflecting a redirection of approximately \$680 000 from the community visitor program funding associated with alcohol mandatory treatment. Putting my other hat on as the Health minister, we released the report recently into alcohol mandatory treatment program, showing that it was clearly a failed policy of the previous government. This is simply acknowledging the cessation of that program.

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, I am interested, as an Aboriginal man and a gay man, in asking you about some of the discrimination laws you expect will be reviewed this coming year.

Ms FYLES: Thank you. It is really important that our anti-discrimination legislation meets current community expectations and is contemporary. In Coconut Grove, in my electorate, somebody has put a rainbow—they have literally knitted a rainbow sock around a beautiful tree. That highlights to the community that times have changed and we need to make sure our anti-discrimination legislation provides for that.

We believe that discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, race, socioeconomic status and disability is wrong, and we will not accept it. We committed strongly before the election that we would examine and reform Territory legislation to ensure equality of rights for all Territorians. Since becoming part of the government and a minister I have received advice from the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission and the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice on existing anti-discrimination legislation in the Territory, noting that this legislation dates back to 1993 and other than some minor procedural changes the act has never been subject to review.

We will review this act and include anti-vilification protections. I will just ask Sally if she has anything further to add.

Ms SIEVERS: There are a number of areas; one is that the legislation will hopefully be updated to reflect the sex discrimination terminology in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex. That is from 2013 to make the NT legislation compliant with that. The second, as the minister has said, is to include wide-sweeping vilification powers, including in relation to gender identity, as places like Tasmania have.

The third and fourth areas are in relation to taking away exclusion to access IVF for same sex couples, which is an historical issue. The other is to consider the religious exemptions around accepting students and staff. They are the areas which are under consideration in the discussion paper to deal with LGBTIQ issues.

Mr PAECH: I note that some time ago I wrote to you, Attorney-General, regarding the historical convictions of Territorians who were charged with homosexuality, and that is something I hope we can continue to pursue.

I have a question which may be directed toward you, Attorney-General, or Ms Sievers. Is it possible to get the number of cases in the Northern Territory where some form of discrimination has been reported?

Ms SIEVERS: Is that specifically in relation to LGBTIQ issues?

Mr PAECH: No, I am just interested in the number of complaints or issues that are reported with the commission.

Ms SIEVERS: There are two ways in which we do that. We have an inquiry line which is a high number, over 300. This year the complaints we received, and we do not have all the complaints for this year, range somewhere between 150 up to 190. At the moment we are sitting at about 163 complaints for the year.

Ms UIBO: Attorney-General, what level of resources is allocated for the investigations of any complaints with the Anti-Discrimination Commission?

Ms FYLES: I will ask Sally to respond to that.

Ms SIEVERS: It is not specific; the allocation for our budget is a global amount. The prioritised area in the budget is resolving complaints over other work. If complaint numbers are as high, as they are at the moment, and we are looking at doing evaluations, we have cut back on doing public appearance work. That is one of the statutory functions which have time frames and direct impacts.

We could always do with greater allocation of resources so we can do the promotion and resolution, but it is not broken down. Out of the staff we have, there are two complaints staff members, and that is the bulk of the work they do.

Ms UIBO: How many staff in total work with the Anti-Discrimination Commission?

Ms SIEVERS: There are six who work just in the anti-discrimination component of the work, and there are a similar number who work for the community visitor program, which you have probably heard about, who do the low-level resolution of complaints, such as those detained in mental health facilities, secure disability services and—up until it was withdrawn—the alcohol mandatory treatment.

Ms UIBO: I am interested to know how the Anti-Discrimination Commission is catching up with technology in regard to social media and any complaints they may be receiving through social media about discrimination and what services they are able to supply to those with complaints.

Ms SIEVERS: We have a website where most of our complaints are received. We try to keep active on Facebook. The aim of our Facebook page is to push out stories mainstream media does not pick up. All the centres in the Northern Territory I follow and push out their material. I try to be as active as possible on Twitter to let people know about the issues.

The year before last we were able to create iTalk resources, which I was able to give to the Member for Namatjira to play on a USB in his office. They are also on iTalk and our website. They are about identifying discrimination for Aboriginal people. It came out of Central Australia in five Indigenous languages then was translated into some Top End languages. They received great support. They are available online and we have a number of USBs with that material on it.

During that campaign a rap song was put together at Yirrkala dealing with the issues people were experiencing. It is about resourcing. If there are resources available we will put them into using social media. Social media is a fantastic way to inform people about their rights. The iTalk campaign is for people to identify discrimination and say, 'What would you do; what would you say?' to empower people, but more could be done.

Madam CHAIR: If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 5.2.

Output 5.3 – Information and Public Interest Disclosures Commission

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 5.3, Information and Public Interest Disclosures Commission. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Budget 2107–18 includes funding for the new ICAC, which will replace the existing Commissioner for Public Interest Disclosures. Could you talk us through that and the work the government is doing to ensure there is a smooth transition with the new process.

Ms FYLES: I note that Brenda Monaghan, the Information and Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner, has joined me at the table.

The draft legislation is on track for introduction to parliament in the second half of this year. The ICAC will replace the Commissioner for Information and Public Interest Disclosures. Transitional provisions will be put in place to ensure that ongoing investigations can continue. This will be covered in the legislation.

It is an important part of the process that we transition from this model to the ICAC. We want to make that as smooth as possible so the ICAC can begin its operations as soon as possible.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 5.3.

Output 5.4 – Registrar-General

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 5.4, Registrar-General. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 5.4.

Output 5.5 – Public Trustee

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 5.5, Public Trustee. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 5.5.

I note that questions regarding Output 5.6, Health and Community Services Complaints Commission will be answered by the Minister for Health later today.

Output 5.7 – Children’s Commissioner

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output 5.7, Children’s Commissioner.

While the Minister for Territory Families has overall responsibility for the care and protection of children under the *Care and Protection of Children Act*, I note that the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice is responsible for Part 3.3 of the act relating to the prevention of child deaths.

Are there any questions?

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.7.

Output 5.8 – Office of Parliamentary Counsel

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 5.8, Office of Parliamentary Counsel. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 5.8 and Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – REGULATORY SERVICES

Output 6.1 – Licensing NT

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 6.0, Regulatory Services, Output 6.1, Licensing NT. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Licensing NT is implementing the Banned Drinker Register and has received additional funding to do so. Attorney-General, could you give us an update on how the government is assisting businesses in bringing back the Banned Drinker Register?

Ms FYLES. I note that Cindy Bravos, the Director-General of Licensing NT, has joined us at the table.

We went to the election with a strong commitment to return the Banned Drinker Register, the scanning of the identification and a suite of measures that are health-based, which I will talk more about during my Health portfolio.

Of all alcohol sold in the Northern Territory, 70% is takeaway. We need to work with those businesses. They provide for Territorians who drink responsibly to access alcohol.

Alcohol causes so much harm in our community. The figure of \$640m in 2009 is the economic cost to our community. From 1 September Territorians will need to show identification when they are purchasing takeaway alcohol. We have been working with businesses to make sure that message has been getting out.

The team at Licensing NT began auditing equipment when the BDR was pulled last time. Some equipment was left behind in shops, other equipment was returned to government. They started the process of engaging with businesses around auditing.

I have been meeting businesses to work with them. They will be providing the Banned Drinker Register on behalf of Territorians in their outlets.

We are looking towards a mobile technology. We note that in drive-through bottle shops in particular we will need to make sure the register is as easy to implement as possible. We will have the Banned Drinker Register from 1 September whereby people will need to produce identification to purchase alcohol. That will be scanned and it will show a red screen or a green screen. None of the information will be kept and will be about whether at that point in time they on the register or not. We will be working with businesses to make sure we are continually updating the BDR in the roll-out in businesses across the Territory.

Ms NELSON: There has been some public criticism about the Banned Drinker Register not being rolled out to include pubs and hotels. Could you explain why?

Ms FYLES: In terms of accessing alcohol in the Northern Territory—and I point back to that figure of 70% takeaway when somebody drinks on premises—there are a number of other conditions of licence they need to uphold, including the responsible service of alcohol. We acknowledge that takeaway alcohol is a huge issue in the Northern Territory, and this is a point of intervention at the supply of that takeaway alcohol.

We have a range of suites in the area of therapeutic rehabilitation for people, but we need to start to tackle the issue of alcohol. I note that the committee would be well aware of the alcohol review that is being undertaken, the independent review being led by former Chief Justice Trevor Riley, and I encourage all Territorians to provide their feedback into that, that is, school or community groups or individuals.

We need to look at how we provide alcohol in the Northern Territory for those who drink responsibly, but acknowledge the enormous harm it causes. We have frontline health workers and police dealing with the consequences the impact on business every day.

The focus of the BDR is at the point of sale of takeaway alcohol, but we have that broader review taking place.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.1.

Output 6.2 – NT WorkSafe

Madam CHAIR: We will now consider output 6.2, NT WorkSafe. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Workers' safety is vital in creating a safe and fair work place right across the country. What actions has NT WorkSafe taken to protect workers and promote safe workplaces?

Ms FYLES: I acknowledge Stephen Gelding, Executive Director of NT WorkSafe, who has joined me at the table. It is important that we have safe and fair workplaces. Every Territorian has the right to go to work, and they have the right to come home safely to their family.

In terms of economic prosperity, it is important that we have safe work places. When concerns are raised about incidents or conditions we need to make sure NT WorkSafe has the ability to investigate and take appropriate action.

I missed the second part of your question.

Mr PAECH: I just want to know what NT WorkSafe practices have been taken to make sure we provide those environments for Territorians.

Ms FYLES: I can provide a little further detail. From 1 July 2016 to 31 March, NT WorkSafe has had nine comprehensive investigations into notifiable incidences. These investigations are authorised by the NT WorkSafe Director of Operations. When an incident, accident or a complaint occurs they warrant the use of higher order enforcement tools and these investigations result in a brief being prepared, which is also forwarded to legal counsel for advice.

I have a number of statistics. For example, from 1 July, 2016 to 31 March there were 4986 inspections or workplace visits to 2332 individual businesses. There were 112 improvement notices issued to enforce compliance with the legislation and we had 117 notices for activities that occurred at a workplace that involved a serious risk to the health and safety of a person.

There is significant work in the area of NT WorkSafe in regard to making sure business and workplaces understand their role in safety, and that there is a process for members of the public and employees to place complaints.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 6.2 and Output Group 6.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE
Output 7.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: We will now move on to consider Output Group 7.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 7.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 7.1 and Output Group 7.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

This now concludes consideration of all output groups relating to the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who provided advice to the Attorney-General today.

We will now take a two-minute break before the committee moves on to consider outputs relating to the Department of Health.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Health.

Ms FYLES: I would like to introduce the Department of Health officials who are at the table with me: Professor Catherine Stoddart is the Chief Executive Officer for the Department of Health; and Ms Janet Anderson is the Deputy Chief Executive Officer. We also have financial officers and Top End and Central Australian staff. I will introduce them as necessary to respond to questions.

The Department of Health has had significant changes over the last 12 months. It has continued its journey to consolidate the transformation of the health system in the Northern Territory. The *Health Services Act* commenced on 1 July 2014 and established the Top End Health Service and the Central Australian Health Service. Since then the transition has continued and, as a government, we recently announced that on 30 June the boards that support those two services will be disbanded.

It was noted in the national reform agreement in 2011, when signed, that the Northern Territory has a very unique context for delivering health services and, essentially, those services are well established. Therefore the boards will roll into a period where we will have a service administrator that will provide support. In time we will remedy the legislation to acknowledge that the transformation in Territory health services are well established.

The savings from those boards is around \$1m to \$1.5m each year. In Health it is always a balance between providing the appropriate administrative support, but ensuring as much expenditure as possible is available for frontline health services for Territorians.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the hard work of those boards and the chairs of those boards, and that it is now the next phase for health services in the Northern Territory.

We will be establishing expressions of interests, which are open to have councils, a community council and health advisory council that will support the Top End and Central Australian services, and we encourage

community members to apply. Anyone who is a health consumer, former health worker or is passionate about health is encouraged to apply for those positions. They will be for Top End and Central Australia.

We are also in the process of establishing what is termed a 'medical senate'—Western Australia has this model—which provides for the capacity of our experienced, hard-working clinicians right across the Territory, for our doctors in main hospitals to our Aboriginal health workers to be involved and provide advice to the chief executive and me from a clinical perspective.

Those are exciting changes to NT Health, and we are looking forward to continuing that and having community involvement.

The 2016–17 financial year saw a number of infrastructure projects across the Northern Territory which will provide efficiency for health services as well as providing additional amenity for health workers, patients and families. The largest of those is the \$64m upgrade of the Royal Darwin Hospital, which will continue through the coming financial year, and I acknowledge the federal government's contribution in that space. I was pleased to not only meet the federal Minister for Health last week, but the federal minister for regional infrastructure development, which is where the funding for the PET scanner project has been sourced from. It is very important that we, as a government, have those strong relationships with the federal government.

There have been a number of upgrades at RDH, and patients and staff are starting to notice those changes, although there is a bit more work around the front entrance which is impacting—I thank everyone for their patience and understanding while those vital upgrades take place.

Budget 2017–18 introduces a new output group, the Office of the Public Guardian, in recognition of the establishment of an independent statutory Office of the Public Guardian, subsequent to the enactment of the *Guardianship of Adults Act*.

As occurs each year, the department is negotiating with the Australian Government and other external funding providers on a range of agreements that will affect funding going into 2017–18, and we expect those agreements to be reached shortly, but there may be variations which will be incorporated into the department's 2017–18 budget. That will be acknowledged through the Treasurer's mid-year report.

Some highlights across Health—we have \$36m over two years to support the commissioning of the Palmerston Regional Hospital, and this includes the full fit-out and purchasing of furniture. That is an exciting project that has come a long way since the debacle that we saw under the former government, when holes were dug and then filled back in with special concrete. It will be exciting to share with the residents of that area. It is a construction site at present, but I am working with the department of Infrastructure to provide for the community so they can start to see the shape it is taking. There is a roof on it and internal fit-outs have begun. It is exciting.

I am pleased this government has committed to delivering the rehabilitation pool at that site, which will complement the rehabilitation and geriatric services there, and provide for the people of Palmerston and the regional area. It will also help RDH and release the pressure placed on that hospital.

There is significant allocation in the budget for specialised alcohol treatment services to assist people who abuse alcohol and have dependency issues, building on the back of the reintroduction of the Banned Drinker Register.

Madam Chair, I know you are passionate about youth substance abuse, particularly in remote communities. We have funded \$3m over four years to trial housing and accommodation support in Darwin and Palmerston for mental health clients, which is particularly important, making sure people have a roof over their head.

We have a significant allocation of \$9.7m to replace the Nightcliff renal facility, which is well beyond its use-by date. We will replace that with a purpose-built facility which will provide support. Once we have our renal strategy going forward, we will look at services across the Northern Territory so that those who need to access renal services can access them close to home.

The NDIS is a significant component of my ministerial portfolio, and I am working on the bilateral agreement between the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government to transition approximately 6500 Territorians to that scheme.

We have a number of health services that Budget 2017–18 supports for the health and wellbeing of Territorians. I hope through questioning today I am able to highlight those.

It is an exciting time for health in the Northern Territory. I am very proud to be the Minister for Health and I thank not only our hard-working administrative staff, many of whom have been involved in this process and are here today, but all our staff across Northern Territory health services.

We deliver health services through five hospitals, 70 remote clinics, 20 of which are community controlled, and we have strong plans to transition more community to being community led across 1.4 million square kilometres. So it is a huge task. We work with the non-government sector. It is something I am very proud to be the responsible minister.

I was very pleased with the significant investment from the government of \$259m for providing for the Core Clinical Systems Renewal Program, something that was not fully funded by the previous government. It will provide electronic records across Northern Territory Health and clinical assistance. We will have our community clinics right through to our acute ICU using the same system and being able to access information that will improve the health of Territorians and make the job of very hard-working health staff easier.

The Health budget is the largest of any Northern Territory agency with \$1.57bn. As a government we are continuing our commitment to bolster health services for all Territorians.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions relating to the Minister for Health's statement?

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017-18 as they relate to the Department of Health. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

Are there any questions from members of the public?

Ms FYLES: Madam Chair, could I take a moment, as I did with my previous portfolio. We received a number of written questions and they have been provided to the public through the written questions process.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I have a couple of questions from members of the public. The first question is from the NT Council of Social Services.

Alcohol continues to cost the Territory over \$4000 per adult per year from the harms experienced within the community. This compares with just over \$900 per adult throughout the rest of Australia. It has been noted in other jurisdictions that we will not police our way out of this ongoing health and social issue. Treatment has been suggested to have a 7:1 return on investment, compared to policing with a 2:1 return on investment.

In this budget there is an estimated \$17.2m committed for the development of the alcohol framework and Banned Drinker Register. Is this included in the alcohol and other drugs budget in health funding?

Ms FYLES: Yes, this budget allocation includes \$15.5m, which will develop specialist assessment and withdrawal services and create integrated pathways to treatment services and follow-up services.

We know the former model of alcohol mandatory treatment was a failed model. It was hugely expensive to the taxpayer, but also, in comparison to services offered by the non-government sector, it was substantially more.

In making sure we have clear pathways for those who misuse alcohol, in the Darwin area we will be co-locating the sobering-up shelter with clinical assessment and treatment beds, working with people's primary health providers to help them turn their lives around and deal with alcohol issues.

This funding of \$15.5m will include expanded capacity for rehabilitation services. It will also provide for a banned drinker registrar and specialist clinicians. Then there is additional funding that goes towards the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, which I was speaking about earlier, for the establishment of the BDR and the roll-out of the technology.

Madam CHAIR: The next question is also from NTCOSS.

The budget estimate for 2016–17 for Health for community treatment and extended care for Alcohol and Other Drugs was \$38.3m. The PEFO estimate was \$39.8m, with the budget for 2017–18 showing a reduction to \$37.3m. With the decrease in budget there is also an increase in output expectations from government and non-government services.

The 2016–17 outputs for client assessment and episodes of treatment is \$7874 for 2016–17, and for 2017–18 it is \$10 441. This is almost a 50% increase on the 2016–17 outputs, with a 3% reduction in the budget to provide these services. Specifically in the NGO sector, episodes of care are increased from the 2016–17 estimate of \$6456 to the 2017–18 estimate of \$7272. This is a 13% increase in expectation of the service provision.

Will funding to the alcohol and other drugs sector remain static, increase or decrease, and by how much with the increased expectation of deliverables?

Ms FYLES: Alcohol and other drugs sector funding is listed in Budget Paper No 3. We will be getting more cases for less. Alcohol mandatory treatment was a hugely expensive model with low utilisation rates. BDR treatment is based on 40 rehabilitation beds at a lower cost than the alcohol mandatory treatment.

The Banned Drinker Register is a voluntary model which is more effective to help problem drinkers wanting to address the harms of alcohol in their lives. The BDR is based on a more efficient community model of care; I alluded to that in my previous answer. In terms of alcohol mandatory treatment it was three to four times the cost of a community-based organisation providing alcohol rehabilitation. We had low utilisation rates. I do not have the specific figures in front of me, but it was something we were clear about before the election. We believed it was an expensive model with low outcomes. The subsequent report we released into alcohol mandatory treatment a couple months ago showed the previous government failed to deliver.

In terms of the Banned Drinker Register it will be a more efficient model of community care providing integration in the Top End and making sure there is bed space available across the Territory for those wanting to deal with their alcohol issues. It is designed for someone who has a problem with drinking, to capture them at the point of crisis in the hours after they may have been referred to a sobering up shelter. It gives them a case worker to work with them to help deal with their issues and link back to their primary healthcare provider, whether in a remote community or urban context.

I hope that explains the funding variation.

Madam CHAIR: Are alcohol and other drug services being offered five-year funding agreements consistent with the government's pledge?

Ms FYLES: Absolutely. We have committed to working with non-government organisations to have five-year funding agreements wherever possible. We believe giving non-government organisations the stability and assurance they have funding they can get on with the job of delivering services.

When they were on a one-year funding model they spend a couple months preparing their next funding agreement and worrying about their funding. They could not provide certainty to staff. We believe stepping up to a five-year model provides encouragement. If someone is looking at moving from down south or wants to leave government or the private sector to work for a community-based organisation they have that assurance. It proves certainty for programs.

Some NGOs have asked me to vary their length of contract and we are happy to work with them on that model. Others, as their contracts are coming for renewal, we are working with them to push them out to a five-year funding model.

Madam CHAIR: The NTCOSS question has one last part: for those services with a one-year contract—you have just answered that question, so I will leave that one.

Ms FYLES: I can provide a bit more information. There are rare circumstances where it might be a short-term funding agreement. It may be a specific one-off program the department in the Territory may be looking at, or it may be funded through the federal agency for a short period. That would be the only time you would see funding arrangements outside the five-year cycle. We work with organisations.

The previous government highlighted at estimates—performance and governance issues are managed outside of funding agreements. We need to have faith in our NGO sector and the processes around government payments to ensure they are supported. They have to comply with different acts; they have to provide annual reports; they need to have their finances audited. This is about providing certainty.

Look across the Territory; there are non-government organisations we have funded for 20 to 30 years. Each year or two we make them reapply for our funding. That is where this five-year funding agreement model tackles that so we can get on with the job of delivering.

Madam CHAIR: The next question is from Making Justice Work. Does the \$0.8m for youth substance misuse include specific service delivery for volatile substance abuse? If so, how much is this allocation, and in what towns and communities is it to be delivered?

Ms FYLES: The new funding for youth alcohol and other drugs rehabilitation services includes a number of elements. It is looking at integrated models of services. Approval for funding is under consideration and we are looking to finalising that and rolling it out in early in 2017–18.

Madam CHAIR: The next question I have is from AMANT. What funding has been spent on tobacco control given that the Northern Territory has just been awarded the AMA/ACOSH Dirty Ashtray Award for the second year in a row?

Ms FYLES: It was very disappointing to receive that Dirty Ashtray Award. As a minister I was not pleased about it.

Tobacco remains one of the greatest single risk factors contributing to the Northern Territory's burden of chronic disease and injury. It is estimated to be responsible for 4% of hospitalisations in the Northern Territory.

Smoking rates amongst Territorians are much higher than the rest of Australia, with over a third of our population smoking. The national average is much lower than that at 12%.

It was disappointing for me as a shadow minister to see the former government overturn many of the tobacco control gains that had been introduced by previous governments. We are on the implementation and delivery of education and cessation programs, particularly in remote communities for our Aboriginal population.

We have free quit resources as well as support and assistance to develop smoking management plans. Our government is committed to improving community amenity. We will be looking at increasing buffer zones at community facilities with a 10-metre buffer from the boundary and entry area of community events and facilities.

It is a common complaint that I get that a venue is no-smoking, for example a shopping centre, but you have to walk through a wall of smoke to get into it. This will be looking at dealing with that.

I am looking forward to working with the AMA and other peak bodies on what we can do in the Territory to make legislation, to protect Territorians who do not smoke, but also encourage those who do to give up. They can quit and they need support.

It is an ongoing issue and we want to make sure people have those resources to be able to quit.

Madam CHAIR: The next question is from Making Justice Work, Sam Bowden. Through-care services for adults and children exiting mental health and alcohol and other drugs treatment facilities are critical to reintegrating people into their community and supporting them to remain in their community. What funding has been allocated to through-care services in urban and remote regions of the Territory for adults and children exiting mental health and alcohol and other drugs treatment services?

Ms FYLES: It is an important question. Providing a through-care approach is something that Northern Territory Health values. We want to make sure people who exit an in-patient or a secure facility—non-

custodial supervision order clients on release from custody are considered for mental health and supported accommodation. Community and mental health and alcohol and other drugs teams are equipped to provide a seamless model of care for those clients transitioning from in-patient or secure setting to community-based settings. Supported accommodation is funded by the Department of Health and the health services to try to help provide that pathway for people so they can have through-care. We know it is a barrier to successful transition into community.

Madam CHAIR: The next question is from Leanne Hayes of Rocky Hill Table Grapes. Why spend so much on bringing back the Banned Drinker Register when we saw little or no change at all when it was introduced last time?

Ms Evans-Hayes states there were a number of technical challenges with the previous BDR system and that people with alcohol problems still sought to access alcohol through alternative means.

She also asked why we have so many grog outlets in Alice Springs.

Ms FYLES: Alcohol is a huge issue in the Northern Territory. A huge amount of money is spent on the impact of alcohol. We have the highest alcohol-related hospitalisation rates in the country. I was at the Alice Springs ICU earlier this year and the doctor in charge at that point in time told me seven out of the 10 beds were being used for alcohol-related harm—road trauma, domestic and family violence—and that is unacceptable.

More broadly, this government is committed to reducing the harms of alcohol. We have the independent review, which I am very pleased is taking place, and I encourage all Territorians to provide their feedback. We want to make sure that Territorians who drink responsibly and enjoy entertainment precincts have access to alcohol, but we have to look at the huge amount of harm it causes from a health point of view, which our health workers, police and community deal with every day.

In regard to the Banned Drinker Register, we have allowed a year to implement the system to bring in place the legislation and to rectify any technical issues. The Banned Drinker Register was pulled by the previous government simply because it did not like it; it did not even let it see out a reasonable amount of time. They simply turned it off overnight. At that point about 3500 people who were banned were able to access alcohol instantly.

We have the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice rolling out the technology component of the Banned Drinker Register. I spoke about that when answering questions earlier this morning. There are significant supports in regard to helping people deal with their alcohol abuse issues and how they can tackle those.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. The next question is from Rainbow Territory.

Ms FYLES: I apologise, I did not talk about the second part of her question in relation to Alice Springs. I agree with the question; I have huge concerns with the number of alcohol outlets in the Northern Territory. I think there are 530 liquor licences in the Territory for on and off premises, which is one for every 353 adult Territorians. When I shared that with some of my federal counterparts last week, including the federal Health minister, they were left astounded.

Part of this alcohol review is looking at the provision of alcohol across the Northern Territory and the density of alcohol being available, and I am very much looking forward to the independent expert panel providing information back to government. The full report will be published and government will respond to that. I believe there might be some easy solutions we can put in place, but there is a lot of hard work to be done. I am willing to take that lead as the Minister for Health and Attorney-General and work with community on how they want to see alcohol provided in the Northern Territory.

I am advised that in Alice Springs there are 94 licensed premises in the Alice Springs region and 40 of those have authorisation to sell takeaway alcohol. Of those, 17 have authority to sell takeaway alcohol to the general public and the remainder are in-house guests and social clubs. They are concerning statistics and the alcohol review is looking at how we can have so many liquor licences and what we can do going forward to provide alcohol to those Territorians who drink responsibly, but looking at that huge harm it causes across our community.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. The next question is from Rainbow Territory; it is in regard to suicide prevention funding. There are two questions. What percentage of the funding for suicide prevention in the

2017 budget is being allocated to suicide prevention in remote communities for sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse Northern Territorians?

Ms FYLES: That is an area that you, Madam Chair, are very passionate about. We are currently holding public consultations as part of the review and rewriting of the Northern Territory suicide prevention strategic plan, and those community consultations have been well attended. It has been very difficult for some members of the community to attend those and I sincerely thank them for sharing their personal stories so we can reshape a system to provide for Territorians. Those public consultations will continue until the end of July, so I encourage anyone who would like to provide feedback to do so, whether it is a short sentence via email or attending a session.

There is total funding in Budget 2017–18 of \$1.44m. In terms of delivering services we recognise, particularly when referring to Rainbow Territory, that this group of people have specific needs and concerns and we welcome their views, particularly in light of the consultation process. We need to take into consideration the health needs of every Territorian. Every Territorian is unique.

We are making sure we have programs available to Territorians. We are reshaping the suicide prevention strategy and welcome that input.

Ms STODDART: In light of the work on suicide prevention, the consultation is currently occurring in late June and will conclude in July.

Madam CHAIR: Rainbow Territory posed that first question about remote communities. The second question was about urban and regional communities so you have actually covered that answer as well. Rainbow Territory has some further questions in regard to mental health services and support funding.

What percentage of the funding for mental health services and support in the 2017 budget is being allocated to mental health services and support in remote communities and urban or regional communities for sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse Northern Territorians?

Ms FYLES: There is \$57m per annum spent on mental health. The Northern Territory Government has commenced a review of the NT Mental Health Service Strategic Plan 2015–2021. We will look at what other jurisdictions are doing in terms of service delivery, and we will ensure the Northern Territory has the most effective contemporary services. We recognise that different client groups have different needs.

We make sure there are programs for the whole population, but recognise the individual needs of specific groups. We acknowledge as a department that, as a relatively small jurisdiction, we are able to provide specialty services for people in this space, and we take pride in making sure there is ongoing recognition to those who attend as individuals to provide inclusive supportive care for them.

Madam CHAIR: Rainbow Territory has another group of questions. It is about inclusive practices training. How much funding from the 2017 budget will be allocated to train frontline staff working in suicide prevention service delivery on inclusive practices for sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse Northern Territorians?

Ms FYLES: Again, I point to that figure of \$1.44m for providing ongoing funding. Specific suicide prevention training programs here in the Territory, including Anglicare, are funded through the Northern Territory Government for a suicide intervention and awareness training program.

The NT Mental Health Coalition was funded significantly with \$582 000 for mental health and life awareness promotions, which include suicide awareness training. A number of programs are run by the community organisations. I do not have the specific figures on the Northern Territory Department of Health training, but we are making sure there is training provided so we can recognise specific client groups and provide support to them.

Madam CHAIR: I believe you have covered the next question which was the same question in regards to mental health support services and how much funding from the budget will be allocated to train frontline staff working in mental health support service delivery on inclusive practices for sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse Northern Territorians.

Ms FYLES: I can add a little more in the sense that the programs are also evaluated against their defined program outcomes and making sure we use those evaluations to fund and model future service programs. We will also inform the development of the NT suicide prevention strategy. We recognise the needs of the

members of Rainbow Territory and who they are advocating for, and we believe their redress through the programs offered to the entire population as a whole group—and the chief executive wanted to add something to that.

Ms STODDART: There are a range of suicide prevention activities that happen through the Department of Health, but we also undertake quite a bit of training that is consistent with the Northern Territory public service's guidelines. That includes the unconscious bias workshops that are offered for our staff as part of their training. We also have a range of activities related to inclusion and diversity in order to create a culture that is consistent with what we would expect for a contemporary agency.

Madam CHAIR: This follows on—we were talking about evaluation from Rainbow Territory. How much from the funding from the 2017 budget is being allocated to evaluate whether services, programs or projects for suicide prevention are reducing the risk of suicide for sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse Northern Territorians?

Ms FYLES: I have probably already answered that in the previous line of questions around the evaluation of projects going forward. I am not sure if Catherine has anything to add.

Ms STODDART: All of our projects have an evaluation built into the program as part of a standard process for us. All suicide prevention programs will be evaluated as part of the define outcomes for those programs. That will be built into the suicide prevention strategy.

Madam CHAIR: The next one is very similar; it relates to mental health support. How much funding for the 2017 budget is being allocated to evaluate whether services, programs or projects for mental health support are inclusive of sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse northern Territorians?

Ms FYLES: Again, I feel that in responding to previous lines of questioning we have provided a response for that. If the questioner does not feel we have adequately covered it I am happy to follow up afterwards.

Madam CHAIR: Our next question is from Mr Samuel (inaudible). Budget 2017–18 lists the following as expenditure for healthy Territorians:

\$3 million over four years to trial a new partnership between the Territory government and non-government organisations to provide support services to up to 200 people with a mental illness who live in public housing in Darwin and Palmerston ...

That was a quote Mr Kaytampa provided.

People with a mental illness often face significant issues surrounding their utilisation of medication to manage their conditions. People may face reduced access to their medicine due to financial hardship and prioritise other needs over their medicine. This ultimately leads to reduced management of their mental illness.

People with undermanaged mental illness can find it harder to function in the wider community including securing stable work and managing social and professional relationships. This often becomes a cycle that is hard to break free of. Many medicines are not high cost and pharmacy businesses are often able to make arrangements with consumers and health services to offset or remove the financial barrier the cost of medicines create.

Mr Kaytampa's question is, to what extent are pharmacists and pharmacy businesses being consulted in this partnership trial, and what proportion of this expenditure is being allocated to the provision of medicines to help these people best manage their condition?

Ms FYLES: That was a very interesting question and I thank the member of the public for it. This was a project that, in coming to government, we were quite passionate about. Like you, as members of your electorates, I have a number of members in my community living in public housing who require additional support. We set them up with a house, a roof over their head, but we do not give them wraparound support. As electorate officers and members of parliament we come in contact with them regularly and start to understand the complexities of their needs.

This funding provides wraparound support to people living in public housing who require additional support to keep them healthy. A steering committee has been established which consists of membership from the

departments of Health and Housing, and peak bodies such as the NT Mental Health Coalition and NT Shelter.

We are undertaking a review of current policies, frameworks, needs assessment and analysis to look at the model we will roll out in the Territory. The planning phase is happening now and we are looking at rolling out the pilot early into the new financial year. It is designed to provide people with that support. As the question has pointed out, people with a mental illness face a number of challenges and we want to provide the best support we can.

The cost of medicines is funded through the Commonwealth under the PBS. This trial is providing wraparound supports to people living in Territory housing, making sure they are coping and staying on track with their healthcare.

Ms STODDART: This is a collaborate project. It is required to be effective between the departments of Health and Housing and the non-government sector. The key issue for health is in how we manage the clinical services provided to this group of people, including medication management, so we can support them in their care, how they manage medication and recovery. It will be on an individual client base. It is part of helping them towards their recovery journey. It is also affected by the NDIS. We will be taking that into consideration as we start to roll out the program from the beginning of the next financial year. We are currently in the planning phase.

Madam CHAIR: The next question is from Rainbow Territory again. How much money is being allocated to community consultation with sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse Northern Territorians in relation to the NT Department of Health's Core Clinical Systems Renewal Program to ensure that appropriate and accurate data is collected on the NT population that is sex/gender diverse and sexually diverse?

Ms FYLES: This Health's Core Clinical Systems Renewal Program is a significant game changer for Territory Health. It is a huge project and undertaking, with the departments of Corporate and Information Services and Health working together. Letting our clinicians take the lead in this project has been extremely beneficial.

Obviously, \$259m over five years is a significant amount of taxpayer resources, but I believe it will benefit Territorians greatly in making sure we have the most up-to-date information on Territorians available when they require medical care. Allowing our clinicians to be very involved in the planning and development of this project is the key to making it different to some of the other systems that have been rolled out around the country. Clinicians from all fields have been consulted in ensuring the system is most appropriate for their clients.

Regarding the specific question about appropriate consultation with relevant stakeholders, that will be undertaken through the development and implementation of this project so we can make sure we include points along the development of this program.

We have not had specific stakeholder groups in consultation. That has not been finalised yet, but it is something I have been assured will take place in the roll-out of this system.

Madam CHAIR: We have another question from AMA NT. What are the planned budgetary savings on the abolition of the health boards?

Ms FYLES: As I outlined in my opening statement, that began six years ago with the 2011 national reform agreement which noted the Northern Territory's unique context. We have health services delivered a very broad region. As I have outlined clearly to the public, from 30 June the boards that were established when the health services were established will no longer exist. We will then move to putting an administrator in place, which will provide that support, and in time, amend the legislation.

This will provide about \$1m to \$1.5m in savings in board fees, member fees and sitting fees, but will still provide for Territorians to be involved in their health services through a health community advisory council in the Top End and in Central Australia.

Separate to that will be a clinical senate structure that will provide the ability for clinicians to have direct input to the chief executive and my position. I was fortunate to be invited by the medical advisory committee at Royal Darwin Hospital a few weeks ago to meet them and listen to some of their clinical concerns. It would be great to have that forum across the Territory for all clinicians to provide input into government and policy.

The cost savings in abolishing those health boards, which was the direct question, will be about \$1m to \$1.5m per year. We feel we are still catering for Territorians to have that opportunity. The expressions of interest, I have been advised, will open this week—I am not sure if I said it last week or this week in my opening statement. They will be open right through to the end of July.

I have asked the Department of Health to be active at the show circuit to encourage Territorians who might not have previously put their hands up to be on a health advisory council to do so. You do not need to have a high level of qualification; you just need to be passionate and have experience with health services in the Territory.

Madam CHAIR: I have a series of questions from Mr Chris Walsh at the *NT News*. The questions are being posed to each minister. Please provide the total expenditure and itemised detail of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for all chief executives in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Ms FYLES: The total expenditure for the Department of Health, which includes travel across the organisation—which also includes the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, which is by far the largest component—for international, interstate and intrastate travel for the Department of Health is \$1.9m. For the national trauma centre it is \$1.7m, noting that the trauma centre has provided responses to the number of countries overseas.

It is a significant figure in regard to international, interstate and intrastate travel, but this covers everything within the Department of Health. It covers remote area nursing, doctors moving to different parts of the Territory to provide services and the large component of the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre.

Madam CHAIR: The next question is from Chris Walsh. Can you please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by your chief executive from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, and please list the number of times the chief executive has visited that location over the last five years.

Ms FYLES: In regard to the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, it is within overseas travel that they have the majority component. We were only advised of these questions recently, so we will follow up with some written information to Mr Walsh. We do not intend to hide anything; we just want to provide as much advice as we can today.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, would you like to take this question on notice so you can provide this information to Mr Walsh at a later date?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to go through the series of questions from Mr Walsh. I assume they are the same questions for the Department of Justice, but I want to assure the public and Mr Walsh that if there is follow-up we can provide that.

The CE of the Department of Health has not made any international visits during the period of 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, and details of international travel for the past five years will need to be taken on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.5

Madam CHAIR: I will restate the question for the record.

Please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by your chief executive from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, and please list the number of times the chief executive has visited that location over the last five years.

Ms FYLES: We are happy to take that on notice.

Madam CHAIR: That question to the Minister for Health will be allocated the number 3.5.

Madam CHAIR: In the case of international travel, please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip, and the written report into what taxpayers gained from the trip. If no report given to the minister exists, please explain why.

Ms FYLES: As I understand there were no international trips made during that period.

Madam CHAIR: Please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for public servants in your agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Ms FYLES: I will provide some clarification. In the first question I was asked for the total expenditure for the Department of Health, and that travel was \$1.9m. In regard to this question, the total expenditure by NT Health, which includes Top End and Central Australia Health Services, was \$6.8m. I incorrectly answered the previous question; this is the figure that is broader and includes clinicians, remote area nurses ...

Madam CHAIR: \$6.8m?

Ms FYLES: Yes. I just want to make that completely clear for the record, the figure of the \$1.9m is for the Department of Health and then this figure here is for Northern Territory Health, which includes the two health services. I apologise for that and will follow this up with written responses because I think it is quite technical in nature, because the Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre comes into that as well with a significant component but provides a significant service overseas.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you very much. Can you please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by public servants from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 and please list the number of times the public servant has visited that location over the last five years.

Ms FYLES: The National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, which receives funding from the Australian Government to provide support to developing countries in developing their health services—and I acknowledge the hard work under Len Notaras in times of critical incident response.

They have visited Dili, in East Timor; Vanuatu; Hong Kong; Geneva; Fiji; Nandi; and China, and that would be a mixture of providing emergency response as well as ongoing training and building capacity into the regions. I am advised that Top End Health Service and Department of Health staff have visited three locations overseas: Barcelona, in Spain, on a scholarship; Auckland for a clinical presentation; and Chicago for a national regulation role.

It is very research intensive to determine how many times over the past five years those cities and towns have been visited, but we will take any questions on notice to provide as much information as we can.

Madam CHAIR: Fantastic.

Ms FYLES: Similar to my previous comments with the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, travel is important, particularly in the health space. We are providing health services across a very large part of Australia, probably some of the remotest parts of the world, and it is our job to support Territorians. But it is not something we take lightly; we acknowledge it is taxpayer dollars and we think long and hard before travel is undertaken.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. From AMA NT—is the Palmerston hospital progressing to plan and on budget?

Ms FYLES: Yes. I am very proud that the Palmerston Regional Hospital is back on track from the debacle we saw from the previous government, which was more interested in political point-scoring than actually building a hospital for the people of the Palmerston region. The hospital is due for completion early next year and then it will be handed from the department of Infrastructure over to the Department of Health and will need to go through an intense commissioning phase, and then it will have a staged opening.

It is funded within the budget; the Department of Health is working very hard on it to make sure there is a clinical delivery plan that will provide for the people of that region, compliment the services at Royal Darwin Hospital and make sure we can provide healthcare of the highest quality to Territorians.

The total project cost is \$170m, and that includes \$40.3m as a revote, acknowledging that the project was not on track under the previous government. There has been an additional \$36m over two years provided for the commissioning, which is furniture, fittings, equipment and ICT, and we are very much looking forward to delivering that project with a staged opening from mid-next year.

Madam CHAIR: I have a few more questions. A member of the public asks the following: her daughter has stage four endometriosis; one in ten women suffers this hideous disease. Why do women have to travel interstate for gold standard excision surgery?

Ms FYLES: That is a very important question. Health services in the Northern Territory deliver them across the clinics and within the five hospitals. We need to make sure at all times that the patient's clinical care is the absolute priority. Patients with complex requirements, at times, need to be referred interstate for surgery and procedures and they are supported by the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme.

The Territory does not have the high level 5/6 surgeon required for this highly specialised procedure.

It is a mixture of making sure we try to recruit where we feel there is a need, acknowledging that in the context of health services in the Territory we are best to work with interstate institutions, and we have a strong relationship with a number of them in delivering health services for Territorians.

Of course we want to offer as much as we can in the Territory, but at times Territorians need to travel to receive that high-level quality care.

Madam CHAIR: The member of the public continues: in October 2016 her daughter made inquiries to have a gynaecologist insert the Mirena, a simple procedure, but the wait list for an appointment with a private gynaecologist was six months and there was a 12-month waiting list for public access. What is the government doing to reduce that time frame?

Ms FYLES: I might ask Catherine Stoddart, Chief Executive, to provide further response.

Ms STODDART: The gynaecological waiting list is in line with national standards. There are three categories for waiting lists that are determined based on clinical need. Generally a patient with endometriosis with significant pain would be category two and would need to be seen within 90 days. Otherwise they are generally classed as non-urgent and are triaged by the health service as a category three. It is a clinical decision. An initial consultation is required to determine whether a surgical or a non-surgical option is required.

Although we cannot comment on this individual case, we do undertake regular audits of our waiting list to ensure that we are in line with the national guidelines. We also provide regular clinical governance to other clinicians who might be managing those patients, particularly if they are remote, through telehealth whilst they are on the waiting list.

Madam CHAIR: A member of the public asks, how many dermatologists are there, private or public, and what is the waiting list?

Ms FYLES: As I understand there are two public dermatologists in the Top End Health Service and there is a six-month wait list for this specialty service within our system. There is also a private clinic. I understand one of those public doctors operates a private clinic in Darwin. The waiting list is significantly shorter—less than one month.

The Central Australian Health Service has nine outreach visits scheduled for Alice Springs Hospital for this year. That is one every five to six weeks. The specialists stay for two or three days and provide services through outpatients and paediatrics. Priority One patients are seen within approximately three months. In Alice Springs there is no difference in the waiting list times for private and public patients.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes the questions I have from the public.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – TERRITORY-WIDE SERVICES

Output 8.1 – Territory-Wide Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 8.0, Territory-Wide Services, Output Group 8.1, Territory-Wide Services. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise the current official rate of Indigenous suicides in the Northern Territory and provide a comparison with 10 years ago?

Ms FYLES: I will take the question on notice to make sure I get you the exact statistics of the figures you have requested.

Question on Notice No 3.6

Madam CHAIR: Can you please restate the question for the record, Member for Nhulunbuy?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise the current official rate of Indigenous suicides in the Northern Territory and provide a comparison with 10 years ago?

Ms FYLES: Yes, and I can provide some broader information here. We recognise that suicide is a devastating issue impacting on our communities across the Northern Territory. Whilst I do not have the specific figures you have requested here today, the rates of suicide in the Northern Territory are the highest in the country and we are committed on reducing those rates, as we outlined prior to the election.

The suicide prevention coordination committee which has been established by the Department of Health is engaging Northern Territory departments, the Primary Health Network, AMSANT, the Department of Defence, the federal government Department of Health, the Department of Social Services, Veterans' Affairs, and Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Chair today is ably assisting me as the assistant minister in this space. We are committed to working across government and across the Territory to reduce those rates. I again point out to those listening and members here today that the suicide prevention strategy being developed will very much guide this work.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nhulunbuy of the minister has been allocated the number 3.6.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise the current Indigenous life expectancy rates in the NT and could you advise of rates 10 years ago?

Ms FYLES: I apologise, member, but we will have to take that on notice to provide to you. We are providing work in this space. The government has strong plans around early investment, working with women when they are pregnant so we can lift the birth weight rate of babies. That will give them long-term health benefits—intensive partnership early on through either the Nurse-Family Partnership Program, working with community nurses and health clinics to give our children the best start in life, flowing through to Families as First Teachers. I am happy to provide those statistics on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.7

Madam CHAIR: Could you restate the question for the record please, Member for Nhulunbuy?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise the current Indigenous life expectancy rates in the NT and could you advise of rates 10 years ago?

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nhulunbuy of the minister has been allocated the number 3.7.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise of the rates of Indigenous people suffering with chronic disease now and 10 years ago?

Ms FYLES: We are trying to get you those statistics now. As we come towards the end of the session I might be able to come back to you. Going back 10 years and getting that statistic specifically for you—but I can point to the work we are undertaking in making sure we have appropriate health services and are working with community to lead that.

Question on Notice No 3.8

Madam CHAIR: Could I ask you to repeat your question please, Member for Nhulunbuy?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise of the rates of Indigenous people suffering with chronic disease now and 10 years ago?

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nhulunbuy of the minister has been allocated the number 3.8.

Madam CHAIR: I have a question for the minister under this output. It is in regard to Nurse-Family Partnerships. This government is making children the centre of its agenda how will the Nurse-Family Partnership Program contribute to improving the long-term outcomes for children and their families?

Ms FYLES: The Nurse-Family Partnership Program is a specialised nurse-led visiting program that supports pregnant women with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander babies until the child is two years of age.

The Australian Government Department of Health funds a number of sites in the Northern Territory, including Wadeye, Maningrida and Gunbalanya. The Top End Health Services has a hub and spoke model in Palmerston, in Darwin by Danila Dilba, and in Alice Springs through Congress. I was pleased to recently attend a presentation by Congress on the success of that program.

It provides intensive support for when a woman is between 20 and 28 weeks pregnant. If we can lift the birth weight rate we can give people long-term positive health outcomes. That has been evidenced.

This program has been in place through the federal government, and the Northern Territory Government has committed to expanding the program. We hope to have five additional sites, and there is funding in this budget to provide for that, which will be ongoing.

We are working with the Australian Government. Last week I met with the federal minister, and he is very supportive of us continuing this program and funding it ourselves, especially since hearing from Congress about the early success of the program. This program began at the University of Colorado, and the Australian Government has a licence to operate it in Australia, so we are working through those agreements at the moment. We are very much committed to the early intervention and prevention through funding programs such as this.

Madam CHAIR: The Termination of Pregnancy Law Reform Bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly in March 2017. How will government ensure that the health and wellbeing of Territory women will be protected once the bill becomes law on 1 July 2017?

Ms FYLES: I was very proud to be able to present that bill to the parliament, and I was proud of the bipartisan support we received. I note that 20 members of the Assembly supported the bill.

It was time that Territory women had the same access to health services as other Australian women. In fact, women around the world have had this access for two decades.

In regard to the legislation being passed, the department has been working with clinicians on the clinical guidelines and they are in place. This will be available to women in the Territory from 1 July.

The legislation removes the requirement for a termination of pregnancy to be performed in a hospital. It allows medical and surgical terminations to be performed in out-of-hospital settings, but in accordance with strong NT Health clinical guidelines. It had a number of elements to it, and we spoke in great detail at the time about it.

I was pleased that the legislation included safe access zones around the premises for women attending the clinic and the staff working there. It removed the criminal offence in the provisions under the *Criminal Code Act* and provides for regulations through the Chief Health Officer.

This was community led and I acknowledge all those in the community who led this campaign. It was a key election issue and something I was proud, as the Minister for Health, to deliver on. I could not have done it without the support of the parliament. I thank all members for their bipartisan approach.

The clinical guidelines have been developed based on international best practice, taking into account our conditions in the Northern Territory. There are a number of elements in the guidelines. There are approximately 600 terminations performed in the Northern Territory each year. Australian experience shows that 20% of terminations are performed as early medical terminations.

We will provide for the adequate transition of services here in the Territory, taking into account the new legislation, which allows medical as well as surgical terminations of pregnancy. That will come into place on 1 July, delivering on a key election commitment.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, for a long time the Department of Health has fought against taking responsibility for remote morgue facilities. Has this changed under the new government, and if so, what directive has been given to Department of Health staff and contract health organisations that work with communities in regard to morgue facilities?

Ms FYLES: This has been an ongoing issue. I am pleased to update the committee that a number of changes have been made to the remote morgues.

Top End and Central Australian Health Services are responsible for establishing and maintaining management arrangements for remote community morgues, working with Aboriginal-controlled community health organisations.

A number of works are in progress. There are new morgues at Galiwinku, Numbulwar, Docker River, Maningrida and Ngukurr to name a few. There are significant upgrades at a number of morgues across the Territory. I will be happy to provide the committee with a full list. Those upgrades are complete.

Regarding the morgues in future, I understand the facilities are built by the Department of Housing and Community Development but are transferred to Health to provide the ongoing management, making sure people in remote communities have access to those facilities. You would have heard many more stories than I about this. It is particularly important to this government.

Ms UIBO: Minister, it is my understanding the Department of Health is currently undergoing a 10-year renal strategy determination. When will that strategy be released and how will it drive the allocations for the \$1.4m for two renal-ready rooms and the placement of those across the Northern Territory?

Ms FYLES: I know you are passionate about this. As I said in my opening remarks, there is \$9.7m for a new Darwin renal centre, which will provide a purpose-built facility in Darwin. I recently visited facilities at Flynn Drive in Alice Springs which provide renal services.

Budget 2017–18 allocates \$1.4m for two renal-ready rooms for remote communities. Regarding where they will go, the 10-year renal strategy is in the final stages of development by the Department of Health. This strategy will determine the priority for communities for these remote renal rooms. We acknowledge that there are a number of benefits in providing renal services in community. Family members can provide ongoing support to patients and there are no associated housing issues if people have to come into Alice Springs or Darwin centres to receive that support.

It is something we are committed to. That 10-year renal strategy will guide us not only in delivery of these two renal ready rooms, but ongoing renal services across the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO: Minister, is there a date for the release of that strategy?

Ms FYLES: My understanding is it is very close, in the next six to eight weeks. I will be happy to update the committee or the House on this.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Madam Chair:

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on that output? That concludes consideration of Output 8.1 and Output Group 8.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 9.0 – DISEASE PREVENTION AND HEALTH PROTECTION

Output 9.1 – Environmental Health

Madam CHAIR: We will now move on to Output Group 9.0, Disease Prevention and Health Protection, Output 9.1, Environmental Health. Are there any questions?

I have one question, minister. What is the Northern Territory government doing to ensure that the health of Territorians is not impacted by the levels of PFAS discovered in Darwin creeks and in groundwater supplies in the regions surrounding RAAF Base Tindal in Katherine?

Ms FYLES: I know there are a number of members, including the Member for Katherine, who are passionate about this issue. This is a legacy issue from the use of firefighting foam at both RAAF Base Darwin and RAAF Base Tindal. Australia had been using an interim environmental health standing committee guideline. They were revised earlier this year.

In the wake of that revised guideline and the detection of PFAS, the Department of Health has undertaken a number of actions. Our phase one testing of seafood from Darwin waterways by Charles Darwin University, working with traditional owners, the Larrakia people, looked at those people who would harvest food from the creeks and waterways and the impacts and revealed a low-level presence of PFAS. CDU is now reassessing that phase one report with the update expected soon.

The phase two testing on fish, prawns and crab samples is being finalised using the new food standard for PFAS. The Department of Health will advise on results and provide public health advice on fish consumption when we receive both the initial recapped report and the new report. There is signage on Darwin waterways warning people who may be fishing, hunting or gathering of what to look for in terms of PFAS.

Defence released its preliminary report in November and has adopted a precautionary approach, providing alternative drinking water to 42 properties located close to Tindal that rely solely on bore water for drinking. Defence intends to provide a long-term arrangement for provision of alternate drinking water in the form of rain water tanks for residents who are eligible. That is my understanding.

Defence has been conducting a number of community information sessions. They are going into a more detailed 12-month environmental investigation to determine the nature of PFAS around these bases. I note this is affecting two areas in the Territory but is a broad issue across Australia close to Air Force bases.

The Northern Territory Government has been actively working with our federal counterparts. I wrote to the then Minister for Health, Sussan Ley, then reforwarded that correspondence to the incoming minister, Greg Hunt from a health perspective. The Chief Minister has written to the Prime Minister around those concerns. It is from a number of factors. Health does the testing and can provide the environmental health advice, but as this is an issue from federal Defence bases it is quite complex.

We have been providing the community with as much information as we can, working with the federal government. Power and Water is the other government agency involved. It carries out sampling of the Katherine town water because, at times, the bore water is supplementing the river water there.

As the Minister for Health, I am responsible for the testing, but as a government we need to make sure we have all the information for Territorians.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 9.1.

Output 9.2 – Disease Control

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 9.2, Disease Control. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 9.2 and Output group 9.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 10.0 – COMMUNITY TREATMENT AND EXTENDED CARE
Output 10.1 – Alcohol and Other Drugs

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 10.0, Community Treatment and Extended Care, Output 10.1, Alcohol and Other Drugs. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: Minister, could you advise if there is funding to provide assessment withdrawal and specialised alcohol treatment services in remote communities or on homelands.

Ms FYLES: In terms of providing assessment services, it is generally in the five urban areas, for example near your electorate in Nhulunbuy, and case workers would then work with the individuals. Utilising community clinics across the Northern Territory, nurses and remote area staff can provide initial advice then follow through with further supports.

I will ask the department to provide more detail for you. Also, that is on top of the significant services of beds in the regional centres noting that at times people need to travel to Katherine to receive treatment.

Mr KALIMNIOS: The only thing to add to what the minister said is that as part of our general primary healthcare service offering there are assessment treatment processes that happen as part of the normal overall healthcare process in communities. That is mainly where we deliver that primary front-end service support.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Mr GUYULA: Further to the last question, there are Yolngu who would like to run healing rehabilitation centres on country. Are there funds available to establish these services?

Ms FYLES: We would work with primary healthcare providers to provide for programs. It is important in tackling alcohol harm and abuse across the Northern Territory that we provide a range of options for people. We know there are better outcomes if they have support from community and family, so through the primary healthcare provider that could be looked at.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise how much has been allocated to in the budget to reduce volatile substance abuse and how much will be allocated to help remote community-based organisations to strengthen and apply their own Indigenous structures to deal with this problem?

Ms FYLES: As you are aware, Member for Nhulunbuy, concerns have been raised regarding a significant number of young people sniffing aviation fuel or avgas in East Arnhem, particularly in the communities of Galiwinku, Milingimbi and Gapuwiyak. Sixty young people have recently been referred to volatile substance abuse prevention assessment under the act. Avgas has a very high level of lead, and 142 children referred for sniffing avgas are testing outside the normal levels for lead. A number of children have required emergency admission to RDH.

It is serious concern for us as a government, both the immediate and long-term consequences. The Centre for Disease Control issued an alert for lead toxicity on 14 June and recommended that health practitioners take blood-level testing in communities where it is known or there is a possibility of avgas sniffing.

Aviation companies have been asked to relocate their planes to Nhulunbuy overnight, particularly while the issue remains active and the Department of the Chief Minister is working with Miwatj Health to develop the best response for each individual community. DCM established a working group of senior officers in April to coordinate a whole-of-government response and a comprehensive plan for this issue.

Immediate action has been undertaken by the government to prevent the theft of avgas. As you would be aware, significant security has been put in place temporarily, particularly at the Galiwinku aerodrome, with an expanded night patrol and CCTV monitoring. Security with dogs has been used at that facility. We have provided an immediate response while we work through the longer-term education of the community's understanding of this issue.

There is a focused community engagement plan which will develop a comprehensive long-term plan to deal with this issue, involving the community. That plan includes improved security infrastructure, community safety initiatives, diversion activities, and health and education for young people to understand the serious consequences of sniffing avgas.

I have Hugh Heggie, the Chief Medical Officer, with me. I am not sure if you wanted to hear from him or have a follow-up question. I know you are concerned as a local member. I can assure you that the government is responding to this issue.

Mr HEGGIE: Volatile substance abuse, or VSA, has been in the Territory for decades. It has come and gone from different regions, with different substances. It is a significant health issue, particularly because it commonly involves young persons and with immediate and long-term health effects and also economic and education effects.

Over time it has been working with communities, families and complex clients, patients and persons and it has been assisted by the VSA legislation and the VSA assessment teams to work with those families and communities. It seems that there has been a cluster of VSA involving avgas in East Arnhem and that is a public health issue. It is an outbreak of a disease and it is being managed through whole-of-government, led by the Department of the Chief Minister and involving the communities, police, non-government Aboriginal medical services and government services.

It has been managed like an outbreak and assessing how many people are involved, the effects of health access in terms of testing and monitoring these persons, of which the average age is about 14, and it would seem that security and access are big issues. Avgas has a much higher aromatic content and a much higher lead content. Whilst the availability of that fuel with its lead may, in time, change, it will not occur quickly.

At the moment, and I am not saying it is limited to East Arnhem, but there is a clustering there at the moment. It is about working with the families and community around education, youth diversionary activities as well as health-related activities. We are also working towards making elevated lead level—the process to make that a notifiable disease so we can clearly track those people. This will be something on which we work collaboratively with those communities into the future.

Mr PAECH: Minister, I understand the Banned Drinker Register is coming in on 1 September and I am very welcoming and supportive of that. As part of the government's alcohol reforms, will town camp residents have the ability to work with the Northern Territory Government to develop individual alcohol management plans? A yes or no would suffice.

Ms FYLES: It is not as simple as a yes or no answer. It is complex in the space that town camps and alcohol management plans—the federal government is involved, so it requires the federal minister to sign off on that.

We recently released the report into licensed clubs in remote communities. I think it is very important that women and children must be at the centre of any consideration of licensed clubs, but that report's finding include some interesting information. As the minister responsible I have passed that report to our alcohol policy and legislation review.

Mr PAECH: Minister, I will rephrase the question. Is there appetite for your department to work with town camp residents on alcohol management plans for their town camps?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 10.1.

Output 10.2 — Disability Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 10.2, Disability Services. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: Minister, could you advise of funding for disability services in remote communities in this budget as compared with the last budget?

Ms FYLES: It is quite complex because the National Disability Insurance Scheme which has been rolled out in East Arnhem starts to pick up elements of that. It is not a straightforward split in terms of remote urban communities.

We are working constructively with the Commonwealth Government on the NDIS roll-out. There is real opportunity for remote communities in regard to service provision of disability support services. As a

government, with the Office of Disability, we continue to provide services and will continue to ensure the Northern Territory has adequate services from providers, non-government or private, or from the government itself.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 10.2, Disability Services.

Output 10.3 – Mental Health

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 10.3, Mental Health. Are there any questions?

The government has announced an investment of \$3m over four years to support people with mental illness to maintain their public housing tenancies. Can you please advise why this program is limited to only those living in public housing?

Ms FYLES: This trial has been restricted to tenants of public housing due to the number of identified clients with mental illness in public housing requiring support to maintain ongoing tenancy. We believe it is an important component—if we provide wraparound support services can we help people maintain their lease. We felt that the public housing, due to the higher levels of identified tenants with mental illness, would be the starting point for that trial. We look forward to seeing the outcomes and how we can provide for it in a broader context in the Northern Territory.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 10.3 and Output Group 10.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 11.0 – NATIONAL CRITICAL CARE AND TRAUMA RESPONSE

Output 11.1 – National Critical Care and Trauma Response

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 11.0, National Critical Care and Trauma Response, Output 11.1, National Critical Care and Trauma Response. Are there any questions?

What level of accreditation does the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre hold, and what does this mean for Territorians and our close neighbours?

Ms FYLES: I will ask Professor Len Notaras, who leads the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, to come to the table.

I congratulate all involved. It is led by Len, but we have a hard-working team based in the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre. We also have a number of clinicians who work in health services in the Territory who participate, as well as a number of people from interstate.

I was proud to visit the centre, which was fully set up late last year, for its accreditation with the World Health Organization. I congratulate the critical care and trauma centre as it provides invaluable support to Territorians, Australia and Southeast Asia.

Professor NOTARAS: The centre is globally verified by the WHO. That in itself is a credit to what is happening in Darwin. The minister referred to the shake-out late last year—the verification document, which is called the blue book, was developed here in Darwin between 2010 and 2013.

The very standards that the international group, the WHO, use were developed here in Darwin, at Royal Darwin Hospital primary health and other areas. When that verification occurred late last year, the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre representing Australia was one of five national entities. In fact, it was the only Western, first world entity that received verification. Russia, China and Japan were the others, as well as Israel.

We are now training other facilities across the Pacific. It is a relevant sequel to the question asked of the minister earlier, about travel. People from the centre, like Bronte Martin and Professor Dianne Stephens, are mentoring people throughout Southeast Asia; Macau, in China; and other parts of the world, including New Zealand, Timor and Bali.

Next Monday and Tuesday I will be in Bali. We will be doing some work with the Governor of Bali, accentuating the work that has gone on over the last eight to 10 years in training the Indonesian responses. We are doing a similar thing with Timor as well. It makes a very exciting story for the whole of the nation, coming from Darwin.

That said, if I look back to last week's V8 Supercars, a premier event, the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre ran the medical response for that event. That is not just about driver safety, but in the background we have, with Manchester and the tragedies that have been occurring internationally, we have been covering the event of a mass casualty event should it occur in Darwin, God forbid! That has been hailed across this nation as something that is incredibly important. It has been led here by the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre in Darwin.

It is well supported by our minister, but it goes a lot further than that. I will refer to the notes because my ability to remember the nomenclature sometimes gets me. There is a project called the PARTY project. The National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre has been working very closely with Top End Health Services in preparing to roll out a pilot of the PARTY program for 12 months. Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth is what PARTY stands for.

The program is licensed as one-day in-hospital injury awareness, a prevention program for high school students, which is very relevant to the alcohol prevention the minister spoke of earlier. The purpose of the PARTY program is to provide valuable information for young people about injury—that is, trauma—that will enable participants to recognise potential injury-producing situations and make informed preventative choices before they actually get into this issue, therefore impacting on our hospital service in a positive way, but also on families.

Members of the panel have asked about ways of tackling alcohol issues, and this is a pertinent one which is coming out of a collaboration of Top End Health Services and the program.

The National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre has also been a key in consolidating not just the local response, but Australia's response to a range of disasters. We are not just doing it internationally; we are also doing it nationally. Today we have people in Gove training people in various aspects of remote area response to trauma. We had people in Alice Springs two weeks ago. We have people across the Territory. Two or three years ago we did the Maningrida trachoma outreach program.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you very much for sharing that with us. Are there any further questions on this output?

Mr GUYULA: Madam Chair, I would like clarify something in Output 10.1. A couple of questions ago I asked ...

Madam CHAIR: The Alcohol and Other Drugs output?

Mr GUYULA: Yes. I was not really satisfied with the answer to my question. Can I ask that question again of the minister?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise how much has been allocated in the budget to reduce volatile substance abuse. How much will be allocated to help remote community-based organisations to strengthen and apply their own Indigenous structures to deal with this problem? That is what I am trying to get to.

Indigenous leaders out there are trying to create a centre where they can work on rehabilitation to help their children. How much can the government support that?

Ms FYLES: I will ask Janet Anderson, the Deputy Chief Executive.

Ms ANDERSON: In the earlier answer the minister referred to a review we will initiate. There is no straightforward answer to your question because we still need to consider those sorts of details. I can give you an assurance that the review will be looking at exactly those sorts of things.

It has come to our attention that we need to look closely at the way we are managing volatile substance abuse prevention and treatment. The Chief Health Officer set out for you some of the dynamics from a public health perspective. Those are matters that we will have to take into close consideration, along with

the existing service provision, whether that is reaching the people most in need, and if it is not, what we need to change to ensure we get better results.

Clearly that will require some engagement and conversations with members of remote communities where the problem is emerging. I am sure we will come to talk with yours and other communities to see what we can do better to improve the prevention of youth getting into these sorts of difficulties.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 11.1?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 11.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 12.0 – OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC GUARDIAN **Output 12.1 – Office of the Public Guardian**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 12.0, Office of the Public Guardian, Output 12.1, Office of the Public Guardian. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 12.1 and Output Group 12.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 13.0 – HEALTH SERVICES **Output 13.1 – Top End and Central Australia Health Services**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 13.0, Health Services, Output 13.1, Top End and Central Australia Health Services. Are there any questions?

I have a question in regard to the Alice Springs palliative care facility. Can you advise on how this government is delivering on its promise to deliver a dedicated palliative care facility for Central Australia?

Ms FYLES: The Australian and Northern Territory governments have committed to constructing a palliative care facility on the Alice Springs Hospital campus. I was very pleased that, as minister, one of my first responsibilities was to outline that it will be a palliative care facility. I visited the site and listened to the residents of Alice Springs, who outlined to me quite clearly that they felt it could not be a multiuse facility and it needed to be a standalone palliative care facility. I visited the Darwin facility and saw the benefit that provides to Top Enders, and I feel that Central Australian residents deserved the same. The palliative care facility will be composed of an overnight facility with 10 beds along with communal day-living space and associated supports.

The budget is \$6.3m which is funded by the Australian Government with \$5.3m, and \$1m from the Northern Territory Government. Construction is currently under way by local contractor Scope Building NT and I understand the concrete slab was poured on 2 May. The facility is due for completion later this year.

This is an important facility for the people of Central Australia. I was pleased to be able to listen to the community and that we can deliver as a government.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

I have one question in this output in regard to the PET scanner and the enhanced cancer services. There are three parts to this question. What action is this government taking to deliver the long-awaited PET scanner and cyclotron? How will this project benefit patients and their families facing traumatic times on their cancer journey? Is the project on track and on budget?

Ms FYLES: Again, another project that I am very pleased to be able to deliver. The federal government made an election commitment of \$15m for a PET scanner and a cyclotron. Once I became the minister intensive work indicated that it would not be possible to deliver the project for \$15m. Initial scoping said the project would cost \$21m. I worked intensively with the department, and I thank everyone in the team who worked on the project. The revised costing was \$18m.

The Northern Territory Government has committed \$3m to the project. I was pleased the federal Minister for Regional Development, Fiona Nash, committed the \$15m from the federal government. I met with her last week in Canberra. We are pleased this project is going ahead. Every time a Territorian has to get on a plane for treatment it adds further burden to them.

The PET scanner will be located at the imaging department of Royal Darwin Hospital, co-located with MRI, X-Ray, CT scan et cetera. The cyclotron component will be elsewhere on the Royal Darwin Hospital campus. The PET scanner will be delivered by September next year and the cyclotron will follow. We will be able to offer services, flying the isotopes in and then making the cyclotron in the Territory.

This is an important project. I listened to the clinicians who explained that in terms of imaging and advancements it is important that we have our own cyclotron. We can deliver the services by flying the isotopes in from other places, but going forward, the length of time between those being made and the scanner taking place is shrinking. It is important for Territorians to have access to both. I was pleased to work constructively with the federal government to deliver this project on behalf of Territorians.

Not only is it a diagnostic tool for cancer patients, but a number of clinical assessments require this PET scanner.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

This concludes consideration of Output 13.1 and Output Group 13.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 14 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Output 14.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 14.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 14.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

I have a question in regard to remote staff safety. Since the tragic death of remote area nurse Gayle Woodford in 2016 in Fregon, far north South Australia. What action has this government taken to ensure the safety of the Territory's remote area workforce?

Ms FYLES: The Northern Territory Government had a remote area nurse safety review, with recommendations, released late last year. It outlined recommendations in order of priority one, two and three. All priority one recommendations are being addressed with implementation either complete or being finalised. I was pleased to work with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation on this. They provide support to frontline remote area nurses. It was important to have their views and the views of nurses taken into account.

In the wake of the tragic death in South Australia we have implemented the review and recommendations in a staged approach providing support to those nurses who deliver healthcare in very remote conditions of the Territory.

Madam CHAIR: If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 14.1.

Output 14.2 – Shared Services Provided

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 14.2, Shared Services Provided. Are there any questions?

This concludes consideration of Output 14.2 and Output Group 14.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Health. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank departmental officers that assisted the minister today. I note we have six minutes before our time with the minister is due.

TOP END HEALTH SERVICE

OUTPUT GROUP 15.0 – TOP END HOSPITALS

Madam CHAIR: I invite the minister to introduce the officials accompanying her in regard to the Top End Health Service. We will consider Output 15.0, Top End Hospitals.

Member for Nhulunbuy, would you like to ask your question?

Mr GUYULA: I understand that \$9.7m has been budgeted for a replacement renal health service in Nightcliff and \$1.4m for renal-ready rooms in two remote communities. I believe strongly in renal health services on country, because when the old people come into Darwin for ongoing health treatment the young people lose their knowledge and guidance. Could you advise of any other funding and provisions for renal health services in remote communities?

Ms FYLES: Across the Northern Territory we deliver renal services in the urban areas, and the budget allocation you mentioned for a new facility in Nightcliff is well overdue. The facility was not purpose built; it does not provide a level of patient comfort or privacy. We are looking forward to delivering a new facility in Nightcliff. We offer renal services in Katherine and Alice Springs as well.

Providing renal services on country is important to this government. We are looking for that renal strategy going forward to drive the allocation of resources. We have allocated budget provision, as you have outlined, for two renal-ready rooms in remote communities, but that will not be the end of it. Once that renal strategy going forward has been worked through we will be looking at budget allocation.

I understand the points that you raised that leaving people on country has far better outcomes for community. It has far better outcomes for those individuals, and from a government point of view, when people come into town long term we have obligations around housing and other supports we need to provide. I think it is very important that we deliver health services to people as close to home as possible and we are very committed to that.

Ms UIBO: When will the replacement for the renal Nightcliff facility actually commence works?

Ms FYLES: I have been advised that the works will commence later this year or early next year. It is quite a difficult project, as you can imagine. We will have to scope design tender for the project, but we think it is important to provide that facility on its existing site. There are hostels and public housing nearby; it is on a bus route and it is close to other medical services. We felt that that location was suitable for a new renal location.

My understanding is that the new facility will be built at the front of the site whilst the old facility can operate towards the rear. It will be complex. We will need to move some of the chairs up to the Royal Darwin Hospital site, but in the long term we will have a purpose-built facility that will be more designed to purpose, for staff and patients alike.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise how much has been budgeted for preventative education on renal health issues and what services run these programs?

Ms FYLES: I will hand to Michael in a second, but it fits into a lot of things and it is one of the strategies driving us in working with women when they are pregnant so that we can lift the weight of babies when they are born so they have far better long-term health outcomes, and working intensively with families through those early years.

The Minister for Education and I sit on the subcommittee of Cabinet for children. Giving our children the best start through healthy diets, exercise—all those things have a factor to play—fits within the primary healthcare realm.

Mr KALIMNIOS: Just in support of what the minister was saying, we have a range of strategies around prevention that are imbedded in our primary healthcare and community services, from a series of interventions around better health, particularly in early childhood, during pregnancy and all those things through to when people develop renal disease, and education about how to deal with and treat that.

There is no specific budget allocated for prevention per se; it is just part of our normal offering of services that is imbedded strongly in what we do. A lot of our service improvement agendas are around things like blood pressure, diabetes management et cetera, which are very much targeted to try to prevent onset of renal failure later in life. It is a very big feature of what we do right throughout all our community centres and I am sure that would be the same for Central Australia as well.

Mr GUYULA: Thank you. No further questions.

Madam CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, the time is now 12 pm, which brings the Minister for Health's appearance to a close this year. Thank you, minister, and thank you to your staff and all the public servants who helped in your preparation to be here today.

We will now break for lunch for 30 minutes and the committee will reconvene at 12:30 pm today to consider the outputs relating to the Department of the Legislative Assembly. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

MADAM SPEAKER'S PORTFOLIO

DEPARTMENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. I note that while the Administrative Arrangements Order puts responsibility for the Department of the Legislative Assembly with the Chief Minister, by convention Madam Speaker administers the department, so she will now answer questions relating to the department's outputs.

Madam Speaker, I welcome you and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Madam SPEAKER: Madam Chair, to my left is the Clerk, Michael Tatham; to his left is the Chief Financial Officer, Diem Tang; and to my right is the Deputy Clerk, Marianne Conaty.

Madam CHAIR: Madam Speaker, I invite you to make a brief opening statement and will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions, and finally non-output-specific budget-related questions.

I will ask the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members, and finally other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister, rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on an output. Madam Speaker, would you like to make an opening statement?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to do so.

The Department of the Legislative Assembly is a unique entity, because while it is a government department like any other, it specifically provides support for the elected Assembly and so, by convention, the government leaves it to me, as the Speaker, to direct the CEO of the department on matters relating to day-to-day operational responsibilities. The Clerk of the Assembly also provides procedural and administrative support to all members.

I am pleased today to advise this committee that over the past year the Assembly administration has delivered the following highlights:

- the induction of new members of the Thirteenth Assembly
- the opening of the Thirteenth Assembly
- completion of two new electorate offices and commencement of one further relocation
- the induction and employment of all the new electorate officers for members
- Know Your Assembly seminars, which are hugely popular
- adult education delivered to 415 Territorians
- recruitment of the Independent member research team
- papers presented to Australian and international conferences
- we hosted the international CPA mid-year Executive Committee meeting in Darwin, in April this year

- implementation of the response plan to the 2016 People Matter Survey
- outreach to schools across the Territory
- Assembly visits by schools reaching 3755 students
- we do an annual survey of members
- we have increased skilling with more rostering of departmental officers to the Clerk at the Table during Assembly meetings
- we have commenced the next review of the standing orders for the Thirteenth Assembly.

These are a mere snippet of our activities, which will no doubt be taken up further in the annual report estimates later this year.

Before taking questions, I wish to turn briefly to today's so-called exclusive report by Christopher Walsh in the *NT News*. As Mr Walsh reports, the Clerk of the Assembly has travelled in the role both domestically and internationally.

Whilst it is very easy to try to characterise travel for Commonwealth Parliamentary Association events as 'junkets' the reality is the Northern Territory is part of the wider world. We have been an active member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association since our Assembly first came into existence. We are a branch of the Australian region of the CPA, one of the nine recognised regions in the organisation.

From 2015 until the end of this year, I had the privilege of a three-year term on the Executive Committee of the organisation, which is the board of the organisation. The organisation is headquartered in London. That means travel is involved. Along with my fellow executive committee board members in South Australian and New South Wales, I participate at CPA meetings twice a year. Throughout the year I also contribute via email, telephone and video hook-up. On every occasion I have travelled overseas for these meetings I have disclosed it on my Facebook page, and it has never been a secret that I am travelling internationally and why, and what the outcomes are.

I gladly disclose today that I intend to travel to Bangladesh in November for the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and for the final board meeting for my term on the executive. I intend also to be accompanied by the Clerk and for him to participate at the associated Clerks' conference while in Dhaka.

When I travel unaccompanied by my senior professional adviser, the Clerk in that role provides advice and assistance and uses the opportunity to meet colleague Clerks and participate in associated educational events for professional development of colleagues as well as to the benefit of the Northern Territory Assembly.

No government minister I am aware of travels without departmental officials, and this is no different.

The Clerk is well regarded amongst his colleagues in other Commonwealth jurisdictions. I know this from firsthand feedback. He participates by presenting papers and chairing meetings at these events and is valued for his expertise and knowledge of unusual parliamentary procedure, such as when the Northern Territory decided to sack the Speaker in the 12th Assembly.

The various papers presented are available to all staff, and conference travel is reported on the department's monthly all-staff forum, often published on websites such as the ANZACATT, ASPG and SOCATT sites. The Clerk can explain in detail what they mean.

Given the spotlight on public administration, I take it as a mark of excellent public administration that the only concern a media outlet has with my department's \$30m annual budget is to focus on approximately \$37 000 worth of travel for six trips, which will already be disclosed and reported on the Northern Territory Government's website in response to written questions to agencies ahead of the estimates—already public information, already disclosed. Whilst the amount is not insignificant it is required and it is accounted for.

The Legislative Assembly, as a workplace, is one of the most transparent and scrutinised places perhaps in the world. What other workplace has all of the words spoken by its participants at meetings broadcast and transcribed in *Hansard*?

What other workplace produces minutes of proceedings, including today, live tweets of proceedings, procedural decisions in the form of written legislation which is freely available on the Internet, publicly tabled annual reports each year; is subject to constant auditing, the results of which are made public each year by the Auditor-General; and appears before this publicly broadcast and transcribed committee meeting? Which other workplace has available to staff concerned about poor decision-making a rigorous regime for public interest disclosures?

Just to ensure that shareholders, that is, the public, get what they want, which other workplace is subject to a performance review each four years—all of us, when Territorians get to decide at the ballot box who gets to govern? None that I am aware of.

Those who work for us are also just as accountable. They are required to adhere to the requirements of the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*, the *Financial Management Act* and other fair and transparent procedures, audits, reports and disclosures, as well as the Clerk's decision-making being subject at this committee meeting today?

That is why when the *NT News* claims there is some sort of cover-up of alleged maladministration in my department I am very sceptical of the claim.

Madam CHAIR: Can I just interject there? Are you close to wrapping?

Madam SPEAKER: I am. Mr Walsh's approaches to both the Clerk and me in relation to the anticipated story appear to have been designed to create confusion, with assertions and allegations that are still confusing, even when I read the story this morning.

For complete accountability and transparency, I am pleased to table Mr Walsh's emails to both the Clerk and me, as well as his email to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in London, which adds to the confusion.

I decided we would not reply to Mr Walsh's emails because of the tone and approach taken. I seek leave to table paper number one.

Instead of Mr Walsh asking clear questions seeking additional factual information on top of what was already publicly available, the content of his emails referred to shadowy sources and alleged secrets. His approach is to initiate argument and make assertions.

The content of his assertions and mixed up questions are inconsistent and confusing, and his tone is aggressive and plain nasty.

Madam CHAIR: Sorry, Madam Speaker. I am going to have to cut you off there. We have a 20-minute time frame and we have a number of questions to get through.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you. I table papers two, three and four.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to Madam Speaker's statement?

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017–18 that relate to the Department of the Legislative Assembly.

Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

Are there any questions from members of the public?

Ms NELSON: I have questions from Mr Chris Walsh. Could you please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itineraries, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for all chief executives in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, interstate and intrastate travel?

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Katherine. Yes, I can table the report, it is publicly available in the answers to questions 38 and 39 and there are the answers to the questions.

Ms NELSON: Thank you. Would you please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by chief executives from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 and please list the number of times a chief executive has visited that location over the last five years.

Madam SPEAKER: It is all included in that paper I have just tabled.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Ms NELSON: There are further questions but I will just take a minute because you have just tabled that report where it is all publicly ...

Madam SPEAKER: It contains the answers. That is the travel of all departmental staff.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 — PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES **Output 1.1 — Assembly Services**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Parliamentary Services, Output 1.1 Assembly Services. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Madam Speaker, there have been some disruptions this financial year in relation to the provision of sound and camera services to the Legislative Assembly. Can you advise the cause of the problem and whether it has been rectified and the cost associated with that?

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Namatjira. Yes, I can. At last year's Estimates Committee proceedings I mentioned the agency was looking at upgrading the seven-year-old, poorly functioning cameras in the Chamber and it would cost \$600 000. The six Chamber cameras had been progressively failing to varying degrees over many months.

In July 2016 I endorsed the replacement of all cameras in the Chamber. This decision was based following the receipt of a report from an independent consultant, Harris Kmon Solutions, and advice from the Departments of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics and Corporate and Information Services, so both departments have been involved.

Following a select tender process undertaken by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics in August 2016 the broadcast camera replacement project was awarded to Darwin-based Audio Technology. The cost, which includes supply, installation and commission of the project, was \$499 860 GST inclusive and was funded from the DLA's 2016–17 minor new works infrastructure budget. The cameras and lenses were procured by Audio Technology from Sony Australia, but came from Japan. The camera robotics were produced by Audio Technology from Telemetrics in the USA. As you can understand, Madam Chair, it is specialised technology.

The new cameras are like-for-like replacement of the previous cameras. Due to lead time with procurement of the cameras, lenses and robotics and work around scheduled Assembly meeting dates, DLA agreed with Audio Technology to replace the cameras in between the February and March meetings this year. The back end controls, final image adjustments and broadcast outputs were completed in March and May Legislative Assembly meetings, completing the project.

The audio failure that occurred during the March 2017 Assembly meetings was unrelated to the camera replacement project. The audio matrix unit in the broadcast room that takes in signals and distributes them had an internal power supply failure. The Pixel Power PC that provides broadcast graphics—such as members' names, scrolling text indicating what business is taking place and the Assembly logo against a green screen—failed in April 2017. This was a direct consequence of a full-load generator test in April, when the main building's uninterruptable power supply failed causing the Pixel Power PC hard drive to permanently fail, which has all been rectified now.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions on that output? That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 — Members and Client Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 1.2, Members and Client Services. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: I just have a question in relation to the Northern Territory Government provided funding for two full-time positions placed within the library, reporting to the Clerk to provide support to the Independent members of the Assembly. Can you advise whether these staff members have been utilised by the Independent members of the parliament?

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Namatjira. Just one point of correction; they are not located in the Parliamentary Library. They are located in offices of the Legislative Assembly on the third floor. We have recruited—the NT Government did undertake to provide funding for research people to support the Independents in their duties within the Chamber and scrutiny of legislation.

We had funding that enabled us to get a SAO1 and an AO7. They have been recruited and they have been undertaking research. They have done research projects for me, as the Member for Goyder; they have done it for the Members for Blain, Namatjira and Nhulunbuy. They have been well recruited and I think their support is much appreciated by the Independents.

Mr PAECH: Are you aware of who paid for full-page ad in the *NT News* on Monday 12 June, which was addressed to Northern Territory public servants, and I note, had your name and signature on it?

Madam SPEAKER: It is not really under the Speaker's management, but I presume it was something coordinated by the crossbenchers and the opposition's office.

Mr PAECH: Did you approve the use of the official Legislative Assembly logo?

Madam SPEAKER: The Parliament House logo can be used by all Members of the Legislative Assembly. The government crest does have legislation surrounding it and it has guidelines for who and how that can be used, but in regard to the Northern Territory parliament logo, that can be used by any member of parliament on their stationery or in advertisements or letters in local media if they so choose.

Mr PAECH: They do not need to gain approval?

Madam SPEAKER: No, they do not.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

Ms UIBO: I am happy to be directed by Madam Speaker. In regard to Output 1.2, Members and Client Services, is there where the Legislative Assembly provides support for members in regards to travel?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, it is.

Ms UIBO: How many travel reports have you received in the last 12 months?

Madam SPEAKER: I do not know the number off the top of my head, but I will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.1

Madam CHAIR: Can you please restate the question for the record, Member for Arnhem?

Ms UIBO: How many travel reports have been received in the last 12 months?

Madam CHAIR: Are you happy to accept that question?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, they have all been tabled in the parliament; it is just a matter of adding them up.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Arnhem of Madam Speaker has been allocated the number 4.1.

Mr PAECH: I am seeking a point of clarification with the Speaker. I am interested in asking a question regarding the website. Is that best here or in Building Management Services?

Madam SPEAKER: We can do it here, yes.

Mr PAECH: I understand the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly has migrated over to a new website and part of that migration has resulted in some of the functionalities of members looking to pull up the *Hansard* of their parliamentary debates—it is restricted given the new system. Are there provisions put in place by the Legislative Assembly to rectify or remedy that matter?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, there are. It has created issues, I understand, for all members and outside people. A couple of points to note is it the website changed to provide e-tabling and replace outdated software. No funding provided for the website development, so change is done at no or low cost. Some of the functions of the old site were lost due to these facts. The DLA is using a whole-of-government platform, which has not been adapted to suit all of our needs as a Legislative Assembly.

The nt.gov.au platform does not yet have an advanced search functions. Previously *Hansard*, if committee members were not aware, was hosted on Lotus Notes databases, and that is no longer utilised and supported. Initial transition is now complete and the DLA is exploring further low or no cost options to improve functionality in addition to funding options for higher-demand features.

Some functionality improvements would require additional funding. The DLA is researching the systems being used in other parliaments to see which is best practice and which we might be able to afford, and exploring options for data management under the current NTG systems. We will be reporting this back to the House Committee on options and cost when it next meets in August. The committee can then indicate members' priorities for inclusion in a funding request to government.

In simple words, because of the Lotus Notes database no longer being used, we have lost that good search capacity and capability. The more money we spend the better search capabilities we can put in there for members and outside people to use. We are preparing briefs now which we will take to House Committee and then from the House Committee to parliament and government.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output? That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Building Management Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Building Management Services. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: We have been advised there is no camera footage of parliamentary proceedings and debates available prior to January 2016. Can you advise what risks are associated with this?

Ms PURICK: We stream the parliament; we do not record and hold all that footage in a database because it would be massive. When members ask for a copy of their speech from a particular sittings it is usually okay for that sittings or year. Anything further back we do not have the capacity within our systems and databases. If we were to have that capacity in storage and databases that would be a huge cost. It is possible but at what cost?

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

Mr PAECH: Can you advise what the \$1m in repairs and maintenance associated with the package has been for?

Ms PURICK: It is for painting the outside of the building. We had budgeted to paint the building in stages. Last year we did the front and we will finish it all the way around. The NT Government announced its economic stimulus package and put the proposal to us if we could paint the whole building in one set, and that is with the \$1m. That job will be done in September this year for the remaining three sides of the building to stimulate business and the economy, which was the government's plan.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.3 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE
Output 2.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions relating to Output Group 2.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 2.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of the Legislative Assembly. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Madam Speaker, for appearing today. I also thank the departmental officers who provided advice. The committee will now move on to consider outputs relating to the Department of Housing and Community Development after a short break. Thank you for your time.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, Madam Chair, and members.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER McCARTHY'S PORTFOLIOS

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Madam CHAIR: I welcome you, minister, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you this afternoon.

Mr McCARTHY: Madam Chair, with me today is Mr Jamie Chalker, the Chief Executive Officer; Mr Jim Bamber, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer; Karen Elligett, Executive Director Corporate Services; and Mr Ken Tinkham, the Chief Financial Officer.

Madam CHAIR: I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government, budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions and finally non-output specific budget-related questions.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members, and finally other participating members may ask questions.

The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on the output.

Do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Housing and Community Development?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Madam Chair. The Department of Housing and Community Development provides services in affordable and accessible housing, local government and community development across the Northern Territory, and I have had carriage of this significant portfolio since September 2016.

Over this time, and in the months prior, the department has achieved a number of milestones. The former Department of Housing and the Department of Local Government and Community Services were combined to form the Department of Housing and Community Development as part of the machinery of government changes after the August 2016 election. The new department took on the key functions of housing, local government and community development whilst seeing the transfer of the Domestic Violence Directorate, Office of Women's Policy, Office of Men's Policy and Office of Aboriginal Affairs to other departments.

Turning to the department's output, the community housing services delivery output is responsible for more than 12 000 dwellings and 9240 tenancies throughout the Northern Territory and provides services across the housing continuum, from emergency and supported accommodation to public and community housing, affordable and private rentals and home ownership.

As I frequently say, good housing is a right for all Territorians, and this government is working to improve the quality and quantity of housing options across the continuum.

From 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, \$22.1m in housing and homelessness support programs was allocated to the non-government sector across the Northern Territory. The ShelterMe website was reviewed and updated, and approvals were granted for the one-off homeless innovation fund to trial innovative and transformational approaches to the delivery of homelessness services.

In addition the department delivered the Central Australian renal accommodation project, which provides housing in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek for renal patients from remote communities, and undertook needs analysis modelling with the homelessness and housing sector to improve service delivery in future years. In Budget 2107–18 housing and homelessness support is \$23.77m and funding is continued to Stuart Lodge and Apmere Mwerre Visitor Park after it ran out in the previous government's last budget.

The department is the main provider of social housing, comprising public and community housing, in the Territory. By 31 March 2017, 494 Territorians were allocated a public housing property. The department continued its program of repairing vacant stock for reallocation, reviewing the wait list and eligibility of applicants, assisting Territorians to transition along the continuum from public housing to the private market and continuing its capital and maintenance programs.

The department also published a revised wait time calculation that provides a more accurate estimate of the time people wait for public housing. Going forward these figures will be published on the department's website twice a year, in January and July.

The social housing headleasing initiative allows government to supply affordable and social housing without up-front capital cost and makes inroads into our public housing wait list. To date, the department has leased 127 properties and has agreements in place to lease a further 37 properties, with a target of 374 in place after five years of the strategy. Budget 2017–18 includes \$6.3m for this program. A number of construction projects which will be supplying houses under this initiative are due to commence this Dry Season, creating and protecting jobs for Territorians.

In the affordable housing space, the department continued to deliver the Northern Territory Government's affordable rental program, which includes affordable rental headleasing and the National Rental Affordability Scheme. To date the department has delivered a total of 340 affordable rentals for key workers across greater Darwin, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. For 2017–18, \$4.58m has been budgeted to support affordable rental programs, included NRAS and affordable rental headleasing.

The department also rolled out this government's \$5m urban public housing stimulus across Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs to provide much-needed additional repairs and maintenance to existing public housing. This program also provided an opportunity for stimulus to small- to medium-size Territory businesses. The same funding will continue for this program in the next financial year.

In 2016–17 the department continued to develop the community housing sector through transferring management of a 22-unit complex in Alice Springs to the non-government organisation sector for supported and affordable accommodation, and is currently seeking proposals to lease and manage a 39-unit complex in Katherine and three houses in Alice Springs. Further development of the community housing sector is supported in the 2017–18 budget with the provision of \$10m to fund the expansion of the sector.

This output also delivers repairs and maintenance programs, both urban and remote, including the government's economic stimulus programs with \$5m for urban housing and \$5m for remote housing in 2016–17. In total, the 2017–18 budget provides for \$52.6m of Northern Territory Government funding for repairs and maintenance for housing, and \$40.7m for remote housing maintenance through the property and tenancy management element of the National Partnership on Remote Housing.

This government has recognised the critical state of remote housing in our Aboriginal communities and the link between housing and a range of health and social determinants. This government has allocated \$1.1bn of NT Government funding over 10 years from 1 July 2017 in the Remote Housing Investment Package to address the remote housing situation. The department will take the lead in delivering this program hand in hand with local communities. It is not just about the houses; it is about the local decision-making and the jobs that need to be part of this program so we can create real sustainable change.

The department has been undertaking planning and engagement activities in anticipation of the \$1.1bn remote housing program launching on 1 July, and I look forward to providing further updates on this program.

The Housing Program Delivery Office output has been established to deliver the program across 73 communities and remotes parts of the Territory over the 10 years. The office is currently working with stakeholders to develop an allocation and prioritisation method that will allow funding to be distributed community by community. Community development and local decision-making are key components of this program and it provides an opportunity for communities to develop capacity and capability in Aboriginal organisations and the local workforce.

The government is listening to Territorians and understands the urgency of the housing requirement in the bush. To ensure works are commenced in the communities as soon as possible, \$15m of the Remote Housing Investment Package work program was brought forward into the 2016–17 year to provide economic stimulus and respond to Territorians' requests for the program to commence.

The department has had carriage of these early works, and I am pleased to say that houses across 23 communities are receiving \$10m of work under Room to Breathe, a program designed to increase liveability and reduce overcrowding in existing houses. This work has been delivered through local Indigenous business enterprises to create local jobs and capacity, which is a core part of this government's remote housing program.

A total of \$5m was brought forward for repairs and maintenance in remote communities. Recognising that there is also a lack of available serviced lots in communities, government also provided \$20m in 2017–18 for an early start to the provision of land servicing and headworks, with a further \$24.5m in 2018–19.

The funding in 2017–18 provides the department with the opportunity to make an early start on providing the infrastructure in remote communities that will facilitate the delivery of new housing under Commonwealth programs and the Remote Housing Investment Package.

Overall, the 2017 budget provides \$263.3m in new capital works for housing.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, can I cut you off there and we can proceed to questions? I am wary of the time.

Are there any questions relating to the minister's statement?

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017–18 as they relate to the Department of Housing and Community Development. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr GUYULA: Minister, do you have data on overcrowding now and 10 years ago?

Mr McCARTHY: To go back 10 years would be an interesting analysis, but more importantly, there is the work that has started from 2016 in regard to our analysis of overcrowding and how to address that within the existing Northern Territory Government programs and the continuation of Commonwealth programs.

We have also looked at innovation within housing, that is, the Room to Breathe program, which is directly related to overcrowding in remote housing.

We have also focused on local decision-making, which will better inform government on delivering programs, particularly in those regional and remote areas with unique overcrowding issues and long-standing historical issues.

I have officials with me today, and I always welcome them to respond to members in estimates to make sure our story is told. These officials represent the front line of the experts in this field. I have Mr Chalker here, the CE, and he might like to respond to that question.

Mr CHALKER: The issue is very complex. At any point in time we can ascertain in a house what the overcrowding will look like; however, the problem for us is that the demographic may change very quickly. In the next week or so, the number of people in that residence may change dramatically.

We have been doing a general assessment, community by community. With the \$1.1bn program our intent is to develop a more sophisticated allocation model to be far more considerate of the prevalence of overcrowding and how to best ease it not only in the regional and rural settings, but also in the urban settings.

We have various data, but it is only ever for a point in time; it is not truly indicative of the constant issue.

Mr GUYULA: NGOs and Indigenous organisations, such as Red Cross, Yalu in Galiwinku and the TIO organisations which are supporting the development of Indigenous organisations, face the big problem of housing their professional staff. Are you aware of this problem? Is there anything in this budget that might alleviate this problem?

Mr McCARTHY: This represents the industry housing component of the Department of Housing and Community Development's programs, one element of the program. Industry housing is an important aspect because it supports the non-government sector in relation to being able to base their presences in regional and remote areas with minimal costs on their infrastructure and housing components so they can maximise their costs into service delivery.

For more detail on that, I am sure we will be able to have that discussion at the table. Mr Chalker, if you would like to start we can talk about more details on our investment in industry housing.

Mr CHALKER: The issue of availability of housing in remote communities is stark. That aligns not only to overcrowding, but the provision of accommodation for those who are either coming to work at the community or wish to set up permanent work, be it shops or other services available.

The longer-term intention of the 10-year program is to build capacity. It relates to creating local jobs and an economic opportunity for each community to grow and establish its own ability to bring in income that can be turned back in to the community to establish further accommodation and the like, and then potentially have organisations that can grow within those communities to create further employment for accommodation to become an income that can regenerate employment and assets within a community.

That is something we are conscious of with the opportunity of the 10-year program to use that as the impetus to grow. We have a short-term pressure point at the moment on a high number of our communities as it relates to the provision of accommodation for those employed locally. An element within government employee housing is that this commitment is about creating accommodation for local employees. That may provide opportunities for commercial accommodation to be provided further.

Mr BAMBER: The capacity for additional housing for NGOs in remote communities is varied by community. Some communities, like Wadeye or (inaudible) will have their own housing or accommodation they lease to contractors or NGOs and IBEs. Other communities might not have that housing at the moment. Over the 10 years we will be helping to build that capacity, but it does vary. In some communities, rather than moving on the work camp accommodation it has been sold to the local Aboriginal corporation for use as accommodation for IBEs and contractors.

It varies by community because there are 73 communities; some of them have the capacity whilst others need to build the capacity.

Mr Chalker is right; at the end of the 10-year program we should have sustainable communities where renting out VOQ, visiting officer's quarters, IBE and even GH accommodation, that should be a revenue stream for that community, regional council or local Aboriginal corporation.

Mr GUYULA: Minister, could you please advise what is in this budget for housing in each homeland centre. Are there any new houses to be build and in which homelands?

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Nhulunbuy, I enjoy your enthusiasm around homelands. You share that with me. We have a significant investment across the Northern Territory in the homelands program. In essence, 500 homelands across the Northern Territory vary in terms of their operational situation and capacity.

Across the budget in regard to homelands, in 2017–18 you are looking at investment of \$45.685m allocated to homelands. There is \$28.692m for municipal essential services, housing repairs and maintenance; an increase of \$2.3m on 2016–17 expenditures; \$4.042m for municipal and essential services special purpose grants; \$6.46m for the Homelands Extra Allowance program; \$5.891m for the homelands jobs program; and there is half a million dollars being spent in the Elliot town camp housing upgrades.

It is important to note that there is no specific budget allocation for new housing in homelands, but we have factored in the opportunity to create economies in the regional and remote areas through the \$1.1bn program in regard to Labor's investment and the Northern Territory's investment.

You would be aware that there is a very important date coming forward, 1 July 2018, where we hope to have secured the Commonwealth's contribution to the remote housing program over 10 years.

At an official level, discussions are going well and we remain positive but conservative, and we are working with Minister Scullion to deliver the best possible outcome. We consider that the Commonwealth could match our investment or do better, adding the land servicing costs to a program; then you are talking to a potential of a very significant program.

There are two aspects to this story. One is that we will be able to deliver better outcomes for homeland residents when we create local economies, Indigenous enterprises are fully engaged, local people are fully engaged in their jobs and we show better value for the taxpayer dollar. You can think of the clusters around the remote communities such as Gapuwiyak, Galiwinku or Maningrida or down where I live, in the Barkly, and those clusters of homelands around remote towns that can benefit from improved efficiencies and economies.

We are targeting innovation around doing the work better and providing residents with those important innovations, like the Room to Breathe concept. We feel very confident that we will be able to deliver in this space.

In terms of capital for new housing on homelands, this government has said that it is interested in co-investment opportunities. I acknowledge already, in my brief time in this portfolio, the Aboriginal benefits account, which has allocated a grant of \$40m to homelands, specifying that it wants innovation for the value for money.

That is a very good opportunity for governments to develop partnerships and to show how we can work together with a co-investment model. Within this budget appropriation, and on the way forward over the next decade and beyond, this plan is about incorporating better outcomes for homelands through developing economies, efficiencies, jobs and making the taxpayer dollar represent improved investment.

The other side of the story is what we have focused on, working with Indigenous people—the local decision-making involving conversations where we can both bring resources to the table. I look forward to your advice and support in that journey forward.

Mr GUYULA: The federal program Bushlight is run in many communities and is currently being maintained by Ingkerreke in Alice Springs; however, I understand there is no funding for new solar batteries available through this program. Solar batteries have a life of approximately seven years, which means many batteries are now due to be changed. Is there funding for a replacement of these batteries?

Mr McCARTHY: Another good question, Member for Nhulunbuy. The information regarding remote areas and alternative energy investment can be outlined by the Power and Water Corporation. The hearing will occur on Wednesday. They will be able to provide you with the specifics. There are some good investments in that area.

I do not think we have any information in the folders that I have brought with me regarding replacing batteries in that existing program. We can search for that information for you and provide the plan, which is to address innovation in providing energy for regional and remote areas. The Solar SETuP program is rolling out under the Power and Water Corporation.

You might want to save that question and ask it at the GOC hearings on Wednesday.

Madam CHAIR: Would you like to place that as a question on notice.

Mr GUYULA: Yes.

Mr McCARTHY: Mr Bamber would like to contribute.

Mr PAECH: If we are going to place it on notice, it might be best for the advice to come back. I have a series of questions, as do other members. I am mindful of time.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. We will place that one on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.1

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, can you please restate the question for the record?

Mr GUYULA: The federal program Bushlight is run in many communities and is currently being maintained by Ingkerreke in Alice Springs; however, I understand there is no funding for new solar batteries available through this program. Solar batteries have a life of approximately seven years, which means many batteries are now due to be changed. Is there funding for a replacement of these batteries?

Madam CHAIR: Are you happy to accept that question?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nhulunbuy of the minister has been allocated the number 5.1.

Madam CHAIR: Do you have any more questions?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise how many people are employed by the shires and how many of those are local Indigenous people? Are there any mentor and training programs within the shires to develop skills for the local community?

Mr McCARTHY: It will time to get those numbers for you and to align them with training programs and other professional development opportunities. We can get you that information.

Madam CHAIR: Will you take that as a question on notice as well?

Mr PAECH: Can I add on to the member for Nhulunbuy's question. Are we able to get statistics on the rate of Indigenous people employed within the agency and of that, how many are in management. And further, how many women are employed across Housing and Community Services.

Madam CHAIR: I will put those as two questions on notice. I will do them separately.

Question on Notice No 5.2

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, could I ask you to restate the question for the record?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise how many people are employed by the shires and how many of those are local Indigenous people? Are there any mentor and training programs within the shires to develop skills for the local community?

Madam CHAIR: Are you happy to accept that question?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nhulunbuy of the minister has been allocated the number 5.2

Question on Notice No 5.3

Madam CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, could I get you to restate your question for the record?

Mr PAECH: Is it possible to get statistics on the rate of Indigenous people employed within Housing and Community Services, and further to that, how many of those are in management positions? How many women are employed across Housing and Community Services?

Madam CHAIR: Are you happy to accept that question?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira of the minister has been allocated the number 5.3.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions relating to whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy? That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

Are there any questions from members of the public?

Ms UIBO: There are two questions from Making Justice Work, Sam Bowden.

How many additional rooms has the Northern Territory Government identified as needed to end overcrowding and severe overcrowding in remote communities using the Canadian National Occupancy Standard used by the ABS to determine overcrowding and severe crowding? Severely overcrowded houses are those that require four or more additional bedrooms.

Mr McCARTHY: I think it is important for the public to understand a major shift in terms of our remote housing program, not only the significant investment but now the ideology, about not trying to quantify an asset. It is about the people, and the basic premise that we are building off is local engagement and the local decision-making. It was briefly outlined by Mr Chalker, the CE, in a response to the Member for Nhulunbuy's question that part of the important work we have undertaken, established and will be going forward with is communicating directly with community members to establish that specific nature of overcrowding on a place-by-place basis.

In regard to overcrowding, there is no doubt that we have to increase the capacity of housing, and that is within the new housing program. We have implemented a new program, the Room to Breathe program, to specifically address overcrowding. For the member of the public who asked that question, we can provide lots more detail around this policy and start to show that the outcomes that we are achieving, but it is about engaging with the local people, determining the issue—which is the overcrowding—but then looking at innovation around the whole amenity of that dwelling.

In my brief time in the portfolio and my very brief time in the Northern Territory, pushing 39 years, I am very aware of Aboriginal Territorians who are advising government of good outcomes in innovation that relates to lifestyle. People are telling the department, 'We want to look at innovation in relation to outdoor living areas. We want to tell the department how to innovate existing built-form infrastructure, and we want to look at a whole amenity package to improve the outcomes for our large extended families.'

We have moved beyond this quantifying principle and I encourage the member of the public to get some more information because it is a new policy and a progressive policy.

Ms UIBO: You spoke about the Room to Breathe program, which goes to the second question from Mr Bowden. The question is in relation to Room to Breathe; how many new rooms will be created and in which communities?

Mr McCARTHY: Once again, I find it very limiting to try to quantify how many rooms will be delivered. To tell Mr Bowden a very quick story—when this policy was designed it was consulted in regard to an election campaign. I am an example, as other members in the committee are aware. I took it on the road and started that consultation.

Aboriginal families were very quick to pick up on the concept and they said, 'Yes, let's give it a try'. We are large extended families who want to live together, but we want to make sure we can see improved outcomes for our health and our kid's education and those social factors within large extended families.

We took that on the road and now we are implementing this policy. As I said, it is not quantified to rooms. It is about innovation and the amenity of the dwelling, and this is being conducted on a place-by-place case. We are researching and collecting the information. As Mr Chalker said, we have established a new directorate within the agency to conduct the analysis and make sure that those local decisions are

translated into action. I apologise to Mr Bowden. I will not put a number on this because it will be so limiting to the policy we are implementing in respect to local decision-making and empowering local communities.

I will add to that explanation; one of the most important parts of all of this for our government is about local capacity-building and jobs. That is the real essence of this new policy.

Ms UIBO: Minister, the next question from the public comes from Pauline Cass. She says, 'I commend the Power and Water Corporation on its Northern Territory Solar Energy Transformation Program (Solar SETuP). Has a cost-benefit analysis been conducted on installing storage batteries to enable these communities to become totally solar powered, with diesel generators used only as backup?'

Mr McCARTHY: That is a good question from the public. The roll-out of the Solar SETuP has started. Of course, there is a very high level partnership with ARENA, one of the Commonwealth funding agencies. To get the details of that question, it will need to be directed to GOC, the Power and Water Corporation hearing, because you will be able to get some technical details about that for the member of the public.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister. The next set of six questions comes from Mr Walsh. Please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for all chief executives in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Mr McCARTHY: I am happy to table the document with this information. It is important to note that the Department of Housing and Community Development, which incorporates local government, is one of the large departments within government, and there is extensive travel. We have officers travelling the length and breadth of the Northern Territory. The document I will table reflects that. I am very proud of that, because if there is one thing this government plans to do right it is to make sure we engage with Territorians and empower local decision-making. You will see in the budget, across all agencies, appropriations that will deliver that.

I will table this document, the first one about CEO travel. There have been a number of CEOs with the change in the machinery of government. There is no international travel to report in that document.

Mr UIBO: Please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by chief executives from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017. Please list the number of times the chief executive has visited that location over the past five years.

Mr McCARTHY: No international cities or towns were visited by CEOs.

Mr UIBO: The third question relates to international travel, so you have answered that. Please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for public servants in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Arnhem, I have a document to table on travel to address that question. Again, I put on the public record that the Department of Housing and Community Development, which incorporates local government, has staff travelling for consultations and engagement with remote residents, tenancy management, housing inspections, interpreting jobs and council and local authority meetings. Most of the travel is to regional and remote parts of the Territory. There is no international travel within this document. I will table that document.

Ms UIBO: There are two more questions from Mr Walsh. The first relates to international travel so that is null, as is question six, so that completes his questions.

There is one more question from the public, which I believe came in this morning. This relates to the Palmerston Council. The minister has chosen not to allow the council to get a significant loan for \$13.5m to build a car parking structure. Given all the changes in the greater Darwin surrounds, which draws cars to other areas not in the Palmerston CBD, and given the challenges faced by local businesses with the introduction of the disastrous paid parking, would the minister consider cancelling any chance of a loan for such a significant amount for the city to prevent future councils having to take drastic measures to afford the repayments?

Mr McCARTHY: I have had some serious concerns about the application to borrow for this project. A number of important procedures were not followed, and the department has been working through a number of issues with the elected members.

The council is due to respond shortly to issues that have been raised, and that response will help to determine what steps are taken next. Councils are required to have ministerial approval to take a loan and applications are considered carefully on their merits.

Ms UIBO: That concludes the questions from the public.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Output 1.1 – Housing Services Delivery

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output Group 1.0, Housing and Community Development, Output 1.1, Housing Services Delivery. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: What is the breakdown of houses the department manages and delivers services to?

Mr McCARTHY: That is a good one to hand to the CE to kick the ball off in this section, because he can respond with some operational information and details.

Mr CHALKER: We manage 12 083 assets, and that consists of 10 714 owned and leased social housing dwellings, 1369 owned government employee housing dwellings. Of the 10 714 social housing dwellings, that consists of 5017 urban public housing dwellings, which includes 111 headleases; 5036 remote public housing dwellings; 548 industry housing assistance scheme dwellings; 42 emergency accommodation dwellings at Galiwinku; 59 community housing provider managed dwellings; and 12 affordable rental dwellings managed by a community housing provider.

There are an additional 499 dwellings across the Territory that are privately leased for government employee housing; 328 dwellings are leased by the department in the Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Palmerston, Darwin and Casuarina regions for the purposes of formal rental housing. These dwellings are managed on behalf of the department by private real estate agencies.

Ms UIBO: Community housing provides a more tailored and responsive approach to supporting people with complex health and social needs than traditional public housing. How is the government growing the community housing sector in Budget 2017–18?

Mr McCARTHY: That is a very interesting perspective on delivering housing for Territorians, especially vulnerable Territorians, whom I have had the privilege of learning about, and will continue to learn about with the officials at the table and the wider department.

Community housing involves non-government organisations providing affordable and social housing, with a view to increasing housing options for Territorians. Community housing providers can leverage properties they manage to expand and build more stock without using government capital. That is a very important opportunity for the Northern Territory.

They can use housing assets as security so they can borrow private finance to generate new social housing supply. Community housing organisations are able to access Australian Government funding not currently available to NT Government for public housing.

Community housing can provide social housing as an alternative to government owned public, disability, senior or affordable housing targeting low-income earners. Nationally other jurisdictions are considerably advanced regarding community housing, while the NT is in its infancy. That is why we are looking at and working with other jurisdictions to inform our policy.

Budget 2017–18 provides \$10m in an incentive fund whereby expressions of interest will be sought from community housing providers to partner with developers and the Territory government to build and manage social housing properties on an ongoing basis. This is a great program to look forward to.

The community housing sector provides a range of additional wraparound services and support to tenants who tend to be the most disadvantaged in our community. That is a point to reinforce to Territorians; this is a very embracing and efficient way to provide social and public housing so our most vulnerable get the

support they need. Non-government organisations can provide the full array of services tailored to clients who are facing challenging times. As local members we all have examples of that in our constituency.

It is a more holistic way of supporting vulnerable Territorians. The community housing model can help support people when they are at risk of homelessness. This is a huge issue in the Territory. The Northern Territory has 15 times the national average of homelessness. The department is currently undertaking economic modelling as to ascertain the most cost effective way forward, one that will produce the best social housing outcomes for Territorians.

Public houses can be handed over to the non-government sector in two ways: management outsourcing where public housing management is contractually delegated to a community housing provider for continues social housing use. The second is asset transfers where the ownership of housing assets is transferred to a community housing provider for social housing use. This is a significant piece of work, one that will expand housing options for disadvantaged Territorians and provide more jobs and economic development opportunities for local businesses and trades people.

We have had a question around industry housing. The Department of Housing and Community Development supports non-government organisations and the important work they conduct. The department leases dwellings to many key not-for-profit organisations such as Anglicare, Dawn House and Kalano Aboriginal Corporation. The department leases these dwellings at a subsidised rent.

This is so these organisations can operate from an economically sustainable position ensuring, their funding is targeted at the critical service they provide. Services such as emergency accommodation and programs for the homeless, mental health, youth at risk and domestic violence victims help people transition to public housing with improved life skills, support and the ability to better manage all aspects of living independently.

High risk public housing tenants at risk of eviction may also be referred to these programs to enhance their life skills and intensive support. I want to congratulate the work these organisations do. Members are most welcome to engage with the department to learn more about this area. I had a wonderful opportunity of travelling with TEAMhealth through some of their industry housing, meeting the Territorians they support and understanding more about the concept of a better way of doing business in terms of outcomes for Territorians, the taxpayer, especially our most vulnerable Territorians.

Social headleasing is another way the government provides social housing options for Territorians. Headleasing is an innovative method of increasing the supply of social housing dwellings available to Territorians. Social housing headleases allow government the ability to supply affordable and appropriate housing without upfront capital costs. It also allows private investors and developers the opportunity to gain income and potential capital growth while contributing to accommodation solutions of our community.

Over the next four years an additional 211 social housing dwellings will be procured from the private market through social headleasing. As at 31 March 2017 the department has leased 116 dwellings with 11 leases currently prepared for execution. Agreements to lease are in place for a further 37 dwellings, so a total of 374 social headleases will be in place after five years under this current strategy.

This initiative also assists us to reduce our public housing waiting lists and provides private owners with financial security and a housing market that is characterised by increasing vacancies.

Member for Arnhem, I look forward to growing the community housing sector and building on the impact of the industry housing, social housing, social headleases and this new innovative approach to reducing our waiting lists and to support people on a continuum of public housing—a most important concept about supporting people through a continuum of supported public housing and then hopefully the outcome of their own dwellings and home ownership.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, I have some more questions. Minister, can you please explain the changes the government has made to the waiting list methodology?

Mr McCARTHY: I am pleased to advise the committee that early this year we changed the methodology used to calculate public housing waiting times in urban centres. The changes provide a more accurate picture of waiting times for Territorians; the revised method uses median waiting times over 12 months rather than the previous complicated manual process.

The previous method just was not accurate as people were consistently being allocated a property in less time than the previous estimated waiting times. Waiting times will now be published twice a year rather than annually, but for some more details on this change I would like to hand to Mr Chalker, the CE.

Mr CHALKER: We have been working quite hard in respect to communicating what the issue is around waiting lists. The perennial issue that occurs is that for every allocation that we make, we normally have at least an additional, if not more—people come onto our waiting list. It is a cycle that continues. It is one that is growing, and obviously, in the current environment, many people are choosing to come onto the public wait list, so we are working quite hard with that.

On the other side of it, up until 31 March this year we have turned over 494 applications in the urban setting and 423 in the remote setting. For urban that is an average of nearly 13 a week in allocations where we are putting people off the waiting list into accommodation. One person represents an applicant on the waiting list, so we are potentially moving anywhere upwards of families of four to five with one move, so that turnover is quite stark. If you overlay that to the remote and rural setting we are averaging 11 a week.

We suggest that the work we are doing has been quite strong in respect to the turnovers; we have a lot of people who are actually vacating from public housing, so that continuum is working where they are then transitioning into more affordable accommodation opportunities. Then there are those who are on the waiting list coming through. The modelling has been prepared to try to demonstrate that spread much more accurately.

Ms UIBO: Thank you. Where are the waiting lists published?

Mr CHALKER: The intent is for those to start going in six months and they will be placed up on the Northern Territory Government's website.

Ms NELSON: Madam Chair, I have a question. It just leads on to these rural towns the minister mentioned. Minister, can you please tell us the difference between urban and remote public housing, including in your response how they are classified, who classifies them and what this means for regional towns like Tennant Creek and Katherine?

Mr McCARTHY: In regard to definition, we really need to start with the socioeconomic and socio-geographic definition of an urban area. Katherine has approximately 11 000 in population; Tennant Creek, 3500 population, which was previously 5500 population, and we are on the comeback. The definition of urban also relates to Darwin and Alice Springs. If you look at that as a base for a definition and then relate it to policy in the Northern Territory, we are relating the definition to our unique circumstances and challenges.

Within urban centres we are looking at a demographic that has access to services and essentially has an economy. We have the industry, support services that conduct their daily business in support of the town and its needs and wants. In remote areas, as you would know, Member for Katherine, we have massive disadvantage. This is over decades. Our policy for remote areas is trying to get the bull by the horns and start to make sustainable changes.

I am proud of this policy because it is underpinned with building local capacity and workforce, engaging the people in every layer of the housing and community development sector.

That is why remote areas need more support in regard to the closing the gap methodology. That is recognised by the Commonwealth and supported by the Australian jurisdictions, including the Northern Territory. We have massive challenges and enormous deficits in regard to infrastructure. Importantly, too, we lack the economies in remote areas, so we have to build those economies.

As you would be aware, it costs a lot to do business in remote areas compared with urban areas. Our ambition and policy reflects building economies in regional and remote areas. That will start to drive the balance, close the gap and address the deficits not only in infrastructure, but in support services. To put it colloquially, when we aggregate all the opportunities, such as businesses and IBEs that are operating in remote towns, all the agencies within the town will be looking to the supplier from that town.

When you pick up the phone to get plumbing repairs done it will be going to a local business within that town—Maningrida or Hermannsburg. The local workers will be sourced from that town. The supplies will be resourced across the Territory and other jurisdictions. That economy will then circulate wages and support real outcomes.

Ms NELSON: Can I go back to this question? I want to clarify that classifying towns like Tennant Creek and Katherine as urban areas is not disadvantaging them for public housing investment, or government housing investment.

Mr McCARTHY: No.

Ms NELSON: Thank you. I am satisfied with that answer.

Ms UIBO: I have some questions. What is in the budget for repairs and maintenance across government's public housing assets? How does this affect the waiting list?

Mr McCARTHY: We are always looking at ways to decrease the waiting list. There was some good information traded in your previous question about the community housing sector.

We acknowledge the public housing waiting lists across the Northern Territory are excessive and we are working on that.

Budget 2017–18 has allocated \$32.6m for repairs and maintenance for public housing in the Northern Territory. That includes an additional \$5m in economic stimulus that was announced by government. A total of \$20.2m has been allocated for refurbishment of urban public housing stock, \$3m for upgrades to existing stock and \$13.4m for minor new works—all very important work to not only maintain public housing stock, but also to bring stock that is offline back online. This is an important investment which is designed not only to improve and regenerate stock but also to reduce the wait list.

Currently, \$22m in immediate work stimulus has provided a significant \$5m boost to the local construction industry for repairs and maintenance to urban public housing. Territory trades are delivering much-needed upgrades to public housing stock in urban areas as much of this stock is ageing and in need of repairs. The upgrades that we have targeted have been for roofs, kitchens, bathrooms, fences and security. Disability accessibility modifications and security upgrades are also planned.

This funding enables us to repair our public housing stock at a faster rate and to improve the turnaround times. The faster we repair houses, the faster we can allocate them, of course. That is designed to reduce the waiting list.

I am also pleased to announce that as at Tuesday 13 June this year, under our stimulus program for small and medium businesses, we have seen \$4 739 021 committed to works, with \$3 814 340 expended and 239 small businesses registered from our regional centres. Works have been completed in Casuarina, Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy, with the Barkly to follow.

In other options to reduce the waiting lists there are a number of initiatives to increase the availability and choices in housing supply to keep people in the Northern Territory. The NT Government holds headleases over privately-owned properties which are rented to key service industry workers at affordable rates. The National Rental Affordability Scheme provides affordable rentals to eligible low-income earners at no more than 80% of market rates.

Some of the National Rental Affordability Scheme properties are available through Venture Housing. Venture Housing is the Northern Territory's first affordable housing rental company created through the transfer of government assets and funding. The Department of Housing and Community Development offers bond loans for Territorians in the rental market who do not have enough savings to pay for a bond, helping them to get into a home.

The Northern Territory Government is encouraging home ownership through initiatives such as First Home Owner Grants on new and existing properties. We are also talking to developers about the possible redevelopment of urban public housing and ageing public housing complexes with a mix of public, affordable and private homes. We have plans to expand the community housing sector through the transfer of public housing stock to the non-government sector. We are strongly focused on providing the right services and products to assist people to move from public housing and into the private market and optimally, to achieve their own home ownership.

Member for Arnhem, we have plans to give Territorians better access to affordable housing, which will ease pressures associated with the public housing list. This is very much underpinning our urban housing strategy into the future.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister.

The \$1.1bn remote housing investment is a first in the Territory. Part of this includes the \$10m for early works for the Room to Breathe program. I was very fortunate this month to visit two of the resident of Gapuwiyak out of the five on the early works program. They were very excited and I am looking forward to my next visit to see that construction under way.

Minister, can you please update the committee on the progress made for the early works and what this means for our remote Territorians?

Mr McCARTHY: The early works program, as you have said, has been welcomed. It was brought forward because the policy was truly embraced by regional and remote Territorians and they wanted to get it under way. It was also a great opportunity for the department to embrace the new policy to engage, because we are all enjoying it and very much engaging with Territorians, and that is the essence of the work going forward.

Budget 2017–18 delivers on this remote housing program; it is about making a real difference to the lives of Territorians, particularly those living in the remote areas. The early works has certainly started a conversation, an education and awareness process, and has been an economic stimulus.

For me one of the most important aspects to our work on the ground now, in regard to regional and remote housing, is about building local capacity, such as jobs. We have engaged considerably and thoroughly with Indigenous business enterprises which we have given the honour and opportunity to lead this program in the regional and remote areas.

They are very supportive of this policy and they want to be in this space. We have 23 communities first up in terms of the early works, but we are now working through the list of IBEs right across the Northern Territory because some are very advanced in their capability and capacity, and others will need a lot of supportive work to get them there. That is what the department is doing, celebrating those early achievements and now planning on how we can support those IBEs.

That relates to local jobs, and I try to inspire the department officials. These are the experts on the front line, and there is a whole wealth of an army that sits behind that front line, so I use stories and anecdotes. One of the recent ones I used was—I want you to visualise a remote family today in the Northern Territory, and they are having breakfast. The four year old asks the adults in the room, the extended family, 'What is an apprentice?', because someone in that family has become an apprentice. I want that discussion happening right across the Northern Territory.

What that means is we will build from the ground up. Everybody wants to build new houses, and there is lots of investment. There is around \$200m worth of investment to continue and to complete the 10-year program over the next 12 months, but if we can engage local people—and I am particularly encouraging younger local people—to start with the important repairs and maintenance opportunities through IBEs, if we can then have those younger people participating in that middle level construction such as the Room to Breathe innovation, then they will move on to the new builds and the major housing construction industry.

Government policy is around offering five-year agreements in this space. If you are offering a five-year certainty around an industry program then you can train apprentices and can bring people through the continuum.

Many Territorians have heard the big figures, and in terms of the 10-year program—\$500m for the construction of new remote public housing, the HomeBuild NT package; \$200m to construct new government employee housing in remote communities, including housing for local employees; \$200m to build additional living areas in existing houses under the Room to Breathe Program; and \$200m for repairs and maintenance to better look after houses.

In Budget 2017–18 the share of this investment is just over \$106m, and that is just the start of this program. I have been waiting to get to 1 July. When you talk about that \$1.1bn program over 10 years and you look at the Commonwealth investment that we feel very confident we will bring to the table, those announcements will be forthcoming.

You have a significant program that is a real game changer for the Northern Territory. We want the focus to be on the bush. What does that mean for mainstream Territory industry? It means they have certainty in significant work and policy innovation in the bush, and we welcome them to be part of it.

Already, the Indigenous business enterprises tell me the phones are running hot. They are interested in joint ventures, partnerships and the supportive role where they can leverage off existing industry with tier one and two accreditation, down to the accredited trades and important areas we need. That relates to great opportunities in training to employment, apprenticeships and traineeships and engaging remote residents. It is exciting. The most important part is that now the bush is in front of this. They will be determining how they want to do business. That will deliver efficiency in the remote areas, but it will also deliver the economies.

When we can have real jobs and construction across all the agencies—not just Housing and Community Development, but Education will need to leverage off these businesses developing in the remote areas. It will be Health, the non-government sector and residents of remote towns. They will be supplying work. It will be the incorporation of the homelands model around this.

There is a lot to talk about in regard to this question. There are the specifics of the \$10m Room to Breathe program and the \$5m remote repairs and maintenance program brought forward. It is now ongoing. We have talked about the reasons. In terms of specifics to conclude this answer, the consultation regarding early works for each community was important learning for the department and it was conducted either through the housing reference group or local authority.

Community members provided input around the selection of lots and nominations for local businesses to undertake the work. Requests for tenders were released late March and April with contracts being awarded in April and June.

First works have commenced in 15 communities and all work is expected to commence by the end of this month in 2017. This government is committed to the reforms. It is a new way to do business that the bush is embracing.

Ms UIBO: You mentioned in your opening statement support for homelessness services. Can you please outline some of the funding available for homelessness and support services in the Northern Territory?

Mr McCARTHY: The government is committed to supporting vulnerable Territorians and providing them access to short-term accommodation and specialist homelessness and community mainstream services.

The department manages and administers grant funding for a range of housing and homelessness support services across the Northern Territory, including crisis and short-term accommodation; managed supported and transitional accommodation; outreach and case management; peak body funding; tenancy support programs; and programs to help tenants achieve sustainable tenancies within the public system.

Services are funded by the department through a mix of Australian and Northern Territory Government funding made available under the national affordable housing agreement, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and Northern Territory Government direct investment.

In 2016–17 grants for housing and homelessness support programs stands at \$22.6m. As of 31 March 2017, \$22.1m is currently allocated in grant funding to Territorians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Of this \$4.67m is allocated to tenancy support programs. The 2017–18 budget for housing and homelessness support programs is \$23.773m.

Ms UIBO: Some very good points there, although there may be some consideration from people and reservedness about antisocial behaviour that may come occur and is currently occurring in public housing premises. What is the government doing to address this antisocial behaviour in public housing?

Mr McCARTHY: There are some enormous challenges when dealing with some of the most vulnerable Territorians. Government is committed to effective measures to address antisocial behaviour related to public housing.

The public housing safety strategy addresses antisocial behaviour in and around public housing through a range of preventive initiatives. Those initiatives include Public Housing Safety Officers operating around the Northern Territory—there are bases in Darwin and Alice Springs, but teams also travel to Katherine and Tennant Creek—as well as the red card and visitor management policies, acceptable behaviour agreements and cross-agency collaboration with the NT Police.

The Public Housing Safety Officers—I could tell some personal anecdotes, but I will leave that for the time being. It would be good to have Mr Chalker contribute to this discussion on those initiatives. It is very

challenging work that we are very keen to progress. We see those opportunities not only with the initiatives I have just put on the table, but in the development of a better community housing sector.

Ms NELSON: Can I just add to the question before Mr Chalker responds? It relates to the Public Housing Safety Officers program.

Madam CHAIR: I will get you to ask after Mr Chalker has responded.

Mr CHALKER: We have increased our business intelligence profiles that relate to the activities of our Public Housing Safety Officers, that is, our understanding of and connectedness with the antisocial behaviour incidents, and our follow-up attendance. We are identifying that our tenants are not the primary cause of the antisocial behaviour; it is invariably linked to a number of the visitors who visit our tenancies. We are trying to work through some ongoing strategies in relation to that.

We have a wonderful working relationship with NT Police across all public housing environments. They do significant job operations as the hotspots arise. Our intent over the next year is to further understand that level of detail. As the minister and I have discussed regularly, housing and community development cannot just be about the assets; it is about the people. We have to turn our minds to how we can better use the services we have interlinked to see greater outcomes.

People who come onto our radar who are potentially in tenancies that create dysfunction and upset and distress neighbours could benefit from some early intervention and prevention-type strategies. Whilst we look at community housing organisation development and opportunities that might arise, we may be able to build some supported accommodation for those people when we do our early engagement with them.

We can ensure sufficient wraparound services are there so that environment is identified much earlier. Because of the creation of the children and families standing committee, of which I am a member, that then allows a much greater information exchange across all agencies to identify who has come to attention.

The one privilege we have in Housing and Community Development is that we are invariably being invited into people's homes. That is a rare privilege. If we can continue to focus on that relationship—our Public Housing Safety Officers do an excellent job in building those relationships—then by having a greater focus on a whole-of-government approach to this, understanding our business and sharing that information to guide our resources more effectively—overlay that with an increased focus on early intervention and prevention and the use of supported accommodation, plus the homelessness services that will gather—we intend to focus on reducing visitation rates, which we believe will have an impact on reducing the amount of antisocial behaviour around those premises.

Ms NELSON: I want to know where Katherine fits into the Public Housing Safety Officers program, because we do not have any based in Katherine. If we are considered to be urban, why are we not getting the same, and how can that be factored in?

Mr McCARTHY: I pick up on your enthusiasm because I share it, living in Tennant Creek. I know the difference it makes when our Public Housing Safety Officer teams visit. At the moment they are based in Darwin and Alice Springs, and we could probably provide some numbers around that program if you are interested because it is a significant investment, but a very good, targeted investment.

The way we are managing it, with the fiscal constraints that we have as a government, is around using these teams to travel into the regions into Katherine and up from Alice to Tennant Creek, basically working off local knowledge to support those public housing tenants and our community members around those important times of the year where we have a lot of movement and visitors and the potential for antisocial behaviour.

Something that we can build on into the future, which I am sure you are keen on as a local member; I am very keen as a minister, and let us say we are learning great lessons and the teams are doing great work. Let us look into the future where we can build those opportunities, Member for Katherine.

Ms NELSON: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms UIBO: How will government employee housing be allocated throughout remote communities?

Mr McCARTHY: As you know this is a new policy and it is very dear to my heart, having had experiences over many years questioning the equity around delivery. I will take you back 39 years, when I was living in

a Silver Bullet caravan. I was teaching children in the Silver Bullet caravan—your father would be very in favour of this story, Member for Arnhem.

We opened that school on the riverbank, but we actually got to move into caravans; that was our permanent dwelling. I used to farewell the children and the assistant teacher, and the assistant teacher lived behind some corrugated iron. It was a camp that was built by the women—these dwellings were built by the women in those days. The assistant teacher before me did an incredible job, a foundation member of that community, the first school pioneering those efforts, and she lived behind a piece of corrugated iron.

I said to myself, there is something wrong about that; there is just something not right. Thirty-nine years later we are in a government that has delivered this policy. With new policy comes enormous challenges, and part of the question is about how we are managing this policy now. The Office of the Commissioner of Public Employment has taken carriage of the administrative procedures around engaging with each chief executive officer to start to deliver on this policy, to look at the parameters of the policy and how it can be delivered.

It is pretty safe to say that Territorians would know, with this new policy which has major ramifications for regional and remote housing, we do not have the stock. It is now about how to build it. It is important how to allocate it but it is also very important how to build it. It will not just be about new built form; once again we are looking at innovation and how to provide the stock to acknowledge our local recruits. What comes with that is a major incentive to take on a job, to undergo training and accreditation and take on a role within Health or Education, Police or other agencies.

However, Health and Education are our main clients in terms of our government employee housing. We are looking at innovation and improving the housing mix, better ways of doing business in terms of our non-Indigenous recruits from outside of the regional and remote towns. In terms of a CE's perspective and working with the Commissioner for Public Employment, Mr Chalker may want to make some comments about how we are progressing in relation to the member's question.

Mr CHALKER: We are very keen to try to be as innovative as we can in the provision of the accommodation. We are not convinced that a three-bedroom residence for a sole occupant is the best use of the available resources. As we look at rolling out our \$1.1bn program across all 73 remote communities we will also be looking at how we can best utilise not only the land that is available, but use that to maximise the availability of accommodation considering the demographics there.

We will work with all chief executive officers of the relevant agencies that have, or hope to have, government employee housing opportunities for local employees. We will work with them on their expectations and requirements. We will work through that as it relates to the priority of the available employment. Current employment will take precedence over aspirational employment. As we get the model balanced we are hoping to be able to meet the need and allow growth in each community.

Ms UIBO: In addition to that question, there is \$2.9m towards upgrades of existing dwellings for government employee housing. When will those upgrades commence?

Mr BAMBER: We have an ongoing program for new GH build upgrades. It is a rolling program so it just carries on. We have a program of works with DIPL. We will say to them that we need this many built in each of the 73 remote communities and this many upgraded, and it is just a rolling program that carries on.

Ms UIBO: My last question in regard to government employee housing is will the rolling program include the removal of asbestos dwellings that are allocated for government employee housing?

Mr McCARTHY: A good question, and one for Territorians to understand. The Department of Housing and Community Development recently announced it will be inspecting all 1983 pre-1983 dwellings. The potentially contain asbestos. It is important for Territorians to note that it does not present any real danger, but it is something that the government is focused on identifying and removing.

For some more detail some of the officials might want to comment.

Mr CHALKER: As long as the infrastructure is not disturbed and in relatively good order, we can ensure it is safe. That is progressed until such time as that asset will reach the end of its life and go through the normal replacement regime. In the event that it is friable or damaged it is removed and the works are remediated. As long as it meets the standard it will remain in place and securing the relevant signage goes on to indicate that it does contain it but is not harmful in the condition in which it has been treated and

repatriated. If it is being demolished we follow all guidelines on removal of all the material that contains that, and we ensure that it is disposed of in a registered facility.

Mr PAECH: Can I follow on from that? To be clear, when we talk asbestos in the Northern Territory does that sit with your agency?

Mr McCARTHY: It is a crossover of agencies, but the Department of Housing and Community Development is responsible for the public asset and therefore the management and disposal of asbestos.

You then have the local government realm of legacy asbestos within the environment. You would be aware of some Commonwealth programs that have been addressing and continue to address. There is some interesting research coming up with a proposal for Yuendumu.

The other agency you may want to ask questions on asbestos and its management is WorkSafe.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions in relation to this output?

Ms UIBO: There is \$181m for Indigenous housing and infrastructure which is revoted works. What is the community engagement strategy in remote communities with the department working on those communities to let people know about the works and any programs in the department?

Mr McCARTHY: I am very proud of the Department of Housing and Community Development's community engagement strategies. They continue to inspire me with new and better ways of doing business. They have embraced the new government's policy on that.

Regarding that infrastructure program and its relationship to community engagement, Mr Chalker might want to start and there may be other officials.

Mr CHALKER: Obviously the NPARIH funding envelope has been ongoing for a considerable period of time. As we move into the next financial year we have the formalised commencement of the \$1.1bn housing program as well. With that we are seeking, by 1 July, to have the remote project office fully functioning in respect of what that work will do. We already have our plans in place in respect of the NPARIH money that is left over for the next financial year, and we are working with communities to try to identify where we can best expend that money to maximise the work from the ground as it relates to individual communities.

We do not want to be isolated just to 10 communities for the next financial year; we want to ensure that there is Room to Breathe with government employee housing and the new builds actually spread, as well as the repairs and maintenance element of that program.

We are working with communities to establish their determinations that relate to local decision-making, because we want to ensure there is no one model overlaid. We do not believe that one model will fit all. That is the sentiment we get when we engage. We are working with communities to understand them and hear from them regarding how the relevant Indigenous enterprises are currently set up and what level of influence and development opportunities may arise for them, and moreover how we might be able to support them. Again, that will be a whole-of-government approach with a number of agencies, including Trade, Business and Innovation and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

We know there are a number of Indigenous business enterprises that have gone into receivership in recent times. That is something we want to try to mitigate as best we can by working with communities. We want them to understand that we are coming with scopes of works. Obviously, part of the engagement is covering off what the capacity of the current services is within those communities, relating to their power and water supplies. We are also looking at the works needed for further services being provided.

Again, it is not just about housing; it is a contribution and discussion from community in respect of their needs, their concepts about future growth and how we can create and sustain employment opportunities in the community. The community engagement strategy is ongoing work and we continue to refine it as it relates to community by community.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Mr Chalker. Madam Chair, may I continue my questions?

Madam CHAIR: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Minister, can you please clarify for the committee what the refresh of Territory public housing stock is?

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Arnhem, I am sure the officials will be really enthusiastic about answering this.

Mr BAMBER: The refresh of public housing refers to a five-year urban housing program. Of the 5000 assets we have in all the urban centres, many of them are quite old. The average age is 30 years. Many of them are getting towards the end of life, so the refresh refers to a renewal of public housing. You might have a 40 or 50-year-old house on a really good block, so the block is the asset, not the house.

This is what the minister was referring to earlier, working with developers and housing providers to take a block and replace that old house with a small complex, or to take some contiguous blocks and merge them into a 10 or 11-house complex. The refresh refers to that program of renewing older houses for something that is more modern, suited to older living, NDIS or whatever the modern building code is.

Ms UIBO: Thank you for clarifying that terminology for me. I was quite interested in that.

Minister, there is \$3m allocated for public housing upgrades and existing dwellings across all regions. How will this be equitable across the Northern Territory?

Mr BAMBER: Again, the short answer is that it is on a pro rata basis. This is an allocation of \$3m each year for upgrades of the same 5000 public housing. We normally allocate it on a pro rata basis, based on the number of houses in each community. But then you tweak it for need. For example, in Katherine you might have older houses that need a bit more work, so in that year you will put more of that \$3m into Katherine. Next year it might be Tennant Creek that gets a share of it. In Katherine, in Victoria Highway, we did a townhouse upgrade that was about \$1m. They are the ones on the Victoria Highway. Katherine, last year, got a big share of that \$3m. Next year it will be some other area.

Ms UIBO: How does the department ensure equity for repairs and maintenance for Indigenous essential services to make sure they are allocated equitably across the Northern Territory? This is in regard to the \$16m allocated.

Mr McCARTHY: In 2016 the NT and Australian Governments jointly funded an access and asset review across 400 homelands and outstations in the Northern Territory. The review, conducted by the Centre for Appropriate Technology, examined the state of essential service infrastructure, including power, water and telecommunications.

Municipal and essential services implementation plan had been developed, which outlines how services will be provided to homelands in the Northern Territory until 2023. The public release of funding allocations and special purpose grants provides greater accountability and transparency in this process. This information helps homeland residents make informed choices about maintenance on their homeland.

Ms UIBO: I have a follow-up question in regard to repairs and maintenance for Indigenous housing and how it is allocated across the Northern Territory, in regard to the \$40m allocated in the budget.

Mr McCARTHY: I will get the officials to give you the details on this, but I will start off by making sure it is acknowledged that local members play an important part in this process. The more active we are the better outcomes we get. There are some very active local members who have embraced the opportunities around housing and community development.

Mr CHALKER: Part of the program is focused on ensure we treat need. A lot of our accommodation with significant issues to it requires expensive treatment. As we move into this 10-year program the broader element of trying to create local business sustainability and employment—we are working on the belief we will be able to get to repairs and maintenance far more quickly than what currently occurs where people may be required to travel with the relevant equipment and replacement materials from a major centre.

As we go through this first year looking at the broader inspection of individual properties, the departmental representatives will be on the ground engaging with people. They will be able to work with the local decision-makers on which areas have the highest priority need. We are looking to maximise the use of any contractors that have to travel so that while they are there any additional repairs can occur into the maintenance scheduling as opposed to urgent repairs.

Urgent repairs are costly. If we can stabilise the maintenance role that we do, ensuring there are relevant resource capability that is established and grows within a community, we believe we can maximise the spend of that money. As we move towards the next financial year we will be able to roll that over to other properties in various locations if we get the savings we are hoping to realise.

Mr PAECH: In my community of Alice Springs there have been a few houses sold from the department recently. Have the funds accumulated from those sales been put into repairs and maintenance or just into department general revenue?

Mr McCARTHY: The sale of a public housing asset is retained by the department to create a fund to sustain the program. That investment would be directly reinvested into what has already been discussed at the panel around a better housing mix, new innovative products. Yes, Member for Namatjira, that is completely recycled. One of the challenges is that when you study other jurisdictions' new innovation there is a lot of capital produced. In the Territory we have limited capital from our sales programs, so it is always a challenge for the Department of Housing and Community Development to maximise that return.

Mr PAECH: Through that process, particularly in places like Alice Springs and the urban areas of Darwin, is there work being undertaken by the department to look at alternative living options for senior citizens in terms of providing a source of aged care accommodation. We have seen a number of senior village built over the past; is that something that we can anticipate will be done during this term of government as well?

Mr McCARTHY: I can remember the Larapinta development under the previous government that I had the privilege of serving with. Mr Chalker may like to give some more details.

Mr CHALKER: We are looking at a number of options in respect of that, none the least being the community housing organisation opportunity. As we engage with that industry there may well be a preference to establish and grow some senior accommodation given that some of them do specialise in that provision of accommodation. That will then be an engagement activity that we will undertake to determine whether there is a case for it for new builds or within existing and the transition of those. There is certainly a significant focus on what we can do in respect of the seniors' accommodation.

Mr PAECH: Following on from that, there are a number of senior Territorians throughout the Northern Territory who currently occupy a three-bedroom home and there may be one of them in the property. Are there incentives or mechanisms being put in place by the department to encourage them to consider moving into options like senior villages in the Northern Territory?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, that is important work. Being a born-and-bred Alice Springs Territorian you would appreciate the sensitivities we deal with around that. It is about acknowledging our Territorians and their individual histories, families and heritage, but yes, we are working on that.

We had a recent opportunity to test that in the greater Darwin area with a new development in Fannie Bay, trying to encourage Territorians who are not currently in a good housing fit to look at something different, something alternative, something more suitable for their senior years, freeing up that existing three-bedroom conventional dwelling in the suburbs.

It is something we will continue to explore across the Northern Territory as the education and awareness of this increases we may see some better outcomes. At the moment it is still very challenging but something the department is focused on.

Mr PAECH: The Treasurer is very big on getting people into homes accessing the First Home Owner Grant. I am interested in Territorians who are in public housing and the process which is undertaken should they wish to apply to buy the property, what that process is and if any works that they have taken the opportunity to develop the existing property. Is that taken off the valuation price towards the end when we are giving them the price of the property?

Mr McCARTHY: I will get the officials to make that comment.

Mr BAMBER: We do make our houses available for sale to long-standing tenants and with regard to the assessment of the property you start with the market value of the property. We then have a process where we take into account the value of modifications made. Yes, it is a good process. We had been encouraging sales and getting sales where people are taking the opportunity to move into their own house.

Mr PAECH: While we are on that subject, that is only for residential dwellings as a house and not units?

Mr BAMBER: You have got me there. I will have to check. I am mainly conscious of standalone dwellings going through the sales rather than units.

Mr PAECH: Further to that, when a sale is made in that nature is that money put through to general revenue for the agency?

Mr BAMBER: Once again, as the minister said, it goes into specifically housing renewal programs. It is for housing, not general recoveries.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, did you have further questions?

Ms UIBO: I do, thank you. Minister, in regard to the additional \$1m that has been allocated for the support of Aboriginal interpreters in facilitating the implementation of the remote housing package, do you know how many Aboriginal interpreters will actually benefit from further employment opportunities under this funding of an additional \$1m.

Mr McCARTHY: It is an initiative I am very proud of, and I am sure colleagues are very proud of it as well because not only does it make a lot of sense in terms of good engagement and local capacity building, but it shows true respect for our first Australians and their culture and language.

This is an important area that helps underpin our local decision-making across the board, not only housing and community development. I think it is important to briefly mention the Chief Minister continually reminding our regional and remote Territorians that it is not just about local governments, it is about education, health, social justice, housing and community development. The Aboriginal Interpreter Service certainly plays a very important role moving forward.

Something else I have learnt in this portfolio is that the majority of our Aboriginal interpreters are part-time casual positions. It is a really good spread across the Northern Territory and a good opportunity for Aboriginal Territorians to participate in a very meaningful and important job but still have flexibility in the workforce.

The Aboriginal Interpreter Service in the Northern Territory has about 30 interpreters on staff covering the major languages of the Northern Territory, more than 400 casual interpreters covering close to 100 languages and dialects, and seven trainers from backgrounds such as linguists, health, adult education and law. The Aboriginal Interpreter Service develops professional and accurate registered interpreters who are trained to interpret accurately and be impartial; it is a skilled profession and an intellectually demanding role.

The additional funding will support the broadening of the interpreter base to underpin the NT Government initiative on local decision-making across a broad range of portfolios, both Territory and Commonwealth. Traditionally a large part of the role of interpreters has focused on translation in courts, policing and hospital or community clinic settings, but this will expand to community development and community decision-making negotiations.

The cost for interpreting is approximately \$70 per hour, with the charge for telephone interpreting currently \$35 per half hour. For scripting the charge is \$100 per hour. In terms of FTEs, this would be around nine positions, though as the work is casual it is difficult to quantify the exact number of employment opportunities. It is clear that this funding will provide additional employment for interpreters across the remote parts of the Northern Territory and better access to information and services for those who use the Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister.

Mr PAECH: Minister, you may have already clarified, but how many interpreters are on the books?

Mr McCARTHY: FTEs?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr McCARTHY: There are 30 interpreters on staff, covering the major languages, and 400 casual interpreters.

Mr PAECH: Great. Given the landscape of the Northern Territory and the fact we border onto three other jurisdictions—Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, all of which I have the honour of bordering in my electorate—is there a demand there for other jurisdictions to be accessing the Aboriginal Interpreter Service?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes. It is something that, as Territorians, we should all be very proud of. Our Aboriginal Interpreter Service is viewed as a national success story, as something that the other jurisdictions are trying to build and replicate.

We do cross-border work. It is important given different linguistic and cultural groups that frequent the Northern Territory.

There is a far more important story to tell. If one of the officials would give us more detail—there are some great stories.

Mr CHALKER: We have been focused on growing the use of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, not just internally but externally. We have a focus on remote housing, as well as local government, as a department. With our housing reference groups I expressed my view that it is a necessity to use an Aboriginal Interpreter wherever we go. With the number of casual interpreters we have we need to use their skill set. To leave it sitting idle and unused may dull the skill. That is not advantageous to anybody and not a sufficient return on investment in the training.

The quality of the interpreters is fantastic. Seeing their training, which I have had the privilege of doing first hand, and the work that they do, they are an exceptional resource. I think their ongoing promotion—the further use where it becomes natural to do that, as opposed to an afterthought, is part of the drive we are doing internally. The appetite for the interpreters and the management within that area is very much about their continued and growing use.

Their reputation nationally continues to grow. We are getting a significant amount of use externally which is also promoting their use. As recently as earlier this year we had an Aboriginal interpreter involved with a Supreme Court matter in Western Australia that resolved a significant ongoing matter. She was highly credited by the judiciary in respect of the assistance she provided.

The work they are doing is well-suited for the Northern Territory to continue to invest in because it is breaking down barriers for all of us.

Ms UIBO: I commend your department on continued support for the Homelands Extra Allowance program. Homelands and outstations are a very important part of the Northern Territory, particularly for remote Indigenous Territorians. Can you inform the committee of the process of how Aboriginal Territorians living on homelands or outstations apply for and access the Homelands Extra Allowance for their existing dwellings? As I understand there is \$6m in the budget with an additional \$1m to come into the 2017–18 budget.

Mr McCARTHY: I remember sitting on that side of the estimates process for four years. Each year I used to ask a question around the homelands extra fund because it was so important to understand it and translate that information to the constituency. There were eligible homelands residents who had not made application. I continually made the department aware of my interest in the program and of the need to make sure we supported all homelands residents who were eligible to apply for and access the opportunity for repairs and maintenance.

It was important to learn about eligibility criteria. For a homeland or outstation to be eligible for funding it must meet a number of criteria. The homeland or outstation must be permanently or seasonally occupied. The definitions of occupancy are:

- Permanently occupied: a community that has a permanent population of core residents living at the community year round. The population may vary in numbers due to seasonal and cultural reasons, but there is a consistent core group of residents that live at the community.
- Seasonally occupied: a community that has a permanent population of core residents, but because of restricted access during the Wet Season is not occupied during this time. These homeland communities are typically not accessible during the Wet Season and residents will live in alternative accommodation such as towns or town camps while they cannot access their homeland.

In determining the occupancy, the department relies on information provided by technical officers and service providers. If there is any dispute to the status of residency the onus is on the resident to show that the homeland is occupied permanently or seasonally. Additionally, there must be a supply of potable water, the homeland must be a permanent place of residence, and a service provider must be willing to take on service delivery obligations.

New outstation homeland residents must demonstrate how they will access education services if they have children. The Homelands Extra Allowance offers grants to improve and upgrade dwellings in homelands. Applications are submitted by residents through designated service providers. Residents can apply for one grant per year. Applications will open initially on 1 July 2017 and will remain open until the funding is exhausted. A 10% administration fee will be applied to the funding amount.

Each application for Homelands Extra Allowance is required to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- The house and homeland is funded through the housing maintenance program in the current financial year.
- The house is the applicant's principal place of residence, and the applicant is not a primary or co-client of government assisted housing, such as the Department of Housing and Community Development.
- The applicant must be contributing to the upkeep of the house.
- The applicant must be participating in the economy through paid work, community jobs schemes, training, registered volunteer work, receipt of an aged, disability or carer's payment, self-employment, and/or membership of a community board or committee.
- The total income received by the applicant must not exceed \$85 000 in the last financial year.

Homelands Extra Allowance can be used for repairs and maintenance works agreed upon between the service provider and the resident. Works related to ensuing health and safety, providing shelter from environmental elements, leading to greener, sustainable power and water systems, lowering costs and disability modifications will be treated as a priority.

Some suggestions for other works that are treated as a priority include:

- disability modifications
- uninterruptable power supply or battery backup
- water and sewerage upgrades
- electricity supply and maintenance
- improved occupational health and safety
- improved water and energy use
- new greener technology, which is energy and cost effective
- termite treatment
- extended living spaces.

Ms UIBO: I am very interested in the designs for the new houses that will come under the Territory remote housing package. What types of innovative designs will be looked at, discussed with community members and shared across the Northern Territory regarding what works depend on the climate and the season?

Mr McCARTHY: This is a good question to test the department on. We have this conversation regularly. But first, just a ballpark statement: under the last year of the NPARIH funded program—we are adhering to the conventions of that 10-year program, so residents in remote areas will have lots of comment on the designs and how that program achieved its outcomes.

We are in that space, and we have considerable infrastructure to develop and deliver over the next 12 months. From 1 July this year Labor's \$1.1bn program over 10 years—we have considerable opportunity for innovation. Once again, we are working off the principles of important local decision-making, local engagement, local capacity building and innovation.

It is not just about the remote Aboriginal housing; it is also about government employee housing and trying to bring our clients along with us in regard to Health, Education, Police and all the other agencies we support as a provider. That will be able to deliver the new, flexible, place-based innovation we are seeking.

I feel confident, but I am conservative, that the Commonwealth, when it comes to the table, will share in our successes over the last 10 years. We had the opportunity of participating in a review of the Commonwealth National Partnership on Remote Housing. The department produced an excellent submission for the review.

I had the privilege of attending a forum and speaking to some of the review panel members. It was clear the Northern Territory is held in high regard in terms of the enormous challenges we took on and what we have delivered. I hope that translates into trust from the Commonwealth on the way forward.

The possibility of this aggregated program, with significant resources over the next 10 years, will apply to those important principles of place-based innovation and local decision-making. It will underpin better and unique outcomes for the Territory that we should be delivering.

That is a general response; however, Mr Chalker may want to add to the comments.

Mr CHALKER: Part of the limitation we have at the moment is not knowing the Commonwealth funding going forward. We know what the NPARIH remaining funding is; however, it has inherent limitations to what we can and cannot do as it relates directly to innovation.

This initial 12 months we have a great opportunity to do a significant amount of engagement with community. I am considering establishing an opportunity to potentially team up with an advocacy group around Aboriginal housing. We will be looking to invite industry to various residents and proponents of local decision-making from various communities where industry can demonstrate what they can bring to the table in terms of innovation and types of design products.

The opportunity that creates for relevant communities is it relates to local employment and they can potentially get an understanding from industry what types of works can be available for relatively unskilled labour in the early days. It can contribute to the finalisation and completion of any builds that occur out of there. There can be an engagement where they can start modelling and stepping up skills and capability as they start seeking funding and having it come through.

The great benefit for us will be once we know what the Commonwealth funding looks like. It will allow us to go forward into the further nine years of the program comfortably, knowing we have full assessment in respects of the quantity we have to spend. We can see how to best maximise it. It is not just about utilising the resourcing available, but providing employment for the region.

Those at homelands may be able to pick up employment opportunities and vice versa. Those from remote communities can provide employment and develop skilled labour for further provision into homelands that may create a funding model that works for co-contribution in those localities.

That is the viewpoint we are looking at, how to maximise not only the ability of innovation but how it overlays to developing economic sustainability, job growth in communities and developing skill sets.

Ms NELSON: This leads on to the answer you have given in regards to skilled workforce. Are you looking at way in which we can incorporate the federal program—work for the dole, CDP, whatever they have decided to call it this year?

Mr McCARTHY: As we have demonstrated with early works and the principle of building local capacity, we have targeted Indigenous business enterprises. That is the front line we want to see in this program. They have the opportunity of partnerships, joint ventures and creative commercial context.

Some of the IBEs we have engaged are talking about utilising community development project teams. They will negotiate that on a place-by-place basis so that there will be opportunities. Some IBEs that have significant capacity in their accounting systems and back of house administrative system that have started

have a clear focus on taking people from the community development project into permanent employment with the organisation. Some have already had success in their other operations.

Yes, very much a partnership that is real and one we encourage. It will be negotiated between the Indigenous business enterprise and the CDP projects. Mr Chalker might add something to that.

Mr CHALKER: Member for Katherine, the other part that is important for you to know is, with the establishment of the remote program, the project team has a number of representatives from other government agencies embedded into the team. For example, the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation has a secondee who has come into our team, who will make the link between the jobs opportunities as it relates to NT Government programs and Commonwealth Government programs. Equally, we have representatives from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics who are enacting a crucial element of the program delivery office as well.

By having those elements embedded with us, the silo is broken down and everyone has a broad understanding of the program objectives. It is not just about the asset, it is about how we can maximise economic development, job opportunities and sustainability for these communities going forward.

Ms UIBO: Minister, over \$9m has been allocated for land servicing. What is the department planning to do with the \$9m in regard to land servicing across the Territory?

Mr McCARTHY: In the next two years we are talking about \$44.5m in land servicing, which is really important work to set up the land spaces to take on new housing. In Budget 2017–18, we have an immediate appropriation. I will get Mr Chalker to lead this one to talk about that appropriation and put some figures and locations around that expenditure to start Labor's first budget in this area.

Mr CHALKER: I will pass on to my deputy shortly to speak about the specifics as it relates to that. However, it is not dissimilar to what we have done with Trade, Business and Innovation secondees and Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. We have a Power and Water employee who has been seconded across to our team as well. They have been undertaking significant scope of works across all the communities to identify where the priorities are where we might be in more distressed communities because that will obviously be critical to our future development.

Again, the clear intent here is not to operate in a silo, but try to treat this in broader consideration. We have all available information at our fingertips to make the best-informed decisions with the community that we can.

Mr BAMBER: With regard to the \$44.5m, \$20m has already been brought forward into 2016–17, recognising that we have to get going, because if you are to build new housing in remote communities you need subdivisions, headworks, servicing and reticulation of power, water and sewerage. That \$20m has already been brought forward. The communities we are already working into are Maningrida, Wurrumiyanga, Angurugu, Barunga, Ngukurr, Gapuwiyak, Wadeye, Mutitjulu, Ramingining, Santa Teresa, Yirrkala, Hermannsburg and Gunbalanya. They are just the first cabs off the rank.

We are looking at getting in there and either creating whole new subdivisions and the associated reticulation etcetera, or in the case of places like Wurrumiyanga, there is a subdivision but it is just turning off the lots so they are ready to build houses on. Going forward, this is just the first set of communities. In other communities we have to negotiate leases for the subdivisions. So, there is a bit more work there. But these are the ones where we knew we could get going on straightaway.

Mr PAECH: Mr Bamber, following on from that, there are communities in my electorate where titles of land are owned by Aboriginal corporations. Is the claim that the department will be having ongoing conversations with the Aboriginal corporations as to some form of agreement or arrangement which could be made around the titles of land that are held by those Aboriginal corporations as a mechanism to provide self-generated funds through revenue or housing stock?

Mr McCARTHY: I would just like to kick off with what the Chief Minister has instructed, among many instructions. He does not want to see any impediments to the roll out of this really important program. We are looking at all avenues of negotiation.

Mr BAMBER: I think the minister has pretty well said it; we are at the start of a 10-year program. Obviously if we have existing leases and lots we will be using those, but we said at the very start of this dialogue that at the end of the 10-year program we are looking for Aboriginal corporations and other local owners to set

this up as revenue streams going forward. We will be engaging in dialogues with community organisations like that.

Ms UIBO: Just following up on that amount, minister, the \$44.5m over two years, what percentage of that is actually going to the administration of the land servicing versus the people who are in the field doing the community consultation?

Mr CHALKER: In those respects, 8% is the standard convention.

Ms UIBO: Thank you. Minister, in regard to the design of housing, flat pack homes are being used in other parts of the world, particularly for temporary and transitional housing. Is there a desire to use that style of housing in the Northern Territory to be a quick fix to overcrowding in remote communities, or possibly as transitional housing while new homes are being built in places that are not affected by severe weather, such as cyclones or severe floods?

Mr McCARTHY: I will start by addressing that there are no quick fixes, but we are interested in innovation. What that has created is a wealth of housing providers that are coming to the Northern Territory to display their products and innovation. I think Mr Chalker would have had more than I have had, but I have had my fair share as well.

Just to touch on transitional accommodation, that is something we have been working on closely. We have had a few failures in that area, but now we have had that opportunity to really cement that into policy and delivery into the future.

Transitional housing is, once again, looking at every opportunity from starting with abandoned dwellings and working on those dwellings then using a domino effect to relocate families while their houses are refurbished or renovated, right through to people making local agreements with the department about alternatives. Territory unique outcomes—families advising departmental officers that they want to go bush at this time.

With the new builds we are looking at innovation, but I will tell the committee about the opportunity that exists in terms of utilising existing dwellings and getting a better housing mix. For too long we have had public servants from outside of the community that are using a traditional housing asset, so you have a single officer in a three-bedroom house, for instance. This is quite common across the regions. It is about getting a better housing mix.

We have said to all the departments that we want them at the table to discuss better innovation, products and trying to reduce the traditional built form in a remote town that costs the government between \$600 000 and \$800 000 that can be utilised by a single officer in some cases, and then that changing every 12 months or sometimes before then. We want to look at that innovation built form around housing those officers, which will free up a lot of the traditional stock in regional and remote towns.

We have had examples of this on the ground. Gunbalanya was a great example. I was standing in the middle of town and there was a cluster of three-bedroom houses being occupied by singles—a couple in one case—who were recruits from out of town. There were local families that were experiencing severe overcrowding. The message is let us work together; let us do this together; let us get the departments at the table, through the unions, and make sure everyone agrees to provide better innovation that will free up that existing stock, and we will be able to focus on the local government recruits and early gains when we can see this movement.

Flat pack houses and transportables—it is about local decision-making. We have a convention under the last year of the 10-year national partnership agreement that we have to adhere to; however, there will be flexibility in terms of innovation into the future.

You would not want to set a community up to fail. You would want to engage with a good open dialogue around built form and what is suitable. What we can get to is not necessarily a flat pack, but the innovation that supports the good, healthy living of the extended Aboriginal families in the bush. That is the basis of our Room to Breathe product.

There will be opportunities. We have embraced this time and this space, and it will be based on that local decision-making and seeing how we can deliver the best mix and the best outcome for that town and community.

Ms UIBO: Further to looking at designs of houses, in Numbulwar there were double-storey houses that were built with two bedrooms on the bottom and three bedrooms at the top. I am not aware of any other housing in that type of design across the Territory but I am wondering if that design has been used in any other communities?

Mr McCARTHY: I can talk about a two-storey in Borroloola; that was government employee housing, but would any of the officials like to make comment?

Mr BAMBER: Not off the top of my head, but as the minister said we are at the start of the 10-year program, so we will be working with communities on what housing is appropriate and required within the budget.

Mr McCARTHY: As a former resident of Numbulwar what do you think? Is it a good design?

Ms UIBO: I personally think it is a good design. I know that from the engineer's perspective that the design was created because it was based on the land that it was able to be built on. It is a sandy on the coast. They could not build out so they built upwards.

In terms of alleviating the pressure for overcrowding I feel that it has done its job because you have five bedrooms and extra living space for families who would normally be crowded into a small, three-bedroom home with limited veranda space and limited outdoor use.

I have heard a few issues in regard to when the family group changes because of access to the houses—which is something I am in continuous conversations with the residents of Numbulwar—and just seeing how that is working out. I think the shift, when you have the close family groups either moving out or moving in—it belonged to a different family group, so there is potential for disputes and issues, but I think that is quite isolated.

I think the general idea of building on the existing lot and building upwards was successful in terms of creating more space for families.

The situation for Yurrawi, which is part of the Nhulunbuy electorate, formally a community starting with M. The Member for Nhulunbuy might want to discuss looking at those designs building up double storey instead of building out to alleviate the pressure for overcrowding. I was interested to see if that has come through the department at all.

Mr McCARTHY: I plan to visit Numbulwar. Thank you for sharing that information with the department. You are most welcome.

One point you have reinforced for me, as minister, is about better land use principles that the world is now embracing. Within Room to Breathe we have heard clearly from local engagement that we want to look at better utilisation of land as opposed to an 800 square metre lot. We can do more and better with creating the better amenity that supports Aboriginal families.

Whether it is a second storey or the innovation and amenity of outdoor living areas, we are focused on it. Mr Chalker wants to add to the discussion.

Mr CHALKER: A key part of what we are looking at, which I am very keen to see developed, is a research and development arm within our remote housing program. A number of communities area already on the front foot and have engaged town planners and gone down a significant development pathway in respect of designs suitable for them. One of the lessons not only from them but by us is that some of the additions in the past have not been culturally appropriate. Those amenities are not used because there are issues from a cultural perspective.

It is viable for us to look at a research and development arm that leverages off a significant skill set that exists across industry in the Northern Territory. There are a number of architects working for a number of entities across the Territory that are very innovative already in what they are doing with some of the assets their agencies have responsibility for.

That shows that we are listening and more prepared to engage and look at those solutions.

Ms UIBO: I am happy to hear about the research arm being developed through the department.

Some of the other designs—and I am using Numbulwar as an example because it is in my electorate and it was my place of residence for five years—include the quadraplexes that were built, which were four bedrooms, adjoining quadraplexes with single bedrooms, each with their own kitchen, living space, toilet and bathroom with adjoining verandas. They were not long enough for outdoor living and cover from the weather. They were quite successful in keeping families close together but having separate space.

The other design built in Numbulwar and other communities such as Gapuwiyak is the two-bedroom duplex, which are two-bedroom homes sharing the same main wall, similar to units. I am very interested to see if the department is looking, possibly through that research development arm, at those unit-type dwellings rather than the traditional three- or four-bedroom homes to be able to keep families close but provide privacy for young couples, elderly people and small families to keep that close-knit relationship whilst having their own amenities.

Mr McCARTHY: You are influencing the department officials and I thank you for that. It is about good local knowledge. In the electorate that I represent I get requests for the traditional single men's quarters. The department has embraced culturally-appropriate designs. Place-based, local decision-making, how can we deliver the infrastructure appropriate for the needs of that town? Mr Bamber will contribute.

Mr BAMBER: We are very enthusiastic about the designs you have outlined. We are also looking at designs which allow scaling up. You could have adjoining duplexes with an adjoining door that could open up to either two singles or something for a family, or a couple to extend into. These are the kinds of designs we are looking for in remote communities. I think someone called it Quest-style accommodation where you can open it up and you can have it separate or open the door and have something bigger.

Ms UIBO: Minister, you have already talked about singles' accommodation, which is something I was going to ask about, but since you have already spoken about it I will not.

I am interested to see how the department is working with local government and regional councils in terms of local contracting, especially for housing, maintenance, repairs, local people who are skilled and communities, being able to do that work without the extra contracting and travel fee of driving in and out—me, for example, driving from Katherine to Numbulwar—and improving the internal local economy with skilled workers already living there.

I was wondering what type of relationship—both fall under your portfolio now.

Mr McCARTHY: Some regional council authorities are very interested and have come forward for early works submissions. They tend to have had a history in various elements of the housing sector. Other regional councils have not shown interest yet. They are organisations across regional and remote Northern Territory with capacity, infrastructure and a footprint and that can be serious players.

We can probably give you some examples of existing regional councils and their engagement in the sector. Your points underpin the principle of this new remote housing policy about building local economy. There have been explorations in this policy, with the home handyman located in the community. The majority of service providers are Indigenous business enterprises or majority Indigenous employment, like the regional councils. There are traditional mainstream businesses delivering services as well.

The home handyman concept being explored—we are serious about making a difference. One thing to reinforce is that local government is looking at new innovation around commercially sustainable models to underpin their income and revenue streams. The government is offering five-year contracts in this field because that is the sustainability and certainly that business organisations need.

All those elements coming together will reinforce the local economy principle we are striving for. That is essentially local jobs, better efficiency and outcomes for the limited taxpayer dollar.

Mr BAMBER: Two obvious examples of regional councils who are picking up work through the IBE early works Room to Breathe program are Central Desert Regional Council and MacDonnell Regional Council. They are examples, but we are also working with (inaudible), Bawinanga, Tiwi contractors right across the board, Tangentyere and Ingkerreke. We are very conscious that the regional councils have a presence and employment in all remote communities. What they are looking for is work for local employees.

This would provide a stream of work as part of that \$1.1bn program going forward. The councils are made up of representatives from all the communities. You have that nice tie back into the community itself.

Mr CHALKER: We are not just looking at housing spend for local government; we are trying to get them to broaden their horizons, looking at shared services and strategic local government and infrastructure grants that we want to roll out. That will potentially lead to creating ongoing employment in communities.

I have had discussions with the Commonwealth government around the jobs programs operating in remote communities and how they best team up with local government so the money and grants that go to them can be expended to realise a physical outcome and use available services. If we can create more sustainable and meaningful work, particularly for the jobs programs that are funded in those communities, that may then lead to ongoing jobs. We are not just confining ourselves to the housing programs that relate to local government, we are trying to look at how much further we can broaden that.

Ms NELSON: As the minister will attest, I am a huge advocate for social impact investment. It is important to me, in regard to housing, that we are pushing the social impact investment agenda in making sure there is sustainable—and we are not just plopping houses on land. I have a quick question in regard to that.

This is particularly for Katherine. There is no investment in the budget or money committed in the budget for new housing development in Katherine. We have quite a number of aged homes in Katherine of 20-plus years. I want to find out about the repairs and maintenance for public housing in Katherine specifically. I do not think overcrowding is a significant issue in Katherine as it is in remote communities.

We have ageing assets and long-term tenancy issues in Katherine. What are we doing in Katherine in regard to improving that situation, also keeping in mind the social impact investment aspect of it?

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Katherine, the first project I am really keen to see delivered is in regard to our moves in the community housing sector expression of interest that has gone out for Bernhard Street. Not only will that start to move in our aspirations and our continuum toward better outcomes for public housing tenants and the neighbourhood, but it will also generate significant economic stimulus in Katherine.

We have some project housing projects in Katherine that Mr Bamber will outline. Regarding your social impact, absolutely; this investment in the remote areas is going back to that definition of urban and remote. This is all about social impact. This is the game changer. If we go 10 years forward and push rewind, and we find that over the next 10 years we have not engaged the local community, built the local capacity and engaged people in every layer of the housing sector, not a lot will change.

When we talk about the housing sector it is about jobs, but not just construction. It is the management of tenancies; good, cyclical repairs and maintenance; the middle level construction and the new build. There is the land servicing components and the civil construction and then there are all the agencies that also have a demand. So we create that local economy.

In Katherine it is more of a traditional approach because it is an urban town with an industry base.

Mr Bamber is ready to make some comments and provide you with some more detail.

Mr BAMBER: I am pretty proud of the turnoff on Acacia and on Martin, with six-by-one bedroom and six-by-two bedroom complexes last year. That was designated for seniors. We built those. On the Victoria Highway we did \$700 000 worth of upgrades to refresh older housing. There was a townhouse complex we refurbished. We also have working occurring in Casuarina Street in a one-by-three bedroom dwelling, and Neil Place on a one-by-four bedroom dwelling in Katherine. So we have a building program.

Ms NELSON: Thank you, Mr Bamber. I note there were six dwellings constructed last year ...

Mr BAMBER: Twelve.

Ms NELSON: Sorry, 12. I have to note that that is 12 new dwellings constructed in 21 years in Katherine.

Mr BAMBER: Correct.

Ms NELSON: My big issue is that we have 398 assets in Katherine that are 20 to 40 years old. I can accept the fact that we will not get new development in the new investment for remote communities, but aside from getting the new development or not, I want to see that investment in refurbishing, renovating, fixing—the repairs and maintenance budget.

Mr BAMBER: The houses on the Victoria Highway were an example of the major refurbishment program. I was there three weeks ago, and they look pretty schmick.

Mr PAECH: Naturally, I assume the department would have retention and lifespans for everything in the properties, so that is being adhered to in regard to the lifespan of a kitchen in a public asset and so forth. That is part of the repairs and maintenance schedule.

For the purposes of this exercise, what would the department consider an old dwelling? I would not consider 20 to 40 years old.

Mr McCARTHY: I will ask Mr Bamber to comment on this, because there is a criteria not so much on the age but the economic condition of the built form.

Mr PAECH: Before you start, I am interested to learn the formula of when a house is considered beyond economic repair.

Mr BAMBER: The term ‘beyond economic repair’—you start with a new house. Everything is new, so it is in good condition. Over time, though, the wet areas and kitchen areas start seeing a lot of wear and tear. Walls need to be repainted and after a while the roof starts to go.

As the house ages you start needing to put more into it. We have that problem for 5000 houses in the urban areas. Some of the ones in Darwin were built way before Cyclone Tracy. These are older houses; the older they get the more work you have to put into them.

Every time a house is vacated you have to ask what can be done with it. Is this a house that is beyond our economic ability to keep refurbishing? Do we need to blow it up and build something new, or do we see if a developer wants to take it on and do something with it?

With regard to being beyond economic recovery, it is as much an assessment as to whether we should continue putting public money into the dwelling as it is about making the investment and getting a few more years out of it.

We are the owner of 5000 dwellings, and we have a finite repairs and maintenance program and minor works program. Look at all the houses we have; we need to make the call. There might be a kitchen or a wet area that needs to be upgraded. We have to make that decision for 5000 dwellings for the remote areas on an annual basis.

This is where we have our refresh program—it is a house that will cost too much to keep going and we need to replace it, or it is a house we will put repairs and maintenance into. We have a program where we are assessing the condition of our assets and determining what we need to put back into the houses by way of reinvestment.

You do get to a point where some of the complexes, for example, are at the end of their economic life. Kurringal was an example. It was not worth putting more into Kurringal. We now have Akoya, so there has been a renewal there. The older buildings were demolished and we now have a new house life—or building life—starting.

Mr PAECH: I will extend the question further to help me fully understand the context of town camps. What is the process, given that a lot of our town camps are landlocked in municipal divisions? You cannot flip a house for sale when it is beyond economic repair. That requires conversations around whether there is a new build, and I recognise that there are conversations that need to be had with the federal government, but I am just interested in that.

Mr CHALKER: The complexity is that there are many layers of different rules for different places. The town camp review that will come before Cabinet in the not too distant future will start to articulate some of the specific issues that relate directly to town camps, the ownership and overlay of the *Residential Tenancies Act*, where it applies and where it does not apply.

More broadly if I go back to what I think you were asking before regarding this concept of scheduled maintenance, where there has been some advancement more recently in the technology environment—for example being able to use tablet form and go into a premises and digitise the house or asset as it presents—that will enable us with a lot more information to actually manage and determine to a greater

level of certainty when scheduled maintenance will meet the benefit of cost versus treatment that arises for the unexpected.

For remote in particular, one of the key areas that will get significant savings is if we can actually create a sustainable element that can do those repairs and maintenance from community as equally as having the stores relevant for the materials that need replacement, whether it is taps or that type of hardware, as opposed to the cost of having to wait for it to be brought to community and the tyranny of distance that we all face.

That is a broader part of everything we are looking for, particularly for the remote delivery, but equally, as we move through our urban repairs and maintenance contracts—and this will have some impact on town camps—it is ensuring that our scopes in the future clearly articulate the expectation that we require from not only a scheduled maintenance, but also for the panel contractors to respond to the urgent repairs and maintenance environment.

We are in a better position and we are only growing in that space to have better information at our fingertips. We are still bringing a lot of our remote housing online to our systems, so we very much still have a distinct urban management system and one that is remote. We are ultimately trying to move towards trying to make sure it all sits under one data bank and that the level of detail is accurate in a more significant point of reference for us to make an informed decision to get the best value out of each dollar that we spend.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, I have two more questions for the minister; one relates to town camps. I know this is something the Member for Namatjira is very interested in. Minister, do you have a date on when the town camp review will be released publicly?

Mr McCARTHY: Not yet because it has to go to Cabinet first, so the process is that the department is finalising it—it was a massive review, by the way, an extensive review.

Ms UIBO: Over \$2m.

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, the price tag was considerable. The department is finalising that review; I then get my chance to look at it, and then I have to get it on a Cabinet list to present to Cabinet. It will be released and there are some decisions around how you release such a document of this proportion, but that will be the outcome. I am sorry that I cannot give you a date on that.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister. I will chase you for it later anyway.

Mr McCARTHY: Sure.

Ms UIBO: How many housing maintenance officers are working with the department in communities?

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you for the question. We will look at the notes to acquire that. Member, we will take that question on notice.

Mr BAMBER: The particular issue is that the housing maintenance officers are actually other organisations under handyman contracts, so collecting it would be an exercise.

Question on Notice No 5.4

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, can you please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Minister, how many housing maintenance officers are employed in communities?

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, are you happy to accept that question?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Arnhem of the minister has been allocated the number 5.4.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions in regard to this output?

Mr PAECH: Minister, I want to get a brief on what the department is doing in terms of the transitional accommodation that it has in jurisdictions such as Alice Springs. Where are we with that process and what is happening?

Mr McCARTHY: Can you define transitional accommodation in Alice Springs?

Mr PAECH: I am talking about facilities such as Percy Court and places like Stuart Lodge. I want to know the process of where they are at.

Mr McCARTHY: Stuart Lodge and Apmere Mwerre the visitors park—when we came to government we discovered this—no longer had any funding under the previous administration, so it is great to see that this government has provided ongoing appropriation to keep those places operational for the important services they provide for the wider community of Central Australia, including the Barkly.

I have visited Percy Court and the supported accommodation program there and learned lots of lessons about how we support not only our vulnerable tenants, but also prospective tenants in public housing. Percy Court has a budget appropriation in 2017–18 ongoing.

Mr BAMBER: If I can talk to some of what you call transitional accommodation—I will discuss some stats for Garraworra, for example, which is run by Anglicare at Berrimah under funding from us. Up until this year, 31 March, we had 82 clients supported through that program. Percy Court, which is Mission Australia, is funded through our programs we have had 173 clients supported up until 31 March through that program. That is a six- or 12-month program. As you are aware, it is live-in, transitional accommodation—tenancy living skills and moving into public housing.

We also have something called the (inaudible) program through Mission for Salvos.

Mr PAECH: Mr Bamber, you have just mentioned tenancy living skills. That is done through Percy Court. Is there any form of tenancy living skills that is done in-house with the department when they are handing the keys to a property to a tenant?

Mr BAMBER: We have a range under that \$23m of services that was referenced by the minister earlier. There are a range of TSP programs, tenancy support programs, provided in-house through various NGOs.

Mr PAECH: I understand that the department of Housing also, through its industry housing, releases dwellings to community organisations or organisations that may take children into care, or organisations such as Life Without Barriers and so forth. How many of those properties are in the industry housing portfolio area?

Mr BAMBER: About 545 industry housing—these are public housing dwellings where we provided them to NGOs, and there are a range of NGOs to whom we have provided them, so that they can provide accommodation with their programs. They will take program funding from Health, Education, Corrections or the Australian government. They will use the housing we have provided to accommodate those programs.

Mr PAECH: How long would a lease for that program last? Is it the same as a residential tenancy where you would be locked into a two-year or one-year agreement?

Mr BAMBER: These industry housing arrangements tend to be ongoing. We would normally change those arrangements, only if they request the change.

Mr PAECH: Is that paid market rent?

Mr BAMBER: By no means it is very highly subsidised.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.1

Output 1.2 – Housing Program Delivery Office

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Housing Program Delivery Office. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.2

Output 1.3 – Community Development and Engagement

Madam CHAIR: We will now consider Output 1.3, Community Development and Engagement. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: How are morgues in remote communities identified for construction or refurbishment? I understand your department holds the responsibility for this.

Mr McCARTHY: I had a good discussion with the department, and I will hand over to Mr Chalker to give you the details.

Mr CHALKER: The Australian and Territory Governments contributed \$2.5m and \$3.67m respectively, and reviewed following a coronial recommendation. The morgues in existence ...

Ms UIBO: Could you repeat the second amount? It was \$2.5m and ...

Mr CHALKER: And \$3.67m. There are 20 remote communities that are benefitting from the program; 12 communities received morgue upgrades or refurbishments to Australian standards, and eight other communities will have new morgues constructed.

At this point upgrades and refurbishment works are being completed in Alyangula, Borroloola, Jabiru, Ali Curung, Nyirripi, Papunya and Yuendumu. Upgrades and refurbishment works are under way as of March at Wadeye, Elliot and Gunbalanya. The new morgue in Galiwinku was nearing completion.

The contract for upgrade works in Lajamanu is being awarded soon, as is the release of the tender for Kintore. Contracts for morgues in Docker River and Numbulwar have been awarded. The works are well under way. That will expire the funding allocation. If there are communities identifying further need then that goes through the normal process—raising awareness with the Department of Health, which has oversight of remote morgues.

We have had the responsibility for the construction and upgrade, and the day-to-day oversight and management is in the domain of the Department of Health.

Ms UIBO: Minister, the second question I had in regard to morgues has been answered by your CEO.

The next question I had is regarding the \$320 000 put aside for repairs and maintenance for remote training centres. I was wondering where that will be spent in the Territory.

Mr CHALKER: It will all be expended in the Territory and it is to provide ongoing support and repairs and maintenance for those training centres.

Ms UIBO: Do you have a list of where those centres are located?

Mr CHALKER: They are in Angurugu, Yirrkala, Nhulunbuy, Milingimbi, Galiwinku, Jabiru, Borroloola, Papunya and Yuendumu.

Madam CHAIR: Are there further questions on this output.

Ms UIBO: I have one more question. Not to be morbid, but it is about morgues. It is a big issue in remote communities, as the minister knows. Is the department considering the possibility of having mobile morgues, or temporary morgues, that are not fixed structures and can be moved depending on the location and the needs of the community?

I have heard of the need identified in the community in my electorate in regard to the type of process that is culturally appropriate for possibly a week-long ceremony to have the body in the community. Is the department looking at that in partnership with the Department of Health?

Mr McCARTHY: I have not had that discussion yet. That has not come before me until now. It is an interesting issue and concept in terms of dealing with cultural sensitivities. As the CE advised, any developments need to be brought forward to the government and to the Department of Health in this context, and we can progress if from there.

We have our budget cycles where community ideas, issues and needs can be brought forward. There was a note passed forward here where ALPA has utilised a facility as you described for a gathering at Kalkarindji, for instance. It looks like the technology is in place and I encourage you to bring that to government to see how we can progress it.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister. I will do so formally in a letter. This community does not have a morgue facility. It is roughly 220 kilometres by dirt road to the nearest town centre. It is something they have looked at and they were asking about on my recent visit early this month. I will be writing about that and the cost of being able to provide that service in the community without having to fly a body out, and the extreme cost for families or the support for families through corporations or land councils to fly a body back in for the ceremony. I am looking at alternative ways and your department is open to it, so I am very happy about that.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Local Government

Madam CHAIR: We will now consider Output 1.4, Local Government. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, can you explain the increase in funding for community development engagement and how this will support the government's policy agenda in remote areas in particular?

Mr McCARTHY: The Territory government is strengthening local government with an additional \$5m in Budget 2017–18 ongoing to bring the total funding to \$97.2m. The Territory government is supporting our local government sector by creating jobs and building stronger communities. This will give further support for local government services and infrastructure.

A new \$5m fund will support projects that improve key infrastructure, such as local roads, parks and public facilities. This new strategic local government infrastructure fund will add a flexible \$5m investment each year for regional and shire councils to use for projects designed to increase liveability and community development outcomes. There will be one round of funding in August/September each year, with eligible councils restricted to a maximum of two applications each round.

As members would be aware, the limited rate and service charge revenue raised by our regional and shire councils seriously impacts on the ability of local councils to adequately maintain assets. This fund will directly assist councils with asset replacement and improve service delivery across our regions. This could include the resealing of internal community roads, improving stormwater management, upgrade or repair to parks, playgrounds, swimming pools or waste management sites, as well as other community projects.

Regarding the previous questions we have been taking, this new strategic infrastructure fund would also allow flexibility and what I am encouraging—shared resources in delivering better efficiencies. It would also address common issues among communities.

This new grant fund will also present opportunities for collaborative projects across councils, NT Government, Australian Government and other organisations to pool funding for joint infrastructure initiatives and/or complementary projects.

Budget 2017–18 also confirms that funding has been approved which increases the Northern Territory Government's financial assistance grants to the local government sector. The Territory's regional and remote populations are increasing, along with the demands on local government. As a result, the government announced an increase in the NT operational subsidy of \$1.5m, or 6%, to \$27.5m per annum. This grant increase commences in the new financial year and is ongoing.

The allocation for eligible councils will be based on the Northern Territory Grants Commission's standard methodology using demographic data, with disability factors, and is used for distributing financial assistance grants.

The Northern Territory operational subsidy is allocated across the nine regional councils and three small shire councils. This represents the first increase to the NT operational subsidy since 2013–14. In addition to the increase in the NT operational subsidy, the Territory government will add \$500 000, or 17%, to the special purpose grants pool to assist councils in their delivery of services, such as for the purchase of plant and equipment or meeting operational costs.

Importantly, local government in the Territory will also benefit from the return of indexation of financial assistance grants from the Australian Government when they resume on 1 July 2017 after a three-year hiatus. This will provide an additional \$1.168m a year to assist councils to undertake their important work in communities across the Northern Territory.

One thing I have been very clear about with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, which brings a lot of experience to the table, and with our regional shire councils is this concept of shared resources methodology.

There are many examples where we can deliver better efficiencies if we have these regional councils working together across a range of service delivery. It is very common when you look at the infrastructure components, the plant and equipment components and the procurement components.

I believe it has been embraced by our regional government sector. We have seen some modest but substantial increases in the funding and grants programs. There are also other commercial opportunities coming forward for our regional government sector in regard to the general Department of Housing and Community Development's programs.

Mr PAECH: Do you have an estimate of how many roads in the Northern Territory fall within municipal and regional councils to maintain?

Mr McCARTHY: I do not have that information in front of me, but five years ago I would have had it here. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics can supply you with that information.

Mr PAECH: Coming from local government in the past, I am interested to know if your department plans to play a support role in hosting local government forums in which we bring together regional councils and municipal councils to come together and talk about the issues you have mentioned, such as procurement, economic development opportunities and so forth. Is that something the department is looking into, hosting a range of those key forums?

Mr McCARTHY: My immediate experience since coming to this portfolio has been with Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, attending the AGM and forums and dinners they host which have that informal networking. There is a lot of that going on.

One agency I have been very influenced by is CouncilBIZ, which was set up to offer shared resource methodology across administrative systems. I have been encouraging the department to create opportunities for regional councils to explore those opportunities to cross-check their service delivery and see what can be resourced through a shared resource methodology.

I think it is a great concept. Mr Chalker, does the department have anything to bring forward in regard to this?

Mr CHALKER: We are looking at what role local government can play with any of our programs. As I indicated earlier, one of the things we are keen to do is bring industry and key stakeholders along as we talk more broadly about the remote housing program and what that can leverage off that. I anticipate that local government and the local authorities will have representation in and around that, especially given some of the history of a number of the councils, with housing being property tenancy management and repairs and maintenance in the past.

We engage regularly with all the various councils in respect of activities and putting grants out. The level of engagement is quite high, and that will remain an ongoing focus.

As the minister indicated we meet with LGANT twice a year, so it is something I am happy to commit to raining with them later in the year, once we have come out the other side of current local government elections in August.

Mr PAECH: Further to that, do you anticipate any financial commitment from the department that will need to be made. I should rephrase that. Is there any expenditure going into the local government elections that will need to be taken from your agency?

Mr CHALKER: There is an ongoing arrangement in respect of what the NT Electoral Commissioner undertakes, and that engagement occurs with relevant local governments as well, and then we get more of an understanding of what that allocation is and can work through it from there. I do not think we have a specific allocation for it, but if the NT Electoral Commissioner seeks further funding from us that is something the government can consider.

Madam CHAIR: Can I just check back with the Member for Namatjira, was there a question before the two that you just asked that needed to be taken on notice for the record?

Mr McCARTHY: The municipal roads.

Question on Notice No 5.5

Madam CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate your question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Minister, Can you provide us with the number of roads, or total kilometres of roads, that the government is responsible for?

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, are you happy to accept that as a question on notice?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira of the minister has been allocated the number 5.5.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions for this output?

Ms UIBO: Minister, can you explain the increase in funding for local government and what impact this will have on the Northern Territory local government sector?

Mr McCARTHY: There is a good story around the increase in local government funding. There are some modest increases, but some substantial opportunities, especially with the grants program and the new \$5m infrastructure program.

In relation to the local government sector—Mr Chalker, do you have any comments to make other than my previous response? I suppose the achievement of better shared resources, the opportunity for the regional government sector to engage in the wider programs of the Department of Housing and Community Development and in terms of commercial outcomes, and the building of the workforce will all be significant improvements for the sector across the Northern Territory.

I have also, as the minister, brought ideas and strategies to the table, which the department has embraced with various levels of enthusiasm. One is a waste management project that I have canvassed among the local government sector, looking at one of the issues that I see now is becoming a real problem in terms of our Housing and Community Development sector, and that is abandoned cars.

The department is keen to pick up some of my ideas around not only improving the amenity of people's living areas and living spaces, but also the amenity of the area in which they are living and that relates to how we can better assist local government around waste management and disposal. One in particular is abandoned cars, not only in yards but in towns, communities and associated waste management sites.

Look at Central Australia, for instance; there are extensive waste management sites with dumped cars, many of them stacked and not really commercially viable at the moment because of the distances that the national metal recyclers are prepared to travel. These projects we are trying to bring together.

Another is animal management, which I am pushing because I cannot see any sense in doing all this work around housing and not being able to address some of the other real constraints on improving health and social outcomes.

I think a grant program like the \$5m infrastructure fund, with a shared resource methodology among a group of the local government sector, could look at the purchase of infrastructure that could start the business of recycling metals and addressing this issue that is getting out of control with abandoned cars across the Northern Territory.

That is some of the thinking. I congratulate and acknowledge the government on, first of all, the planning of policy in terms of the lead-up to the NT general election, and now the implementation of some of those policies. The new infrastructure fund leads to more opportunities for local authorities. They receive \$5.1m each year and allocate through local decision-making and place-based initiatives. Special purpose grants have increased as well.

Funding is important and will definitely help. In terms of the regional government inefficiencies, when we start to drive this shared resources methodology—working together and utilising good thinking to deliver better for very limited taxpayer dollars.

Mr PAECH: I have one further question on local government. I want to confirm that public housing pays rates. Do town camps pay a municipal rate?

Mr TINKHAM: We pay local government rates in all the urban centres. We also pay rates on anything we lease in remote centres. Town camps I cannot specifically say, but I would think if they were rateable we would be paying them, yes.

Mr PAECH: I ask the question because I assume that our town campers, whom I represent a large majority of, access municipal and essential services in the bordering municipalities. Could I ask that that be followed up on notice? I am curious to know what the position is.

Question on Notice No 5.6

Madam CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, could you please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Could you advise whether town camps pay a base municipal rate?

Madam CHAIR: Are you happy to take that question on notice, minister?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira of the minister has been allocated the number 5.6.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

Ms UIBO: The amalgamation of the departments under the new government created some friction with some of the regional councils in regard to the disappearance of a separate department of local government. Being amalgamated into your portfolio, has this affected any local government services?

Mr McCARTHY: No, it has not affected services. It reflected the new government's policy on the machinery of government changes. There have been efficiencies delivered through the changes.

Some members of the local government sector picked up that there was no individual title of the minister for local government. I have travelled the Northern Territory and tried to reassure the sector that it does not make any difference. It is the Department of Housing and Community Development in title, but it actually is a department of housing, local government and community development.

I am pleased to say that Mr Chalker, as the new CE, has made some important strategic changes within that cluster of departments and continues to drive efficiencies. As he reminds me, we are embarking on programs that are some of the biggest that the Northern Territory has ever managed.

I am sure Mr Chalker would like to make some comments on that as the architect within the organisation.

Mr CHALKER: The key for us is to ensure we are breaking down silos. In any remote community that I travel to, and which any of you travel to, local government are a constant. They have a presence out and about.

I see a great deal of opportunity to work better with local government. Local government is also engaging with the community and contributing to the local decision-making. There is nothing that will preclude local government from being involved in local decision-making. It will be the will of the community. I see them as standing leaders in that community. They are elected members. Many have local authorities. We are trying to grow the visibility and activities of local authorities through that engagement as a responsibility of the department.

Clear indication within the agency is that we are seizing opportunity where we can and trying to promote synergies in all our efforts. It is breaking down silos so we can maximise all efforts on the ground. Simple engagement activities—we have people heading out to community but driving past homelands. I suggest to them that they should drop into homelands along the way. It is a wasted effort to have someone not visit a homeland but drive past it to go into a local authority meeting.

If we lead the way I am hopeful local government will see, when we talk about shared services, we are not just asking for that to occur for them. It is something we are serious about in how we are doing business and making sure we are maximising opportunities.

Local government plays a vital part in the structure. We are working with many regional councils to ensure they are not getting themselves into trouble relating to legislative mismanagement or financial management issues. We are working hard with our compliance. The level of engagement is positive across the sector.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any remaining questions on this output?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.4 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE
Output 2.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 2.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – ELECTORAL SERVICES
and
OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Madam CHAIR: With regard to Output Groups 3.0 and 4.0, for the NT Electoral Commission, I note that while the Chief Minister is responsible for the NT Electoral Commission responsibilities under the *Electoral Act*, the Minister for Housing and Community Development is responsible for NT Election Commission responsibilities under Chapter 8 of the *Local Government Act*. However, since questions regarding local government were asked of the Electoral Commissioner during his appearance with the Chief Minister, he will not be reappearing.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Housing and Community Development. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank departmental officers that attended today.

NT HOME OWNERSHIP

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – NT HOME OWNERSHIP

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consider the NT Home Ownership business line. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding NT Home Ownership.

I am mindful of the time minister; we have about 16 minutes remaining with you.

Mr McCARTHY: No opening statement. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: Does the committee have any questions in regards to this output group?

Mr PAECH: I think those questions were covered by the Treasurer on Monday.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of the NT Home Ownership business line.

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider outputs relating to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make a quick opening statement.

Mr McCARTHY: I would like to acknowledge and introduce Craig Allen, Commissioner for Public Employment, and Robert Csar, Acting Chief Financial Officer. I have a good statement prepared but I will not use it. With the issue of time we will go straight on.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to come back to the statement after questions have been asked if there is remaining time.

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017–18 as they relate to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Output 6.1 – Employee and Industrial Relations

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 6.0, Employment Services, Output 6.1, Employee and Industrial Relations. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Minister, I have a few questions. Can you explain to the committee how the government is planning for the increase in older workers in the Northern Territory public service and how we can support them?

Mr McCARTHY: As the member and committee members would be aware, across the developed world we experience the situation where the baby boomer population moved to adulthood and into retirement. The more retirement, the more we are losing that institutional knowledge from our workforce. This knowledge needs to be transmitted and replaced.

In the NT we have a lower age profile than other jurisdictions, but we are still grappling with the effects of this demographic issue. What the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment is doing in developing an ageing workforce policy framework to better assist the Northern Territory Public Sector in managing older workers is probably best explained by the commissioner, Mr Allen.

Mr ALLEN: The ageing workforce is one of our major focuses in a strategy we are undertaking called Hands Up for Inclusion, which is a multipronged strategy. It is interesting that the definition of aged workforce is people over 45. That encompasses a large number of people and the average age of the

Northern Territory public servant is 43. So, there is a large cohort moving into what we determine as being the aged workforce.

We are working with a number of peak bodies on designing and developing strategies and tool kits to assist managers to work with people who require some adjustments. We are supporting managers to embrace flexible working arrangements and making the adjustments so that older people in the workforce are encouraged to stay within the workforce. There is a wealth of corporate knowledge and we have to ensure we have the processes and policies in place to ensure they stay with us.

Mr PAECH: Minister, could you explain to the committee how the public sector is trying to increase the number of workers who have a disability, and what is being done to support them?

Mr McCARTHY: Good question, Member for Namatjira. Once again, I ask Mr Allen, who inspires me at our regular commissioner meetings. If you could answer that question, I am very interested to listen as well.

Mr ALLEN: Thanks, minister. In our Hands Up for Diversity program there is aged workforce—and disability is another area on which we have a strong focus. The percentage of our workforce that identifies as having a disability is 1%. We think that is underrepresented within our workforce. We think it is higher because many people are reluctant to report that they have a disability.

We are doing a lot of work with our managers with training about unconscious bias in conjunction with the Anti-Discrimination Commission, which has rolled out a number of those programs. A number of agencies have mentioned that they have participated in those programs.

More practically, we coordinate and run the Disability Employment Program, which we call the DEP, which provides entry level support for people with a disability to gain access into work with the Northern Territory public service. Quite a number of people over the years have participated in that program. I am pleased to say that when people come to the end of that program, which is a two-year program where people are employed and their salary is subsidised, they are being employed in jobs directly. There is a pathway for people through that program. That is really one of the really exciting things we are getting through that Disability Employment Program.

There is a long way to go and a lot of work to be done. We work with agencies to make sure that they are making the adjustments that they need to support employees in that field.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide me with some information and an update on the Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy that is being done and where we go to from here?

Madam CHAIR: Can I suggest we close off Output 6.1, which is Employee and Industrial Relations, and move onto 6.2 for Workforce Planning and Development?

Ms NELSON: Madam Chair, I have one question on this output.

Minister, there are several EBAs coming up for negotiation. Could you elaborate a little on the domestic violence leave in these agreements? Is the office looking at putting those in the EBAs?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes—very important lobbying on behalf of Territorians. The commissioner is leading this with the negotiations across the union movement and across the public sector, and that will be within the realm ...

Ms NELSON: I have a vested interest. Obviously I am a woman, but I am also the assistant minister for women's policy and the assistant minister for prevention of domestic and family violence, so it is something I am quite passionate about. Will it be in the EBA?

Mr ALLEN: We are in the process of negotiations at the moment. Domestic violence is one of the key issues we are looking at. We do have one of the best leave provisions for domestic violence in the country. In fact, we have unlimited leave for domestic violence victims. We have had initial discussions with the unions, but we want the unions to have ownership of the domestic violence policies that we come up with.

The unions have provided us with a number of clauses around domestic violence that we want to incorporate, and the way it is captured is still part of the negotiations that we are in with the unions. Domestic violence is a really important and significant issue, and we want to work very closely with the unions around that.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.1.

Output 6.2 – Workforce Planning and Development

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 6.2, Workforce Planning and Development. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: On behalf of the Member for Namatjira, can you provide an update on the Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy, and where can you see it going from here?

Mr McCARTHY: For the committee members, colleagues and Territorians in general, Commissioner Allen is very focused on Indigenous workforce development and has inspired me in my brief time in this portfolio. I will hand to the commissioner to reply to that question.

Mr ALLEN: We have a very small team of very dedicated people who are focused on the Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy. We recently had a forum in Alice Springs with Aboriginal employees, and that was well attended with 80 participants over two days. Those forums are really important for us in our planning and our development because we use those forums to get direct feedback from Aboriginal employees about issues they see in the workforce and strategies they believe will assist us in increasing the number of Aboriginal employees.

When we started this program the Aboriginal employment number was around 8.3%, and we are currently at about 10.46%, so in a very short period of time we have increased by 2%. There is still a lot of work to be done in the space around retention of Aboriginal employees and around mentoring and training. That is anticipated and we have received funding to develop those programs and roll out those programs into this new financial year.

We are hoping with the roll-out of those programs that we will see more retention, which will then help to increase the numbers of Aboriginal employees. It is very much a very sharp focus of our office to make sure we move towards that 16% target for Aboriginal employees.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 6.2, Workforce Planning and Development.

Output 6.3 – Public Sector Appeals and Grievance Reviews

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output 6.3, Public Sector Appeals and Grievance Reviews. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 6.3 and Output Group 6.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Output 7.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output Group 7.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 7.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 7.1.

Output 7.2 – Shared Services Received

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 7.2, Shared Services Received. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 7.2 and Output Group 7.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, I am interested in what programs OCPE has in place to cultivate and support women in leadership roles within the public sector.

Mr ALLEN: I am pleased to say the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in the country that now has 50% women in senior positions in the public service. That is a great outcome. There have been, and there still are, a number of programs that support women.

We are seeing an increase in the number of women who are chief executives. There are currently five chief executives and nine deputy chief executives who are women.

We are starting to see a shift in women in senior positions, and I think that reflects the Territory as we have more women in Cabinet. We are doing a lot of work in that space. We are looking at programs like the public sector management course. In our most recent cohort 63% of the NT participants were women. We are encouraging women to participate in our Future Leaders Program and our executive leader network programs. There is a great deal of support.

We are seeing some really good outcomes from that. To be the first jurisdiction to achieve 50% is a good outcome. That is through good policy.

Madam CHAIR: There being no further questions this concludes all output groups relating to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and the commissioner for attending today, and the officers who provided assistance. I also thank the public servants who assisted in preparation today.

The committee will now break for five minutes before returning to consider outputs associated with the Department of Primary Industry and Resources.

Mr McCARTHY: Before we go, I table the response to Mr Walsh's questions put to each CE. The Commissioner for Public Employment has also offered that information. There is no international travel.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER VOWLES' PORTFOLIOS

PRIMARY INDUSTRY AND RESOURCES

Madam CHAIR: I welcome you, minister, to today's hearings and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mr VOWLES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am accompanied by Alister Trier, the Chief Executive, to my right; the Deputy Chief Executive of Resources, Rod Applegate, to my left; General Manager of Fisheries and Product Integrity, Ian Curnow, on my left; and on my right is the Chief Financial Officer, Karen Simpson.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions, and finally, non-output specific budget-related questions. I will invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members, and finally other participating members may ask questions.

The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow minister's questioning on the output. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Primary Industry and Resources?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to appear before the committee in relation to my portfolio of Primary Industry and Resources.

Primary Industry and Resources is a critical portfolio for the Northern Territory economy; it covers a variety of industries ranging from commercial and recreational fishing, pastoralism and agriculture to minerals, exploration, mining and petroleum. These industries are fundamental to jobs and development across the Territory, particularly in rural and remote areas of the Northern Territory.

In 2015–16 the Australian Bureau of Statistics put the value of agriculture, forestry and fishing in the Northern Territory at \$582m. For mining and energy in the same period the figure is \$3.046bn, 12.9% of

gross state product. A critical point is that these industries are broadly dispersed across the Northern Territory and are therefore critical to the health and development of regional communities.

In 2017–18 my department has been allocated \$92.67m. In addition to its ongoing role as a regulator the department also has a significant role in industry development, opening new markets and providing important facilities for industry and, of course, Territorians. In the fisheries sector the government has committed to \$50m over five years to expand and enhance infrastructure for recreational fishing across the Northern Territory.

My department has a key role to play in working with the industry to identify priorities and get projects up and running. I thank the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee for its assistance in this process, and I am pleased to say that progress has already been made on a number of the projects to deliver this objective of government.

My department is also leading a project to help Tennant Creek develop into a service centre for the mining and petroleum industries. The role of the private sector is acknowledged in this, but there are initiatives that could be taken that will encourage development.

My department will be arranging for an examination of a proposal for a small processing facility capable of treating ore from a number of small operations in the Tennant Creek region. We are also working actively through the legacy mines program to make safe a number of former mining sites and therefore open them up into a potential tourist trail. The Northern Territory Geological Survey will also be ramping up initiatives to examine the geological potential of the Barkly Tablelands.

On the agricultural side, my department is closely involved in initiatives to see Katherine develop as an inland port, and the project is led by the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics, but also has a role in identifying potential products and supporting research into key commodities. We also maintain a strong program of engagement with our international partners. On the mining and petroleum side, we have established links with China, Japan and Korea and have begun testing the waters in India.

On the agriculture side we have established links with Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Japan, and we are looking to build on these contacts and expand the markets available for Territory produce and investment in Territory projects. In support of this, I have asked my department to closely examine its research priorities with the aim of improving the transfer of research outcomes into produce in the markets.

I am also personally maintaining a strong focus on engaging with various industry sectors serviced by my portfolio.

I look forward to any questions the committee may have.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the minister's statement?

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017–18 as they relate to the Department of Primary Industry and Resources.

Are there any agency-related, whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

Are there any questions from members of the public?

Ms NELSON: I have several questions. This is from NT Lock the Gate Alliance, Ms Naomi Hogan. Has the NT Government costed the subsidies that would be supplied to onshore gas companies to build gas fields on greenfield sites.

Mr VOWLES: As Naomi and the Lock the Gate campaign would be fully aware, the Northern Territory Labor Party made a promise to Territorians that if we were elected we would have a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing of unconventional gas reservoirs in the Northern Territory. We have done that. We also

promised that we would have a scientific inquiry into hydraulic fracturing of unconventional gas, which we are doing now; we are in that process.

This is important for the Territory. There no preconceived outcomes from this inquiry to government. We are serious about this. We need to get this right; that is why we have an expert panel to do that. I thank Naomi for the question and for any further information I will hand over to Alister Trier.

Mr TRIER: There has been no work undertaken yet in relation to shale gas resources, simply because the outcomes of the scientific inquiry into hydraulic fracturing of unconventional reservoirs in the Northern Territory and government's decisions in regard to that are yet unknown.

Ms NELSON: Thank you. I have an additional question from Ms Hogan. Has there been a formal quantity of analysis on the price impacts to Northern Territory domestic and industrial gas users of plugging in to the east coast gas market through the Jemena Northern Gas Pipeline?

Mr VOWLES: I have been informed that this question was answered by the Treasurer yesterday, as energy falls within her portfolio and ministerial responsibilities.

I am happy for Alister Trier to comment, if he has any further comments.

Mr TRIER: I have nothing to add.

Ms NELSON: Thank you, my next question is also from the public, from Ms Pauline Cass. There are two questions. What subsidies have been provided to onshore gas companies and their associates?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you, Member for Katherine, and thank you to Pauline for sending in that question. I will hand over to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: The simple answer is that there have been no subsidies provided to onshore gas companies and their associates.

Ms NELSON: Thank you. The second question is has a compensation fund been created to compensate landholders for loss of production, income or damages caused by the onshore gas industry?

Mr VOWLES: In short, no. We have not created any compensation funds whatsoever around this. As Pauline would know, and most of the Territory knows, we have a moratorium in place. In regard to this question, it is quite hypothetical considering it was in regard to unconventional gas. In short, we have not created a compensation fund, but once again, I will hand over to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: The minister is correct. No compensation fund has been created specifically for loss of production income or damages caused by the onshore gas industry. However, the Northern Territory Government is bound by the *Petroleum Act* in regard to compensation where the holder of a petroleum interest must pay to the owner of land who is comprised in any petroleum interest, and any occupier of land comprised in petroleum interest who has registered an interest in the land. In respect of the owners' and occupiers' respective interest in the land, compensation for deprivation of use or enjoyment of the land, including improvements on the land and damage caused by the permittee or licensee to the land or improvements on the land.

Ms NELSON: My next questions are from Climate Action Darwin. There are several questions from this organisation. How much will the NT Government spend in fiscal year 2017–18 to promote the oil and gas industries, including advertising, networking events, provision of baseline data incentives and administration of exploration and extraction licences?

Mr VOWLES: Member for Katherine, these are great questions, and I thank Climate Action Darwin for submitting those. Exploration and extraction licences and activities are administered by the Energy Division, a part of the department. Just to make sure I give an up-to-date answer, I will pass it on to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: Thank you, minister. Exploration and extraction licences and activities are administered by the Energy Division which coordinates energy policy and regulates all energy pipelines in the Northern Territory in addition to the regulation of all petroleum activities and permits within the Northern Territory.

The total estimated cost of administration of petroleum activities only is estimated to be \$2.3m.

Ms NELSON: My next question is also from Climate Action Darwin. In fiscal year 2017–18, what amount of royalties does the NT Government expect to earn from the Northern Gas Pipeline development as a result of increased gas export?

Mr VOWLES: I will put that straight to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: Basically, I am not privy to that information which is held within Treasury and not made available to this department.

Ms NELSON: My third question is also from Climate Action Darwin. In fiscal year 2017–18 what resources has the NT Government committed to support the development of the Northern Gas Pipeline?

Mr VOWLES: Before I pass to the CEO I want to talk about the Northern Gas Pipeline. We are talking about a project that has had major project status since September 2014 that we supported coming into government, simply around the potential jobs for Territorians—in the vicinity of 900 during construction. There will be 622 kilometres of pipeline and 90 terajoules a day potentially going through it.

You would have seen that we have approved 344 kilometres of the 457 kilometres in the Northern Territory section, and the Phillip Creek compressor station. There are a number of different processes to go through, including the NT EPA, and the federal government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* has been approved.

We are very excited about this project. But for further information I will hand over to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: The overall Energy Division's budget, as quoted in the budget papers is \$3.385m. That covers a range of activities, as described before. It covers administration of tenure, regulation of pipelines and a range of operational and exploration activities. There is no specific budget line item to the Northern Gas Pipeline. It covers a range of those areas, so a portion of the energy budget goes to the regulation of gas pipelines.

Mr VOWLES: It is about Tennant Creek. This government had a clear commitment coming into government that we want to make Tennant Creek the mining services hub of the Northern Territory. I have mentioned jobs on the Jemena gas pipeline potential for locals. We are seeing already local contracts being awarded to locals. That is what this is about. We encourage creating and facilitating investment opportunities in these regions. It means people are coming to Tennant Creek and the Northern Territory for work. Once they are here they realise what a great place it is.

Ms NELSON: My next one is still from Climate Action Darwin. In fiscal year 2017–18 how much security is Jemena expected to pay to protect the pipeline from environmental and social damage generated by the Northern Gas Pipeline?

Mr VOWLES: I will give that to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: The company is required to take out \$100m in insurance and sign an indemnity.

Ms NELSON: Have they done that?

Mr TRIER: To my knowledge, yes.

Ms NELSON: Next question is from Jimmy Cocking. What is the NT Government's position on the coal deal made just before the CLP left office?

Mr TRIER: The government of the day made a decision to support a proposal put forward by Tristar. The proposal was to exchange their existing granted tenure from mineral authorities over the same footprint. Tristar sought to pursue this course of action as a means to further the longevity of their desert hills coal project.

This proposal is permitted under the *Mineral Titles Act* and the decision demonstrates the Northern Territory is supportive of ventures that may bring a level of prosperity, economic development and employment to rural and remote areas. The coal project has the potential to be one of those ventures. I might ask the deputy chief executive if he has anything to add.

Mr APLEGATE: The application by Tristar was straightforward. They had 23 exploration leases coming to the end of their first six-year period. They sought to convert those into mineral authorities of which they would be converted back to around 20. This is effectively to give them more assurance in terms of longevity with their exploration program. After the first six years with an exploration licence they can only seek renewals for up to two years. They were seeking to have a longer period to do their exploration and bring their project to fruition.

By applying for mineral authorities it resets the clock, and mineral authorities are issued for periods of six years, then they can seek renewals for a further six years. The process is going through the National Native Title Tribunal, so we do not know the outcome. As far as the *Mineral Titles Act* is concerned, if these mineral authorities are granted they will be so under the same conditions they currently enjoy with their existing exploration leases. They will continue to pay the same amount of rent as they currently do.

Ms NELSON: You can certainly understand that question—licences that were issued when the CLP went into caretaker mode. What conversations have been had between the NT and federal governments about the proposed Chandler Salt Mine and permanent toxic and hazardous waste storage facility? That question is also from Jimmy Cocking, the next couple will be from him.

Mr McCARTHY: It is an important question. Chandler Salt Mine, or Tellus Holdings, has major project status. They are going through environmental approvals. We are talking about the potential of a \$670m investment over the construction period of three-and-a-half years.

This mine has the potential for 750 000 tonnes of salt per year. I know the Member for Namatjira is excited about this project, because it is about Titjikala salt. With the approval process, we have the potential of having Titjikala salt not only across Australia, but potentially across the world.

This government has a focus on creating jobs for Territorians first and then bringing others to our wonderful Territory. This project has the potential for between 270 to 540 jobs during construction, and 150 to 180 full-time jobs in the operational phase, so this is a significant project. I will hand over to the CEO for more information.

Mr TRIER: The minister is correct; the Chandler salt project is currently being assessed for potential environmental impacts under Northern Territory and Australian Government legislation.

The issue of permanent storage of hazardous waste was identified in the early stages of the environmental assessment process and has been specifically addressed in the terms of reference for the Chandler project.

The development proposal triggered formal assessment by the Northern Territory under the *Environmental Assessment Act* and by the federal government under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. The terms of reference for the environmental impact statement were prepared in consultation with the Northern Territory and federal governments, and finalised after a public review process.

The present terms of reference for the environmental impact assessment do not cover the issue of a nuclear waste repository, so that is outside the scope of the present situation. Any such proposal would require a new, separate and specific assessment process to identify and address issues of concern.

Just as importantly, from the initial development proposal, Tellus has specifically stated that nuclear waste will not be accepted at this facility for storage, and they have been crystal clear about that from the beginning.

Tellus have stated they will not accept nuclear or uranium mining waste, infectious materials, materials that can react with salt, and materials not safely containerised or sampled.

The permanent storage of hazardous waste will be comprehensively assessed during the assessment of information contained in both the draft environmental impact statement and the supplement to the draft environmental impact statement, which addresses all issues raised by both governments and the public during the public review process.

Until this process is completed, it is unknown whether further discussions on the storage issue are required.

Ms NELSON: Thank you.

Mr PAECH: The discussion around storage is for the future, it is not involved in the initial proposal put forward by Tellus Holdings for the security? Essentially, is any talk around that supplementary to the original application which did not specify that and had no objective or purpose of doing so at the time?

Mr VOWLES: We will take that on notice and will hopefully bring the answer in by the end of this session.

Madam CHAIR: As it is a question on notice, Member for Namatjira, please re-state the question for the record.

Mr VOWLES: Hang on. We may be able to answer the question. The Chandler program consists of an underground salt mine, as you know, with the resulting voids to be used for securer storage and recovery of equipment and permanent isolation of difficult-to-manage waste. This is to store 30 000 tonnes of waste per year, with potential to increase to up to 400 000 tonnes per year.

My understanding is it will not be hazardous. From the initial development proposal, they have specified that nuclear waste will not be accepted at this facility for storage, or uranium mining waste, infectious materials, materials that can react with salt, and materials not safely containerised or sampled.

Ms NELSON: You have just answered the next question, but because these are questions from the public I will ask them so they are on the record.

Is the Chief Minister, which I know is not you, concerned about the possibility of the Tellus facility becoming a Trojan horse for a nuclear waste repository?

I will move on to the next question, from Jimmy Cocking. Has the NT Government minister considered the potential cost of security for the Chandler facility after its initial proposed 29-year life?

Mr VOWLES: I will pass that to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: Provisions in existing legislation consider the potential cost of the security for the Chandler facility. The calculation of the remediation security will be assessed under the authorisation process in the *Mining Management Act*. As part of the approvals process, the proponent will be required to submit a mining management plan for assessment under the *Mining Management Act*, and this will be used in the assessment and calculation of the appropriate remediation security at the time.

The government has a policy of obtaining 100% security bond for the project during the life cycle of the project, and government approvals processes require environmental security to be lodged before approval is issued. This is reviewed on an annual basis for the life of the project.

Ms NELSON: I will go through all the questions, as opposed to addressing you each time.

These questions are from Justin Tuddy. Over 30 years of operation at the Ranger project in Kakadu, mining has now ceased and rehabilitation has commenced. Although the mine plans to continue processing stockpiles for a few more years, there is a hard deadline to be packed up by 2026. Has the NT Government budgeted for a dedicated cross-portfolio working group to address issues related to the Ranger rehabilitation?

Mr VOWLES: I went to the Ranger a few times when I was shadow minister for Mines and Energy, and as the minister for Resources. It is important to meet the people who work there and meet the community.

There is a Ranger Uranium Mine remediation process, which is scrutinised by the Minesite Technical Committee, which includes my department; the Northern Land Council; Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation; ERA; and members of the Australian Government Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, who are purely there as observers.

All remediation plans are discussed by this committee, and the approval and authorisation by the appropriate NT and federal ministers will come from that process. If there is any further information I will pass that on to Alister.

Mr TRIER: As the minister has just described, there is a process in place, which is funded and operational. It has been in place for a long time. In regard to working to address issues related to Ranger rehabilitation, this is part of the consideration, so the minister is absolutely correct.

Ms NELSON: Minister, at a recent meeting of the Alligator Rivers Region Advisory Committee a member of the Department of Primary Industry and Resources was asked about the department's responsibilities for day-to-day monitoring and regulation of the Ranger Uranium Mine in Kakadu. As the project rapidly moves from production to rehabilitation the project risks and commensurate departmental responsibilities are rapidly changing.

The Department of Primary Industry and Resources was asked as to its capacity to take up new monitoring of the Magela sands. The departmental officer responded that they could only do so by suspending one of the deep monitoring bores, noting that their current capacity stretched to meet their existing program. The question from Justin Tuddy is, what additional budget allocation is required to satisfy the minister as to the department's capacity to meet their growing responsibilities for day-to-day monitoring and regulation of the unprecedented project that is the Ranger uranium rehabilitation?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you, Member for Katherine, and Justin. I will pass that straight to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: I think the key point here is that Energy Resources of Australia is undertaking an improved environmental monitoring program, and in addition, the Australian Government is supervising the scientist branch, which undertakes a regular independent program of surface water monitoring. The role of the Northern Territory Government is trying to take check monitoring at the Ranger mine site.

All monitoring programs are reviewed regularly to maintain relevance to the changing situation at the site as remediation progresses. I think what that is saying is that there is some flexibility in where the monitoring takes place on a prioritised basis.

Ms NELSON: What is the timing of that monitoring?

Mr APPELATE: Ranger has been the most monitored and heavily regulated mine in the Northern Territory's history. That monitoring has been happening since day one and will continue right up until the closure, right after closure and for a period after closure. There is an extensive monitoring program that has been approved by both the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory Government, which in place at the moment. Whilst it will change as the mine moved from operational to closure, the rigour of that monitoring program will continue.

Ms NELSON: At the same level?

Mr APPELATE: At the same level.

Ms NELSON: Minister, we have seen departments that are being shuffled at the federal level with the Supervising Scientist branch moving from the science division to the Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division of Environment and Energy as well as at the Territory level, as we see a regulatory agenda appear poised to move regulatory responsibilities from resources to environment. Will these arrangements affect the NT Government's appropriate monitoring and regulation in any way?

Mr VOWLES: We are not expecting any effects to the NT Government's monitoring and regulation. We as a department and a government take this very seriously. We know that it is important for Territorians.

We have to maintain the work we do in this monitoring regulation and we will work with the federal government when we need to on this. It is obviously an important issue out at Ranger, but for any further information I will get Alister to respond.

Mr TRIER: The minister is correct; machinery of government changes are a natural part of life and affect all levels of government. It is all about aligning the administrative arm of government to the priorities of the government of the day. I think that is an essential and necessary process. However, the independent regulatory functions and statutory responsibilities remain. Whether or not they get shifted, those statutory responsibilities still have to be delivered by government, and that remains the case here.

I think the question is will the rearrangements affect the Northern Territory Government's appropriate monitoring and regulation in any way. The short answer is no.

Ms NELSON: I think that is the reassurance that Mr Tuddy was looking for. Noting the pressing schedule for the cessation of major rehabilitation works, can you please table the most recent mine closure plan for public review?

Mr TRIER: Energy Resources of Australia, the operator of the Ranger Uranium mine, has recently submitted an updated draft of the mine closure plan to members of the Minesite Technical Committee for comment. The membership includes the department, the Northern Land Council, Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation and the Australian Government. These organisations are currently assessing the draft plan and we will be providing comments to ERA shortly.

Once ERA has received and assessed all these comments it is understood a copy of the final draft of the mines closure plan will then be published by ERA.

Ms NELSON: This question comes from Donna Mahoney. I must reiterate what I said recently. These questions are from the public, and as such, I will be asking them so they are on public record.

This is in regards to the Dundee Beach boat ramp. How many tries will you make to get it right?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you very much for taking the time to ask that question. It is an important question. I came to government and was fortunate enough to be given portfolio of Primary Industry and Resources, which includes fisheries. The Dundee boat ramp facility was commissioned by the previous government and had some issues. It was two years late.

Coming in as the minister, I said we needed to finalise this and finish the project. We did that. It is opened. I am the first to admit, as I did, that there have been some issues in regard to Dundee Beach boat ramp, but we immediately tried to rectify those. I am absolutely committed, as I have said in the media a few times, to sorting those issues out in regard to its usage and its parking issues.

One of the issues there is with the migrating sand. It is accumulating on the boat ramp. We have had a design consultant look at it. We have engaged a local contractor to undertake the maintenance of the sand removal from that ramp. I was recently, in April, at the annual general meeting of the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory, where this was discussed. I was able to announce that government will spend \$1.5m in upgrading the car parking space, which is a continuing issue.

This is one of our most popular boat ramps in the Northern Territory. I did not go there over Easter because I knew it would be so busy, and it was. It reinforces that with this Labor government that we have committed the biggest rec fishing infrastructure spent in our history in Australia, \$50m. This is an important part of it, Dundee boat ramp. So we must get it right.

We came into government talking about completing projects. We had Shady Camp—the tender was awarded last year. Coming into government we have had to throw \$970 000 into that project so it gets going, and they are starting work right now.

It is all about access for Territorians. You want people to fish and do it safely when they launch their boats. I thank Donna for her question. It was a short question, but it was a good question because it is important. It is a great spot to launch a boat and fish, and that is what we want to enjoy in the Territory.

Ms NELSON: My last question is from Mr Chris Walsh. There are several parts to this question. I will ask each one individually and then ask you to respond to that.

Could you please provide the total expenditure and itemise details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related cost such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for all chief executives in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you, Member for Katherine. Who was that from?

Ms NELSON: That was from Mr Chris Walsh.

Mr VOWLES: From the *NT News*? Thank you very much, Chris, for asking the question. That has been asked of every minister, so I am prepared for this one.

Before I hand it over to the CEO, I will state that travelling is part of building trade relationships that will foster industry growth and investment in the Northern Territory. It is part of our core business, especially in my Department of Primary Industry and Resources, where we have trade partners such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia. We have done our first trip to India with regard to resources. Travelling is part of our core business to create investment and foster those relationships.

Also, importantly, we are competing in a global market for investment. We have to be proactive in promoting the Northern Territory as an attractive place to invest. Especially for my department, it is important that we travel and get out there. Also, not a very well-known issue—not an issue, a good news story—is that we also have a lot of federal, external funding that will allow our department people to assist people in Indonesia and the Philippines to create their economic opportunities around cattle.

Having said that, I will pass over to my CEO.

Mr TRIER: In addition to the minister's comments, being a primary industry and resource focused agency, our work is in the regions and, by nature, we have to travel. Our geologists need to get out and understand the geology of the Northern Territory. Our biosecurity officers and stock inspectors need to get out and work in their role of protecting and underpinning the biosecurity of our produce. Our researchers need to get out and understand and participate with research on ground. As the minister said in his opening remarks, there is the ability to increase the on-farm impact of research, so we have to travel and get out there to do it. Much of that is intrastate as well.

In relation to the six questions, I will table the documents. In doing so, I acknowledge that we have not answered question number six in this and we will take that on notice, given that it will take us a fair bit of effort to pull that information together.

The other thing I will acknowledge is in relation to one of the questions which asked for trip reports for all international travel and if a trip report has not been provided, why not? We have identified that one trip report is missing from departmental travel. That travel occurred prior to August 2016 under the former Department of Mines and Energy. The person travelling was travelling on external funds and through an externally-related project. However, it is in our own process and we will rectify that.

Ms NELSON: Just to confirm, you are tabling a report that provides responses to all of these six ...

Mr VOWLES: Five.

Ms NELSON: Great, thank you.

Question on Notice No 6.1

Madam CHAIR: We will take question six on notice. I believe we have the previous wording?

Ms NELSON: Yes, you do.

Madam CHAIR: We will allocate that number 6.1.

Ms NELSON: Madam Chair, that ends my questions from the public.

Mr VOWLES: I want to thank the public. There was Naomi Hogan, Jimmy Cocking, Justin Tuddy, Donna Mahoney and—were there more?

Ms NELSON: Climate Action Darwin.

Mr VOWLES: I thank them for their time in submitting questions. I respect the fact that it is important.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PRIMARY INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT Output 1.1 – Market and Enterprise Development

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Primary Industry Development, Output 1.1, Market and Enterprise Development. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: Yes, I have one. Minister, there are a number of Yolngu clans who are interested in primary industry development. These range from cattle and buffalo industry, crocodile hunting, farming for skins and meat, fisheries such as freshwater barramundi, saltwater fish and others. These clans have Yolngu authority over the land that these industries exist on. How can the government assist these clans to create viable industries without infringing on their Yolngu authority and ownership of these industries?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you very much, Member for Nhulunbuy, for your question. It is an important question; economic development is very important throughout the regions. I am very passionate about Indigenous economic development on country.

Before I pass over to the CEO for further information on where there possibly could be some funding sources or more discussion around this, it gives me a great opportunity to highlight the Indigenous coastal licences that are out there. I think we have 21 that have been approved and 14 that are active. I think the last figures were over 2600 kilograms of fish alone that have been caught, and nearly 1600 of those have been sold. We saw just a couple of weeks ago a catchment of about 250 kilograms that came in from Maningrida in to Darwin to sell. There are real opportunities there and also a pathway and a process to foster economic development opportunities.

I welcome your question, but for more specific information I will hand over to Alister Trier.

Mr TRIER: Like the minister said, I think it is imperative to be focusing on these various areas. Specifically, you covered a range of activities, starting with buffalo.

I think there is a very good emerging story for buffalo and the opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in the buffalo industry going forward—where that is in line with their aspirations. I acknowledge that not all Aboriginal people want buffalo on their land. There are groups who are interested in having them removed due to the environmental issues. The department has been working with the Northern Land Council in prioritising areas for access to buffaloes.

I am not speaking on behalf of the Northern Land Council, but I think one of the main considerations is to ensure that, as a part of that access the real jobs and economic activity for the landholders in the area. With the price of beef being what it is, buffalo are becoming a real economic prospect. Our buffalo export numbers for this year are as high as they have ever been at this time of year. That bodes well for the future of buffalo.

In terms of cattle production, I understand there is some activity already happening at Nhulunbuy, but we are very keen to continue working with the various groups there on developing bespoke industries, such as cattle production that services local domestic needs for meat, with potential further development over time. I think there are some real opportunities.

We have always considered this and still have work to do, but the mine site removes forestry and rehabilitates it to native woodland. There could be some possibilities of turning it into forestry opportunities and that is an ongoing discussion that we have not given up on.

The minister spoke about Indigenous coastal licences, but I might just hand over to the general manager.

Mr VOWELS: I will jump in. I want to talk specifically about buffalo on country. We are looking at 800 buffalo exported in 2013, and it has gone up to 5097 in 2015. Last year was 5792 buffaloes, so it is really growing as a market. If there any way we can foster that to assist in setting that up in the country we would be more than happy to do it. I am going to pass it on to the guru of coastal indigenous licenses

Mr CURNOW: The Fisheries Division of the department has also been very active in the Nhulunbuy region as it has around many parts of Arnhem Land. In addition to the Aboriginal coastal licence program, the minister mentioned to support that the department has a fishing mentor program where we employ a number of Aboriginal staff who are ex-commercial fisherman. They have been active in Nhulunbuy, training the locals in a range of associated things, including handling fish, gear repair and how to repair nets. Aboriginal people in communities know how to catch fish, but it is those supporting things around running businesses, so the program has been running well.

In addition, the department has a training coordinator around its Aboriginal program, and that position is based in Nhulunbuy. That staff member has been over there for about a year. In addition to the fishery mentoring program, the other training that has been coordinated from there includes the ranger training. For a number of years the department has been training over 100 rangers that have completed their

Certificate II in Fisheries Compliance. A number of rangers have also done a Certificate III course in Fisheries Compliance. In recent years we have also started to train rangers in research skills, how to collect research material. That certificate-based training has been very important. We now can use ranger programs to support the department on a fee-for-service basis to collect samples in the field and extract the necessary stuff out of the fish and send it back.

Not only does it provide jobs on country for the ranger groups, it is also a cost effective way for the department to run their programs in the remote parts of the Territory. It is a win-win program. In addition to those programs there is Garngi, which is the fishing corporation that has been set up in Nhulunbuy. The department has arranged training in governance for the board members. They were quite keen to make sure they had the right structure and training around the administration of their board. In addition to some of the other Aboriginal coastal licence stuff I understand Garngi has very recently purchased a coastal line fisheries license. With that training and support they have bought a full-blown commercial licence and are very keen to start operation soon.

The department is very keen to continue those partnerships in the Nhulunbuy region.

Mr PAECH: While we are talking about livestock. Member for Nhulunbuy, I understand you have buffalo on your country.

Minister, for the bottom part of the Northern Territory, I am wondering what work is being done in terms of the camel and donkey areas of production, and if there is a growing market demand there?

Mr VOWLES: Camels have been talked about for a long time as well as donkeys. There has been a lot of interest in donkeys over the last couple years. I never get the wording of what they are after—ejiao, which is the gel from the skin. That is about farming. There is real interest in that space around a potential new market. We have camel culling every year with the problems they create in the environment. Donkeys are something we are seriously looking at, but we need to know more.

I am traveling to China at the end of this week. I will be visiting a facility there to look at how it operates so I can get firsthand experience of what that looks like. There has been serious interest from international companies around that. Like anything, we need to make sure we have looked at every avenue around this and the potential. In the end it will be a final investment decision by any company interested.

There are a lot of processes to go through. Do we have somebody waiting to do it? No. Are people interested? Yes. On this table we still do not know enough about it. That is why, as part of my trip to China, I will be having a look at it.

I am happy to pass that on to Alister if he has more to add.

Mr TRIER: I have been to China and the demand for donkeys is very real. The company we met at that occasion process a million donkeys a year. That is how big they are. They source them from right around the world and they could double that now. That could have a marginal error, but it is a lot.

The underpinning thing is that ejiao demand is right around the world through Chinese communities, not just in China. It is real. There has been the perception that there are millions of donkeys running around the Territory, which is not correct. The genetics of our donkeys are far inferior to the donkeys in China. There are issues there and the minister referred to things we need to work out.

Just as important is the fact we need to understand the production characteristics of donkeys. When they exist in a native environment, what do they eat, what do they focus on and what are the impacts? Are they the same as cattle or horses? We need a real understanding of these sides of it to ensure we have a knowledge based foundation to make decisions going forward.

The minister is correct; at the end of the day it will be a commercial decision. Some intergovernmental protocols will need to be finalised. The Australian Government is looking at them. They see this as serious as well.

Camels are a bit more vexed and they can be a significant environmental issue. I remember the droughts a few years ago when they were creating havoc on communities. It is an issue. There is a view that an industry can be made out of them by harvesting. I might be a bit cynical, but the reality is people go for the camels to make money and the ones that do not get left behind. You are not really dealing with the environmental issue.

From a departmental point of view we have always maintained the line that a camel industry would need to be a domesticated one where you have control over your animals and they are managed in a sustainable way, not just harvested with all the underlying environmental and social issues. I know people will disagree with me, but there has been a fair bit of research into it.

Mr PAECH: When you say domesticated—currently it is what we would call a wild harvest, where it is going out and mustering and there is no paddock dedicated to growing the product to be able to ship it off.

Mr VOWLES: We do not have camel at the moment. After a couple of years the feral ones will be taken care of. We are looking at 2013–14, when there were over 300 000. That is an estimated increase of up to 10% per year.

In the Dry they come into town looking for a feed and something to drink, so they cause a bit of havoc there. But, interestingly enough, one thing that has sparked a bit of interest is camel dairy, which is being discussed with proponents. It is in the early stages of scoping studies. We are working with Austrade to look at this investment and facilitate an investment opportunity with camel dairy.

We owe it to Territorians to ensure we are looking at every avenue for revenue and business, and business on country, in all the regions of Central Australia. We need to make sure we have opportunities that are sustainable. You have the wild harvest, but then you have to go into a tame or domesticated situation.

Ms NELSON: Over the last 20 or so years successive governments have spoken about this occurring in Katherine. With the location on the north/south Stuart Highway, which intersects with the Victoria Highway, linking to WA and being adjacent to the rail line, Katherine is ideally placed to become an important agribusiness hub, which I am passionate about.

Could you please outline what work this government is doing to make this happen? What will make us different from the successive governments that said they would do it?

Mr VOWLES: You are very passionate about representing people in the region. Thank you for the work you have already done in this space, advocating for the people in Katherine.

I also thank the assistant minister, the Member for Fong Lim, Jeff Collins. We have both been to Katherine; I have been about five times since I have been in government and I have made a commitment to get there as much as I can.

One of the main priorities handed to me by the Chief Minister was to work on Katherine as an agribusiness hub and inland port. That is what we are doing. You talked about the north/south Stuart Highway and the Victoria Highway, the connections around Katherine. It already is a fairly successful service hub as it is. We want to build on that. We want to build on the infrastructure. We will do scientific research and promote the region to investors to capitalise on what it has, which is a natural competitive advantage to the rest of the country and, almost, the Northern Territory.

We want long-term investment into Katherine. It is not about us, the Labor government, delivering on this; it is also about the continuity of all governments leading on from here. Katherine is a major focus for us, and for all governments moving forward.

I visit Nino Niceforo at Tropical Treasures; Mitch at Kings Farms; and Manbulloo Mangoes. I have even caught up with Jack at the NT Cattlemen's Association. We all agree that Katherine is and can be a major source of investment for the Territory. We are really keen to do this. We will invest a lot of money—we have already invested a lot—into Katherine. The NT Government has already committed \$10m to the Mapping the Future program for soil and testing, which will support scientific teams and gather data on the soil, water and biodiversity assets.

Over the five years the study will identify suitable agricultural land and water reserves and then take them to the region's producers and potential investors; we need to facilitate that investment. It is really important that we do this properly and correctly, this is beyond a term of a government; like I said this is about looking after and locking away the future of Katherine.

I know the very good job that the mayor does there; she does not like it being called the inland port, but regardless of what we call it, we are committed to making it the agribusiness hub of the Territory. I could talk about this forever, Member for Katherine, and I am sure you want to hear it. Agribusiness and

agriculture—even Deloitte Access Economics, in its Positioning for Prosperity paper, identified agribusiness as the next wave growth area for Australia.

We want the right public investment to unlock the private sector. I am very confident it will be the agribusiness hub of the Territory.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Are there any other questions on Output 1.1?

Mr GUYULA: I have one more here. You have probably answered my question for this one but I will read it out for the record and you can fill me in.

One of the barriers to primary industry growth is when governments say that the business is not viable without good knowledge of country or industry. Good knowledge is held by the Indigenous TOs; for example, a number of years ago I wanted to farm crocodiles in Arnhem Land and I was told by a member of government that it was too difficult because there is no market for crocodile products and it is too hard to farm them.

I do not believe this is true, but I know the Yolngu face these barriers as well as the barriers of government paperwork, tax requirements and so forth. Could you advise how this government will assist Indigenous business enterprises?

Mr VOWLES: It is a good question and I thank you for it. Like I said before in my previous answer—but as you said, I might have answered it—we were very supportive, especially me. I am very passionate about Indigenous employment opportunities, especially on country, for people who have that experience and knowledge of their country.

I have a very capable, good and thorough CEO and very good support staff in the department who know where I sit on this agenda. I think times have changed, I really do; there is a lot more knowledge and respect for local knowledge around the cultural values, the history of that land and what can and cannot be done on that land.

We have seen the crocodile industry alone, just for the skin and the meat, grow significantly. I think it is up near \$25m a year in the Northern Territory. We are leading the way; we have some of the biggest names—I do not know them too well, the handbags—I think it is Hermès and Gucci that might be here.

Mr TRIER: Louis Vuitton.

Mr VOWLES: Louis Vuitton. They all have croc farms in the Northern Territory for their products. It is a real opportunity so I encourage and stress that I am more than happy to foster any ideas or concepts you have about how we can make it an easier process or step you through that. We are going forward on any investment we can get and facilitating investment into the Northern Territory around our primary industries.

Like I said, we have heard about camels and the potential for donkeys. Crocodile farming has changed considerably, and I think it is a really credible alternative opportunity for Indigenous land owners as well.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions for that output?

Mr GUYULA: Yes. In all these areas of primary industry, I am concerned that Indigenous people become employees of industries, as you said, rather than owners, co-owners or shareholders. How is the government ensuring that Indigenous people are given appropriate ownership?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you Member for Nhulunbuy. I will pass you to the CEO for a response.

Mr TRIER: Member for Nhulunbuy, you have raised a valid point and, as the minister indicated earlier, we are in a transitional stage. The goal is that Aboriginal people run their own businesses and as you said are shareholders rather than just wage takers.

We are still going down that road with some of our fisheries' commercial opportunities. We have focused initially on getting the technical aspects of getting fish in a safe and healthy format to market, which is a different set of skills to understanding how to run a business and how to stand back from the operational issues and focus on the business element.

From a department point of view, our skill set is primarily at the technical level. We have programs in fisheries and we have a program called the Indigenous Pastoral Program which has been going for more than 12 years now. It involves us; the Northern and Central Land Councils; the Indigenous Land Corporation; and the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association.

The program is moving past just getting people working and is now setting up businesses and Indigenous enterprises. It is looking at a range of skills such as the operational, technical and business management skills, and on top of that the structural governance that is critical, especially in an Aboriginal context.

The program has been going for a number of years and we still have a lot of work to do. I acknowledge the point you make and it is a long road.

Mr GUYULA: Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Plant Industries Development

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Plant Industries Development. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Livestock Industries Development

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Livestock Industries Development. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Major Economic Projects

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.4, Major Economic Projects. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.4, and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – FISHERIES AND PRODUCT INTEGRITY

Output 2.1 – Biosecurity and Animal Welfare

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 2.0, Fisheries and Product Integrity, Output 2.1, Biosecurity and Animal Welfare. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Minister, on Sunday you announced that the government would be lifting the restrictions on growing bananas in the Northern Territory. Would you detail the success of the banana freckle eradication program, and the steps the Northern Territory Government has taken to support the banana industry?

Obviously it was a success, because we have lifted the restriction, so how did we get there?

Mr VOWLES: Sunday was a fantastic day. I am normally at the Rapid Creek Markets as the local member, so I was able to drag the media along there to make an announcement about the banana freckle eradication program. In a couple of weeks we will be lifting the ban and we will get rid of the six red zones across the Territory. As I said on Sunday, I thank the farmers and people in the Northern Territory who had banana plants that were taken out of their yards for their patience.

Ms NELSON: Thank you for acknowledging that.

Mr VOWLES: It has been a massive program. We are talking about an industry nationwide that is worth \$600m. In the Territory it is roughly \$5m a year. It has been a long process of four different phases. We are in the fourth phase.

This eradication of the banana freckle has been a \$26m nationally-costed response with a plan. There were some issues around this. I was the shadow minister highlighting some of those issues. As the minister I have been very fortunate to come in towards the end of that.

As I said, the red management zones will be abolished and Territorians will not require a permit to purchase, grow, move or sell banana plants in the Northern Territory. But they will still need a permit, as usual, if they go interstate or sell them interstate, even for bananas coming in from interstate.

It is a great announcement. It has been nearly four years. There is no banana freckle in the Northern Territory. We have to go through a process, but it should take a couple of weeks for it to be gazetted. We will make sure the public knows about that as well. We look forward to bananas back at the markets, some lady fingers are growing in my back yard of my house again. We can move on and enjoy bananas in the Northern Territory.

However, I take this opportunity to stress that biosecurity is everyone's issue. It is a priority for everyone. I also take the opportunity to thank the department for its response. It was not something you do every day or every year. Hopefully we will not be doing it again.

In regard to the banana freckle and the melon virus, it has been a response which got us to the point where we can grow bananas legally again.

Ms NELSON: There have been quite a few things happening in the Northern Territory with the viruses like the melon virus and banana freckle. Can you explain what the financial impact was to the Northern Territory?

Mr VOWLES: With regard to bananas?

Ms NELSON: Yes.

Mr VOWLES: As I said, it is about a \$5m industry within the Northern Territory. It was a serious impact, of course. But we got a lot of response from the mums and dads growing them in the back yard who had their bananas taken from them. That is something we dealt with. As a minister, I have not had to deal with it very much.

If there is any information, because this is an important issue, I will pass it over to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: In regard to financial impacts, the figure the minister quoted was the impact per year for businesses in the Territory ...

Ms NELSON: It was \$5m per year over the last four years, give or take.

Mr TRIER: Yes, over four years. Businesses were not able to participate. There was a compensation component as a part of that, but with compensation you still have to go through processes and bureaucracy and it is not easy for those who go through it. Whilst businesses were compensated, I am sure they will all tell you it was no fun.

The minister made a couple of really good points. The program has been exceedingly successful. We have destroyed more than 500 000 banana plants and visited more than 45 000 properties. These are astounding figures. That gets to the community participation. I am the first to acknowledge that we learnt some lessons along the way and we could have done some things better, especially in the early days. That has been a lesson for us.

The community participated, and that is demonstrated in the fact that we have had over 99% compliance, which is as good as you will get.

We need to be clear that the Northern Territory has no banana freckle. There has been no sign of banana freckle through any of the testing we have gone through. But we still have to finish our current testing, which is phase four, before we can apply for national proof of freedom. That is still a process that we have to go through.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any further questions on Output 2.1?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Fisheries

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.2, Fisheries. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: I have been living in and walking around Nhulunbuy, and I have been hearing about this and am wondering what it is. What is the Aboriginal marine program for Nhulunbuy, minister?

Mr VOWLES: Thank you very much member for Nhulunbuy, I will say a few words and then pass it over to Ian Curnow from fisheries.

We are doing training programs. Indigenous marine training programs are being delivered in Nhulunbuy to facilitate delivery of the seafood industry business—and marine ranger training. It has been very successful. This is about training local people to be on the water, monitoring their waters. We are very excited about it.

On the whole, since we have come to government, 23 people have passed their Certificate II in Fishing Operations. They have completed their Indigenous marine training.

For further information I will pass over to Ian Curnow.

Mr GUYULA: They are not like Dhimurru rangers or the Yirralka rangers—are they part of this project?

Mr CURNOW: Yes, both groups over there are part of the program. It probably touches on the answers I gave you earlier around the Aboriginal coastal licence, but there is a mix of training programs for rangers as well as a range of economic development programs.

I think that some of the areas we are looking at there, particularly in economic development, sit around aquaculture development. That is one of the key areas we are looking at the moment. That is being supported through research projects that are focusing on low technology, sea-based methods. That involves several communities around the Top End.

Not in Nhulunbuy at the moment, but in other areas, we are looking at sea cucumber or trepang ranching. That is being done in conjunction with commercial partners. We are also looking at things like rock oysters and giant clams, and doing work in communities there.

I guess the opportunities are there to look at the economic development opportunities as well as being able to provide locally grown, fresh and affordable seafood, back in to those communities. That same premise is driving the mentoring program, which I mentioned in response to the earlier the question, and the training around the Aboriginal coastal licence.

A number of communities now are regularly catching things like mullet, whiting and queen fish, selling them back to the community. In Maningrida, every Thursday night at the markets, they are selling those fish. A number of communities are doing that. That is quite encouraging. A lot of it is about getting back to some of the fisheries that existed in the 1950s and 1960s when a lot of Aboriginal people were quite active in the commercial fisheries in those areas. That is an important part.

Specifically regarding the training of marine rangers, there are a couple of elements there. There is compliance training. Not only are we running Certificate II and Certificate III courses in fisheries enforcement, which are classroom-based courses that we do in partnership with a training provider, but that also links to some of the Blue Mud Bay commitments and giving rangers powers.

As part of that process we have been training them every month in evidence collection and what things they will need to do to have powers. As of 1 January this year, the *Fisheries Act* was amended to allow for a new class of fisheries inspector. Previously we only had fisheries officers under legislation and you had to be a police officer to have those powers. Now we have two classes of fisheries inspector.

We also have the Water Police out doing joint patrols with ranger groups, so not only are they getting the classroom training, but they are getting that reinforcement in the field. We are very hopeful that a bit later this year we will be rolling out powers to the first marine rangers once the classroom stuff has been accompanied in the field. That will be a very exciting development that has been a long time coming. The other important element of the training is not just around enforcement, but as I mentioned, it is about getting rangers trained in fisheries research.

Some rangers have also been doing certificate-based training in measuring and analysing fish. That includes helping fisheries staff collect the samples in the field, and then taking all those vital measurements, even extracting the otoliths, which are the ear bones out of fish. Rather than having a fisheries scientist doing that work, they are training local people in being able to do it. All that field-based work is now being done locally, with the samples being sent back to Darwin for analysis. I know the rangers in Nhulunbuy have been very active in all of those programs, which is a great development.

Mr VOWLES: Since 2000 on we have had 145 male and female rangers receive Certificate II qualifications in that, and just as important is that in this budget we provide \$1.3m for development of Aboriginal commercial fishing and aquaculture capacity to operate an Aboriginal marine training program in Nhulunbuy. We have given \$1.3m for that area, and we have given \$1.7m to support the Indigenous Community Marine Rangers. There are real things happening and there are real opportunities.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions on Output 2.2?

Ms NELSON: We have several members in our Caucus who are passionate about fishing. The recreational fishing sector provides some tremendous economic and social benefits to the Territory and Territorians. Can you please advise what the government is doing to continue to support this important sector? We have done a lot already—around the \$50m.

Mr VOWLES: I am more than happy to spend the next 25 minutes talking about the \$50m for fishing. As I said earlier in one of my responses, this is the biggest rec fishing infrastructure commitment in our nation's history, as is my understanding.

This is a phenomenal opportunity to give investment from this government and leave a lasting legacy in the rec fishing space. Creating opportunities for every Territorian to go out and fish, and to have that opportunity. It is not just being able to own a boat and get out in the water, but also give the opportunity for people to go to the wharf and fish or go somewhere else and have fishing platforms.

We are providing and rolling out the first \$11m of this commitment, \$6m of which we fast-tracked out and \$5m in this budget.

We are building roads as well; we are sealing 4 kilometres of the Corroboree Billabong Road. We are sealing the car park at Middle Arm boat ramp. We going to announce very soon the installation of CCTV cameras at Dinah Beach at the boat ramp, because it is one of the issues in the Territory, sadly, that you go fishing and when you come back something has happened to your car. We need to make sure people are safe as well as their vehicles and that their property is safe when they get back.

We are installing toilets at Dinah Beach boat ramp. We are looking artificial ramps and fish aggregation devices. As I said earlier, we have thrown in \$970 000 as part of the \$2.3m infrastructure spend at Shady Camp, and that work is happening right now around the boat ramp.

We are looking at consultancies for land-based fishing platforms. We are sealing the car park at Channel Island boat ramp. With \$1.5m, as I have announced, the Amateur Fishermen will upgrade the car park at the Dundee Beach boat ramp.

We are giving every opportunity we can. I thank the Recreational Fishery Advisory Committee members for the work they do. People are submitting their ideas or their proposals through that process regarding what they think needs to be fixed up—or even new boat ramps. That is going through the right process. That is important as well. I did not want committees sitting there just for the sake of sitting and meeting. We wanted to give weight to the committee.

We have recently announced \$56 000 over the next three years for insurance in the Melville Bay boat ramp. It was great work that Nhulunbuy sport and rec fishing club was doing to maintain that facility every year. It is all encompassing. I could speak forever on this because it is a great news story for all Territorians. If you do not fish at least you have the opportunity to do so.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

Ms UIBO: I am interested in the relationship between the Department of Primary Industry and Resources and the Chief Minister's Department of Trade, Business and Innovation in regard to fisheries and the licencing talked about earlier, particularly for remote communities.

Mr VOWLES: An important part of our core business is to do with Indigenous rangers. I am excited about Aboriginal coastal licences. It is important to all Territorians when government agencies and departments do not work collaboratively. Since we have come to government we have worked on that to make sure we are all on the same page. People know we are working together to achieve what we are trying to achieve. In that regard, the Aboriginal coastal licences are a fantastic opportunity for everyone.

Access is always raised as an issue. We have Blue Mud Bay negotiations with the Northern Land Council, which are ongoing. Any opportunity we can create and facilitate investment in any capacity in the department—we have primary industries, which includes fisheries, other plants and aquaculture. There are so many opportunities. We heard about the potential sea cucumber and giant clams; there are so many opportunities we can create.

Times have changed. If you have a great idea we can hold people's hands through that process to help them achieve.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this output?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.2 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – WATER TESTING SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Water Testing Services

Madam CHAIR: We will now move on to consider Output Group 3.0, Water Testing Services, Output 3.1, Water Testing Services. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: I note that on the budget papers there is a slight reduction in the budget for Water Testing Services. The previous year was \$2.6m, and this financial year, 2017–18, it is \$2.47m. Can you detail for me the services that are provided by the Department of Primary Industry and Resources, Water Testing Services, and the benefits these services provide, keeping in context the reduction in that budget and how we will continue to provide that service?

Mr VOWLES: The decrease here is minus \$82 000, a culmination of revised perimeters for the EBA, CPI efficiency dividends and savings measures. We have minus \$97 000 revised revenue estimates for water, chemistry and microbiology testing. We have \$25 000 which is the effect of the number of other minor budget adjustments, including internal transfer restructures, review and allocations.

This does not mean reduction in testing or service by the department.

Ms NELSON: So the reductions will not have any effect on the testing or the services the department is providing in regards to water testing?

Mr VOWLES: No, because it is also a fee-for-service area. I will pass that on to the CEO, if there is anything he would like to add.

Mr TRIER: The minister is correct. We understand there will be a reduction in the need for some of the services, hence a reduction in revenue. That is part of the difference.

The water testing is important for Power and Water in regard to ensuring their integrity of water supply to communities, especially remote communities. In the service we provide, one of the roles of government is not to take the place of a potential industry. This service is provided in that there is not enough commercial demand to make it a commercial industry, therefore it is part subsidised by government to make it happen. It is essential for the integrity of potable water supplies going forward.

Mr VOWLES: We do all the Power and Water testing of water to make sure—AZRI was testing the water from some of the remote communities, including Tennant Creek.

Mr PAECH: Part of working in partnership with the Department of the Chief Minister—he mentioned yesterday there was a huge emphasis on water and soil testing. Has that been run in partnership with your department?

Mr VOWLES: I think it goes back to the department of the Environment with the \$10m for soil and water testing, which we are claiming, but it is under Minister Moss' portfolio area.

Mr TRIER: Just to clarify, we are talking about two different things. Water testing is about the quality of the water, whereas the water analysis is different.

Mr VOWLES: Drinking water supply meets the federal mandated health standards.

Ms NELSON: As you are aware, in Katherine there is PFAS—contaminated drinking water. I did not pick up that there were any Primary Industry employees or staff members working with the interagency group dealing with PFAS water issues. I need to clarify that the reduction in the budget will not have any effect on that. Is that correct?

Mr TRIER: Absolutely correct.

Mr VOWLES: The PFAS in Katherine is an EPA issue, which we provide assistance to.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT **Output 4.1 – Industry Reporting**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0, Resource Industry Development, Output 4.1, Industry Reporting. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.1, Industry Reporting.

Output 4.2 – Geoscience and Industry Development Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 4.2, Geoscience and Industry Development Services. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.2 and Output Group 4.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – MINING SERVICES **Output 5.1 – Mineral Titles Management**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 5.0, Mining Services, Output 5.1, Mineral Titles Management. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: What work is being carried out to improve the mineral titles management in the Northern Territory, and what impact will any changes have on the work being carried out?

Mr VOWLES: There has been a lot of movement on mineral titles management. It administers the legislative frameworks for regulating and granting mineral titles that authorise exploration, extraction and processing of minerals under the NT *Mineral Titles Act*. This also includes maintaining the register for all these titles. We are looking at ways in which the current system can be improved and modernised, such as developing an online system with 24/7 access.

I will now hand over to Rod Applegate.

Mr APPLGATE: An exciting development that we are looking forward to this financial year is moving away from our paper-based systems of managing and administering titles—going green, going electronic and digitising the whole system. It will be a major development bringing in online systems whereby title applicants can go on their computers, lodge applications and track the progress of their applications as they are being assessed and eventually get an electronic title. We will have the most up-to-date visualisation software so people can look at where these titles exist across the Northern Territory. It is a really exciting project we are embarking upon this year.

In respect of other areas, we are looking to get support to do some minor amendments to the *Mineral Titles Act* and its regulations. As you would appreciate, the *Mineral Titles Act* commenced in 2011. We always anticipated that as it rolled out over the next couple of years we would work out where there were inconsistencies in the way the act and the regulations were applied. Some of these have come to light.

For example, in the new mineral lease provisions, it was intended to accommodate the specific needs of smaller miners where they previously used to get a minerals claim. That was repealed when we brought in

the new act. But the requirements we have in the new act, where we need to understand the size of the resource before we can give them licences, we are finding that is excluding some of the smaller miners from applying, which was certainly not the intent of the legislation.

We are reviewing existing process and procedures to remove unnecessary administrative burdens. Obviously, in a paper-based system there is process creep, where we put in more and more steps that probably are not needed when we move to a fully digitised electronic system.

We are also continuing staff rotations through the teams in mineral titles so that the people are trained in all aspects of title administration and management continue to maintain a consistent and reliable service to our stakeholders.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any further questions on this output? That concludes consideration of Output 5.1.

Output 5.2 – Mining Operations Management

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 5.2, Mining Operations Management. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 5.2.

Output 5.3 – Legacy Mines

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 5.3, Legacy Mines. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Minister, with regard to legacy mines, in the budget I see it has doubled. It has gone from \$3.05m to \$7.5m. Can you clarify for me why it has doubled?

Mr VOWLES: Yes, the \$4.493m increase is just the transfer of the Commonwealth funding for rehabilitation of Rum Jungle mine site. It is just that they do not always have the same timing. That is the major source of it.

They do a fantastic job, not only with Rum Jungle with the Commonwealth Government, but all the work we are doing at the legacy mines we have around the Tennant Creek region. Even the forward thinking about when those mines and shafts are deemed safe—we are looking at funding tourist trails around that region, and we might have already put some money into that. Many people in their caravans—in their later years in life, not so much the young people—are interested in the legacy mines and how we do the work.

I was fortunate enough to do a media event with a simple drone. It has been ground-breaking for us being able to access sites and go down shafts. The efficiency of having a drone occurred in a situation when a team went out and the gate was locked and they could not get in. There was a miscommunication with the landowner. They called him and he said, 'Sorry, I cannot get there'. 'No problem, do we have your permission?' 'Yes'. Up with the drone and off it went, did the work and came back 15 to 20 minutes later, and we had live footage. We are doing fantastic work on legacy mines.

Going back to the question, I will hand over to Karen Simpson.

Ms SIMPSON: Funding came from the Commonwealth this financial year, and the expenditure of that funding could not be completed this year so it has been transferred into 2017–18 and 2018–19. It is all from the Commonwealth.

Ms NELSON: Can I clarify that, in 2018–19, will we see the figure go back to \$3.05m?

Ms SIMPSON: In 2018–19 there is more. This funding has been spread to 2018–19 as well. And what happens from there will depend on further agreements from the federal government.

Ms NELSON: When does this current funding agreement end?

Mr APPEGATE: I think we have around \$10m from the Commonwealth to continue our investigations into coming up with a viable rehabilitation strategy for the old mine at Rum Jungle.

We have just entered into, or are finalising, the current financial agreement with the Commonwealth, which is why part of that money will be carried over into next year and into 2018–19. In the next two years, we hope to be in a position to present a sound business case to the Commonwealth and seek additional resources to contribute to a final solution for that legacy mine so that we can stop the emanation of pollutants from that site.

Ms NELSON: Thank you. So this funding is a two-year agreement? I am assuming the Commonwealth Government has not been as generous as the NT Government has been, where we have issued five-year funding agreements? The federal government is not doing that, so it is a two-year funding agreement?

Mr VOWLES: Yes, Member for Katherine. So far the Australian Government has provided \$18.609m towards developing long-term remediation solutions to address Rum Jungle environmental issues.

In the 2017 federal budget, \$10.048m was allocated, referred to as Stage 2A, which will involve repairs and maintenance works to the existing cover system at Rum Jungle Creek South. That will provide significant economic and employment opportunities for traditional owners and local business.

The legacy mines team said that for some traditional owners it is the first time they have been on that land because the mine has been there so long and they have not been able to access the land. We are working closely with the traditional owners to not only get them on their land, but also assist with economic opportunities in areas such as weed management, or any other way we can.

I commend the department and the legacy mines unit on this; it has been a significant amount of work. Obviously with the funding they are providing, the federal government recognises that we have the knowledge and experience to continue this work.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.3 and Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – ENERGY SERVICES **Output 6.1 – Energy Management**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 6.0, Energy Services, Output 6.1, Energy Management. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 6.1 and Output Group 6.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE **Output 7.1 – Corporate and Governance**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 7.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 7.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 7.0.

Non-Output-Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam CHAIR: Are there any non-output specific budget related questions?

This now concludes consideration of output groups related to the Department of Primary Industry and Resources. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for attending today, and all the officers that provided assistance, as well as all the public servants who assisted you in your preparation today, minister.

Mr VOWLES: I thank the staff at this table with me and all the staff in the Department of Primary Industry and Resources for their extensive work and commitment to providing all the information in this folder. As a former public servant, I am fully aware about how much work goes into this and I thank every single one of you. Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. That concludes the estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence tomorrow morning at 8 am with questions of the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources.

The committee suspended.
