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Madam Speaker Purick took the Chair at 10 am.

VISITORS
Darwin Middle School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 7 students from Darwin Middle School, accompanied by their teachers, Shayden Lucas and Sarah Thomas. Welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I also advise of the presence in the gallery of electorate officers for members of the Legislative Assembly. Welcome to Parliament House. Enjoy your time here and your seminar.

Members: Hear, hear!

INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER AGAINST CORRUPTION BILL
(Serial 30)

Bill presented and read a first time.

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

The purpose of this bill is to create an independent commissioner against corruption, or more commonly known as an ICAC. The ICAC will be appointed to investigate and bring light to any corruption in the Northern Territory. This bill also repeals the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* and transitions its whistleblower protection functions to the ICAC.

This bill demonstrates how our government is restoring trust and integrity to government.

The model adopted in this bill has been developed to align with 50 of the 52 recommendations made to this Assembly by Commissioner Brian Martin AO QC as a result of the Anti-Corruption Integrity and Misconduct Commission Inquiry. It creates an ICAC with comprehensive powers to investigate improper conduct. The ICAC's primary role is to investigate and deal with the most serious, sensitive, systemic, corrupt conduct by public officers and bodies.

Clause 10 of the bill defines corrupt conduct. The conduct must be sufficiently serious in that it must either be an offence punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of at least two years or conduct which would warrant termination of services. In the case of elected public officers, such as honourable members of this Assembly and local government councillors, there is very little behaviour that would legally warrant termination of service. To ensure elected officials can be investigated by the ICAC, an additional test applies which allows officials to be investigated for a serious breach of public trust. The term 'breach of public trust' is defined in the bill and means conduct that is intentionally or recklessly inconsistent with the duty to act in the public interest, or other functions of the public body or officer.

The corruption must be connected to public affairs. The ICAC will not look at people's private affairs except to the extent where they are connected with public sector corruption. The term 'connected to public affairs' is also defined and means conduct while performing public duties or representing oneself as a public officer. Off-duty conduct by public officers is also captured if it is closely related to the performance of an official function or if it involves the use of public resources in certain circumstances.

The terms 'public officer' and 'public body' are defined by clause 16. Public bodies include not only government agencies but statutory authorities, courts and tribunals, local government organisations and government-owned corporations.

Where contract service programs and recipients of government grants are performing functions under those contracts or with public monies, corruption related to those functions and that expenditure can also be investigated by the ICAC.

The definition of 'public officer' is also comprehensive. In addition to public servants, it includes ministers, members of parliament, judges, statutory office holders, ministerial advisers and electorate officers, as well as any member, officer or employee of a public body.

Corruption by persons who are not public officers can also be investigated in the event that a person conspires with a public officer to engage in corrupt conduct. It is also corrupt conduct for any person to engage in conduct that would significantly impair public confidence in public administration. Such conduct can occur through activities such as:

- collusive tendering, misappropriating or misusing public resources
- dishonestly undermining a regulatory scheme designed to promote or protect health and safety, public health, the environment or the amenity of an area, or the management and commercial exploitation of resources.

Anyone can be investigated by ICAC for certain serious offences such as bribing a public official or abuse of public office. These offences are in Part IV of the Criminal Code. Before ICAC is fully operational the government intends to amend those offences to ensure they are not limited to conduct involving public sector employees but extend to the conduct of public offices. Clause 8 provides that the act operates so the ICAC can investigate the improper conduct that occurs before this bill commences.

A person who was a public officer at the time the conduct occurred but is no longer a public officer will be able to be investigated for their conduct as a public officer. However, the ICAC has extensive discretion to determine which investigations should be prioritised. Schedule 1 provides a list of matters the ICAC is to take into account when making those decisions. These considerations include prioritising matters with present relevance, considering the extent of which a matter has already been investigated, and considering the extent to which relevant and reliable evidence of the improper conduct is still available. This allows the ICAC to take a commonsense approach to handling historic allegations.

In addition to corrupt conduct, the ICAC will investigate anti-democratic conduct as defined by clause 15. Anti-democratic conduct means conduct by a person or body that constitutes an electoral offence aimed at undermining the democratic process in a significant way. It excludes minor offences, such as defacing an individual ballot paper, but it includes offences relating to improper handling of political donations or attempting to more broadly influence the outcome of an election.

The ICAC has jurisdiction to investigate lesser matters of misconduct and unsatisfactory conduct, but unless the ICAC has good reason to conduct the investigation itself, it is expected that the ICAC will refer such matters to other bodies in accordance with clause 18(3). It is expected that anti-democratic conduct that is not sufficiently serious or does not otherwise warrant investigation by the ICAC will likewise be referred. Clause 9(1)(e) also gives the ICAC the jurisdiction to investigate offences against the ICAC bill, which notably include the offences of retaliation against a whistleblower.

It is an object of the bill that the creation of an ICAC augments the Territory's existing framework for responding to improper conduct. The ICAC does not replace existing investigation bodies such as the ombudsman, police or specialist bodies such as the Children's Commissioner or Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. By referring matters to these bodies the ICAC will remain free to focus on the serious corruption that requires its jurisdiction and specialist powers.

Part 3 Division 4 of the bill provides a process for referrals. Clause 38 contemplates that sometimes the ICAC will work with existing organisations by way of a joint investigation arrangement. Staff from other organisations can also be made available to the ICAC to assist with investigations. Clause 122 provides that when staff from other organisations are used in this way they become ICAC staff for the purpose of the act and become subject only to the direction of the ICAC for the purposes of the act. These provisions allow the ICAC to sensibly leverage existing resources across the Territory and interstate in order to adopt the best investigation approach on a case-by-case basis.

A common concern with respect to investigating corruption in the Territory is that we are a close-knit community and that actual and perceived conflicts of interest are likely to arise from any person appointed to the ICAC. While the ICAC will be an experienced person with demonstrated integrity, the government recognises that these potential conflicts of interest must be covered. Clause 120 allows a person to be appointed as an acting ICAC to deal with a particular matter where the ICAC has a conflict of interest. An acting commissioner can be appointed to operate independently but concurrently with the ICAC. The ICAC

may therefore continue to perform the role of managing the office and the majority of investigations with acting ICACs appointed as needed to handle investigations where conflicts or potential conflicts arise.

The ICAC has extensive powers to search, seize and compel evidence as recommended in the Martin report. Even prior to commencing an investigation, the ICAC may make preliminary inquiries and conduct random audits and reviews of public bodies. Once the ICAC has an evidentiary basis to commence an investigation, the ICAC has a wide range of coercive powers. It may:

- inspect financial records of banks and other financial institutions without a warrant
- require a person to attend a location, answer questions and to produce documents or other things
- enter and search public premises without a warrant
- enter and search private premises if a warrant is granted
- seize and retain evidence located during searches, issue directions to public bodies to do or refrain from doing something in order to avoid obstructing an investigation, or to protect a whistleblower.

In addition to the powers just mentioned, it is anticipated that consequential amendments will be made that amend other legislation to give the ICAC the power to seek warrants to install surveillance devices; intercept telecommunications; and conduct controlled operations, meaning covert operations where investigators can assume false identities and conduct otherwise unlawful activities.

I will take a moment to advise the House, this bill—we will be providing a passage for this to go to scrutiny committees that we will hopefully set up whilst in this parliamentary sitting. This bill has been released as an exposure draft bill and many people have been questioning me if we will debate it today. We will not be debating the bill today. We have the exposure draft, which had public consultation, as I spoke about yesterday in Question Time.

The bill will now sit on the Notice Paper for the appropriate scrutiny from this parliament and I am hopeful it will have the additional scrutiny from those scrutiny committees. There needs to be consequential amendments and they will be brought forward to the House this year.

NT Police currently have these powers, and it is essential the ICAC have them as well.

The ICAC will usually conduct investigations in private but has the power to conduct public inquiries where required. It may also decide there is a need to make a public statement about an investigation, for example, to clarify what action the ICAC has taken or request people to come forward with evidence. Usually the ICAC will operate in private to protect an investigation and potential prosecutions.

However, the bill provides for the ICAC to be able to report directly to the Assembly on a range of issues that would not usually require revealing the specific details of investigations. In particular, the ICAC may report to the Assembly on systemic issues, matters that are impacting on whether corruption is occurring in public bodies, reporting of improper conduct and the protection of whistleblowers, and on matters which are or may seriously affect the ICAC's ability to perform its functions.

It is anticipated that conducting investigations will be a major part of the ICAC's operations. However, the point of creating an ICAC is not merely to investigate, but to make sure improper conduct is properly dealt with. For example, if it becomes apparent to the ICAC that money is inappropriately disappearing from a public body due to poor accounting practices, the ICAC can immediately make a recommendation to the public body to fix the poor practices and halt unauthorised spending. There is no need to conduct a complete investigation that provides exactly who took the money and why before a recommendation can be made. Depending on the amount of money and the circumstances, the ICAC might conduct an investigation itself, or they refer it to police to handle as theft or to the public body to handle as a disciplinary matter. This will free the ICAC to focus its specialist knowledge and powers where they are most needed.

As recommended by the Martin Report, the ICAC also has a broad educative function. An effective anti-corruption strategy not only tries to detect and punish people after the event, but encourages organisations to adopt processes and procedures that minimise the risk of improper conduct in the first place. Organisations that build a workplace culture where integrity is valued, rewarded and modelled will prevent corruption before it can occur. Recognising this, clause 8 provides that the ICAC has jurisdiction to investigate a public body

for the actions of its staff if the public body has let a corporate culture exist that directly encourages, tolerates, or leads to improper conduct occurring, or if it fails to deter or prevent it from occurring.

This bill includes a whistleblower protection scheme. The scheme is being transferred from the *Public Interest Disclosure Act*, but has been subject to a public consultation process and, as a result, contains improvements.

The scheme set out in Part 6 of this bill clearly defines responsibility for managing and protecting whistleblowers. This was something the government consulted the community on earlier this year.

The bill places the primary responsibility for protecting and supporting whistleblowers on public bodies. The ICAC will provide guidance to public bodies on how to fulfil this role and has the power to step in if a public body is not adequately protecting a whistleblower.

Two powerful incentives for public bodies to take this function seriously are built into the scheme. Clause 100 provides an offence that can be charged when retaliation against a whistleblower occurs in the course of the management or supervision of that whistleblower. In those circumstances, it is a complete defence to show that the action taken against a whistleblower was reasonable management action justifiable for reasons such as poor performance. However, it is the defendant who must prove this to the court on the balance of probabilities.

Further, under clauses 101 and 104, the public body is liable for retaliation by its employees, and the amount of compensation it will pay is affected by the steps it takes to mitigate the harm caused by the retaliation or by generally developing and implementing policies and training aimed at preventing retaliation.

The ICAC has powers to ensure public bodies fulfil their roles appropriately. It can conduct random audits of compliance and direct a public body to take a specific action to prevent retaliation if it receives information that retaliation has occurred or been threatened. If the ICAC receives information that retaliation has occurred or has been threatened, it can initiate an investigation into the matter using its full coercive powers.

To assist public bodies in meeting their obligations the ICAC must issue guidelines for public bodies about frameworks and practices for minimising retaliation. The ICAC also has the power to provide or arrange for physical protection to be provided to a whistleblower if this becomes necessary.

To assist whistleblowers in protecting themselves, the bill requires the whistleblower to be provided with information about their rights, responsibilities, and available avenues of support at an early stage. In addition, costs cannot be awarded against a whistleblower who claims for compensation, unless the claim has no reasonable basis.

A claim for compensation can be brought in any court or tribunal of competent jurisdiction, and the court or tribunal must consider holding proceedings in private or a non-publication order to protect the whistleblower's identity. For example, it is possible to bring a low cost proceeding before the relatively informal Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal and seek a small amount of compensation and an apology.

One difficulty of whistleblower protection schemes is that a whistleblower may not follow all the technical steps to make a protected disclosure. Clause 93 provides a safeguard by allowing the ICAC to declare that a communication is to be treated as protected, and the person making it is to be treated as a whistleblower going forward.

In addition, whistleblower protection under Part 6 can be obtained by communicating improper conduct to a range of investigatory bodies and statutory authorities, including the ombudsman. The protection is obtained whether or not the person specifically states the communication is a protected disclosure.

Given the ICAC's enormous powers, it is crucial that the person who takes the role is appropriately skilled and impartial. In addition to the eligibility requirements specified in the Martin Report, namely that the ICAC be a lawyer of 10 years standing or a former justice of the Supreme Court, the bill provides that the ICAC must not have recent political affiliations. A person who, within the last five years, has served as an MLA, ministerial staffer, political party office-holder, or made a reportable donation to a political party, will be ineligible for appointment as the ICAC.

The ICAC will be oversighted by an inspector. The role of the inspector is not to be a secondary ICAC. The inspector will have full access to the ICAC's records, be able to audit the ICAC's use of coercive powers, and investigate allegations of impropriety by the ICAC.

In the event that serious improper conduct is identified, the inspector has the role of triggering a more serious investigation of the ICAC's actions. The inspector makes an annual evaluation of the ICAC and produces a report of that evaluation to this House, the Legislative Assembly.

I reiterate that this has been an enormous body of work, and I thank the department officials and people who have provided information to date. I would also like to clearly outline the intention of the government with this bill. The intention is to consult widely and to have feedback from Territorians. That is why we had an exposure draft before we got to the point of introducing the bill to the House. I believe it is the first exposure draft in my five years of being a member of this Assembly. The bill is now before the House and can go through the appropriate scrutiny by members of this parliament and the broader public.

I hope it will also be the first bill to go to the scrutiny committees that we propose to establish in this parliamentary sittings. I want to clearly outline to members of the community that the government is serious about this bill. We have been serious about public consultation. This bill is a significant step forward and provides the legislative framework for putting in place an ICAC in the Northern Territory.

We will have consequential amendments being worked through now that we have this bill.

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

Debate adjourned.

YOUTH JUSTICE AMENDMENT BILL (Serial 29)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Territory Families): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The main purpose of this bill is to amend the *Youth Justice Act* and the Youth Justice Regulations to provide Territory Families with primary statutory responsibility for youth justice and youth detention.

The Commissioner of Correctional Services is the statutory authority responsible for administering the *Youth Justice Act*, which includes responsibility for young people in custody and the appointment and direction of Community Corrections officers exercising powers in relation to young people. Administratively, however, the functions sit within the portfolio of Territory Families.

Currently the *Youth Justice Act* provides that Community Corrections officers appointed by the Commissioner of Correctional Services are responsible for the preparation of reports and supervision of young people on behalf of the Supreme Court and the Youth Court. These provisions continue to operate as the current legislative framework for youth detention and youth justice.

However, the intent of this government is that all matters relating to children and young people should fall within the portfolio of one agency. Territory Families was established to bring, under one area of responsibility, a whole-of-life approach to supporting families and placing child protection and youth justice within a broader framework of prevention and early intervention.

A hallmark of a contemporary youth justice system is the recognition that children are different to adults. They are different developmentally and cognitively in terms of maturity level, and they rely on adults to care, support and supervise them. In accordance with national and international standards, children should be kept separate from adults within the criminal justice system. This is to ensure that children are dealt with in a manner appropriate for their age and their level of maturity, a principle already endorsed in the *Youth Justice Act*.

It also ensures that the authority for youth justice is separate from the authority for adult correctional services by providing that the statutory authority that lies with Territory Families is consistent with international standards and best practices.

Territory Families has assumed the administrative responsibilities for youth justice. But the current provisions of the *Youth Justice Act* and the Youth Justice Regulations require legislative amendments to allow Territory Families to assume the functions currently sitting with the Commissioner of Correctional Services. That is the purpose of this bill, to bring into legal effect the machinery of government changes that have already occurred.

It is important to note that this bill is limited in its scope. It is not the intent of this bill to change the context or nature of the functions relating to youth justice. Rather, this bill changes who exercises these powers and functions, and ensures that the exercise of the functions relating to young people sits with Territory Families.

The bill before us today is not a reforming bill; it makes no major changes to the legal system already in place. In effect the purpose of the bill is to legally separate the Youth Justice System from the adult corrections and adult criminal justice system. This is a necessary first step on our reform process.

I now turn to the main features of the bill.

Firstly, this bill removes references to the Commissioner of Correctional Services in the *Youth Justice Act* and replaces these references with the Chief Executive Officer of the responsible agency, that is, Territory Families.

This bill also creates a new statutory officer, called a community youth justice officer, and prescribes a process for their appointment in the *Youth Justice Act* to assume the functions that the current Community Corrections officers have with respect to youth justice. The creation of this statutory role enables the community to clearly see the functions of officers who work with young people in the youth justice system. Through the creation of this role the bill draws together the functions that already exist under the act and applies these to youth within the current justice system under Territory Families.

This includes current powers in the Parole, Bail and Youth Justice Acts. The creation of the statutory officer role within the *Youth Justice Act* gives Territory Families and the government the opportunity to be transparent about the roles and practices within our youth justice system. This has not always been the case and is one reason why our reform of the youth justice system has started with the bringing together of responsibility for youth into one department and one act.

Only a small number of Territory Families employees will be able to exercise the powers of a community youth justice officer. In exercising these powers the community youth justice officers will be guided by information provided by other Territory Families frontline staff.

Staff in Territory Families are currently preparing the delegation instruments, policy, procedures and training that community youth justice officers' roles will receive prior to this bill taking effect. This process will improve the quality of our youth justice system and incorporate the outcomes of the Royal Commission where relevant.

This bill removes the power from the Commissioner of Correctional Services to temporarily accommodate youth detainees and offer assistance to the superintendent of a detention centre to deal with emergency situations and operational issues. In addition, this bill inserts a new section to allow the use of a detention centre to accommodate youths in the custody of the sheriff because the Commissioner of Correctional Services will no longer be able to accommodate them in custodial correctional facilities. Both of these amendments are significant and occur in the context of our intention to clearly separate youth justice from the adult corrections system.

Another main feature of this bill is the introduction of Division 2 of Part 6AA within the *Youth Justice Act* to establish a monitoring and supervision framework specific to youths who are subject to any monitoring orders. This will allow community youth justice officers to utilise powers that have been, to date, exercised by probation and parole officers.

This bill also inserts a new Part 4AA into the Youth Justice Regulations to set out the procedural and evidentiary requirements relating to alcohol and drug testing as part of the new monitoring and supervision framework. The powers and functions relating to alcohol and drug testing otherwise sit within the *Correctional Services Act* and are administered by probation and parole officers, but are now clearly recorded within the legislation relative to youth.

As part of the transfer of powers and functions this bill also includes transitional provisions in relation to immunity and commencement of prosecutions, and it ensures existing orders of the court and Parole Board will continue to have effect. That is clear in Division 4 of Part 17 of the *Youth Justice Act*.

Schedule 2 of this bill includes all other amendments to the Youth Justice Regulations replacing the references to the Commissioner of Correctional Services and probation and parole officers with references to the Chief Executive Officer of Territory Families and community youth justice officers.

Finally, this bill provides consequential amendments to various acts across the Northern Territory statute book to ensure all other powers and functions relating to youth justice and youth detention fall within the responsibility of Territory Families.

The consequential amendments are in Schedule 3 of this bill and amend the *Bail Act*, the *Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Registration) Act*, the *Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Registration) Regulations*, the *Correctional Services Act*, the *Cross-Border Justice Act*, the *Cross-Border Justice Regulations*, the *Interpretation Act*, the *Mental Health and Related Services Act*, the *Parole Act*, the *Sentencing Act*, the *Sheriff Act*, the *Surveillance Devices Regulations*, the *Terrorism (Emergency Powers) Act* and the *Victims of Crime Rights and Services Act*.

I reiterate my opening remarks, that this bill is not a reforming bill. However, it is the start of an extensive law reform process that this government, through Territory Families, will lead.

We are committed to a full review of the *Youth Justice Act*, but this will be guided by the findings of the current Royal Commission and extensive community consultation. Ensuring that the legislative functions relating to youth justice and youth detention sit with Territory Families will ensure that the next steps towards review of youth justice can proceed efficiently.

I commend the bill to the honourable members and table the Explanatory Statement to accompany the bill.

Debate adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT **Investing in Jobs – Mining and Primary Industry**

Continued from 17 August 2017.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I applaud the minister for continuing all of the programs the Country Liberals initiated in government. The Country Liberals have a strong record in supporting Primary Industry and Resources and therefore the best thing Labor can do at this point is follow the direction we went. The minister has done a pretty good job of not cancelling our programs.

I will outline some of the programs initiated by the Country Liberals that the minister forgot to mention. We reopened the cattle and buffalo livestock export trade and diversified into new markets. When we came to government our graziers were suffering from the federal Labor ban on live exports, our biggest family industry. We provided \$280 000 for ongoing cattle inspection services to facilitate market access to eastern and southern Australia, again to diversify our markets.

We invested \$1.8m in collaborate projects to drive innovation in the cattle industry and introduced a new 1080 Wild Dog Management program. When we came to government in 2012, wild dogs were killing or maiming 60 000 head of cattle each year, costing the industry \$80m per year.

The 1080 Wild Dog Management program changed all of that. We changed the *Pastoral Land Act* to allow for non-pastoral business enterprises on pastoral leases, giving a new lease of life, if I can use the pun, to many enterprises and allowing pastoral enterprises to diversify their income sources. The *Pastoral Land Act* discouraged long-term investment and economic diversification in nearly 50% of the Territory's land mass. It now allows more options and incentives for developing that land and developing more varied businesses on that land.

The Country Liberals also waived pastoral rents on properties that had been affected by severe drought. We provided extensive support to the cucurbit industry throughout the cucumber green mottle mosaic virus outbreak. We funded a \$426 000 soil research project and won a \$1.2m research contract on researching control of the virus. We also developed and implemented an interest rate subsidy scheme to provide temporary relief to cucurbit farmers.

We provided extensive research support to the Territory mango industry with projects, including mango flowering research. For those who do not know what that is, it is to see if you can get mangoes to all flower at the same time and spread the flowering over a longer period. That research is to move the current harvest window forward and/or backwards and expand the mango rootstock trials into Central Australia.

That is a snapshot of some of the programs initiated by the previous government. Perhaps I have given the minister some ideas or more inspiration for programs that he can take some credit for.

But we are here to discuss the ministerial statement which encapsulates the Labor government. It is 42 pages of meaningless platitudes and of repeating policies and programs from the previous government as if they were something new. That might impress some of the new members here, but many of us who were in the previous parliament remember the same programs and announcements: \$1m barra, check; Jemena's northern gas pipeline, check; extractives in the Howard Springs plains, check; Indigenous marine rangers and the training program, check; grant to the NT Livestock Exporters Association to upgrade their Berrimah yards, check.

It is interesting how the government's Buy Local provisions work in this case. I have heard some rumours about those yards, that is, that the contract will go to a Victorian company, which would disappoint everyone in this House ...

VISITORS
Darwin Middle School

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, could I please interrupt to welcome some students? Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 7 students from Darwin Middle School, accompanied by their teachers, Raelene Dawson and Charlee Shone. Welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr HIGGINS: It is good that the minister talks for more than half-an-hour on how good the previous government's policies are. Apart from those initiatives developed by the Country Liberals, this government does not have an agenda. None of their inquiries have reported back.

We had 42 pages on Primary Industry and Resources. What was missing? In this comprehensive statement on all of the primary resources activity from the government, what was forgotten? Can anyone guess? Well, there is one lousy paragraph on cattle. This is an industry that generates 90% of the primary production value which, thanks to the Country Liberals policies' hard-working and favourable conditions, generates \$750m of gross value directly to the economy, with more than two million head and an average 600 000 turned off NT pastures every year. What did this Labor Party statement give them? One paragraph.

Which industries were really missed? Gas. Yes, you guessed it, the minister forgot the industry is banned by government. He did not mention it? Well, he actually mentioned it. There are two sentences on the gas industry. This contrasts with, for example, 10 pages on recreational fishing. One sentence on gas; 10 pages on recreational fishing. I will repeat the minister's sentences on gas because they are quite interesting:

To support and market the sector in the NT I led the Territory's largest contingent to the Australian Oil and Gas Conference in February and also represented the Territory at the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association conference this year.

At these events I met with the major industry players as well as separately meeting with the board of the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies.

I applaud the minister for attending these events. I saw him at the APPEA event. I was not lucky enough to get an invitation to the Territory government breakfast, but that would have been because the minister did not want me to hear what he told those companies about the government's current ban on hydraulic fracturing. But second-hand, I have heard some very interesting things about what the minister—and on other occasions, the Chief Minister's office—is telling the gas industry about their ban. It would clearly appear that the government is telling different things to different people. It would appear that members of the government and Cabinet have different opinions on this issue. I am genuinely curious as to how the Chief Minister will straddle that divide.

We all know what must happen here and I am sure that, in private, the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources agrees with me. The government has to get on with the job of grasping the necessary best practice regulations to regulate the unconventional gas industry so that more time is not lost. The Country Liberals were in the process of delivering the regulations when we lost government.

We all know where this will end. The government needs to restart that process so that when they finally make the decision to allow this industry to foster our onshore gas industry, they will come to that decision. We will find that there will be additional and substantial delays until they can bring in the best practice regulations.

Every day delays employment for Territorians and investment in the Territory. For the government's own political good, every day will bring them closer to the next election and make it harder for them to make the difficult decisions necessary to ensure the Territory's future.

Minister, please forgive me if I do not laud your efforts. I congratulate you on keeping many Country Liberal initiatives; however, you and your colleagues have banded an entire industry, an industry with tremendous potential for the Territory at a time when our economy needs it the most.

You are the minister responsible for primary resources. That includes gas, with our abundant gas supplies in a time when energy, security and the supply of gas are national headline news. You are overseeing decisions equivalent to Labor's live cattle ban six years ago.

For simple and selfish political reasons you have endangered our prosperity and yet hypocritically you come into this place and talk about all the good work you are doing for primary industries and resources with but two sentences on gas.

While I may be a little negative about the minister and this disastrous Labor government, I cannot be more positive about the sectors. The Country Liberals have a strong record in this area and in many ways created the settings for increased investment in the mining, pastoral, agricultural and horticultural industries. Together with aquaculture and commercial fishing, these are great industries and all are important to the Territory. The Labor government will always have our support when they are implementing policies and initiatives that help these sectors.

For all the hard-working public servants in the Department of Primary Industry and Resources, I applaud your efforts. You are tireless workers in touch with your industry and every time I meet producers or miners, people compliment me on your efforts. Personally, I found being the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries to be a job with immensely rewarding portfolios. No small part of that was the fantastic calibre of people working in the department and the industry itself.

I was disappointed that no mention was made of the Chief Minister's comments in the *NT News* on 18 July, when he said that your department has become a 'pseudo environmental department'. The Chief Minister also said your department created delays for mining companies looking to establish themselves here. According to the article, the Chief Minister wants to change your department and its regulations. On this side, we would love to hear more about the substantive changes in this regard, rather than the empty fluff the minister came out with today in this statement.

What would these changes mean? When will they be introduced? Why not inform us and Territorians of these new initiatives, rather than just restating old ones? The old ones are good. We know because we implemented them. That was before the latest thought bubble from the Chief Minister last week about stopping fly-in fly-out workers. We are glad he is at least aware that this government is driving Territorians away, the first forecasted decline in Territory population in 15 years.

The Country Liberals have long supported encouraging workers to be based in the Northern Territory and for companies to base their head offices here. Companies will do that when it is cost effective and there is an environment that provides certainty and encourages further private investment. And need I mention Dan Murphy's?

Companies do not need to be threatened by government to be sensible. It is unclear what the Chief Minister is implying. Is he saying that mines will not be approved if they fly in workers? The best thing the Chief Minister can do for the mining sector, to achieve more direct and indirect jobs in the Northern Territory, is to streamline the approvals process and red tapes for mines, not introduce more requirements and government approval processes.

It is not clear how he intends to achieve this hastily-thought-out policy on the run. There is so much good work going on in the department and it is hard for the minister to give any more than a general overview of the portfolio.

One paragraph on cattle. Did the minister even mention gamba grass? And to those mining projects the minister mentioned—I want to praise all of those who have succeeded and those who are trying hard to get

mines up and running. There are big lead times on these projects and you have to back yourself to have a go.

I am always heartened to hear when work reaches fruition and a new mine opens. We support primary industries, agriculture, cattle, horticulture, mining, aquaculture and gas. Unfortunately Labor's record in this area is blackened by the complete disregard they have shown for an entire industry with great potential, by simply banning it and shutting it down at the government's order.

This government is a fair-weather friend of Primary Industry and Resources. It will say the right things but drop you like a hot potato if environmental activists campaign against you. The environmental activists have their sights set on the gas companies right now, but it is only a matter of time before they turn their attention to the pastoralists, miners and commercial users of water. At that point, these industries will need more than a fair-weather friend in government; they will need a champion. On present indications I am not sure this government will have the gumption to defend and support their primary industry.

I am always happy to talk about these issues and industries, and while the minister is continuing with our industries and spruiking the industry, he will have our support.

Mr GUNNER (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources for bringing this statement before the House.

The sustainment and development of jobs in these vital industries is a major priority for this government. The minister talked about this government's \$50m investment in recreational fishing for example, delivering on the commitment we took to the last election. This is an investment in jobs during construction and ongoing jobs in supporting and associated industries.

The importance and value of recreational fishing should not be underestimated. In 2010 it was valued at \$80m and we are confident the figure has grown substantially since then. This is why, as the minister stated, we are funding a Territory-wide recreational fishing survey to obtain up to date data on participation rates, catch composition and effort distribution.

The Territory's reputation as a world-class recreational fishing destination is a unique advantage that contributes to our \$1.8bn tourism industry that provides around 15 500 jobs for Territorians. I thank the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources for his statement, for delivering on our election commitment, and delivering jobs for Territorians.

We understand that a secure and rewarding job is the best way to improve our quality of life. We know that job security and a clear pipeline of work will have a positive impact on our population, and that is the key to the Territory's future. People who have jobs are more likely to stay in the Territory; people who get jobs are more likely to come to the Territory; this is very obvious. We need to attract more people to the Territory and keep those we already have. Strong population growth will see greater economic growth and a better share of GST revenue for Territorians.

The previous government's failure to develop a plan for the economy after INPEX has left us facing tough economic times. They failed Territorians. The CLP failed to invest in jobs or population growth and they left a huge budget deficit. They blew it. They left a legacy of a slowing economy, a population in decline and business uncertainty. Reversing this trend and the task of economic repair is incredibly challenging. It is a tough task but one that we have taken head on as a government.

In June, my government delivered a budget which boosted the economy, and I thank the Treasurer. It created and sustained thousands of jobs across the Territory and will continue to do so. It will transform our cities and regions into tourist, business and investment attractions. We allocated a record \$1.75bn to infrastructure investment that will support and create 14 000 jobs in construction and associated industries. The 2017–18 infrastructure program includes \$640m in housing and related works, including \$106m as the first step in the Territory government's \$1.1bn, 10-year Remote Housing Investment Package, delivering real jobs in the bush.

This is important to make sure there are locals available to take up opportunities, and the mining and resources sector is very much often about remote jobs. We have to make sure our remote Territorians are in a position to take up those jobs.

There is \$730m to upgrade roads and transport infrastructure across the Territory, infrastructure which will no doubt support some of the valuable mining and resource jobs mentioned by my colleague; \$196m in

health infrastructure to improve the wellbeing of Territorians, including \$11m for renal services; \$141m for educational facilities; and \$6m for a new preschool in Tennant Creek.

When I was in Tennant Creek with the minister studying the Jemena pipeline construction process and opening the Edna Beryl gold mine, we spoke a lot about this. It is critical that we match economic investment with social investment. When we create those jobs, we need a social fabric for the people in those jobs. Otherwise you end up with this fly-in fly-out situation. You have to match economic investment with social investment.

There is \$370m for economic and community infrastructure works, including the Territory's contribution to the ship lift at the marine industry facility, and \$127m for lifestyle and environment infrastructure, including the new rugby league stadium at Warren Park and upgraded sports facilities in Alice Springs. These projects not only deliver construction jobs, but improved facilities and improved quality of life for Territorians. This is an important part of the effort to keep people in the Territory and attract new people here.

As we work towards delivery of these projects, we have listened to Territorians and kept government money flowing to support jobs. Territory tradies and subbies wanted the Home Improvement Scheme returned, so we brought it back bigger and better. So far, vouchers worth more than \$22m have been issued to NT homeowners. These homeowners have contributed an additional \$39m on improvements, bringing the total value of works to more than \$61m. The delivery of this work, which is still ongoing, will be spread across more than 1500 approved businesses registered with the Home Improvement Scheme.

The estimated total impact of the bigger and better Home Improvement Scheme, including direct and indirect, is more than \$105m. In addition to this, more than \$20m worth of vouchers for eligible construction and maintenance works have been issued through the Immediate Works Grants program. These vouchers will be redeemed through more than 370 eligible businesses. This very popular program is enabling not-for-profit community organisations across the Territory to undertake important improvements to their facilities while keeping tradies, subbies and suppliers in jobs.

Together, the Immediate Works Grants, the bigger and better Home Improvement Scheme and the home renovation grant will generate a combined estimated economic impact of \$145m. That is a lot of money keeping many tradies and suppliers in jobs right now.

We must also look to the future and set up a framework to create jobs for our children and grandchildren. That is why we developed the economic development framework, infrastructure strategy and infrastructure plan in June. These three documents were the culmination of an economic summit process, which engaged more than 240 key organisations and almost 1600 people from multiple sectors across the Territory.

In partnership with Deloitte we brought together the private, not-for-profit sectors, land councils and Aboriginal representative groups, unions and the community. The economic summits discussed the most important directions and actions we need to take to accelerate the Territory's economic development now and into the future. Together the economic development framework, infrastructure strategy and 10-year rolling infrastructure plan will inform long-term decision-making, provide policy and regulatory certainty for investors.

The EDF identifies five growth sectors. These include agribusiness, tourism, energy and mining—all of which were reflected in the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources' statement. It also identifies Defence and Defence support industries as a growth sector, and recommends that the Territory government establishes a Defence and national security advocate position in Canberra.

I am very pleased to reaffirm that we have delivered against this high-level action. In June I announced the appointment of former senior Defence official, Air Vice Marshal Margaret Staib, as the Northern Territory's first Defence and national security advocate. Ms Staib's role will be to establish a team in Canberra to step up the Territory's engagement with Defence and ensure the NT capitalises on current and future Defence opportunities. Ms Staib will help position the Territory to benefit from \$20bn worth of Defence construction projects which are planned for the NT over the next 20 years.

We have listened to the construction industry about the need for this position and have taken action as an investment in job creation across the Territory, which is what we promised. The connection between Defence, mining and resources is critical, because we have a small population base in the Territorians. It is critical that we maintain capability and capacity here and that people cross the sectors. We need a combined interest in our skill and labour pool to ensure we can guarantee the delivery of major projects.

It is critical that we look at these things and how they work together. The Territory has a strong, capable and proven construction industry, with capacity to deliver projects and supply goods and services that meet the needs of these sectors and the US and Australian Defence forces. We have to make sure local businesses get the best shot with Defence contracts. They will see thousands of jobs created here over the next 20 years.

That will keep people in the Territory, attract people to the Territory and promote training in the Territory. From local talent and new talent—a pool of people capable of taking up the massive potential we have across a range of areas in the Territory. We can provide world-class products and services locally, which means we can produce a quality product for our Defence customers with the added benefit of local knowledge.

To further support the Territory's Defence work, government is also delivering training workshops to assist local businesses to get ready to compete for US defence tender construction work; boosting Department of Trade, Business and Innovation Defence NT to deliver additional strategic policy planning and engagement functions; providing funding support to Australian industry Defence network, including \$30 000 to support the recruitment of a new CEO; providing \$80 000 of funding to the Industry Capability Network to undertake a US Navy supply chain analysis to determine service and supply opportunities; developing a Defence engagement plan and partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, ICNT, AIDNT and the Master Builders Association; and funding AIDNT to run specific Defence contractor training in Katherine and regional areas.

Securing Defence work for Territory businesses and jobs for Territorians is not a one way street. By working with Territory businesses, Defence stands to capitalise on strong local knowledge, supply chains and experience. It will help the Australian Defence Force and US Marines to build stronger community relationships. It is strategically important for Defence to know that this work can be sustained here in the Territory. They do not have to fly people in for the work or take platforms away from the Territory for repairs or maintenance. Strategically, it is important to them that this work is done here.

The competition for attracting and securing major projects across the world is strong. The policy framework, which determines if a project is eligible to receive major project status, has recently been reviewed by the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation to ensure it remains and represents best practice.

In order to be competitive it is imperative that the NT is recognised as the place to do business. Major project status is attractive to project developers as it provides proponents with tangible proof of the NT Government's support for the project, subject to the proponent being eligible to secure appropriate regulatory approvals. This assists proponents when they go to the market seeking funds.

Major project status also provides a single point of coordination across the NT Government. This enables timely identification and resolution of issues and timely approvals, which increases proponent certainty regarding government process and timing. A number of the projects mentioned by my colleague, the minister, have achieved major project status and some have gone even further.

We have signed a project facilitation agreement with major metals company, TNG Limited. The \$850m Vanadium-Titanium-Iron mine and refinery project has potential for more than 1700 construction jobs and 600 ongoing jobs in the Territory. We have also signed a project facilitation agreement with KGL Resources Limited for their \$190m Jervois Copper-Silver-Gold project. This project has potential to create 360 jobs during construction and 300 ongoing jobs once operational.

The minister also highlighted that construction has commenced on another major project: Jemena's Northern Gas Pipeline. Jemena was granted a pipeline licence in April for the NT portion of the pipeline and commenced construction on the \$175m Phillip Creek Compressor Station in May. The first 240 kilometres of the NT portion of the pipeline is expected to be constructed by the end of this year, potentially providing up to 600 jobs for Territorians.

Primary Industry and Resources exports from Australia require ports, ship and marine infrastructure, which provides the Territory with another opportunity to create jobs. That is why we are currently progressing the Ship Lift and Marine Industry Project with the Paspaley Group. The facility will be designed to meet the needs of the general maritime sector, oil and gas industry and the current and long-term needs of Defence and the Australian Border Force.

The aim of the Ship Lift and Marine Industry Project is to catalyse further development of industrial land at the East Arm Logistics Precinct and maximise economic growth and skilled employment opportunities in the maritime and related sectors. Discussion of the export industry, the port and maritime jobs reminds us that

Darwin is the capital of northern Australia. Darwin is Australia's gateway to Asia and is Asia's gateway to Australia.

It was made very clear at the economic summits that the time to enliven and reinvigorate the Darwin CBD is well overdue. That is why we are investing \$100m in a vibrant and revitalised Darwin CBD. A vibrant Darwin CBD is not just essential for jobs in Darwin, it is essential for jobs across the whole of the Northern Territory. A vibrant, activated Darwin CBD leads to improved liveability, more tourists, commerce and jobs for Territorians. It provides a reason for people to visit and to stay in Darwin. The business community and residents have told us this. We have listened and taken action.

Along with the city of Darwin and Charles Darwin University, we are working towards a city deal and have already signed a memorandum of understanding with the Commonwealth government. All efforts will aim to deliver an integrated package of initiatives to help make Darwin more attractive to investors, residents and businesses.

We need to focus on our city and the beautiful Darwin harbour. We need to cool the city down so we can make it a more liveable place. A place that is comfortable to walk around; a place that we enjoy. We need people in Darwin to experience temperature as it actually is and to give it a stronger sense of place. We need to link the Waterfront to Cullen Bay to provide one continuous and connected city. There is a draw card for locals and tourists alike.

Three Darwin CBD transforming major projects have been earmarked as priorities to begin this term of government. We will unveil plans in November this year, and expect to start construction on parts of this project in 2017–18. There are three major projects.

Firstly, we are finishing the State Square project, which will include freeing up space and reducing a major heat generation source by undergrounding those CBD carparks. We will demolish the Chan Building and move the NTG computer setup. This is a three-year project which must be carefully handled to protect the government's major computer centre. We are building a fine arts gallery and moving the Darwin city bus terminal, as well as refurbishing the old Reserve Bank, which will include updating the building and parking area for tourist bus and cruise ship connections.

Secondly, we are moving students from Charles Darwin University to the CBD. An interagency taskforce will work closely with CDU to support strategy for growth. This will include exploring opportunities for housing. Having students in the CBD has brought the city to life in the past, having been a former student of CDU. Uni students in the presence of CBDs around the world has always brought them to life. This project could see existing buildings repurposed for accommodation and learning facilities.

Lastly, we are building a museum of the Northern Territory at the old hospital site at Myilly Point. We have allocated \$50m towards this museum to tell the story of the Territory. This is a space that should belong to all Territorians and give us the opportunity to tell our stories to the world.

Other Darwin CBD revitalisation projects we are working on include removing the old Navy fuel tanks, unlocking land for potential future development and conducting a feasibility study into a Bali-style water theme park in the city. This is a direct result of suggestions made by local businesses during the economic summits' process.

It is not just Darwin getting a CBD makeover. We are establishing Alice Springs as the nation's inland capital. We are investing in infrastructure and supporting local business, providing the stimulus to create jobs for the short-, medium- and long-term to bring vibrancy back to Alice Springs. Extensive engagement has commenced with Alice Springs Town Council, traditional owners, business owners and other stakeholders to develop a vision.

We have allocated \$20m to revitalise the Alice Springs CBD; \$20m for the national Indigenous cultural centre; \$50m for an iconic national Indigenous art gallery; \$2.3m for the Alcoota fossil megafauna exhibition in the CBD; the beginning of a \$100m Indigenous art trail that will connect the Alice Springs art experience to art sites across the Territory; \$20m towards the hospital; \$11m to support and rehabilitate youth at risk and improve community safety; \$6m to replace the Alice Springs Women's Shelter; \$3m to upgrade the domestic violence court in Alice Springs; \$1m in upgrades to Alice Springs youth detention; \$6m for sporting facilities in Alice Springs; and \$300 000 to every school in the centre.

There is a bright future for Alice Springs because we are supporting jobs and keeping people in Alice Springs while we unlock more private investment and grow our economy. Perhaps some of this growth will come

from opportunities derived from advanced manufacturing in remote areas, improving supply chains and lowering operating costs.

I recently joined CDU Vice-Chancellor Professor Simon Maddocks to announce a \$400 000 NT Government grant for the purchase of a LightSpee3D printer from Darwin innovative start-up company SPEE3D. Their 3D printer is a world first commercial 3D printer that was invented in the Territory and has the power to revolutionise manufacturing technology. The printer that the NT Government is investing in will form the centrepiece of a new industrial research hub to be based at Charles Darwin University. The hub will pave the way for the creation of jobs into the future for Territorians as well as generate new and exciting economic opportunities in the NT.

We can see the potential for 3D printing to be in remote communities, creating an ability for people remotely to work out what they need and have it produced for them and not be investing in supply chains. Necessity is the mother of invention and many of our remote places have significant needs. There is an amazing capacity for that to be the wellspring of innovation. We have seen in the connected world that when someone has an idea in those remote places and makes a solution, the ability to then market that to the world is there. We need to recognise that our remote communities could be hubs of innovation.

The Territory Labor government was elected on the promise of creating jobs. Supporting initiatives that will drive innovation and future economic opportunities are essential to this. We want to partner with local enterprises that drive innovation in the Territory. By diversifying the economy through innovation we are opening the door to new economic opportunities and jobs for Territorians now and into the future. We do all of this while ensuring as much of this money stays in the Territory as possible through our strengthened Buy Local Policy, placing renewed importance on value for the Territory.

The Northern Territory is the best place in Australia to live, work and play. We can make it better and we will do that. As a government, our interest is always how we can make the Territory a better place. We are working hard to get more people to call the place we love home. The best way to attract people to live and stay here is by creating job opportunities, delivering better services and maintaining the unique Territory lifestyle.

The Minister for Primary Industry and Resources is doing a significant body of work in one of the major areas of job growth for the Territory. I commend the statement to the House.

Ms MANISON (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I also support this very important statement the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources has presented to the Chamber. We know this is a vital industry sector to the Northern Territory. I have to thank the minister, he is so passionate about his portfolio. He loves getting out across the Territory to meet with people in industry and go on site. He has also been a fantastic ambassador for the Northern Territory, going overseas, interstate and throughout the Northern Territory to promote the importance of this industry and ensure we are working closely with the sector to understand its needs and maximise all of the opportunities ahead.

The Member for Fong Lim has been working as his assistant minister, getting out and about, meeting many people as well, and playing that important role of supporting the minister. This is a critical sector to the Northern Territory. If you look at the statistics the minister outlined for the value of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in the Northern Territory, they were at \$582m in 2015–16. For the same period the figure for mining is over \$3bn, which is 12.9% of gross state product.

When you look at those figures—and we all know people who work in these important industries—there is no doubt they are key drivers of economic growth. They support thousands of jobs across the Northern Territory. As a government, we are committed to supporting the mining sector, the development of the resources sector, working with the pastoral sector and making sure we maximise the opportunities in horticulture and agriculture. We are committed to working with these sectors because we heard, loud and clear, from people across the Northern Territory through our economic summits process, that these are key industries.

For a very long time in the Northern Territory, these industries have supported our economy and thousands of jobs. We have some wonderful stories across the Northern Territory of our great pastoral families that have worked with people in the Territory for a long time to develop the industry. The beef industry does a great deal of work today ensuring that it supports jobs and provides this very important product for export and for Australians as well.

Through our economic summits we have developed our economic development framework and 10-year infrastructure plan. As part of that 10-year infrastructure plan we have made it a priority to ensure we look at where government invests money on the delivery of infrastructure to get the best value for investment, and that we look at where we can open up opportunities for further economic development and development of industry, such as further development of the pastoral sector and agriculture. We look at where we prioritise those dollars to ensure we are getting maximum bang for our buck for Territorians.

Part of Budget 2017–18 looked at that. We delivered a budget that was very strong on infrastructure investment—in fact, a record \$1.75bn infrastructure investment—because we are seeing a transitioning economy and a slowdown. It is important that we support jobs now and into the future. We have a strong focus on infrastructure, because we believe it does not just invest in the Territory now but for the future.

We have seen the continuation of our commitment of around \$50m going to fishing infrastructure in the Northern Territory, as part of the budget, because fishing is a great part of the Northern Territory lifestyle. There are many people who love hitting the water to go fishing when they have time. Fishing is also a fantastic tourism industry in the Territory.

We have the wonderful Million Dollar Fish program and that competition is continuing. I acknowledge that was an initiative started under the previous government. I think it was a fantastic initiative and CrownBet are very committed to it. It is wonderful to see them running this competition again. This is another example of why we are supporting our corporate bookmakers, particularly with this threat we see from other states, territories and the federal government that are putting that industry at risk.

This is why we will do everything we can to keep our bookmakers here in the Northern Territory. It is not just about the 350 jobs they support for Territorians, but also the extra yards they take in the Northern Territory through sponsorship of events such as the Million Dollar Fish competition. Therefore, it is important we work to do everything we can to keep the bookmakers in the Northern Territory.

There is a range of projects under way with this \$50m investment. At Corroboree Billabong we will see the 6 km sealing of the Corroboree Billabong Road; there is work for the sealing of the car park at Middle Arm boat ramp; the installation of ablution blocks at Dinah Beach boat ramp; completing the upgrade of the Shady Camp boat ramp; and CCTV at Dinah Beach boat ramp has been done. There is much more to come as part of this important \$50m investment into fishing infrastructure across the Northern Territory.

We must thank the hard-working AFANT. It is a very important organisation that stand up and (inaudible) NT fishos, and do it in a way that is about ensuring best outcomes for the Territory as a whole. They are a fantastic and professional group that work with all governments and have an important role supporting our local fishos.

As infrastructure minister, one area I am particularly focused on when it comes to supporting Primary Industry and Resources is ensuring our roads investment is targeted to support these industries. As part of our 10-year infrastructure plan, the key priority investments are the areas that are not just going to deliver good social outcomes, but also the economic development opportunities they present.

This year in the budget we delivered a \$733m budget focused on roads and transport infrastructure. Other things such as barge landings, for example play a very important part for communities.

We are focused on the delivery of the Beef Roads Program and the Northern Australia Roads Program and thank the Australian Government for its commitment to investing significant amounts of money into these roads. The Northern Territory Government has also supported this.

There is a raft of work happening. It is tough to secure that funding because, ultimately, we are up against all other jurisdictions in putting our case forward for why the Northern Territory deserves this investment. I have to thank the very hard-working public servants within the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, particularly under the leadership of Louise McCormick. She is a very professional public servant who is very passionate about the area of transport infrastructure and works hard to ensure the Northern Territory secures critical funding.

It will never be enough money; we all know that. We have a vast network of unsealed roads and there are many areas where work is needed to make roads immune to floods, for example. We know bridges are not cheap infrastructure at all, but that work continues and is ongoing. The government will continue working with industry to recognise the priority areas and where we need that investment.

To name a few of the works and areas that are in the budget papers, particularly the infrastructure paper, there is continued work, for example, on the Plenty Highway and the Docker River road; there is \$5m going into upgrades of the Maryvale Road; work continues on the Tanami. It is a very big task but work will continue and government has continued that commitment. The Keep River Plains Road will play a major role in supporting Project Sea Dragon as well as potential future development out of the Ord.

We will see more work happening on the Lester and Tablelands Highways as well as the Barkly Stock Route. In this budget alone we are looking at \$25m for selected strengthening and widening of the Tablelands Highway, an important beef road, and another \$12.5m for the Barkly Stock Route. There is a great deal of work happening on some of our important road networks to support the pastoral industry and mining and resources, as well as tourism opportunities.

We have also secured funding to support the heavy vehicle industry. It is really important that when you are speaking in the context of the pastoral industry, mining, resources and agriculture to be mindful of the fact that we need heavy vehicles to move the product. We need to make sure we have the right facilities and quality of roads to make their industry as safe as possible.

There will be work on the Roper Highway for those vehicles and further work to support heavy vehicles with truck parking bays and more work going into the Arnhem Highway, particularly around the Adelaide River area for flood immunity issues.

The roads program is a huge and very important body of work when you look at the context of these industries. If we do not have quality roads, it is much harder for these industries to thrive. We must do everything we can to keep securing the funding, knock on the door of Canberra, work with industry and community to ensure we are making the right investments to unlock the full potential of our Primary Industry and Resources sectors in the Northern Territory.

I want to talk about some investments happening in the Katherine region. We will be developing a transport and logistics hub there, as we see wonderful potential in the Katherine region. It is an exciting place. There are opportunities through tourism but in the primary industry sector as well. It is a place with vast potential.

By ensuring we have an appropriate transport and logistics hub we will give more opportunity for the primary industry sector to look at how they get product to market and maximise their business opportunities. I was on site the other week looking at where we are hoping to do some of this work. This will play an important role in the future development of agricultural opportunities in the region.

It is also about making sure we do the groundwork to attract investors and get them to make the commitment to invest in the Northern Territory. For example, there is \$1.8m to provide a new generation of geoscience to investigate resource potential and promote investment in the Katherine region and \$1.2m to adapt intensive agricultural production systems to improve agribusiness investment certainty. There is \$1.1m to operate the Katherine and Victoria River research stations, where a range of work happens, to do the research to unlock the Northern Territory's full potential to attract more investors to do business and invest in local jobs for now and into the future.

We are continuing our investment in the ship lift in the Top End. I acknowledge that is a project continued from the previous government, but it is important that we have responsible governments delivering continuity of the projects that can do good things for the Northern Territory.

Ship lift facilities will enable us to have greater potential for the fisheries sector to open up the Northern Territory. This makes way for the development of more marine engineering to support more vessels in the Northern Territory, not just Defence vessels. We have the world-class south sea pearling industry in the Northern Territory, something very special that has been developed here. We also have had a long history of a very strong fishery sector—of fishing activities in the Northern Territory too. The ship lift facilities with greater marine engineering capacity helps those industries to further grow and develop.

We are working with the Barkly region, particularly around Tennant Creek, to ensure it is a mining and resources hub. We want to maximise the potential by looking at the opportunities for mills and their development, because we want to see Tennant Creek as a thriving resources hub—supporting business and exploring the full opportunity for the development of those resources.

There are many major projects in the resources sector that have attracted major project status with the Northern Territory Government. We will continue working to see what can be done to bring those projects to fruition.

The minister outlined work around TNG Limited's Mount Peake Vanadium-Titanium-Iron project and, as he said, it has the capacity to create a mine in Central Australia that would have:

... an estimated capital cost of \$208m, mining 8.4m tonnes per year and producing 1.8 million tonnes a year of magnetite concentrated refiner with an estimated capital cost of \$647m located in Darwin.

When you look at the potential of that project alone, as the minister said, that is up to 1700 jobs estimated during construction and 600 ongoing jobs, which is quite significant. He also spoke about KGL Resources' proposed \$190m Jervois Copper-Silver-Gold project north east of Alice Springs having the potential to create about 360 jobs during construction and 300 ongoing jobs once operational.

He also spoke about the Verdant Minerals' \$750m Ammaroo Phosphate project south east of Tennant Creek. It is estimated there will be around 300 jobs and once operational, about 160 direct and ongoing jobs.

These are just a few of the projects outlining the immense potential for further development in this sector, which is important to the future of the Northern Territory. It has been for a long time and will continue to be important.

Another major project on the horizon for the Northern Territory is Project Sea Dragon and what it may offer. It has the potential to see \$1.7bn in export revenue over 10 years, producing over 100 000 tonnes of prawns each year and around 1000 jobs. That is no small project, which is why significant work is going into Project Sea Dragon, making it come to life. There is a lot of work happening with the potential for hatcheries, maturation areas and grout ponds, which are all important potential projects.

There has been funding secured ...

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

Motion agreed to.

Ms MANISON: Significant roads funding has been secured for the Keep River Plains Road to support Project Sea Dragon.

Recently, I was fortunate to attend an economic analysis event hosted by INPEX at the petroleum club. It was a fantastic night because it was for INPEX to launch a body of work it commissioned ACIL Allen to do to look at the economic impacts of INPEX, its contribution to the Northern Territory and what it will contribute going forward.

We are at the full peak of construction at INPEX and will feel the results when it moves from the construction to the operational phase. You cannot have a project of that size and scope in a small economy like the Northern Territory and not feel a transition as we move from the construction to the operational phase.

We have planned for that through our infrastructure investment, but also through the work we are doing to further grow and develop our economy. The Primary Industry and Resources sector plays a very important role in that, as well as our record infrastructure investment. The important thing to note is that the relationship with INPEX does not finish when the construction is over. They will be here for the next 40 years and will be a part of the Northern Territory after that. There will be ongoing jobs and an ongoing contribution they make to the NT through their project, which will continue for a long time.

It was a wonderful project, secured by the former Labor government, continued by the CLP government, and now we have the duty in government to continue to work with INPEX responsibly into the future to make the most of opportunities and relationships with them.

I thank the Chief Minister and the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources for the work they have done, going overseas and interstate, to make sure they have the Territory at the front of the mind of key investors of the industries there. They make sure we are promoting the Northern Territory and its full potential. It has been a great deal of work, but it is important to acknowledge those key industry groups that support these important jobs, people, companies and investors every day.

The NT Cattlemen's Association does a marvellous job and works very hard, as do the Minerals Council; the NT Farmers Association, or AFANT; the NT Seafood Council; and APPEA. There are a range of bodies that work very hard to promote investment and support those jobs in the Northern Territory. We look forward to

continuing work with them hand-in-hand, because it is important that government has a strong relationship with these key industry groups so they can make sure they understand what is happening, where the priorities are, and how we maximise opportunities.

One of the quiet achievers I want to acknowledge is the extractive industry. It plays an important role when it comes to the construction of the Northern Territory. Headed by Tom Harris, the extractive industry is full of very important people. You do not hear about them too often; they go about their business of making the materials that build the Northern Territory and are a very important sector. I thank them for their work in the time I have been in government, working with us to make sure we are aware of the issues they face and where the challenges are, and also how they see that we can work together to ensure they can do their job.

If we do not have access to the materials we need to build things, it becomes quite problematic. You need access to these sites to get the materials needed that ultimately enable construction in the Northern Territory. If that industry is flowing well it ultimately puts downward pressure on the cost of building the Northern Territory.

They are often forgotten. They tend to go about their business doing what they do, but they are very important people. The feedback they have given us—and they are very frank and honest with their feedback, which is what you would expect from this type of industry. They are fantastic and we will continue working with them hand-in-hand as we do everything we can to maximise the opportunities in Primary Industry and Resources.

Again, I thank the minister for presenting this statement and the members who have made their contribution. This is a vital industry for the future of the Northern Territory. It supports thousands of jobs. We will work closely with the key stakeholders to make sure we maximise the opportunities ahead and government targets its investment to maximise its opportunities as well. We look forward to seeing the growth of these industries well and truly into the future.

Mr COLLINS (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I also support the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources and the ministerial statement he delivered in this Assembly.

As the assistant minister, it has been my great pleasure to have worked closely with the minister across the regions, engaging with industry and meeting stakeholders in Primary industry and Resources. This has included meetings with mining industry representatives in Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine. We met various peak bodies such as the NT Cattlemen's Association, AFANT, the Seafood Council, APPEA and the Minerals Council of Australia. The industries represented by these bodies are the pillars of the Northern Territory beyond Darwin and a significant section of the overall Territory economy. Primary industries, fisheries and resources are each sectors that create so many jobs in the Territory. Importantly, outside these sectors, they also create many more jobs through the various service and supply sectors that feed them.

The jobs created are diverse in their skills to the extent that our regional centres function as a result of jobs created in primary industries and resources. I have seen this firsthand when accompanying the minister on numerous trips throughout the Territory, in Alice Springs during the economic summits and taking part in the energy and mining growth sector breakout meetings. Also, I have held a number of small business round tables in Alice Springs.

The business people of Alice Springs, including those local businesses supporting mining and primary industries in the surrounding areas are a real pleasure to deal with. They are pragmatic, focused on building their businesses and confident of their futures.

In Tennant Creek I have met with people from Jemena on a couple of occasions. I have had the pleasure of seeing the works commence, jobs being created for locals and the flow-on economic benefits for Tennant Creek.

In July I was with the Chief Minister and the Member for Barkly at the opening of Emmerson Resources' Edna Beryl gold mine. The physical size of this mine is inversely proportional to its overall impressiveness. The ore extracted from this small footprint mine bears more gold per tonne than anywhere else in the world. Each tonne of ore extracted from Edna Beryl currently produces about 44 grams of gold. Investigations indicate that this will increase to about 120 grams per tonne in areas still to be mined. By way of comparison, the ore mined from the open cut mine in Kalgoorlie produces about one gram per tonne.

There is so much potential on the horizon in the Barkly. This government's election commitment to revitalise Tennant Creek as a mining services hub is starting to take shape. The Jemena pipeline is under way in

creating jobs on the project across to the Queensland border and in Tennant Creek, as the town services the construction of the pipeline. Local businesses are getting much of the work, stimulating the local economy and creating local jobs. This is great news for Tennant Creek and for the Barkly ...

Mr Paech: Love Tennant Creek.

Mr COLLINS: We love Tennant Creek.

Also and importantly, the feasibility study being commissioned into the Central Milling Facility in Tennant Creek is well under way. Once in place, this facility has the potential to kick off a number of small-scale mines in the region, also adding to the Tennant Creek economy in much the same way as the recently opened Edna Beryl mine.

There are a number of major projects being supported, not just in Tennant Creek—the Mount Peake Mine. This morning we have heard about Jervois Copper; Ammaroo Phosphate; Nolans Rare Earth; and to the south of Alice Springs, Chandler Salt. These projects are presently making their way through assessment, having mass employment potential and wide-ranging benefits across the Territory.

Katherine is showing a wealth of potential in horticultural resources. In Katherine, the minister and I visited the Department of Primary Industry and Resources research farm; Nino Niceforo and his Tropical Treasures Mango Farm, the largest mango producer in the country; and the TFS sandalwood nursery and plantation. These are just a small sample of what the Katherine region has to offer the Territory more broadly, not to mention its local member.

I also speak today as the Member for Fong Lim and would like to take this opportunity to speak about how jobs in Primary Industry and Resources and investment in jobs affect my electorate.

On the surface it may seem odd to link a suburban Darwin electorate with rural industries. However, there are a large portion of my constituents who make a living in the same supply and service industries that support rural industries. People in suburbia contribute to the vitality of the Territory rural sectors; jobs loading live cattle in the regions, or loading ore from our mines; the road train drivers who freight supplies out to our rural industries, or who transport the live cattle in from the bush or cart fuel out to our mines; the truckies that freight our farm produce to market; the tradies who service much of the plant we see in our mines.

Just across the border from my electorate is the Duck Pond and while I would love to claim it as mine, it is actually the Member for Port Darwin's; perhaps that was a mistake. Nonetheless, the Duck Pond and the fleet harboured there is the heart of the seafood industry of the Northern Territory. You will find all the tradies there servicing the vessels as well as suppliers loading fuel and stores.

What I do have in my electorate, though, is the Dinah Beach boat ramp, also mentioned this morning. It is unquestionably the busiest boat ramp in the Darwin area. I am very proud to say this Labor government has fulfilled its election commitment of installing CCTV cameras to make the facility more secure. The other upgrade of installing ablutions at the site is under way.

I may very well be the world's worst fisherman—I am not joking—however, in spite of this fact, I do enjoy fishing when I get the chance. Recreational fishing is by far the largest leisure activity in the Territory. Recreational fishing is also a major draw card for interstate and international tourists. While the Million Dollar Fish was an initiative of the previous government, as pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition this morning, it has been enthusiastically supported by this government as well. The infrastructure provided by the government to support recreational fishing is fundamentally important to underpin this promotion and to encourage more people to come to the Territory and experience what we have to offer. Hopefully some of them may even decide to stay.

Recreational fishing injects significant revenue into the Territory and creates many jobs for Territorians, such as jobs at tackle shops, boat yards, service stations and the like. Recreational fishing infrastructure construction is a significant provider of jobs for Territorians. Under this Territory Labor government's \$50m fishing infrastructure spend, over this term of government, it will be the contributor of many more.

This government's commitment to supporting local content will mean local jobs. As the assistant minister, I look forward to supporting the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources in any way I can, as our government delivers on this record recreational fishing commitment. This Labor government is creating jobs in primary industry, fisheries and resources and I am looking forward to supporting the minister.

Ms LAWLER (Education): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the statement by the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources on how this government is investing in this important area of our economy to grow local jobs. I am proud to be a member of this government, a government putting people first by prioritising jobs to grow the economy and support families.

Primary and Industry and Resources has significant potential to grow and develop new enterprises. Not only does investing in these industries have the potential to grow jobs in industries such as aquaculture, fishing, pastoralism, agriculture, minerals, mining exploration and petroleum, it also provides opportunities for service roles in regions that are expanding.

This government knows that if we are going to grow these industries we need to make sure young people have the right skills when they finish school, which is why we are investing in education. With an additional \$124m into education over the term of this government, not only can we continue the great programs in our schools but we can expand them. Secondary students can access a range of programs in the primary and resource industries that will support their pathways into further education, training and jobs.

Schools identify programs that fit into the local context that are important to the students and their communities. This is one of the changes we have seen over the years in education, particularly in our remote communities. It is about working with our communities, identifying jobs in those communities and designing from there. It is about making sure the students undertaking vocational education are doing certificate courses that lead to jobs in their communities if that is what they want.

In the Top End students have opportunities to engage in the maritime industry through programs such as recreational boating, which is being offered at the recently established maritime academy at Shepherdson College at Galiwinku on Elcho Island. This course is also being offered as part of the employment pathways curriculum at Milingimbi School, Nhulunbuy High School and Casuarina Senior College.

Who would have thought, even just a few years ago, that you could study maritime studies at a high school or secondary facility in the Northern Territory, let alone in a remote community like Milingimbi at Shepherdson College? It is a wonderful initiative and if you have not been to any of those places, even Casuarina or Nhulunbuy, to see the boats and the facilities, they are amazing. I felt quite sea sick when we were doing the simulation in Darwin Harbour.

Last year, 14 students completed a Certificate I in Maritime Operations and this year there are a total of 26 students participating in the program in these schools. The Maritime Academy is teaching the skills needed to work in the commercial fishing industry, transport and logistics, tourism and conservation and land management with the local sea rangers. In order to do this, students learn a lot of practical skills. They take on navigational tasks and are required to calculate measurements using electronic and paper aids. They also organise a boat driving schedule to allocate who would be skipper and navigator for each leg and how much fuel they will need.

The maritime academy has high expectations of its students, particularly in terms of attendance. Students are expected to attend and take learning seriously, whether in the classroom doing maths or on the boat navigating. As a result there has been a 98.7% attendance rate, an increase of 29.7% since the class began. I think we can all relate to that, when you are learning about something that is meaningful to you that you enjoy, you will attend school every day because you do not want to miss out.

The final assessment for the year will be a collaboration between the three Arnhem Land schools with a major final task: students will navigate their way from Galiwinku on Elcho Island to Nhulunbuy. They will then complete the elements of shipboard safety course as a group, which is a requirement to work on a commercial boat. It will also equip them with the skills and terminology required to undertake VET qualifications in 2018.

The students at the Maritime Academy have their own uniforms, instilling pride in their work. They will also become mentors to the next group of students who undertake the program, teaching them about teamwork and leadership. From all reports their confidence has skyrocketed, attendance has increased and the students are enjoying going to school, and they go home very happy about the work they are doing.

VISITORS
Darwin Middle School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Year 7 students from Darwin Middle School, accompanied by their teachers, Erin Shannon and Sarah Thomas.

We also have another group of Year 7 students from Darwin Middle School, accompanied by their teachers, Raelene Dawson and Sue Loeliger.

On behalf of honourable members, welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Ms LAWLER: My niece, Hayley Higgins, is the school captain at Darwin Middle School. It is a school I have a lot of affiliation with. It is a great school.

I cannot wait to hear about the final expedition. It is about making learning relevant and meaningful for those students. These are the kids who will go on to employment in the maritime industry. They will have the confidence and skills required to do so.

With the government's investment of \$50m in recreational fishing over the next five years, there are real job pathways for these students. The new grants program designated for smaller grassroots fishing clubs, Aboriginal communities and other organisations to provide access and facilities for recreational fishing projects will provide our remote and very remote communities with the support needed to establish local enterprise that can provide jobs for students undertaking maritime studies.

We have heard about the fishing at Maningrida; it is great that those students will be prepared to be involved in those sorts of jobs in the future.

From the water to the land there are fantastic programs happening in the pastoral and agricultural industries. The Territory is a place with so many opportunities across our vast land, and there are smart and hard-working Territorians who achieved great things in these industries going back to the last century, such as our station owners, farmers and hard-working people on the land.

The wonderful and gratifying thing about pastoral and agricultural work is that you get out of it what you put in. You literally reap what you sow. I know many hard-working men and women from all over the Territory who have made a good, honest living from the land. It is some of those old Territory families who most of us know and have been associated with that have worked the land, and their families have owned those stations for a long time.

It is now time to open opportunities up to the next generation. The pastoral industry, like many industries, has an ageing workforce. With the development of technologies and IT, there are far more career options for young people. Gone are the days when a son or daughter simply takes over the family farm or works on the station. While I am very pleased to see our students and young people having multiple career options, it is integral now more than ever that we attract young people to the pastoral and agricultural industries.

We have heard today from the Member for Fong Lim about the biggest mango farm in Australia being in Katherine. We need to be able to provide the workforce for those types of industries.

Young people are the future of our pastoral and agricultural industries, so we need to ensure they have access to quality learning programs that support their future jobs, and this starts with education. In the Territory there are a number of schools that offer vocational education and training programs with hands-on experience in the pastoral and agricultural industries. The pastoral futures program, now in its fourth year, has over a hundred students from Centralian Senior College, Yirara College, Tennant Creek High School, Katherine High School and Taminmin College engaged in their program.

This sees students learning about the pastoral industry as part of their senior studies. The program is a partnership between the Department of Education, the NT Cattlemen's Association, the Indigenous Land Council, the Northern Land Council, the Central Land Council and the Department of Primary Industry and Resources.

This is a great example of industries and government working together to create jobs and provide opportunities for young people. As part of the programs, students undertake either a Certificate I in AgriFood Operations, Certificate II in Rural Operations or a Certificate III in Agriculture, which give students skills associated with working on a modern pastoral program.

This means that students learn to handle horses and cattle, cooking, handling of motor vehicles, using ATVs and the like, first aid, as well as skills in information technology. Since the Pastoral Futures Program began, 167 Territory students have now completed certificates in these areas. This is something we can all be very proud of.

Knowing these students have not only enjoyed their work but also gained a qualification is very satisfying for all of us to hear. The program creates pathways for students to enter the pastoral industry through work placements conducted on stations or properties, including handling horses and cattle, as well as those practical things such as first aid.

This program has been growing over the past few years and it is great to see that students progressing year-on-year through to the Certificate III in Agriculture. The Pastoral Futures Program also gives student pathways to other industries, such as animal husbandry, animal nursing, veterinary science all have close links with the program and may help a student realise that these industries are where they want to focus their future studies.

Students get a lot of value out of the program, as it allows them to receive a formal qualification or credit points towards their Year 12 Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training, all the while getting hands-on skills.

Most importantly, it allows student to have a direct link and direct contact with the employers that could be their future bosses and employers. The Member for Goyder and the Member for Nelson have close affiliations as well with Taminmin College, which continues to be a great example of how pastoral futures and agricultural programs work.

Taminmin brings a high number of students into the program, which increases the pastoral futures presence across the pastoral industry, particularly around the rural areas of Darwin and the Top End—have that positive link with Taminmin,

Other schools in the program have been encouraged to visit Taminmin as an example of best practice in the pastoral industry. As part of the Pastoral Futures Program, students from across the Territory were able to show off their prized cattle at the Darwin, Alice Springs and Freds Pass shows. For quite a while, that has been a component and it is wonderful to see the kids from Taminmin in their uniforms. They look great with their white cowboy hats on and the red and white shirts, having a wonderful time and showing off their animals. It is a wonderful component of the Pastoral Futures Program, of which Taminmin was at the forefront, and it has flowed on to other schools across the Territory.

The Member for Barkly saw firsthand the Darwin Show, the Pastoral Futures Program and what they are doing. There have been some students come up from Tennant Creek to be involved at the shows and see the practical, hands-on things for kids.

It was also fantastic to hear that coming out of the 2017 Pastoral Futures Program, Mariah Setour, a student from Centralian Senior College, will represent the Northern Territory at the Rockhampton Beef Week show next May as the 2017 champion student cattle handler, an outstanding accomplishment for Mariah.

It is wonderful to hear these stories coming out of our schools and it is great to see a young woman showing such great skill and talent in what is often seen as a male dominated area. I wish Mariah all the very best at the Rockhampton Beef Week show, handling the cattle.

The impact and value of the cattle industry are vital for the Territory and now we have these students in our schools, getting those skills so they can be part of that industry as well.

One of the Tennant Creek High School students has been nominated for the VET in Schools Student of the Year Award at the NT Training Awards 2017. This is a fantastic accomplishment for Alison Morrison, a boarding student who has been living away from her family. Her family live in Borroloola and she is in Tennant Creek completing her studies. I wish her all the very best at the NT Training Awards 2017.

Hopefully, she can take out that award. I understand Alison is an inspirational leader within her school community, which is great to hear. She will be a future asset for her community of Borroloola, if she chooses to go back, or in Tennant Creek. She has the choices to take those skills anywhere in the future. There are great opportunities and a good story of a girl from Borroloola.

The Juno training centre in Tennant Creek is being established to provide a greater breadth of pastoral and agriculture industry-related schools for students from the Barkly region and across the NT. The broader intention is to supplement the on-the-job learning experience across a number of environments.

The Juno training centre has been leased by the Department of Education from the Barkly Shire for 10 years to provide this training. I look forward to officially opening the centre and meeting the students next month with the Member for Barkly. With space to accommodate up to 60 students, including 17 boarding spaces, it will be a great asset for the regions.

If you are a kid from Rockhampton Downs or Corella Creek and you want to have that experience with your vocational education and those intensive courses, you will be able to travel into the Juno training centre where there is accommodation to get those learning experiences, whether it is learning to ride and drive a quad bike or learning about fencing. Whatever aspect of the pastoral industry, those students will be able to gain that at the Juno training centre. I am looking forward to spending some time in the Barkly with the Member for Barkly and having a good look at the Juno training centre.

As with government's new focus on Tennant Creek as a mining services hub and the development of a new tourism trail of former mining areas, the Department of Education will now look for opportunities for students to learn about the tourism, mining and petroleum industries, creating more opportunities for young people to move into jobs in the region. That is a vital link. It is about looking at those jobs in the region and remote communities and making sure students can see that line of sight and link to those jobs.

That is what encourages kids to attend school. It motivates them to go to school every day when they know the direction they are going and that they have job opportunities and a future. There are some great things occurring in education in preparing those students for future employment and providing those pathways and culture opportunities. What is in it for the rest of the Territory? We keep young kids in the Territory and they are also a skilled workforce.

Similarly, in the Katherine region, the development of Katherine as a transport and logistics hub will continue to support the development of the region's agribusiness industry. At Katherine High School—I was fortunate to visit earlier this year—students are participating in VET qualifications for agrifood operations, rural operations and agriculture. As one of the Territory's agribusiness hubs, it is great to see our young people on pathways to local jobs in areas they are passionate about. I know the Member for Katherine works closely with her schools, including Katherine High School, and will follow those students' progress.

When we were there recently, it was great to have their vocational education students prepare a lunch for us. It was wonderful to see the skills they have. This shows a great example of local jobs leading to international opportunities, with the recent signing of a memorandum of cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Aquaculture Projects, a demand for donkey farming in China and expanding mango exports to the US. There are many future employment opportunities for our young people and schools are working hard to ensure students have the skills to transition from schools into jobs and further education and training in these industries ...

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, would you like to resume after Question Time?

Ms LAWLER: Thank you.

Debate suspended.

REORDER OF GENERAL BUSINESS

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I seek to reorder General Business Notices as follows:

- Number one, the Coroners Amendment Bill in the name of Mr Guyula, which currently is number one
- Currently number 10, Senior and Carers, to become number two in my name
- Notice number five in the name of Mr Wood, which is the Definition of the RR, to become number three

- Youth Crime, currently number 12 in my name, to become number four
- Number nine, currently in the name of Mr Wood, which is Public access to Darwin River Dam, to be made number five

I have had discussions with the Leader of Government Business and the crossbenchers who have agreed to this order.

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition spoke with me as Leader of Government Business and we acknowledge that he is missing his opposition whip this week. We need advice as early as possible because we like to put some thought and consideration and speak to our Caucus colleagues, but I appreciate he reached out at the earliest opportunity on this issue.

The Assembly suspended.

PETITION **Pension and Carer Concession Scheme Review**

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, I present a petition from 6497 petitioners praying that a genuine review of the current Northern Territory Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme be undertaken. The petition bears the Clerk's certificate that it conforms with the requirements of standing orders.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read:

The below signatories concern for NT seniors respectfully demand that the NT Government immediately undertakes a genuine review of the current NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme. The review must embrace the original attempt of the scheme to assist with relieving cost of living pressures to help seniors remain in the Territory after retirement. The review must not be a cost-savings measure. The government must also adhere to its pre-election commitment of respect for seniors.

Your petitioners, therefore, humbly pray that the government urgently undertakes:

- *Revision of the current NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme to become the Seniors Concession Scheme.*
- *All seniors 65-plus to be equally included in the future scheme.*
- *Review the eligibility of all other recipients.*
- *Seniors with grandfather entitlements are not penalised.*
- *Concessions to remain attached to existing utilities and services.*
- *Cap power and water concessions to the regional average.*
- *Savings to be redistributed to existing concessions.*
- *Ensure future sustainability of the scheme.*
- *Intra-Territory travel to be included.*
- *Engagement of all seniors in the review process.*

CORONERS AMENDMENT BILL **(Serial 19)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr GUYULA: (Nhulunbuy): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The Coroners Amendment Bill makes two very minor changes to the *Coroners Act*. At section three there is a list of definitions. At the bottom of this list is the definition of 'senior next of kin'. The act currently splits the definition in six points (a) to (f). The amendment changes (f) to a number 2. The other change is a note at the end of section three.

This will highlight an example for Yolngu culture to make a new definition more explicit in its meanings and assist the policy creation for NT Government institutions, especially Darwin and Gove hospitals.

The problem is, the current definition of senior next of kin provides no hierarchy and means that Indigenous custom, which is not intended to be interfered with by the act, is pushed aside by mainstream custom. It has practical outcomes, because the senior next of kin definition is used within the act to designate the people the coroner is supposed to communicate with in situations like autopsy or exhumation.

It has effect more broadly because it is the only act that provides a precedent for state to family and individual rights in regard to the release of deceased persons from government institutions like morgues. The individual who gains control of the deceased also gains control of issues like location of burial and rites particulars. This issue is of particular interest in regards to this amendment.

The current outcome of this tiny matter of text is that it can lead to major burial disputes that unfairly disrupt the East Arnhem region. By supplementing point (f) with point 2, the definition of senior next of kin is split into two. This enables the act to suit instances involving non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people of the Northern Territory alike. This amendment would therefore more readily give Indigenous Territorians a chance to resolve their own disputes in regard to burial rights and agreements. The amendment is small but will have significant real life outcomes.

A significant problem of our region of East Arnhem Land is burial disputes. Mostly these matters are managed within our extended clan and Ringitj nation circles, but sometimes a dispute develops and someone runs to the hospital to claim the deceased, gaining leverage against the rest of the family and clan in the process.

This is when the *Coroners Act* comes into play. In the absence of other legislation, the *Coroners Act* directs government policy about to whom the body of the deceased should be released. This is not without precedent, because the definition of the *Coroners Act* has been utilised in this manner in the case *Calma v Sesar*. Since that time, lawyers have advised that, in a dispute, the court would likely place emphasis on the Englishman's version of senior next of kin, rather than any understanding from Indigenous law or custom.

The other interpretation is that there is no difference between points (a) to (f). In those cases, guile is the best weapon. At times, when conflicts happen, as is human nature, this has put NT Government institutions like the coroner's office and hospitals, who oversee morgues, in the middle of the major conflict, sometimes involving hundreds of people across our region.

In the heat of an emotional event like the passing of a loved one, and sometimes depending on the lawlessness of the people involved, if there is a difference of opinion about where a person should be buried, some who know they have advantage in the Northern Territory law will take it. They will call the hospital and claim the deceased. This is mostly a problem when partners, brothers and sisters of the deceased get involved. Some have been known to get lawyers to hassle the hospital to leverage control over the dispute.

Partners, brothers and sisters are kin that should not be involved in these matters according to Yolngu law. There are extended reasons for this but, in short, it maintains safety, peace and enables proper, healthy grieving. The hospital, however, is in a catch-22. If they respond by employing the customs of Englishmen they will be in the middle of an enormous dispute that could have ramifications, including patient outcomes, for years to come. There will be resentment, feelings of injustice and emotional pressures on the hospital staff and the bereaved alike. No one wins.

All the hospital can do is send people away and tell them to take it to court or work it out themselves. When the hospital tells people that, it is a credit to them; they are doing their best to seek peace and stop lawfulness in a bad situation. But this is not satisfactory to the people. As long as the leverage of the Englishmen's customs is available, some will continue to take it. Therefore, the matter will not be resolved, and in worse cases, the deceased is in a freezer decaying slowly for months or even a year.

In the meantime, abusive words and threats can be shared across the region, inflamed today by social media and mobile phones. Some cowardly types might even employ sorcery. In the meantime, the peacemakers of

the clans are spending hours resolving disputes and spending thousands of dollars in the process. Planes are dispatched and cars travel hundreds of kilometres for meetings and Yolgnu dispute resolutions.

This is all because of a letter (f) instead of a number 2. The problem is that the dispute is not fought on one set of parameters like disputes in the mainstream, but is fought on two sets of parameters: Yolngu law of the people and the law of the *Foreigner's Act*. It does not have to be like this.

If the *Coroners Act* is amended, as I have suggested, when a dispute happens we only have to make peace along one frame of parameters, not two. In this case, we will not have the lawless doing whatever they like. They will be answerable to their peers and families.

The hospital can legitimately tell us to go away and work it out according to our custom. It will also allow mediation centres like East Arnhem Mediation and the Community Justice Centre to assist clans and leadership to come together. They would be able to facilitate successful meetings without slippery, unwieldy parameters and changing authorities and stakeholders, a situation created by two sets of laws.

This type of situation, where NT law so clearly impacts on the Indigenous way of life, also reinforces the idea that Australian law is not a rule of law, but a law of belligerent and the richest. Not having chosen this law, the people can only view those who use it for leverage as immoral. They view them as more willing to make war than peace, and it shows that those rich enough to afford lawyers are more likely to win regularly. To Yolngu people, this type of situation makes the Australian law feel arbitrary and all about money.

I cannot emphasise how important burial is to Indigenous people, and to my people in particular. For Yolngu, the body of the deceased person is a sacred article of law equal to the status of Australia's paper constitution. The body must be returned to its proper place, and in the right way. It must be returned to the country it came from. It is a cycle of constitutional law from the country, returned to country.

If someone puts the rights of relationships as given by the Australian constitution in danger, we would all fight for it; true? Well, it is the same for us. Each person is a citizen who has rights under traditional law. These rights are set into the country itself, set into the flesh and bones of our people. We will fight for the rights given to us in time immemorial, long before this parliament was a twinkle in the white man's eye.

In any case, the *Coroners Act* was written to give a fair go to Indigenous people and their culture. I do not believe that its intent was to sit there and look pretty and give a cursory wave to Indigenous ways. But it is worse than that, as right now the *Coroners Act* encourages situations of dispute and conflict. When burial disputes happen, it sets up our people and the staff of the Northern Territory Government facilities for months of conflict and bad blood. It is immensely frustrating and unjust. It wastes time and thousands of dollars.

We need a break and that break is the exchange of an (f) for a 2. If members seek further advice please speak with me but otherwise make contact with agencies with experience in this matter, like East Arnhem Mediation, Community Justice Centre, NAAJA and the Gove hospital. I am sure they all have things to say. I commend the bill to the House and table the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

MOTION **Seniors and Carers**

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I move that this Assembly recognises that seniors and carers play a very significant role in the Northern Territory and are deserving of our support so that seniors and the people in care can continue living with dignity in the Territory. We call on the government to listen to the views of seniors and carers and undertake a genuine review of the NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme with an open mind and not a predetermined outcome.

The Member for Spillett, my companion in keeping this government to account, is not here this week but a lot of the work and preparation of this speech was done with her in mind, and she prepared a lot of it. While I am the one delivering it, she is the one that deserves a lot of the recognition for the work.

The Northern Territory Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme was established in 1979. It was created and subsequently expanded under a Country Liberal government. Other than expansions and enhancements to the concessions and some changes to eligibility, the purpose and structure of the scheme remains essentially unchanged.

The purpose of the scheme has always been twofold: to act as an incentive for older people to remain in the Northern Territory and to assist seniors, pensioners, carers and low income earners with the cost of living in the Northern Territory.

These intents were achieved through a number of concessions available in full to all existing members of the scheme. These include electricity, alternate energy, local council property rates, water rates, sewage rates, garbage charges, motor vehicle registration, driver's licences, spectacles, public transport, interstate and overseas travel.

The travel concession is restricted to seniors, aged pensioners and veterans on the scheme. Those currently eligible to receive these concessions are limited to individuals in possession of a valid Commonwealth Department of Human Services or Commonwealth Department of Veteran Affairs concession cards, a carers allowance, and all members who entered the scheme prior to eligibility changes in 2014.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has been very busy over the last many weeks meeting with stakeholders and concerned community members about the proposed review of the scheme. From these meetings, the overwhelming theme is that the scheme, as it stands today, is achieving both intended purposes.

Most of the people we have spoken to believe the scheme does a good job as incentive for keeping seniors in the Territory, and that it directly assists with the costs of living expenses. Many seniors and pensioners who we have been in contact with stake their entire Territory lifestyle on the continuation of this scheme. That is why there was wide-spread anxiety about the future of the scheme when the Labor government released its fact sheet in March of this year.

This fact sheet listed a number of things the Labor government already decided about the scheme, including that the scheme would be two-tiered. All future concessions would be administered by a debit card loaded with a single, annual concession amount that could be used only with identified vendors, and there would be a cap on concessions, but no details were given as to which concessions would be capped.

The figure of \$700 every two years was also mentioned, with no explanation of what this would mean for current or new recipients and no qualifying statements whatsoever. The new eligibility for the scheme included all Territorians over the age of 65, but it did not include the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.

The information from stakeholders is that there are women between the ages of 60 and 65 who hold a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card who would then be excluded. The new list also excludes the Carers Allowance in favour of the carer's payment. The eligibility criteria for the carer's payment is much stricter than those for the allowance, meaning some carers would also be excluded.

The fact sheet promised that a discussion paper would be released to seek community input. But that input would be limited to ways to streamline access and administration of the debit card and the choice and flexibility of vendors.

For a government that came to the election with a promise to be open, transparent and consolidative, this left a very bitter taste in the mouths of many Territorians. It appeared that so much had already been decided with very little explanation.

The Chief Minister was quick to go on radio and expose the reasons for the changes being the high levels of 'rorting' and seniors taking advantage of the scheme, in an apparent attempt to discredit the current scheme and ease away the government's poorly thought-out and even more poorly announced changes. Understandably, these announcements evoked outcry and extreme anxiety from the community. The fact sheet was just enough information to be worrying to both members and potential members of the scheme. Reactions ranged from anger that so much had been decided without consultation through to anxiety, so much so that one Palmerston resident ended up needing to go to hospital.

We had multiple pensioners contact us who were very concerned that living in the Northern Territory would become unsustainable for them if the scheme was altered significantly, and that they would have to uproot their lives and leave.

For the Northern Territory to face the loss of any of its seniors or carers would be a great tragedy. They add value to the whole community that cannot easily be measured. Many senior Territorians have been living in the Northern Territory their whole lives. They have contributed to the development of the Northern Territory and want to stay here to enjoy what they helped build and see it continue to develop for their children,

grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We know that senior Territorians in our communities are the volunteers. They are not sitting idly by, receiving their benefits. They have time to spare and use that time selflessly, helping the community by staffing countless volunteer organisations and events.

For the parents working and contributing to the economy, the grandparents are the unpaid carers, putting in the hours and caring for the next generation of Territorians. It is the grandparents teaching those young children what it has meant for them to live here, they help them to grow up with a desire to stay where their family comes from and make their contribution to developing the Northern Territory. If the grandparents are forced out of the Territory, we may see parents choosing to settle elsewhere along with them.

Though it was belated, we were relieved that the government has since repealed all decisions regarding the review of the scheme and opened up the process for discussion. We are now nearing the end of the six-week consultation process, which will be closing next week.

However, there appears to be just as much uncertainty in the community as ever. There were a number of concerns raised with us regarding the way the consultation has been undertaken, including the scope of the consultation being too limited, the survey questions being vague and leading, and lack of information about the current scheme.

It has come to the point where Territorians cannot be certain if the government has already made up its mind and has geared the consultation towards the answers they are looking for. One of the concerns raised about the consultation was that the reasons stated for the review were too weak to support the significant changes the government had planned.

The reasons stated in the consultation documents and sessions were that the current scheme was open to fraud, including rorting by travel agents and members using large amounts of certain concessions, but there was a large discrepancy between those using a lot of concessions and those not using very many. Home owners had a greater range of concessions available to them than non-home owners, and not all concessions were easily accessible to people living in rural and remote areas. Whilst on the surface these are reasons to investigate the scheme they should not be automatic triggers of such a large scale anxiety-provoking reform.

In terms of the fraud or rorting of the scheme, we must be very clear on the fact that travel agents committed the fraud. Members of the scheme are not the ones who perpetrated the fraud. We must be very clear on this message, because many of the members of the scheme were feeling attacked by the way this was portrayed by the Chief Minister and his Minister for Territory Families, whether or not it was intentional. If fraud and rorting of the scheme by third parties is a problem, it should be investigated promptly and safeguards should be put in place to manage it. This should not be done without affecting the scheme's members who were not the ones at fault and should not be punished.

Similarly, the high use of concessions, such as electricity and water, is not a fraud in itself. There is no cap on how much electricity and water usage a member of the current scheme can claim. The more someone uses, the more it is automatically discounted off their bill. The member has no input into this calculation, which occurs when the bill is issued. They simply pay the remainder when they receive the bill.

If there are members using an unusually large amount of water or electricity and an issue, such as using the concession to run a business, can be identified then this should be investigated promptly. Any action taken should not be an impact or punishment to other members of the scheme. The results of any investigation should be made available to the public, prior to undertaking a review which asks for community feedback, so the people providing feedback are better able to understand what is happening.

Indeed, what the public was given was vague accusations of fraud and rorting, and being told the whole scheme needed to change to prevent it. This is misleading. The discrepancy between the dollar amounts claimed by heavy users of the scheme versus those who only used a small amount was also stated as a reason for the review. There are a number of reasons this could have been occurring.

A member's partner could be the claimant for all the concessions in the household. Those members who have Indigenous people in their electorates should realise that the overcrowding in houses means you could have multiple people entitled to discounts living in the one house, and only one person can claim the electricity. Therefore the others claim nil, leading to that big discrepancy between what one person claims and another does.

It is possible that some of the registered members have left the Northern Territory and not updated their details. Someone may simply not need the concession. Perhaps a senior living with their family does not own

a car and only claims for spectacles. These are things that should have been investigated prior to bringing the scheme to public consultation. Instead, the government has assumed this is a marker of the scheme being unfair. If the government does not know why this gap exists, it must not be used to justify the review. If the reason for the gap is known, that information should have been made publicly available prior to the review so respondents were able to provide their feedback from a well-informed platform.

If it turns out that some people are having difficulty accessing the concession or do not know what they can claim—I point out Indigenous people. Many of them are completely unaware of what they can claim. Then again, this could be an administrative or communication issue that should be addressed without a complete overhaul.

Again I stress that any solution should not be to the detriment of any existing members of the scheme.

Finally, homeowners who are members of the scheme are able to access more concessions than non-homeowners. This is another reason the government has used as a basis for the review. We have had feedback from homeowners and non-homeowners in the community. Many are of the view that homeowners face additional expenses in the sense that they pay rates, repairs and upkeep to their homes. Non-homeowners do not face these expenses, therefore the additional concessions available to homeowners make sense and are fair.

Others claim that the additional expenses are passed along to non-homeowners through rental rates, meaning the scheme is unfair. Despite the difference in views, both sides could agree that if this is something the government is concerned about, making additional concessions available to renters would be the preferred solution.

There should not be any reduction in concessions already available to homeowners. Similarly, if there is innate unfairness in the way the scheme is administered in remote communities or rural areas, then the scheme should be expanded to accommodate these needs, not to the detriment of the urban users.

Some suggestions we have heard on how this could be done include concessions for those who use bore water or solar panels, fuel for those who need to commute regularly to access basic commodities, and expanding travel to interstate travel so that those living remote can get to town for shopping and health appointments.

The people in Batchelor have lodged a petition about having access, coming from Batchelor to town for health reasons, visiting the doctors—all this should be considered as part of this scheme, but must not be to the detriment of existing scheme members.

Many, if not all of the reasons stated in the review could be solved with administrative procedural fixes or minor changes, rather than a complete overhaul to a scheme that is, by all accounts, achieving its goals. It is unfortunate that the average user now has to feel personally attacked by the government's insistence on its reasons for the review.

Aside from the reasons for changing the concession, there are a number of aspects of the consultation process that Territorians, and we in the opposition, found problematic.

Initially, the only way to provide feedback was through an online survey. Great, if you live remote! Many of the seniors flagged this as an issue due to many of them not having access to the Internet or, indeed, even a computer. It took a long time for the survey to be circulated through the mail. However, when it arrived, many found the survey extremely restrictive in the questions asked, room allowed to answer, and information about the current scheme. In fact, information about the current scheme was one aspect of the consultation that was very noticeably absent.

The opposition had a presence in nearly every community forum. The running commentary from attendees was that there was not enough information being offered about the current scheme for people to make informed responses to the survey. One respondent stated:

One of the big worries is that we are being asked to comment and show favour for the current concession scheme, and many of the people who were on the grandfather scheme, or not on it at all, do not know about the conditions of the current means-tested scheme and vice versa.

Many people complained about the low-level investigation and aspects of the scheme that were professed to make it unfair. People felt they were not informed enough to be making statements about what was unfair

about the current scheme, when they were provided with little other than the government's vague statements about all the unfairness and no concrete evidence to back up these statements.

Proper consultation is not just throwing questions out into the void and hoping for the best. It is the responsibility of government to make sure people are properly informed about why a review is taking place, and are given information to back up these reasons. It is not a guarantee that everyone will access or understand that information, but to make it inaccessible undermines the entire consultation process.

Other people stated that the survey and forum questions were too vague, too loaded or were leading questions. For example, one of the survey and community forum questions people were asked to respond to was, 'Should electricity and water concessions be capped?' People were confused as to why electricity and water concessions were grouped together. Some wanted electricity capped, some only wanted water capped. But there were no provision for this in the question. It was either yes, no, or unsure. Questions like this caused even more anxiety and unrest amongst the respondents, who started to doubt whether this was truly a consultation with everything on the table or whether the government had some other agenda.

But by far what caused the most apprehension in the community was the idea of the debit card to replace all concessions. That is good wording, isn't it? 'The debit card to replace all concessions.' We have found there is very little support for the idea of a debit card. Almost unanimously across the board, among all stakeholders we have spoken to, this was considered a bad idea.

Among the many concerns raised about the debit card include, but are not limited to, the additional difficulty members of the scheme might face in budgeting for the year ahead. Some imagined they might be in a bind if too much of the debit card was used up in the first half of the year, leaving nothing for the second half. Most people preferred to see concessions come directly off their bills at a stable rate, as they always have.

Regarding the risk of misuse of the card, even with approved vendors, there was talk by government and departmental staff about the possibility of the card being used to purchase fuel and even whitegoods. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to prevent the wrong type of purchases being made when an approved vendor sells a range of items. For example, fuel stations often sell cigarettes or lottery tickets.

Administration of the card runs the risk of over or underpaying individual members. It would be very difficult to access each individual member's needs for concessions to predict what they would use year by year and load the card accordingly. As the current scheme stands, members receive nothing unless they use the service tied to the concession, and most people we have consulted would prefer it remained that way.

The risk of elder abuse has not been considered. People are concerned that, as a tradeable commodity, the debit card runs a significant risk of elder abuse to the holder because it could be used to purchase a number of goods and services in value, and people may choose to do the wrong thing and abuse a senior's or carer's debit card. This would be very difficult to police or prevent.

Some people were concerned with needing to remember yet another PIN number and keep track of another card. What would happen if the card was lost or stolen was also a concern. People were concerned about what would happen to the money remaining on a card at the end of the year. Would it roll over? For how long? If it did not roll over then the government runs a risk of people overusing the scheme, not because it is needed but because they would lose the remaining unused money.

Clearly the debit card was an ill-conceived idea that should never have come to fruition. The community has been nearly unanimous and more clear on this point than any other. Since its inception in 1979 the purpose of the scheme has always been to act as an incentive for older people to remain in the Northern Territory and to assist seniors, pensioners, carers and low income earners with the cost of living in the Northern Territory. We, in the opposition, will be strongly opposed to any changes to the scheme that interfere with its twofold purpose. We will strongly oppose anything that drives our valued seniors and the amazing work they do out of the Northern Territory, and the loss of any concession or any of the current eligibility groups.

The voice of the community has been very loud on this issue and has been very reasonable, so we hope the government is listening. Listen to what seniors and carers are telling you and ensure this is a genuine review and one that respectfully recognises and acknowledges their value and significant contribution to the Northern Territory. Ensure the outcome of the review enables our valuable seniors and the people who contribute care in our communities continue to live here with the dignity they deserve.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Territory Families): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, we share so much agreement with the members on the other side of the House. We have an opportunity to have a motion we will be fully

supporting that aligns to the commitments the Labor Party made going into the—a bipartisan approach to seniors.

Our ‘respecting Territory seniors’ election commitment made a very clear promise that we would be reviewing and improving the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme. We were up front about it before we came to government. We did not sneak up—one of the great joys of my job is that I am the minister responsible for senior policy and it has given me the opportunity to meet many great senior Territorians. It was great to see so many fantastic senior Territorians here at Question Time involved in the process.

We received a large petition to make sure we review the scheme and a position calling to undertake the review which we are now doing. We have broad community support for the fact that we need to look at the scheme and that it is an important scheme. We all know what an important role senior Territorians play in our community. All of us on this side of the House are very active in our community, speaking to people every week. Senior Territorians play an important part in many of the places we visit as local members such as sporting, interest and historical clubs right across the Northern Territory.

I think I bring a new view to this House as someone new to politics and the role as minister.

The thing that has surprised me is the trust deficit with this issue and the fear so quickly stirred up by a small amount of voices. We went to the election saying we would review the scheme. This is a genuine consultation that I am proud of and I would like to thank my Caucus members. I know some of them will speak today about the type of things they have heard in their community. We are open and have been very clear throughout consultation that everything is on the table. We are happy to consider all proposals put forward and will be transparent about the decisions we make and why they are made.

It is important to make sure we are very clear that this policy is just one part of what we, as a government, want to do to support seniors to stay in the Territory. We need to address employment needs. We need to address the issue of elder abuse, which I think is much broader than just a concession card. We need to be looking at the underlying issues of elder abuse and the vulnerability of elders to that abuse from a range of people.

Retirement villages—someone was trying to minimise the impact of free public transport, but I have to say that, for those doing it tough, that extra \$5, \$10 a week the free public transport provides is a major change in their lifestyle.

I would also like to acknowledge that today we are standing on Larrakeyah land and I want to acknowledge Aboriginal elders who have looked after this country for generations. It is important that we make sure that all voices are heard in this debate.

Those of us who came more recently and built towns, or rebuilt in the case of Darwin—our social system, and started clubs. There is a whole range of senior volunteers who support our families and working mums like myself. We have reminders of where we come from and where we are going.

We also went to the election with the promise to put the seniors who had been locked out by the CLP back onto the scheme. I understand much of that trust deficit is because there was a poor process with the last changes to the scheme. It was not very well communicated, and it happened suddenly. People who were expecting the concession were cut out of the scheme. We were very clear prior to the election that we thought this was unfair.

The Opposition Leader said people are concerned that we are punishing them because of the fraud within the scheme, but it is an important part of good governance that we do not waste taxpayer dollars and when we are aware of fraud, we have to deal with it. There is no doubt that this is part of the review.

This is one of those schemes where the more we looked at the administration and at different aspects of the scheme the more we knew there was a lot needed to be done to reform the scheme for it to be evenly and fairly distributed.

Under the CLP government—the Member for Araluen was the responsible minister at the time—the top 100 people were claiming over \$6000 a year with a few claiming up to \$10 000 while others collected less than \$50. The system had not been audited and was open to fraud and exploitation. Millions of dollars were taken by unscrupulous travel agents when all the dollars should have gone to pensions and seniors. That is why we are making sure the scheme is accountable for taxpayers’ monies, that it is transparent and, above all, fair.

We have engaged a firm to review the management systems of the scheme. That is an internal issue. We want to make sure government systems are as efficient and as effective as possible. This is a scheme that has not had a modernisation; some of the systems are possibly still from 1979, when the scheme started. It has been added to in an ad hoc way, and we need to make sure we have a contemporary scheme that meets the needs of seniors in 2017, not 1979.

This government is committed to transparency and accountability, and the scheme must reflect both of these values. I want to be clear—and I was disappointed in the House last week when asked a question from the other side, I answered it in good faith and was clear that the purpose of this review is not about cuts. I was very clear, yet in a speech 15 minutes later the Leader of the Opposition claimed we are cutting the scheme. We have been very clear about that and have—the budget papers show this—invested another \$2.1m into the scheme so that more people can access it.

The consultation process we have undertaken has been a great process. It is fair to say it has probably been the biggest consultation done on the scheme. We started with talking to seniors, carers and pensioner bodies. We had an expert reference group established specifically for this purpose because in the Territory we are fortunate to have such active bodies who are knowledgeable about the scheme and the needs of the community. A whole range of people were involved including COTA, Association of Independent Retirees, National Seniors and NTCOSS. I would like to thank them for their input into that process.

We commenced a general public consultation on 10 July and released a discussion paper and survey. We have said it many times, and will say it again: no decisions have been made. Everything is up for discussion. We had some policy ideas that we tested with the community and will continue to test those. We are getting feedback on the specific areas in the survey but have not made any decisions. We are open to discussion on what the consultation says. We are very committed to ensuring those seniors who were unfairly cut out by the CLP will be included in the scheme.

We have worked hard to ensure that all affected Territorians are informed and are able to contribute to the scheme. I apologise for any confusion, I am disappointed that there have been loud voices misleading on the intent of the survey, which feeds on the trust deficit we have been talking about. I can reassure senior Territorians listening—and I know many do—and pensioners and carers that we are committed to making this a better scheme.

Letters have been sent to all people currently on the scheme; we have done lots of ads in the *NT News*, *Centralian Advocate*, *Katherine Times* and the *Tennant and District Times*; and we have done radio advertising regarding the public consultations on AHA, Mix FM, Territory FM, Gove FM. Information has been provided on government websites, including the Territory Families site, where the seniors concession area is the most visited part of that section of that site and has been for quite a long time.

We have also done work through social media as we know a significant amount of seniors use it. Myself, my team and Territory Families have met regularly and consistently with the relevant peak bodies throughout this process. Fourteen public consultation forums have been held in Darwin, Palmerston, the rural areas of Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek. Two further forums are scheduled, additional forums have been conducted where requested, and peak bodies have held their own forums in Darwin and Alice Springs.

I thank all the hard-working staff in my office and in other electorate offices. Many staff have made calls. We have made 4177 calls to senior Territorians, and we have had almost 1000 conversations. Also, 1131 voicemail messages have been left. We are continuing those calls up to the end of the consultation period.

We have received more than 2300 responses to the survey, online and mail copies, and I am advised this is the biggest response to ever be received for a Northern Territory Government survey.

I note the almost 7000 signatures on the petition which was introduced by COTA, the Association of Independent Retirees and National Seniors Australia. Many people volunteered their time to fill that out. We respect that petition. I hope they were also encouraged to fill out the more specific survey, because some of the questions they urge us to undertake are through that process.

Consultation has been adapted to the bush to ensure those who are eligible have the opportunity to have their voices heard. Territory Families is using local staff to conduct consultations in Wadeye, Maningrida, Gunbalanya, Ramingining, Galiwinku, Groote Eylandt, Borroloola, Ngukurr, Ti Tree, Yuendumu, Yarralin, Kalgarindji, Ntaria, Mount Liebig and Papunya.

The local members of bush seats have been busy talking to their constituents as well. When I have been out bush I have had some consultation with seniors on community visits.

To give a bit of a sense of what we are getting back in regard to feedback—the majority of respondents support most aspects of the scheme. Many feel that pensioners and carers should be part of one scheme and seniors should be part of a separate scheme. I support what the Opposition Leader was saying about the dual purposes of the scheme, to support people on low incomes with cost-of-living expenses, but also an incentive to keep seniors here. Those are the two most important prongs of this policy. We will continue to work through that feedback.

There is a high level of support for capping electricity concessions. Most people I have spoken to do not feel it is reasonable that some people are getting over \$6000 back from the government, and we need to remember that is probably half of what they are paying for power and water. That is a very large bill. The Opposition Leader is right; no one has ever said that is roting. We are saying we need a scheme that is more robust and does not allow for such disparities in the usage of the scheme. The most valued concessions, according to people in the surveys, are electricity, water and motor vehicle registration.

The debit card proposal has a very low level of support, with a large proportion of respondents expressing it has not been explained well, and we hear that. We want a scheme that is as flexible as possible. A debit card may have given us a tool to deliver that flexibility to seniors, but we are also hearing the flipside is that people are concerned it may lead to not being able to pay their bill at the end of the year if they have used their allocation. We hear that and will be continuing to put all that information into our consideration as we make decisions, and as I have said very clearly, no decisions have been made.

All in all, so far it has been a very positive process. I have to say I have enjoyed talking personally with so many seniors in my electorate. This reminds me that I live in a wonderful place. I have some remarkable seniors in the electorate of Braitling. The other great privilege is I get to meet seniors across the Territory and all of us are proud of the people and their achievements. Every time I go to a seniors' event I hear stories, and some do sound a little taller than true, but we all enjoy a good yarn and there is nothing like a Territorian to tell a good yarn.

I always find out some interesting part of how the Territory has grown. The other day I was met a woman who said she was the first person to do an ultrasound at the Alice Springs Hospital. Another told me they were the first nurse at Papunya. These are the stories that make up who we are and we value them—the stories, the people, the seniors' contributions to the Territory.

We want to keep senior Territorians here when they retire because we know how much they contribute to our community. We are proud to stand here and support, in bipartisan unison, the importance of senior Territorians. It has united us as a House, and we will continue to work through it, ensuring we have a scheme that senior Territorians deserve, that meets their needs, cannot be exploited for the wrong reasons but celebrates who senior Territorians are and why they should stay in the Territory.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I think I have the right to speak, I have my card here. I am number 26308 and you will be interested to know what it says, so you just have to be quiet. I'll make sure my glasses are right.

The holder is a valued member of our community. Please extend every courtesy and assistance.

I do not want to hear any interjections, please.

I must admit, I was not aware until the last minute this was coming on. The schedule changed from GBD late yesterday, so I will have to wing it today. I have heard some issues that worry me in the discussion. I am happy the government has not made up its mind as to what it is doing yet. My advice is that, when you get close to what you think you will do, do not do it without us seeing what will do first. I think that can be a problem because I was looking at some of the documents that have come from the department—lots of sheets of paper. This version of the Northern Territory Concessions Review says:

What has government decided?

Well if you want to get people's hackles up quickly, you do not want to send that letter off in a hurry. It said:

Government has agreed to the following components for the new concession scheme. All seniors aged 65 years and over will receive a minimum of \$700 every two years in line with the government's election commitment.

Well, did that start people knocking on my door! I think the minister is well aware that this is what caused the problems. I do not oppose the government reviewing the situation and do not agree with the Opposition Leader sliding over the issue that the CLP changed the system drastically. I will raise that issue a little later in relation to me. I have raised it at a public meeting. It is an issue, especially for self-funded retirees and also a senior's partner working and whether they have the right for concessions. I will come back to that later.

The issue of rorting was exaggerated, not because we are saying there was not rorting in the travel scheme. Most people were not thinking travel scheme because they regarded that as something they were not part of. They were looking at the rorting from the point of view that the government said people were claiming large amounts for electricity. I understand that and I am a supporter of capping. One of the issues with capping can be people in the rural area who pump their own water. I balance that with people who also pump swimming pools, which I regard as a fairly luxurious use of electricity. Trying to find that balance of capping on electricity used for essential purposes will be the trick.

An example regarding the debit card at the public meeting I attended—and this is not knocking the people who went to the meeting. I cannot speak for the suburbs but in the case of the rural meeting I do not think the organisers understood that people are pretty wise when they get older, they are not dumb. They have lived a bit longer and they know all the tricks of the trade. They expect to be treated as if they will not answer a question instantaneously. The problem was that a series of questions went up on the screen and you had to press one, two, or three. That is fine, but it failed—and I have said this to your advisers, minister—because there should have been some explanation to those questions, and time for people to debate them.

A classis was the first question: 'Do you support the current scheme?' Hello! My wife is in the old scheme, and there is a new scheme and they are both current schemes. How to confuse people in five seconds flat. Not a good way to start a meeting. That question should not have been asked, in the sense that you need time—10 minutes maybe—to talk about and understand what the government was trying to put forward, or the government should have written it in a better way.

If you are not clear in theses discussions, people will shoot you down very quickly. This is a very sensitive issue for many people. I have many self-funded retirees in my electorate, I have at least 1600 people over the age of 65. If I added the ones over 60, it would be a greater number than that. People are very concerned about what the government is trying to do.

In relation to the debit card, at the very end of the meeting it popped up, with about 30 seconds to talk about it. What do you think? Bingo! Everyone said, 'No debit card'. I am not saying that is not a fair indication of what people think. I certainly did not have enough time to find out what you were talking about. I did not understand how this debit card would work. People were saying, 'It will look like we are on the BasicsCard'. That was one of the criticisms. There certainly was not, what I would call, a thorough explanation of what the card could be used for or how it would be used. The answer you got was well and truly expected, 'We do not like it'. People will put a big 'No' where they are not sure or simply think it is demeaning. That is what some people thought.

I understand that the government is looking at a range of issues. As I said before, I am well paid. I have not always been well paid, I can tell you now, having worked out bush. But under the old system, my wife who is an Aboriginal woman, was entitled—she has one of these too—for the discounts. She is not me, she is an independent woman. I am not in charge of her and she has, I understand, the right to have a Seniors Card. Under the old grandfather system she is entitled to a deduction on various things; it could be rates or glasses, which are important for her at her age.

You mentioned before that there should be senior and pensioner divisions. Would that mean she would not get those discounts, for instance? She technically cannot take a pension because she is my wife. What I did not get from the meetings is how the government will deal with the grandfather clause. I am happy to pay full electricity and rates et cetera, but to some extent it is nearly demeaning of me to say that my wife is not entitled to some concessions because she is a senior. She is 70 years old. I am calling that little bind.

One solution was—and it will not be that easy to apply—that if you have a household, you basically split the cost of the electricity in half and say you get a concession on half. Of course, that is not so easy to do and from a bureaucratic point of view it is probably impossible, but it was one thing pointed out.

I highlight that this is not much different than people who are in the public service, older people who have retired and then come back and have gotten a consultancy job. While they were retired nobody particularly worried about them, but now that they have a consultancy job do they drop their concession? There is a whole mix of things that the original scheme kept simple.

You could say some things were unfair but one of the things you have to watch—and I say this to my local council quite a bit—is to not make a scheme so complicated that the cost of administering that scheme means you spend more money administering it than what you hand out. When the government decides what it is going to do, someone should do a cost-benefit analysis. How much will this scheme cost to operate? How many people need to be involved in making sure the system is not rorted and how many people are entitled to this et cetera?

If you are going to bring in a scheme you need to try to make it as simple as possible. There will be, like anything in the rural area, a flat rate. Some people get advantages out of the flat rate and some do not, but it is easy to administer. It may be that this system has some inequalities in it, but if you are as finicky as splitting the electricity in half and one side of the family pays for it because they are senior and the other side pays full dollar, it becomes impossible to do and would probably be pretty ridiculous.

When the government is coming back to the people—I presume that is what will happen—there will be a set of options the government is putting forward for pensioners to look at and comment on. You need to do that, because you have lost a fair bit of kudos in the seniors area when that first letter went out. I know you are doing your best to bring that back by having the survey and the public meetings, but you started out on the wrong foot. The way around that is to make sure that, when you come back with something concrete, you put that out.

Believe it or not, although I am not a member of the government I am quite happy to speak to people about what the government is doing in this area. I like to be constructive, and if the government wants us to facilitate meetings in the rural area regarding what you are putting forward, I am very happy to do that. I do not necessarily regard some issues as political, but good governance. One of the important things any government has to do is make sure that when it spends taxpayers' money it does so in a way that is as efficient and fair as possible.

I would be happy to be part of a consultative phase in relation to where we go from here. Many people have been involved such as COTA, National Seniors Australia, Association of Independent Retirees, NT Council of Social Services, Carers NT, Vietnam Veterans and Council on the Aging (NT). Many people are interested. Making sure we are all on the same page at the end is the goal the government needs.

Statements have been made that some people out bush will not get as much as others. I have thought about that and it applies to a lot of things. If you live out bush you do not get the same schooling as someone in town. You will always have differences. It does not mean you are necessarily worse off; you perhaps just do not have need for concessions in that area. The bus is not going past the outstation, so do not expect a bus concession.

If there is no sewerage in my outstation I would not expect the government to give me a sewerage discount. I am not being charged because I am on a septic tank. There will be imbalances, by nature, from where you live. You are more likely to get concessions in a town than you are out bush.

We need to be careful that we do not say, 'You do not get as much'. Is it giving the impression that we will give a bit more where people do not get the same discounts as those in town? I do not think the system should work that way. I think you should just get the discounts where they are appropriate. That is something we should not get too carried away with.

I received a letter from the minister's office about the number of people using swipe cards—it is about \$1500 worth of swipe cards a year. The problem there is—is that equivalent to what I get? When the capping comes in—I am not sure how that works with the power cards—will they be capped or are they already capped, no matter which family or house it is? They are issues I presume the department is looking at.

I thank the minister for allowing the Member for Goyder and me to have a good debriefing. We reported on the meeting at Bees Creek. That was one of the best meetings I have been to. People did not get cranky but asked pertinent questions. It goes to show that when you start to do something that involves seniors, beware. They might be playing mahjong or bingo, or they may be playing lawn bowls, but while they do that they are thinking. They think about their future.

I am going off track here—Bernard Salt is a demographer who writes for *The Australian*. I may have said this before, but he once explained something at a PAC meeting in Perth, which I attended and where he was the guest speaker. As people get older, something happens. A lot of people retire at 65. The average life expectancy for a man is around 84 or 85. They have 20 years of nothing to do. What happens is that people in your community start to think about what should happen with the world. They come knocking on your door because they have nothing else to do. They will tell you how the world should be fixed up, and you will get that until they get to 85.

What I am saying is there are many people out there who have 20 years to think about what you are doing, so if you want to do it, do it well. Otherwise they will be knocking on your door for another 20 years. I look forward to seeing the options that government brings forward. Once you have brought those forward, go out to communities and look at it again before you put your imprimatur on it.

Ms MOSS (Environment and Natural Resources): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I support the motion this afternoon. I thank the Member for Nelson for his contribution. We should all be out talking to seniors in our electorates and putting forward the facts that everything is on the table for discussion. We should be playing an active role in making sure government gets the very best feedback we can from seniors across the Northern Territory about how we can improve this scheme and how we can make this scheme more fair and more equitable. That is what this is about.

I would never underestimate seniors either. Some of my favourite conversations in my electorate is with seniors who, as the Minister for Territory Families has talked about, have incredible stories, insights, experience and knowledge. As a younger person in our community, I acknowledge I can learn so much from them and really enjoy doing so.

We value our seniors in the Northern Territory. I value their contribution to our workplaces right across the Northern Territory, whether it is in the public service, NGOs or businesses. They have shaped the community that we all enjoy. They play an important role in their families, often as carers and sometimes as primary carers for kids as well. We often do not talk about those grandparents who play the primary carer role in their families and there are a lot of them. There are many of them in my community as well, who should have more support and recognition for the role they play in caring for our kids.

As has been recognised in the House this afternoon, seniors take on so much volunteer work in our community. We want to ensure our seniors are supported. We want to make sure our seniors stay in the Territory. It is a fact that our population is aging. It makes sense to make sure we are planning for our future so that we are supporting seniors remaining in the Territory and continue to contribute to our community and work places, for those who wish to continue working.

In opposition, I was proud to be the shadow minister for senior territorians for many of the reasons I have outlined—and to enjoy positive relationships with the peak bodies around the Northern Territory for seniors. It was , generally, a rewarding experience.

I had been in parliament for around 18 months and witnessed what was happening in the community with the changes to the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme. There was a lot of distrust caused by the changes made without consultation with seniors.

There was a lot of angst and it became a very topical subject in the election campaign. It is something that I take very seriously and is still one of the main topics I discuss when I am in my electorate. We went to the election with a broad package of how we would support our seniors based on that respect for them.

It was informed by ongoing conversations with groups like Council on the Aging (NT) and I would like to acknowledge that the former CEO is here in the gallery today. I enjoyed many great conversations with Graham and Dean over the course of that time. National Seniors and its NT Branch and, of course, the Association of Independent Retirees—we had some fantastic and really frank conversations over the course of my time as the shadow minister for senior territorians that I really valued.

The package we took to the election included a number of things. It included reviewing concessions, and ensuring that those who were disenfranchised under the former government could access concessions. We talked about better housing options so that seniors could age in the communities they contributed to and love.

We are committed to more flexible arrangements in the public service, having a look at how we could do that, so we can retain our seniors and their invaluable experience and knowledge within our public sector. This is

something that has been raised by seniors in my electorate, particularly retired teachers, who still have so much to contribute but perhaps need to change the way they go about their day-to-day work. We should be able to respond to that and this is something I know the Minister for Territory Families is progressing.

We talked about age friendly communities and we need to continue to talk about this, because age friendly communities are more appropriate and more friendly for all of us. It is about inclusion and the principles we should be working towards. We talked in that package about acting to address elder abuse.

I am pleased—as proud as I was to be the shadow minister for senior territorians—that we have the Member for Braitling as the Minister for Territory Families implementing these things. There is marked progress against the things we said we would do. We said we would reinstate free bus travel for seniors. That decision made by the former government was exceptionally mean-spirited. I know they had their reasons for doing that which were not particularly well communicated or accepted. We can do better. I was very pleased that we have reinstated free bus travel. We listened and took action on that issue.

We are actively investigating options for retirement villages, particularly in the rural area. It is important to provide more options for seniors. The Minister for Housing and Community Development has an important role in this area as well.

The Minister for Territory Families is progressing how we look at employment through the public sector and will be doing that, I am sure, with the Minister for Public Employment.

There is \$300 000 to support the elder abuse hotline, an issue discussed at the World Elder Abuse Awareness day hosted by COTA when I was the Shadow Minister for Senior Territorians. This is a significant issue and one that has been talked about on a national level, as well as in the Territory.

One of the big questions put to me at that forum hosted by COTA was, what can we do to support this hotline that has been facilitated by the Darwin Community Legal Service? It started the service voluntarily. I am proud that, as a government, we are supporting that work and the ability for them to provide support in remote areas as well as through the full-time and part-time positions that are supported by that funding. I was adamant that addressing elder abuse would be in our policy, so I am even more proud to see that being implemented.

We made commitments in relation to concessions. We clearly outlined in our paper—which I have with me—Respecting Seniors, that there would be an additional \$2.1m in senior concessions to address some of the inequities caused by the changes under the former government. That has been delivered. There is a significant amount of work needed to go into how this is administered. I do not think anyone in this Chamber is under any illusion that this is not complex and important work that has to be done right. I hope we can all work positively together to make sure that happens.

It is in everyone's best interest to make sure we are delivering the most fair and equitable scheme for seniors that we can. Everyone has a role in that. You can either be part of spreading this information, or fear, or part of genuinely putting those views that you are articulating in the House today about feedback you are getting. Feed that through this process and make sure we are building a strong scheme for supporting seniors that will last us well into the future because we value them and want them to stay here.

One of the big issues that was raised with me—I have a retirement village in my electorate. I know I am not the only one. Their ability to access concessions for power and water was raised with me consistently. I made a commitment to those people. I agreed. I was not sure that was entirely fair. I wanted that to be looked at. I made the commitment that we would review the power and water concessions. That is in our Respecting Seniors policy document where we said:

Labor will work to ensure that power and water concessions are available to seniors living in retirement villages ...

Then we went on to say:

... will ask Treasury to immediately undertake a review of the number of people impacted and options for providing support to lower income earners ...

This work will be presented to us.

It is important to me that we have a look at this and make sure people are not disadvantaged because of living in a retirement village or choosing to downsize. The review is incredibly important. It is what we committed to do. Again, I will quote from the document we took to the election:

However, unlike the CLP, Labor will work with seniors and with organisations representing seniors to completely review and revamp seniors concessions and provide a modern pensioner concession scheme that reflects the needs of senior Territorians.

We are doing what we said we would. This is something I talked about again at the seniors forum, hosted at COTA in conjunction with the Association for Independent Retirees. I was debating with the former Member for Sanderson that night. At that time, he was also the Minister for Senior Territorians.

I am sure, if memory serves me correctly, by the end of that forum, the former Minister for Senior Territorians was talking about reviewing the scheme. I wanted to mention that today because I think there was consensus all around, particularly in that forum,—where the moves made by the former government to remove a number of seniors from the scheme, who had seen friends or family able to access the scheme, and all of a sudden were of a differently eligibility criteria and unable to access it themselves. People were extremely angry about that move. This was something we talked frankly about in the forum.

The review is important, we need to make sure this is a flexible scheme that meets the needs of seniors. People in my electorate tell me different things. I have very different feedback depending on who I speak to and where I go. Many will say the most important aspect of the scheme for them is everyday expenses, MVR assistance, power and water concessions and being able to get glasses.

For others it is the travel component, being supported to visit family and friends interstate. People have raised whether or not the travel concession should also include intrastate. There is a gamut of views from all the conversations I have had. In many ways, people give similar feedback but often have different priorities, which is why this is an important process.

It is inaccessible and impractical for many and we need to address that. I find it implausible that the former government was not aware of some of the disparities in how these concessions were used. I question how much information was made available to the advisory committee of the former Minister for Senior Territorians to be able to address these issues earlier. I suspect it could have been addressed much earlier and am proud to be part of a government that is having a genuine consultation process.

This was never going to be an easy task—the biggest survey response from the Northern Territory Government survey and we should be proud of that. I thank all the seniors who are so engaged in providing that feedback.

I want to touch on the fact that a number of people have talked about things being decided. I want to make clear that yes, commitments were made. Yes, it did go in a fact sheet that there had been commitments made. I have had that conversations with seniors in my own electorate. Once I explained that when we say, 'this has already been decided, these are things we are committed to'—we have had those discussions and even those things we made open for discussion. We have heard people say they want to talk about those things as well, including the \$700 per person—'For the people disenfranchised off the former scheme, every two years on a debit scheme'—I am reading from my policy document there. We will open that up for discussion; let us have a genuine conversation about how this can work for you.

We are consulting heavily in my electorate. That has meant two forums in the Casuarina Library. I understand the first one was well attended and there were good conversations. My electorate officer attended on my behalf as I was unable to go. The second, advertised in the *NT News*, occurred a couple of weeks ago on a Tuesday night. My office and I have been calling and doorknocking seniors around my electorate and received good feedback about that being a positive conversation as well as them being able to ask questions.

My office sent out the survey and we have doorknocked seniors in the electorate. I always carry the surveys with me and we ask if anybody needs assistance, or if they would prefer to talk about it. We are doing the work to make sure this is accessible to everyone. We are calling everyone we have numbers for and, of course, people come in to the office to talk about this issue.

Before we put out the survey, I held my annual senior's lunch and about 60 seniors attended. Knowing we were coming up to this conversation, I was really happy to broach this subject and ask for feedback before going into the formal consultation process. People were very happy to do so, even on my very strange

mock-up feedback forms I had done. I knew people would want to have a say early, so we made sure we had those conversations.

I acknowledge that there were service desks opened up. In Casuarina, there is a service desk where people can ask questions and obtain information. I appreciate those working in the division in the Office of Senior Territorians for the incredible work they are doing in getting around the Territory, holding formal sessions and talking to seniors every day.

I would like to thank the Deputy Chief Minister as well who attended an afternoon tea at Tiwi Village when I was speaking to the seniors about this issue. They very much enjoyed that opportunity to speak to the Treasurer directly. There you go, Tiwi Village! You got a direct line to the Treasurer to put views forward on the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme.

On top of the formal consultation process, I will continue to engage seniors in my electorate in any way I can before 31 August and, of course, after that time. A genuine process is important to all of us. It is always a great pleasure to work with the seniors in our electorates and I am looking forward to delivering a robust scheme in partnership with the senior organisations and seniors across the Territory. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute today.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): I thank the Opposition Leader for bringing this motion to parliament because it is one of the more important motions that we have debated for some time.

We are all going to be seniors one day, some will get there quicker than others. Not us, Member for Sanderson, but others. It is not that the seniors of today have a monopoly on seniors, getting older and things of that nature. We all have a vested interest in the welfare of the people in our community, whatever the age.

I was asked to table the petition today, and I did so with pleasure. I thank the different seniors groups for putting that trust in me. It has very clearly demonstrated to government and to others that the seniors, as a group of people in the community, have rallied together very well and strongly. To have a petition with 6500-plus signatures is extraordinary.

From my memory, the last petition was when Labor was in opposition. They had petitions with extraordinarily high numbers in regard to firefighters and workers compensation relating to cancer. The only one that I can remember before that, was the first time the government wanted to sell the TIO. That petition had something like 20 000 signatures.

To have a petition with that many signatures—and there are still more to come. I received more sheets in my office today, which can be tabled. That number of people expressing concern will grow. You do not have to be a senior to express concern and support for a group of people in our community, but this should send a clear message to government that they will not be taken for fools or be pushed around.

The petition shows seniors and the groups who represent seniors in our community presenting a commonsense approach to the solution of the scheme. In my view, there is nothing wrong with reviewing a scheme or reviewing legislation. As a matter of course, it should be done on a regular basis to ensure it is contemporary and is meeting the expectations of the community at that time.

Reviewing the scheme that started in 1979—I have had briefings with the Member for Nelson. It has not had any substantial review since that time. It may have had a little patching up along the way, but is overdue for a review to ensure it meets what the community needs these days. For example, seniors can claim glasses. I do not know why glasses were selected. I assume glasses were selected because people want to drive and the older you get, the more your eyesight fails in some ways.

It is also important to understand that a lot of seniors have hearing issues. A lot of constituents that I know, and even members of this House, have hearing aids. I do not know why it was glasses and not dental or hearing. I think these should all be placed into the mix as part of this review. Maybe it can be called a medical concession, or something of that nature.

When the scheme was introduced it was specifically designed to assist seniors and make the Territory an attractive place for the retention of this group of people who are an important part of our community, as is everyone. These days, more so than any other time, seniors, grandparents and people of that age and era are looking after children and becoming carers themselves, so not as many of them are off driving around the country. People are now looking to grandparents to help ease the cost-of-living pressures that some

families have. Keeping seniors here in the Territory has a flow-on effect to helping people in the broader community.

I think seniors have all been appreciative of the concessions. Yes, there is a small group of people who have ripped off the concession scheme. What we have said and what has been said at all of the meetings—I have only been to the one that was in the rural area—is to fix that weakness. If there are 100 people who are utilising the electricity concession quite legally, but to extraordinarily high levels, deal with that issue. Do not penalise all other people.

Whether it is a capped amount of electricity you can claim, an average use per household or a fixed amount, I am not sure, but it has to be done. It is a legal way they can claim so they have claimed it. I would think the people on that list are quite capable of paying their electricity bills if they have a big house with lots of air-conditioning, a swimming pool, spa et cetera. Good for them, but they are starting to make the scheme unbalanced. This is what needs to be looked at.

In May 2014 the then Treasurer, Dave Tollner, altered the eligibility for people to access the scheme, which went to the criteria of Centrelink eligibility. This disenfranchised about 3000 seniors. You have the pre-2014 and the post-2014 people so you are starting to get—I know you call it 'grandfather', minister, and that is fine, but people retiring now might be on private superannuation. This does not mean they are wealthy. It means they have been smart enough, done their thing, worked hard and invested in their superannuation scheme.

They might own their own property, or almost own it. Why should they be disenfranchised because they had the good fortune to think and say, 'I want to try to look after myself in old age and not be dependent on society and government'? Just because you are an independent retiree does not mean you are fabulously wealthy. That is a misconception that needs to be knocked out straight away.

What possessed the Treasurer of the day to do that, I do not know. We do not know what possessed him to do lots of things he did. That needs to be looked at. Do not assume that because they are a superannuated retiree that they do not, at some stage in their life, need a little assistance along the way with costs.

Labor announced it would review the scheme soon after its election and has further announced a new plan for concessions in the May 2017 budget. I get the feeling this is a bit of 'cart before the horse'. If there really was to be a review, there should have been a discussion paper prepared and public meetings. It is done now, but a lot of angst and upset could have been spared within the community if the review of the scheme was better managed and planned. It is getting there now, but it was not there in the beginning.

Of course seniors got upset. We all have stories of people coming into our offices genuinely concerned, upset, cranky or angry at the thought of it being reduced.

We all know that the main one is electricity, because of the cost of electricity in the Territory, and our increasing reliance on cooling our houses. Whether that is just the bedroom at night or otherwise, it costs a lot of money. I know from growing up here as a kid that the temperatures are generally five or six degrees higher than they were in the 1970s.

The government has held public meetings, and I thank the minister and their staff for organising that in the rural area. We had upwards of 80 people at that meeting. The Member for Nelson and I were there and it was a good meeting. I am not sure if the departmental staff thought as much, but I assured them later that it was a very tame meeting for the rural area. They should have been at the one about the metering of bores; they would have had their eyes opened to what a public meeting in the rural area can be about.

The government put out a lot of information. As the Member for Nelson said, some of the PowerPoint presentations were a bit open ended and needed better quantitative information. They took that on board for future presentations. Overwhelmingly, the people said they did not want a debit card system. You have an uphill battle, minister, to get rid of the stigma attached to having a debit card, which they have aligned to having a BasicsCard. That is the reality. They did not like it. They do not want a set fee. They want the system to be as it is. If it is not broken why are you trying to fix it?

Yes, you have had problems with travel agents, but they are being dealt with. Fix the weakness in the scheme. You might have a few people taking the opportunity to claim electricity concessions; somehow that needs to be addressed. Do not restrict the people who want or need the scheme; deal with the problems within the scheme. There has been a lot of talk in the community, and there is information out there. I know your department and government is taking it all on board. I do not think there needs to be any dramatic changes to the scheme. You might be able to increase it, so it will cost money, maybe \$20m or \$30m.

We know we have an ageing population. We know we will keep ageing, so you will have more seniors. That is a fact you cannot get away from. If it is \$30m this year, of course it will increase. It might be \$32m or \$35m. It must be factored into any budget considerations. We will get more senior people in the Top End. If you want to hang onto them for the benefit of community and families, there needs to be incentives to not only having their families, lovely lifestyle and everything that comes with living in the Territory, but there has to be a little financial incentive.

That was a small component as an incentive to seniors and their families to say, 'This is what we do for you in the Territory'. We have stood apart from the rest of the Territory with this scheme. It was a good scheme. It just needs to be reviewed—tighten up the loopholes and broaden it in some ways, but not necessarily making it more money. Some people do not wear glasses, even when they are elderly, but they might need their teeth fixed up, or the other way around.

We want our seniors to be healthy and be able to see when they are driving, so those things need to be included in the mix.

I commend the Opposition Leader for bringing this to parliament, and I hope the government and minister take all the concerns and comments on board.

Ms LAWLER (Education): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on this General Business Day item. I commend the opposition for introducing it because it is great to have the opportunity to talk about our seniors. I also commend the Minister for Territory Families for the work being done to review this scheme.

I am one of the people who signed the petition. I was very pleased to sign it, because the things in that petition, in the header read out today about having a scheme that is sustainable into the future, is spot on. We need pensioner concession scheme that is sustainable into the future.

They talked about a cap for power and water and that is common sense. It is something that has come out in the discussions and conversations I have had.

The other one that was discussed in the heading and lead-in to the petition was about having airfares for intra-Territory. That is a really sensible move. Instead of supporting people to leave the Territory for holidays, let us have them staying in the Territory. My mum has grandchildren in Alice Springs and it would be a pleasure for her to travel to Alice Springs.

I believe the petition and today's debate is very welcome. I am very keen to see the feedback and what is collated through that feedback, because we need a modern scheme. Listening to the Member for Goyder, this scheme came in 1979 and needs to be looked at and tidied up. We all agree we want a fair and equitable scheme.

We will all be accessing the scheme, hopefully, into old age and I am sure we would like to see a scheme that benefits us. I will be someone who will retire in the Territory and live here until my dying day. I look forward to having some of the benefits. As the Member for Goyder said, some of us will have some superannuation, but whether it is enough—and I might need some new glasses as well. I am very happy to be supportive of this scheme.

I have about 400 pensioners and carers in the electorate of Drysdale, probably not as many as others, which is an interesting demographic. The pensioners and carers in my electorate are some of the poorest people who are in public housing in Palmerston. It is the old Palmerston; the Gray, Driver and Moulden areas, which are the original areas of Palmerston. Some of the pensioners who are in those public housing units have been there for 30 years, since they retired.

For me, it is about making sure those who have the greatest need for this scheme are getting what they should be getting. We talked about fairness. Some of them are not necessarily accessing all the benefits they are eligible for. In the conversations I have with them, sometimes they are surprised by the benefits they could possibly have.

Just like the Member for Casuarina, I have sent the survey to everyone in that age group in my electorate on the Electoral Roll. It has been great to see the responses. Staff in my electorate office have phoned all of the pensioners and seniors in our electorate. We have been doorknocking, had conversations at the markets, had mobile offices and attended forums. I am saying 'we' because sometimes I have done it with the Member for Brennan.

We have seen the full range. We have had people who are very upset talk to us at the markets. It is quite sad at times. They are almost going through their finances, dollar for dollar, explaining to us how they need to continue to have the concessions. It has been about reassuring them that this is not cutting concessions—but hearing from them about how we can make this scheme the best as well as being fair and equitable. This has all been about listening and talking to seniors to get their feedback.

One of the key components of this scheme is to keep our old people in the Territory. I am a grandmother and I know how valuable I can be to my daughter by babysitting. I made best use of my mother as a babysitter. It is not just about that, it is about the broad experiences of our older Territorians and what they can give back to the Territory. We have talked about retiring at 65, and if they are fit and active, there is a lot they can do every single day, whether they are involved in sporting clubs or social events. It is about having the time to enjoy life instead of rushing through. It is about doing the things you have always wanted to do but may not have had the time.

When the older people in our community talk about passing on culture, knowledge and traditions, it is about that loveliness of being able to have old people at family functions. As a child growing up, I did not have my grandparents in Darwin; they were interstate. I attended lots of functions with other friends who had grandparents here and it is a pleasure to now be able to have family functions where we have my mother who is in her 80s, my daughter and my grandson. To me, that is about passing on traditions, whether it is the birthday cake or Christmas function where you are all together and bring a plate.

To me it is about our senior Territorians feeling welcomed in the community and being a strong part of our community, passing on important things to our children. It is a beautiful thing to see grandmas and grandpas walking into school with the little ones, hearing reading in the school and being a part of that child's education. These are the things we need to see more of.

We are very happy to have our seniors as a key part of the Territory and keep seniors here into the future. I have a strong empathy for seniors and a substantial amount of knowledge about them, some through personal experience. My mother is 88 and came to the Territory in the late 1950s or early 1960s. She only left the Territory for about three months after Cyclone Tracy. Quite a few of our old Territorians are in the same boat and have been a strong part of the Territory. They were the people who built the Territory and if you talk to the seniors, like the Member for Braintree says, it is wonderful.

As you get older you enjoy hearing the history and the stories about those who were the old backbone of the Territory. It is lovely to hear those stories and when I go to the nursing home—mum is in a nursing home now—it is lovely to see a heap of old Territorians reminiscing, talking about the old days and their contribution to the Territory. They tell stories about when McMillians Road was a dirt road, when Casuarina shopping centre first got built and the first places in the Territory like the old milk bar and Hotel Darwin.

It is important for societies to have those stories, for Darwin, Alice Springs and all our communities to be able to have and pass on those stories. It is about the contribution our senior Territorians make to all of our lives. From my point of view, the things we can do as a government—the Member for Goyder spoke about that—whether it is \$28m or \$30m, the cost of keeping Territorians here is a small cost for the benefit they put back into our community.

There are so many layers that our senior Territorians add to our communities, let alone keeping the population high, the GST and all the things the Treasurer will tell us. For me it is about the social fabric of keeping our long-term Territorians, older people in the community, and making sure they are well looked-after. When you talk about some of the subsidies and benefits they get, in the scheme of things, these are small things for a government to be able to afford.

We went into the election talking about a review. That is what is happening and is what needs to happen. Any program you have will sometimes be added to, become unwieldy and lose sight of what they actually need to do. It is great that this government has the strength and vision to do that. The previous Treasurer just tinkered around the edges and made a cut to a program rather than having a good look at it and making sure it hits the mark and is doing what it set out to do.

For me, it is about ensuring it is fair and equitable to Territorians across the board, whether you are in a remote community or are a self-funded retiree who has worked all their life and put away a small amount of superannuation. If you are a person on a pension—that is often the case with some of my constituents, they have moved from job to job, so may have been a truck driver or worked in a mine, retail or as a labourer and over that time have been unable to put together a strong superannuation plan. These people may find themselves, sometimes through illness or injury, in a public housing area and on the pension.

The difference in the subsidies we provide makes a difference. These are the people who do not turn on their air conditioner, even if they have one, because they cannot afford the power bills. So they may just turn them on in the evening to go to sleep and have them on a timer. It is about ensuring those people—as I said how you got to be a senior and your financial situation to get to that age, whether you are on an aged pension or whatever else it is. It is about making sure people are able to benefit from a scheme that is fair.

Hearing from the signed petition about caps on power and water are the things we need to look at. That is the good thing about a survey; you can gain feedback from a wide range of people. To me it is important that we do not just hear from a small group. Often in surveys you hear from the loud voices and not everybody, so it is lovely to hear of this petition from 6000 or 7000 people. We want to make sure our survey gets to more than that group of people, that it gets to all senior Territorians, enabling them to have a say about how it can benefit them and the best way to do that.

The baby boomers are aging, that is a fact. The group of people—I think 1964 is the cut off for the baby boomers—they are all getting old and I think I am on the cusp of that group of people. That group wants to be able to spend time in their old age with their friends and be able to travel, if they want to, with the assurance that they can budget the dollars they have but be comfortable as well. Sometimes our concessions are the difference between them being able to do that or not do it.

The other one I was pleased to see reinstated is the free bus travel. To me it was very mean-spirited and I cannot remember which CLP minister talked about the oldies just getting on the bus and travelling around enjoying the air conditioning. It was one of the most abysmal statements I ever heard.

It is often the people in my electorate who do not have a car. It is expensive to have a car, even if there are subsidies for registration, it is still expensive and a luxury for many people to be able to have their own vehicle. A lot of people in my electorate access bus travel, so I am very pleased to be part of a government that has reinstated free bus travel. It gives people that option and the opportunity to be able to, if you are living in Palmerston, travel to see grandchildren and families in the northern suburbs or a friend at Casuarina, or travel into town for special shopping to buy a birthday present, or some other reason where you may choose to come into Darwin.

For some of us, it is not seen as a big deal to be able to travel to Darwin, but for many people who live in Palmerston it is a big deal. To me, the free bus travel has been a very positive thing.

The other thing I am pleased this government is looking at is a retirement village in the rural area. The people who have lived and grown up in the rural area—my mother was one of those people who did not have that option. She has gone into a nursing home in a more urban area. I know some people in the rural area would like to be able to keep their animals. They would like to be able to have chooks, a garden and greater space when they retire or they realise they cannot continue to maintain their block. They want to have a retirement village or nursing home in an area where they can keep their animals or have other animals, or go for a walk during the day and spend time sitting under a tree in a lovely garden area.

My mother and I talk about 40 or 50 years on a 10-acre block at Berrimah and then having to move into a room the size of a private hospital room. It is really tough for those people. I am pleased that one of the things we are talking about is—not only in Darwin but in Central Australia as well—how we can cater for people who have a desire to move into a retirement village and downsize, but not have it beyond their finances, and to be comfortable with it.

Mr Wood: Waiting for it.

Ms LAWLER: I pick up on the interjection from the Member for Nelson. It will probably be you and me there.

Mr Wood: I am going bush.

Ms LAWLER: I might go bush, too, and sit under a tree.

It is about having those options, and that is what people want. Some people choose to downsize and be in an area where they can get a coffee and walk to the movies, but there are plenty of Territorians who want to continue to live a bush life and be with their animals, their chooks and geese perhaps, and have the rural lifestyle through old age.

I am a supporter of older people. That is what happens when you get closer to that age yourself. My husband is retired now. It is about conversations with people in your electorate, but it is broader than that as well. We

reassure Territorians that we are reviewing that scheme, but it is about making it a better, fairer scheme that will keep Territorians here in the long term. How do you do that in a way that is fair?

We have talked about the sorting. Nobody wants to see that. We want to see a genuine scheme. The other side of the coin is, that brings people to the Territory as well. For people with families down south and those who have moved to the Territory for work, it would be lovely for them to bring their elderly family to the Territory and tell them what a great place it is to spend retirement. The weather is so much nicer than dreary old Melbourne or Tasmania.

I commend the Minister for Territory Families. It is hard work to make change and inform people across the Territory. It is about getting the message out, but I also think the 18 members of our Caucus have done a good job of talking with and listening to Territorians. Each person in our Caucus has done that. They have been listening and making sure we get plenty of feedback to make sure we have a scheme that is great for Territory seniors.

Mrs WORDEN (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to the Opposition Leader for bringing this on today. It is the first time I have been grateful for a GBD motion, because it has given us the opportunity to talk about what we are doing and allay some of the fears that have been rumbling in the community since this process began.

The review process is afoot, and it is a good process. It has been going on for at least a couple of months. As the member just stated, we have been out there talking and it has been one of the best periods of discussion with people over the last 12 months. We get people in our electorate office on the daily that are really keen, whether they come in angry or concerned, which is probably the better description for how they are feeling.

That conversation has been exciting and is ongoing. I want to take a moment to thank all of those seniors who have taken the time. It is not just the seniors, it has been the prospective people that have talked about it, because looking forward to retirement is one of those little things that comes with your senior years.

I thank them for their participation. About a month ago I held Christmas in July for my seniors. We decided to bring our seniors together in the middle of the year when the weather was better. It was a great forum, a time to celebrate with them and have some fun and thank them for the work they do. It was a time we could have an open discussion, and we did that. I had well over 100 people come to that. I thank them all for their participation and feedback because it is great and has been exciting.

The other people I would like to thank are my electorate officer and assistant electorate officer who have been having ongoing conversations with the community, particularly when I am not present in the office.

These last couple of weeks of sittings times has not stopped people coming through the door. They are having some great conversations with our community members. I know Alicia and Sue from my office are across the issues and are having those meaningful conversations.

It has been wonderful to hear their perspectives and how they feel about the difference the scheme makes to their everyday lives. Up front, we could acknowledge that the process to date has not been perfect, but it has been a process and is living up to that election commitment.

I believe that whilst going through that process, there has been some deliberate scaremongering, which is a pity. This has caused some confusion. The good thing is that in our electorate offices and when we are talking to people in general we are able to allay those concerns. Today we were able to put on the public record the way we are going. That scaremongering has not been helpful and has been disappointing.

It has been stimulating though—some great discussions, probably some of the best that we have had. From that, the important thing is what we have all learned so far. I describe it as ‘learned’ because it has been a big learning process. There have been discussions about what is currently in the scheme and what is out. I do not know if everybody on the scheme fully understands the range of options, and we have heard today the comments about glasses on the scheme.

We have had people who have been on the scheme for up to 10 years and never fully understood that they could access concessions for spectacles. I am in one of those electorates with a lot of seniors, unlike the Member for Drysdale, having well over 800 senior Territorians. Fortunately, I think I have just about met most of them between this process and doorknocking last year. I continue doorknocking and think I have met most of them now.

There is a diverse range of opinions. Some of that is in the form of whether they are in the scheme or out of the current scheme because of what happened before. Most of it is really about their life, the things that have happened in their lives and those influences. There are people in my electorate, who I have sat down with and had long discussions with who are on great pensions. They have worked extremely hard in their lives, and their partner may have had good super as well. They are very comfortable, acknowledge that up front, and are open to talking about those things.

They appreciate the little things that help them with their power and water and have come to learn it is something they will get that has formed part of their financial budgeting. It is one of those things. People have told us that each year those concessions allowed them to go on holiday. They go on holidays, sometimes overseas for long periods of time, and are enjoying their retirement which, of course, they are completely entitled to do.

There are the people for whom it makes all the difference. There are those continuing and are just over the threshold, thanks to the means test that got brought in a few years back. It is quite complex and I believe that their viewpoint on the current scheme or any prospective scheme changes is formed by whether they are inside or outside the scheme, and also their life experiences.

A lot of that is about their financials and how they are travelling. Life does not always turn out how you plan. There are a lot of people that planned for the future a long time ago. Things came along. I have a relative who planned and had great super, but close to retirement they separated from their partner and that super is starting to dwindle. You are looking at two houses, two vehicles and on top of that, they invested what they had left into something that looked like a good scheme to keep them going, keep them busy in their retirement, something they were passionate about and lost their super, ending up on the Commonwealth pension.

It is not for us to judge those life choices. Lots of people make choices that do not pan out the way they wanted. Women who separate from their partners, often with children in their care at a time when they have not had a long working career, not have a lot of super behind them. They were looking towards super that included two people and find themselves separated and starting again later in life. That contributes to the savings they have on retirement and some of those people are now becoming seniors. Life choices, life not panning out how you expected, influences how people feel about the scheme.

I want it noted that the message I have heard from people is that they are not rorting the scheme. I want my constituents to be aware that I know seniors in my electorate are not rorting the scheme. If there are administrative issues in the scheme, that is what they are. If there are loopholes in the scheme that some people are taking full advantage of and exploiting, that is for us as government. What I am hearing is that the minister in that area is taking responsibility and that is pleasing.

We know that seniors are not running around deliberately rorting the system. There is a difference between that and taking advantage of loopholes. That is our responsibility and we take that seriously.

I want to talk about the contributions of our seniors and what they mean to us. I have a gentleman by the name of Anwar. He will not mind me speaking off the cuff about him. He sits outside my office three days a week and is a retired Territory schoolteacher. Lots of his ex-students come past him each day. We have just upskilled him to become a Commissioner of Oaths. He sits outside my office collecting for charity. He is extremely well known and gives his time because he wants to make a difference. He contributes tirelessly every week. Other than when he is travelling, which he does regularly and is totally enjoying his retirement, he is a tireless volunteer.

I will also talk about Marian, who I met through Neighbourhood Watch and was here for a seniors' function last week. She is, I would say, approaching 80. She is a constituent of the Member for Karama. She is delightful and has spent possibly the last 10 years volunteering tirelessly for Neighbourhood Watch.

Jim McAdam, also in my electorate, has been with the Waratahs netball club for the last 20 years, volunteering as an umpire. He is a well known JP and has been a marriage celebrant, marrying people in the Territory for a very long time. These are amazing people who give back.

Volunteering is in addition to the support—I heard the Member for Drysdale talk about how important it is, in terms of her own circumstances, to have her mum here. Every year my dad comes for up to six months. It is important, particularly when you are in this House. My dad is the one ferrying my teenage daughter from appointments and looking after bits and pieces so we can work. He has been in my life, standing right behind me in everything I have done, since he retired. It is such a great support to have. I am looking forward to

when my dad will be here permanently as a Territory senior, from next year. He is returning home to sell up and move here; it will be great.

What is also important in this debate is the health and welfare of our seniors. You have to run the air conditioner more when you get a little older. I must admit I am starting to feel the heat a little more these days, so the air conditioner might be on a little more than it was 10 years ago. I agree completely with our Speaker; the one thing we continuously hear is how important those power concessions are to allow people to run their air conditioners and things like sleep apnoea machines all night, every night. It is those extras that people need. As people get older they might have a disability and there are needs for that.

I have not really touched on disability but will briefly. This is obviously not just about pensioners, but also carers. For me, that has created an extra layer of confusion, particularly for carers who might need electricity for running specific machines that keep themselves or their loved ones healthy. It is important, particularly with the cost of power here.

One of my observations is that the scheme, as is, requires some clarity. It is something I have pained over and discussed at length with people. Is the scheme about saying thank you? Is it about valuing the input Territorians have made in building this place that we have now? Or is it about helping our most vulnerable? In terms of Labor values, we would lean towards assisting more vulnerable people. However, I believe that this scheme needs to be a mix to meet the needs of that range of people.

I do not really want to pre-empt the outcome of the review with further comments about what should be in and what should be out. I have written to the minister formally, as the voice of Sanderson, about the things we have heard. I had some robust and excellent discussions with the minister because she has had an open door for discussion, which has been great. I do not pre-empt the review, but there are still some confusions about the Seniors Card you get at age 60. It should possibly be a different scheme for carers. I am not convinced that carers and pensioners have much in common. The carers I have spoken to and who have been lobbying me do not believe they have a lot in common with seniors and find that very difficult.

We need to provide very clear information; we are getting there and this debate today is an important part of that. We need to acknowledge that it is complex. When you start unpacking each of the individual components of the scheme as it is, it gets more and more complex as you go. We need to find a middle ground and give some consideration about age, given that the national age for pensioners is now 65. I believe that capping, and I have raised this with the minister, is misunderstood. We need to understand what that means and make sure the community understands as well, as I believe there is genuine misunderstanding about what capping would mean and look like.

I believe we need to look strongly at eligibility. We have heard time and time again that there are people who are possibly living interstate and not using our system as honestly as we would like. Again, that is an administrative tidy up. We acknowledge that and we need to do something about it.

I have taken the steps of writing. While we need to invest, it is not an endless bucket because we are in tough economic times. There are a lot of things to work through.

This is not—and this is a message that has been a bit of scaremongering—a cost reduction exercise. It is not about saving budget. There has never been any mention on our side about this being about cutting costs. I am not sure where that idea came from. This gives us an opportunity today to put that out there. That is not what this is about. This is about knowing, in a contemporary, modern sense, what our seniors need to keep them here.

What support would they like to see from government to make the Territory an attractive place that allows them to stay. If you are on a pension, which is just over \$20 000 a year, this is a very tough place to live, particularly if you are in the private rental market.

We have lots of things to work through. The grandfathering by the previous government was a mistake. It has created a 'haves and have not' system. It has left a bad taste in the mouth of many. It has been mentioned today that it is more than 3000.

The travel component is not for everybody, but I think we need to make intrastate—and also allow people to come here to visit when our seniors are unable to travel themselves. It is one possibility to look at. If you have people traveling intrastate and visiting, the money stays in the Territory. That is an important component. There is real merit in doing that.

We do not all have the solutions. I do not have the solutions, but we are listening. We continue to listen. People's concerns have been heard. This has been genuine consultation. I have been to a consultation session myself and seen the work firsthand that is being undertaken by the departmental staff. I give a huge congratulations to them and the minister; well done. It is really hard work. I have seen them stand in front of some very irate people and ride those waves. They just keep giving information so that people are well informed and listen. It has been a great process—not perfect, but we have gotten there.

I have sent out two letters and a survey to seniors, and they have responded in droves, which is pleasing. I have been to one of the forums and it has been a great learning curve for me. We do not have the solutions but I appreciate the opportunity to contribute today. I look forward to a fair and more robust scheme, a more modern scheme, that is sustainable—a really important word we need to think about—and demonstrates a value of seniors to the Territory.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Mr Deputy Speaker, I support our seniors and very hard-working Palmerston seniors. When I started campaigning for the role of Member for Brennan I visited many seniors across Palmerston and spent many mornings and afternoons with them. I drank many, many cups of tea.

These catch-ups were delightful and brought back many fond memories of times when I would do this with my grandparents, particularly my nana, who I had the greatest respect for. I have been brought up in a family that views seniors as very important people. They are the most respected members of my family. In my family seniors, or our elders, are always our first priority. This includes at any family gatherings or meal preparations our elders are always serviced first with a drink or a meal prior to any other person at the function. This is then followed by our children, our women then last is always our men.

I am hard-wired to stand up for our seniors; it is the only way I know. It is one reason I stood to be a member and be on the Labor side of government. This is a government that stands up for people and families first. We must not forget what was happening to our seniors prior to the 2016 election and the new Labor government coming in.

And I say, let us not forget the facts. The facts are that CLP cut seniors from the scheme. They made seniors pay for bus fares, for parking at the hospital and pay fines for parking at the hospital while these seniors were in the hospital. They did not consult with seniors; they just acted as they knew best. Now I ask, what sort of people in the CLP do these things to the people I respect most in my family and my community?

The Gunner government was elected in August 2016. The following actions to support seniors then happened: bus fares and parking at the hospital is free for seniors again and all seniors will now get something under the scheme.

Most importantly we are a government that listened to our seniors, and I am very happy we are consulting with our seniors. We are in total contrast to the CLP and I am very proud we are, as the principles and values I grew up with for seniors are within my Labor colleagues here today in this Chamber; we are on the side of our seniors.

Yes, there is currently a consultation paper from our government as we want to consult with and listen to our seniors. And yes, these documents released by Territory Families prior to the consultation paper did alarm some seniors and we have heard our government apologise a number of times for that, as it was not the intention.

I also attended the Palmerston seniors' consultation forums where there was a large attendance from Palmerston and the rural area. The seniors spoke of their own complex issues and concessions. Some got them and some did not; some wanted a card system and many did not.

However, it was clear that there was no fair system in place and the different situations are complex and need a lot of consultation and thought, which this government has committed to. What I also know is that this government wants to make its seniors' concessions better and fairer for all of our NT seniors. This was the objective of the whole consultation exercise, and by goodness we will do this.

The seniors in my electorate and many others from around Palmerston have come to my office and are concerned about what others have said to them about the consultation paper. This concerned them, and concerned me even more, as the things they were telling me were simply not true.

Again, I ask myself, what sort of people would spread these rumours and try to upset our seniors who do not need this worry in their life; as they deserve better? I would sit with our seniors and answer their questions

and tell them that I will always be one of the first persons standing up for seniors as it is the way I have been brought up. Then I found there was a petition running, which was tabled today, asking government to look after seniors. I was so pleased as this reinforced what this government believes in.

I am very proud that the Chief Minister and I signed the petition during our fantastic day of Caucus in Palmerston, where all our Labor members attended and supported our people and services in Palmerston. We had a great lunch together in the Palmerston Shopping Centre and caught up with locals, many of them seniors. The Chief Minister even offered to table the petition on that same day, so I am very pleased to see the petition in parliament today.

I treasure every moment with seniors in Palmerston as it brings back so many good memories of my past elders and it is like I am still with them; they are our family. They are the people who built Darwin and still do a lot of volunteer jobs for our community. They are the people who brought their families here and deserve the utmost respect. I will continue to visit and support our over 50s club—which I am now a proud member of—our Palmerston and rural seniors hub, and the Cazalys seniors morning teas. I sincerely thank every senior in the NT, particularly our Palmerston seniors, for giving so much.

I will always stand up for you and I am very pleased this government wants to make your concessions fairer and better for you all.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Mr Deputy Speaker, this is an important motion raised by the Opposition Leader and I thank him for doing that. Our government gave a clear commitment in the lead up to the 2016 NT election to review the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme and I, for one, am very glad we did. It is a very sensitive scheme that impacts on thousands of Territorians, that is not benefitting Territorians as best it could.

The Member for Goyder made it quite clear during her input that reviews are a necessary part of life, they keep us on track and tell us whether or not something is working, or working as well as it should, and gives us a planned way forward to make sure we improve the benefit of that scheme. This is a great opportunity for the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme to undergo that exact process.

I want to acknowledge the Minister for Territory Families for her leadership in this area as it is a tricky subject. Many Territorians have voiced concerns, and on the flipside, share their ideas about how we can improve the scheme to benefit more Territorians. The minister has conducted herself professionally and openly and has been a great source of strength and information for me through this process as her assistant minister for seniors. I have had the opportunity to engage with a number of seniors throughout the Territory on this important scheme.

A number of senior Territorians live in my electorate of Karama, which takes in all of Malak and Karama. It is fantastic that we have so many Territorians who feel empowered, comfortable and encouraged to be part of this review process.

It is very important for us, as the government of the day, to make sure we engage with Territorians to find out how this scheme is benefiting them—we have talked with those who are missing out—and that we make the changes that need to be made.

I was surprised to find that this scheme has been operating for 38 years; that is longer than I have been in existence. To find that in my entire lifetime this scheme has never been reviewed properly, I was devastated to say the least. I am sure it was a series of consecutive oversights over the last 38 years, but that is, no doubt, a very long time for a scheme not to be reviewed.

I was concerned, as are many other Territorians, about the inadequacies of the scheme, for want of a better word, and the roting that took place with travel concessions. That is what can happen when you do not review a scheme regularly to find out what can be done better.

I thank the departmental staff and the Office of Senior Territorians for taking the lead. As a former public servant I understand how hard the review process can be, how open to negativity you become. I thank all the staff for their hard work. We still have a fair way to go, but I believe in their capability and thank them for the long hours and their dedication in making sure we deliver more for Territorians.

The Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme does not just focus on seniors, though. It has been vital for us to talk to our carers, and there are many. They do an amazing job. It is our responsibility to make sure they are supported in their endeavours. I always advocated, in my previous role of suicide prevention, that if

we do not look after our carers, who will? If we take our carers out of the system we operate in, everything else falls to pieces.

Thank you to all our carers, who are doing their part diligently. Many of them care day-in day-out without seeking any recognition or support. Just because you do not seek support, does not mean it should not be afforded to you.

It has also been great to have a number of other Territorians who are concerned about this review asking questions and finding things out, because they have a family member or friend who is a current participant. That goes to show that it can be confusing to follow the intricacies of such an extensive review when there is a lot of incorrect information in the public domain.

The Minister for Territory Families articulated today that she has told Territorians that the scheme will not be slashed. This is not a money-grab by government by any means. This is a way of us reviewing a scheme that is well overdue for a review to make sure it benefits as many Territorians as possible.

Some of the things locally, in my area, have been the stories coming from seniors. It has been a great opportunity, like the Member for Brennan said, to talk to seniors in the community. To have those one-on-one conversations is one of the most vital things I have learned in my role as a local member. It can be confronting to doorknock and speak to people face to face, but the value of those conversations is second to none.

I thank all those seniors who have come up to me, who have answered the door when I have knocked and spoken to me frankly about their thoughts and ideas on this scheme. I went in as a blank canvas. I was not sure how it would impact on everybody, and it was interesting to hear the feedback.

What I have learned from speaking with the Member for Namatjira and a number of my remote bush Caucus colleagues is that the scheme is not benefiting our remote communities as well as it should. I understand there are many eligible people in our communities who are not accessing the scheme, and that needs to change. We also have people who are eligible and are taking advantage of the scheme. That also needs to change.

I mentioned the travel rorting as one component, but it is clear from my conversations with community members that they, too, believe the scheme needs to be reviewed. They hope for no detrimental changes to impact on their current concessions, but when you talk to them about the inequity and the fact some people are missing out altogether while others are getting extreme amounts of the concession, they can see that we, as government, need to find that middle ground.

It was interesting for me to have a number—and I would hazard a guess that well over 90% of the hundreds of people I have spoken to have said they would like to see the power and water concessions capped. At the moment, I think they are the only two of the nine concessions available that do not have a cap on them. We have seen—and the minister has mentioned it many times—a small population of our eligible scheme participants are chewing up a large component of the concessions themselves.

I have spoken to a number of Territorians about the concessions and the ones they like. Power and water seem to be the ones that come to the forefront every single time. Territorians, and our seniors in particular, have taken great pride in telling me they are able to follow their Jacana Energy bill, turn it over and see what their component is and what their concession is under the scheme. A lot of them have told me they would like that to stay. It is a constant reminder, every quarter that we, as government, are helping them to stay here in the Territory and further, that we appreciate everything they have provided to the Territory during their time and how much we value and would love to keep them here.

The review was opened on 10 July this year and closes on 31 August. There has been a lot of information out there and our minister and her agency have done a fantastic job to promote that. As was previously mentioned by a number of colleagues in this Chamber, there have been information sessions. I have not been able to attend these sessions but have spoken to a number of people who have and they found the information sessions quite helpful.

The best thing about the information sessions is that they provided an opportunity for people to come together to discuss this issue specifically. There were a number of people I spoke to who did not feel comfortable asking questions in a public forum and were encouraged by the department and other people in the room to ask the hard questions, make their opinions known, fill out the survey, contact their local member or the department or the minister's office. I think that is the most important thing. When I have spoken to people

one-on-one they tend to tell me more information than they would in an open forum, and I operate in the same way.

There are over 25 000 participants currently eligible for the scheme and I am pleased to see our minister ensured that each and every one of those Territorians received a mail-out of the survey and were encouraged to complete it. Like a number of my colleagues, including the Member for Drysdale, I also did my own mail-out of the survey; it was a worthwhile investment. I followed up with targeted doorknocks and phone calls and, like the Member for Casuarina said, made sure our information on this scheme and this review was out there in the public domain. We encouraged people at every opportunity to complete the survey if they felt the need.

I have been quite fortunate to get into the office during sittings this week and find completed forms left under my door. I have told a number of people out there, if you do not want to send it in the mail, just walk by my office when you are in the Karama Shopping Plaza and pop it under the door if the door is closed, and that is working very well.

It has been interesting to hear a number of my colleagues talk about the issues that have been raised directly with them and to see the similarities and the differences. I guess this will happen all over. My electorate is Darwin urban-based. The issues and the community in which I live is different to a number of other communities, especially our bush seats, so it is fantastic to hear the needs of our seniors and carers out there as well.

One of the things that really stood out for me was the cost of administering the current scheme. I read the cost is \$1.5m, that sounds like an enormous amount of money to me. I have spoken with a number of seniors about how best we could reach those efficiencies that are much-needed under this scheme. As the Opposition Leader and a couple of the others raised, the seniors I have spoken to are overwhelmingly not in favour of introducing a debit card.

We have spoken about other ideas of how we could have the concessions in place and one of the key messages from the people I have spoken with is that they want flexibility. They want the new scheme to reflect that if they want to continue with their power and water concessions, it will be capped and they are happy to find a way to do that.

In my area I have a number of people who have advocated for home gardening services and regular lawn-mowing services. Some people told me they have never accessed the travel component of the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme because they have no interest or inkling to jump on a plane and fly down south. They love it so much in the Territory. That message hit home for me.

I agree with the Member for Drysdale. Why should we be sending and encouraging our seniors to travel interstate when they could be travelling in our own back yard and enjoying the beautiful lifestyle we have in the Territory?

It was disheartening to hear that there were incentives to keep seniors here in the Territory, but it was disappointing to find out that a number of our seniors felt that they were good concessions, but it was not for them. That is why it is important to hear the feedback and make sure everybody has their say by the deadline of 31 August.

It has been a privilege for me to support the Minister for Territory Families with this important review. I think it is a sensitive topic that needed to be looked at and reviewed. I am excited about what the outcome of this review will be, and the way forward, particularly to see more Territorians benefit. It was never about slashing and burning or a money grab for government. This was about looking at a scheme that has been in existence for 38 years and has never been reviewed properly.

I would like to take it further and make sure that if there are any other government-funded schemes out there that have not undertaken a review in the past 38 years, we need to get on top of that.

I have had brilliant conversations with a number of amazing carers, seniors and pensioners. It has been fantastic to hear their input about how they benefit currently and how they would like to benefit from the review of this scheme.

I want to close by encouraging everybody out there, that if you have not had your say on the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme, it is not too late. The review closes on 31 August. There are a number of ways you can have your say. You can visit the Have Your Say website, contact a local member or the minister's

office or speak with the Department of Territory Families and the Office of Senior Territorians. If you do not feel comfortable doing that, start by talking to someone who has also been impacted by the scheme. Talk to other people about how they have been able to find their voice in this, and make sure you encourage as many people as possible to have their say on this scheme.

Mr COLLINS (Fong Lim): In speaking to the Opposition Leader's motion, I will start by thanking him for bringing the motion, as it provides an opportunity to clear the air.

I will not talk for long. I will not rehash things that have already been said, but I do want to confirm to the seniors who are constituents of mine that this process is being undertaken by the government with every intention of properly reviewing the scheme. I would like to confirm that this is our commitment. There are certainly fears and rumblings in the community. That has become obvious.

That is probably twofold. There may be some misinformation or at least poorly worded information provided early on that did not assist the process. I think the Opposition Leader made that point in his speech. We have to face the fact that we, as politicians, are not trusted and, understandably, seniors would have concerns when they were informed the scheme was going to be amended, apparently without their input.

This process has opened those lines of communication. As the Member for Karama said, the communication with seniors in the electorate has been interesting, refreshing, and difficult at times, but usually well informed and well intentioned.

I attended the seniors and carers information day at Bayview and spent the morning there with about 60 seniors and carers. I listened to their concerns; they were well informed and well intentioned. I confirm to all of those seniors that we are taking those concerns seriously. I thank my electorate officer and my electorate officer assistant. They have undertaken the process of telephoning as many seniors in the electorate as they can get in contact with, including sending out surveys. We have been collecting and reading the surveys and forwarding those concerns to the minister.

The ultimate aim of the government is to provide a fairer system which provides more people with benefits under the scheme. It is not about reducing benefits and cutting costs for the scheme. I agree with a point made by the Member for Nelson when he said that when this process is completed and there is a draft available that it should be open for further comment. Seniors deserve that, at the very least.

I support the Opposition Leader's motion.

Mr PAECH (Namatjira): Madam Speaker, I take the opportunity to speak as a rural member and a bush member representing the constituencies of people living outside of urban and metropolitan areas. It is important that they are not the forgotten people and are represented in this Chamber.

I am speaking on their behalf and present some of their views. This has already been done by the Opposition Leader and some of my parliamentary colleagues. I am a bush member and I made an endeavour to send the survey out from my electorate office to those living in the rural parts of my electorate, being Connellan, Ilparpa and Ross Highway, to make sure they were able to participate in the survey and get a response.

As a bush member there is a lot of travel involved—lots of kilometres and getting out and about to see people in very remote parts of the Northern Territory. As I set out on my adventures in the great desert region, a number of surveys came with me and I took the opportunity to sit down, whether at the front of the shop, the school or on the veranda of a house with someone having a cup of tea and having a yarn about what it means for them to be an aged person in the Northern Territory and on country.

I took the time to sit with them and fill out the survey so they were able to make sure the voices of people living in remote, regional and rural parts was heard and could be brought back to the department and the minister to get a clear indication of what people outside of our towns and cities are thinking and feeling. This ensures that when we do these reviews, the views and interests of people living in the bush are heard. People in the bush do it tough, and we need to look at ways to help aged people in the bush, who have contributed so much to society and the Northern Territory over the years.

I just want to pick up on a point that members have made in this Chamber today about people in the bush. We need to remember there are a significant number of people who come to town during the course of their life and take up employment, pay their taxes and contribute to the Northern Territory. When they become old they deserve a level of respect and deserve to return to country to live out their days in peace and quiet.

They deserve access to a system that looks after them and does not discriminate because they do not live in a city or a town.

That is what this review sets out to do, to look at our unique lifestyle in the Northern Territory and make sure we understand your connection to country. We understand that, as an aged person, you might want to move back to the pastoral property your family owns. You might want to live out your days watching the cattle graze and drinking cups of tea, watching the younger generation contribute to the great cattle industry. You too should have access to a fair and equitable concession scheme for aged people. It is important that when you leave the boundaries of the bright city lights, you should still be entitled to have your fair and accessible level to the concession scheme.

The Member for Karama pointed out, this is quite an old system. I am 30 this year; it is long overdue for an overhaul and is a lot older than me. I know the greys are coming through. This place is giving me greys already.

We know the scheme needs to change because there are a number of areas that are not fair and equitable to all Territorians. I will focus on the rural folks, so Members for Daly and Goyder, I am sure you will understand and appreciate where I am coming from.

People in the rural area have a unique lifestyle and are very strong on keeping rural, rural. We need to make sure that rural residents are entitled to concessions we would not usually think about. For instance, quite often their water source is through a bore. They cannot claim for water concessions, but they have to run electricity to run a water bore. That is important when we talk about power costs. We know that power costs in the Northern Territory are high, but we need to look at that. It is because of the lifestyle in the Northern Territory—there are not many other places in the country that have the same level or the same climate conditions that we see here.

People in the bush have raised a number of concerns about the concessions scheme and what they would like to see in the concession scheme. I represent a very diverse and wonderful electorate. A lot of people in the electorate of Namatjira do not want to travel to Adelaide or Melbourne, they want to get on the bush bus from Mutitjulu or Docker River or Ampilatwatja and be able to travel to visit family, have some relief, go out and catch up and hear the gossip and the radar going on in other communities. They want concession for bush buses, for intra-Territory travel to visit their loved ones.

Coming out of these surveys and veranda yarns I have been having with a lot of my constituents are some important areas we need to consider and to look at how we can build upon them.

The electorate of Namatjira is home to the Old Timers Village, a wonderful facility in the electorate of Namatjira, just outside of Alice Springs; all the good things are in the electorate of Namatjira.

I went to the Old Timers Fete a couple of weeks ago and volunteered for the day. I was at the door taking money so we could fundraise for the Old Timers Fete people coming through. I had a lot of conversations with seniors who live there or visit their friends and family there. It was another great opportunity to speak to people and raise awareness about surveys and where they can have their say and input into what it is we are trying to achieve, which is a fair and equitable pensioner concession scheme.

Being out there and speaking with people at Old Timers Village is a wonderful thing. I encourage all members in the Chamber to do it regularly. We are having a morning tea at the Old Timers home in a couple weeks in which I will do another lot of consulting with my aged constituents to talk about what this means.

We have done a lot of public consultation. I have not had the level of consultation that other members have had with people coming to their offices because being a bush electorate means a number of my constituents have not had the opportunity to be on the scheme. I am very much looking forward to continuing to work with the Minister for Territory Families, who is heading up the pensioner concession scheme and bringing it into a contemporary view so we can ensure that whether you live in the bright lights of Port Darwin or Brainting or the best electorate, Namatjira, the pensioner concession scheme is fair, equitable and a system we are all proud of.

Our senior Territorians are some of our most important Territorians. They hold a lot of stories and knowledge. Madam Speaker said in her speech, 'Their eyes and ears might get dodgy, but their memories are very strong. They will always remember the things that have happened.' It is important that we get out and talk to them to make sure they are aware.

The website has been very good. I have been able to direct a lot of people to Have Your Say, whether it is in conversations, market stalls, doorknocking, community visits or social media—to direct people to have their say, because we know the Northern Territory pensioner concession scheme is a good scheme. It provides a range of goods and services like electricity, water, spectacles, sewerage, motor vehicle registration and licencing.

One of the strong things coming out of the scheme for people in the bush is the ability to have some form of concession for intra-Territory travel so that people can get up from Mutitjulu to see people in Port Keats or anywhere in the Territory. It is really important to be a Territory that harnesses and promotes our people to travel around within the great Northern Territory so they can participate.

There are a range of retirement villages in the electorate of Namatjira. Regular conversations with them about this scheme is important because we need to have contemporary bills and acts in this House to represent our changing, ageing demographic. Times changes, the cost of living fluctuates in different areas, and we need to make sure we have legislation in this place that reflects the changing times.

I am very happy the Opposition Leader brought this to the House for us to discuss. I am very much looking forward to working with everyone, including my bush colleagues, to ensure the interests of people living out there is well represented. I had a good few cups of tea with people on some pastoral properties because we should not forget people outside of the towns.

It is not only remote Aboriginal communities it is pastoral properties, outstations, town camps and tourism townships like Yulara in my electorate, where we have a number of people who are still working but are ageing and want to retire at some point and remain in the Northern Territory. We are looking at ways we can make it more appealing for our ageing population to stay in the Territory to keep that knowledge and those stories here.

I wanted to place on record my support. I congratulate the Minister for Territory Families, who is heading up the pensioner concession scheme. It is not an easy task but one I have been very optimistic about and have been advocating. I was certainly very welcoming of the decision to look at reforming this scheme because a number of people in the bush, for various reasons, have not had the opportunity to go on the pensioner concession scheme. I am looking forward to making sure that, moving on, we have a lot of people in the bush who take up the scheme.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): I thank everyone for contributing to this debate today and I think it is an important issue. For some of us in this House who are getting a bit older it is more in the forefront of our thoughts than those who might be a bit younger, like the Deputy Speaker. Only 30? I just cannot believe that. I was grey at 25; you have an easy life.

There are a couple of comments I would like to make. There is a lot of argument that goes on in this House and the previous CLP government did make some mistakes, but I do not think that becomes the excuse for this government to make mistakes as well. I think it is time the government moved on and stood by its policies.

The previous CLP government made some changes in this area and I can proudly say that I was pretty annoyed with them. I think Madam Speaker was in the party at the time and she was also against those. One of my concerns was that it was two weeks before my birthday, which really upset me.

The issue with that, of course, is they made those changes and I disagreed with them and am willing to say that. What we need to admit is that all of this dissent being caused by the seniors—I think the minister said there was some mischief from a few people, or a small number. The thing is, it was the fact sheet that caused that.

I was glad to hear a few members admit that there was a fact sheet that led to some of this misinformation. In hindsight that was a good thing because it focused this whole House, and we have spent about three hours talking about this very important issue which goes to helping senior Territorians address the cost of living and stay in the Territory.

Some of us are lucky in that we have most of our kids and our grandkids here and have reason to stay. Some of us though are not lucky enough to have family here but still want to stay because they like the lifestyle.

If we look at some of the arguments that have been thrown around—why this original fact sheet came out. Since then, one of the other problems has been that the consultation has not been that good. I think some of the questionnaires and surveys have not been very direct. The Member for Nelson pointed out that when you

talk about the current scheme, it is not clear whether the old ones are included or the CLP ones are excluded. All of these issues really need to be made quite clear.

If we look at some of the disparities—and the government needs to have a look at explaining these to people. I raised it in the speech I read on behalf of the Deputy Leader—that is, the number of people living in houses. If you go out into a community and look at a place like Wadeye, you could have 20 people living in a house. There could be a misconception that one of maybe four seniors is claiming a benefit and no one else is, so you have a disparity there.

The Deputy Speaker also mentioned the issue of bores, but I will go a bit further than that. It is not just bores. My property and the Member for Nelson's have gravity feed water, but a lot of people do not. They could have a bore, a pressure pump and a septic tank. The newer septic tanks use a pump out system, meaning three electric pumps. The other complication is what benefits are seniors getting who have solar; they are going to claim less electricity.

To give you an idea of the impact of what those things have on a property, our power bill in a quarter—we have two people living there with a 4KVA solar system, a bore, a pressure pump and the pump on our septic. Our power bill is about \$500. If you compare that to what someone in town pays just for their water—and I am not paying for water—that is a lot cheaper than the water bill.

My net outlay in that area is zero and that would apply to a lot of seniors, so those people will not be claiming the rebate and should not be punished for that. It should not be used as an excuse to cap it because some are making more and others making less. We should be looking at ways of compensating those people who do not have water or sewerage connected to their front door.

When we talk about the number of people who responded to the survey, it is interesting that the minister said there was 2000. I think these figures are roughly right, but 6000 signed the petition. That is a bit of a concern. Is that survey hitting the right people and asking the right information? All the people on the consolidative committee signed that petition. The Chief Minister signed that petition. It is a very significant issue.

The Deputy Speaker mentioned that things in the bush are a lot different. The people there miss out on a lot of services and benefits because they cannot claim them and do not know about them. We talk about going onto the Have Your Say site. I am not too sure how they do that when they are at Woodycupaldiya or Emu Point or a lot of other communities that do not have internet access.

The other day I asked questions on what we are doing about Telstra and the criticism I have of Telstra in some rural areas. How do we address that? Posting the survey out also creates problems; we have all this stuff with the plebiscite and posting that out and saying the people in the bush will not get a chance to say anything. Well it is your party saying that, so you should be considering that when you do these mail outs.

A lot of these people do not collect the mail; it is delivered to the council. This time of year some are on bush holidays or outstations and will not see it anyway. We need to be more proactive in the bush settings to get information back from them to see what they are claiming.

I have to disagree with the Member for Nelson on this one as well when he talks about people in the bush. The schooling may not be as good as it is in the city. Our constitution says that everyone is entitled to the same level of education no matter where you live in this country. It is not good enough to accept that education in the bush is of a lower standard than what we have in the city. I disagree with the Member for Nelson and point out that it is in the constitution. If he wants to change the constitution, let him change it, but I do not think he would get that.

There was a petition lodged in this parliament about people in Bachelor and Adelaide River. They are not very far away and want to be able to access Darwin services. They go to the clinic and get a referral to the doctor. If people drive a car to RDH they get free parking. People say to me, 'Why do they get free parking and we cannot get subsidy for our transport?' That is a valid question.

Most of the people in Adelaide River, Batchelor and Dundee are seniors. They are not getting any benefit out of this. We need to look at ways they can get a benefit that compensates—a free bus. I say that loosely because I think the CLP put a charge on it. They have a bus service here in town and people at Batchelor and Adelaide River do not have that.

We have to make sure these people get an even share of it. I hear some people say they do not want to travel interstate and go on holiday. The scheme has been in for 38 years. People travelled down south to

see their family and I think they used to get return tickets, and then it was changed to a refund amount. Eventually it came to be an amount every two years. That has evolved over the 38 years of the scheme and needs a review.

We have a lot of seniors, and the life expectancy of Indigenous people is increasing with more of them getting to that age, which is fantastic. They are having more say in this. They do not want to travel interstate; they just want to travel around the Territory, and we have to make allowances for that. Those people are also entitled to additional compensation to counteract the fact that people in the city get free buses. They still get their interstate airfares, but they also get free buses and free parking at RDH.

Seniors living interstate get free train travel or subsidies, and you can virtually travel anywhere. It is not unusual for people to have a holiday every two years. Most of us go on holiday at least once a year, if not every two years. Rural people, like me, prefer to stay at home; that is one of the advantages of living rural.

Firstly, the government needs to admit there were a couple of hiccups—I will tone it down—at the beginning of this. I am very happy that everyone is supporting the motion and that you support seniors. The Member for Nelson is happy about that. We are both getting there. I am not too sure about the Member for Barkly, but I am sure he is getting there as well.

There will be more and more of us around, and we will become more vocal. The issue of whether you are a self-funded retiree or on the pension—some people are on the pension because of bad breaks in life, others are self-funded because of good breaks in life. Everyone is entitled to reap the benefits of what they have sown. Everyone in the Territory who has worked hard for the Territory and invested in it deserves to be supported by the Territory in the future. I am glad everyone is supporting the motion.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION **Definition of RR (Rural Residential) Zone**

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly calls on the Territory government to define the RR, or Rural Residential zone as described in the NT Planning Scheme, and state that the minimum lot size for the RR zone in the Litchfield municipality is one hectare. This had always been the definition since the zone was established but was changed last year by the previous CLP minister for planning.

I have to mention the Member for Daly's issues with me on schooling. It is not that schools should not have equal education through the Territory, but it is a fact of life that in a little school on the Douglas Daly you will not get the same facilities as a school in a rural area or town. I was giving a comparison of where one can get concessions, or where they cannot because there are not the facilities available.

The Member for Goyder will remember a fundraising dinner we attended. The Member for Goyder donated some goods to the walk from Suplejack Downs Station to Freds Pass: Horses for Courses. I am trying to think of the name ...

Madam SPEAKER: Tiani Cook.

Mr WOOD: Tiani Cook—I have forgotten the other lady's name—that was supporting the opportunities for people in isolated areas to get better education because that is always difficult in remote communities. But I digress.

In 2011, over 1900 people signed a petition asking that the rural residential size in Litchfield stay one hectare and blocks smaller than that only be permitted in villages or town areas. In this debate people may need a little history. In the mid-1990s, the then CLP government decided to look at changes to the rural area that would rezone sections of land around the Howard Springs area. These did not fit within normal zoning because some developments that occurred in Whitewood Park and Howard River Park were given exemptions by the government to develop land that was smaller than the minimum lot size.

In Whitewood Park you get lot sizes of 0.4, one hectare and two hectares, and in Howard River Park you get one hectare and two hectares. The government decided it was going to put those blocks of land into RR. That caused massive confusion because people who could have a cow on their block could no longer have a cow on their block. You can have a cow on the two hectare, and they said you could not have a cow on the one hectare but they were going to turn all the two hectare blocks into RR, meaning people would be restricted on how they could use the land they had bought.

In the end, the government decided to leave it as it was. When that discussion was on, there was a move by the government to redefine RR as a minimum lot size of 0.4, which it wanted to do for the whole of the Territory. Residents at that time—and I remember standing up on the back of a ute and it felt like an old-fashioned political rally over 1000 people signed the petition saying ‘the minimum lot size in the rural area for the RR zone should be no less than one hectare’.

There was good reason for that. We have always believed that anything under one hectare is not rural. If you want an example of why we think that, the subdivision of Whitewood Park, built around 1984–86 has the three lot sizes I mentioned before. If you look at the 0.4 hectare lots, they have kept a bit of vegetation, but most of them have been cleared. By the time you put a house and a shed on the land there is not much native vegetation left. Most people have kept the one hectare blocks as rural and have not cleared them. Some people have used them for other purposes, but generally speaking, they have stayed as rural blocks. People know two hectares are rural and have different options with two hectares.

It is something we fought over at that stage. The government agreed, and it was in the NT Planning Scheme up until last year. Then our wonderful previous planning minister, in an *NT News* ad on 29 June 2016, announced that there would be two versions of the rural residential zone.

That idea of breaking the RR zone to 0.4 hectare also came from a number of developers. There was a developer at Noonamah, who is still there, whose land was zoned one hectare RR. He pushed as hard as he could through his representative company, Earl James & Associates, to turn his block into 0.4 hectare, using the argument that the rest of the Territory has it, therefore you should be able to do it in Noonamah.

Thankfully, that was not approved at the time, although of course, we have the issue about where we are going in that area. I hope I get time to talk to the new planning commissioner and perhaps the minister on what is happening in areas like Noonamah in regard to the development.

Most rural people do not regard anything under one hectare as rural. The blocks around the school at Howard Springs are 0.4. In the new activity centre plans they are being incorporated into the proposed new activity centre.

This was all going fairly well until the previous planning commissioner released maps of what the planning commission thought were wonderful ideas about the future of the rural area, with extremely large activity centres. Some of them 7 km long, either side of the Arnhem or Stuart Highways, and within those areas they would also put 0.4 hectare blocks. The problem was, they were calling them RR blocks, Rural Residential blocks, and disclosing that they were RR at 4000 square metres, not RR at one hectare.

This was a sneaky way for the NT Planning Commission to introduce something that rural residents had opposed for a long time: redefining what 0.4 hectare blocks were and putting them into activity centres. There is nothing wrong with having 0.4 hectare blocks in activity centres per se, but it is a problem if the activity centres are 7.5 km long, covering all the land on either side, meaning that the bush would disappear for sure.

The other problem is, the actual word ‘rural’ makes no sense if you have 0.4 hectare blocks. They do not relate to people in the rural area as rural. They might look big for people coming out of the suburbs; I am not sure what the larger-sized blocks are in Leanyer, the ones out the back with the sand flies. I am not sure whether they are 0.4 hectare or whether they have a special zone. They are leftover parcels hanging out the back there.

Members interjecting.

Mr WOOD: That is right, an acre. Again, an acre does not fit much on it. Theoretically, you can have a horse on an RR block as long as you do not have a house, according to the rules. I can tell you that most people probably do not accept those rules, because the funny thing is, with horses, you can have stables of course. Not in theory, but you can keep a horse in a stable like they do at Fannie Bay. It is one of those areas in planning that is a bit tricky.

At least the NT Planning Commission decided to shrink the activity centres, almost bringing them back to what they originally were. Then it put a dotted line on the outside of the original line saying that within the dotted line you could have rural residential and then inside the district centre have rural residential 0.4 hectare.

I do not know why the government or the NT Planning Commission did not introduce a new zone and call it ‘large suburban’, because that is how most people see it, especially if you are within the district centre. Why

would you call a block of land in the district or activity centre 'a rural residential block'? It has very little to do with rural except that it is in the rural area. As a rural block, it really would not be regarded as rural by most people in the rural area.

When we come to discuss this, the government probably has its mind set that it is okay to do it this way and I understand that. When the government is looking at these activity centres I think it should consider that the activity centres could at least have their own zones. I do not know what would be against the concept of having a 'large urban' LU block being 4000 metres and under. Not a single-dwelling block, because that has a specific size, but what would be wrong with calling it a different zone and allowing the idea of RR in the rural area to be retained as one hectare?

A lot of people have fought hard to contain the minimum lot size. Those pushing for densification have been the planning people. They have a concept that, if you want more buses, then you need to have more people. I think most people would live without the buses and just have their space. There are also developers who want to make more money. A lot of us have fought hard to make sure the rural area is not slowly turned into a creeping suburb.

During the discussions with residents regarding Wallaby Holtze Road and a new subdivision proposal for the hospital site formerly known as the Holtze hospital, people showed concern about the remanent land in that subdivision. The previous government—Mr Chandler was the planning minister at the time and Mr Giles was the Chief Minister—stood somewhere on the hill next to the Holtze hospital sign with a map showing that area as suburban all the way to Howard Springs Road.

The intention and worry of the people in that area is that if that plan continues, a lot of people will fight tooth and nail and say, 'You might have a hospital there but that does not mean it needs to be turned into a suburban area'. That is not saying there will not be some suburban development, but it should be buffeted by rural development.

If we are doing planning as we once did—sticking to a plan—when Palmerston is full, it is full, and Weddell should be the next stage of development. One of the worst decisions was the Berrimah decision. I have had to live with it and it was a poor decision to turn that into residential land. I call it the 'stack and rack'. A number of people will go into a subdivision that has nothing to do with sustainable living in the tropics, with an average block size of 500 square metres.

I recently drove around a part of Palmerston that I have never driven through, where there is a university development. Boy, I do not think you could even plant a tree. Those houses are so tight that I wonder how people live. If you have air-conditioning it is fine, but to me it does not relate to the tropics. It seems so foreign to have little roads and stacks of houses close together. I am trying to retain what is a good lifestyle in the tropics by having a one hectare block which enables people to do things that are still rural.

In relation to the activity centres—I have an opportunity to talk about those at the moment—the minister looked at me funny and said I have issues about it. Although there was consultation, people do not know—the idea of a road going from the Holtze hospital through INPEX, down Madsen Road, around the Howard Springs shops, down Smythe Road—where I live—to Coolalinga through a rural area which has a rural amenity. I am not saying it does not increase traffic, but to bring traffic from five or six kilometres away, when you have a perfectly good highway and Howard Springs Road, turn that traffic and take it through a rural residential area with a nice little local shopping centre, and have a main road go through it, beats me. I do not know where those planners have been and I do not think they have gone to where I live and seen what the area is like before they drew a plan.

Minister, the activity centre plans for Howard Springs—which I need to find some time to write about—do not show that road. It is shown on the Coolalinga activity centre plan. The problem is that people who may have only responded to the Howard Springs activity centre plans would not have seen the road going through the middle of that country. I will put that as an aside.

Be that as it may, the activity centres are important and I am glad the government is relooking at them. There is room for the 0.4 hectare lots to be a good buffer to some of the rural area because I do not think people want suburbs smack up against rural blocks. One of the worst subdivisions we have ever seen would be the Freds Pass Road subdivision which was approved by former Minister Chandler—a parcel of land not supported by the Development Consent Authority that was overridden by the minister. It now has enormous drains at an enormous cost.

People are up in arms because of spot rezoning and us getting away from the plan. The plan should remain that we develop Weddell as our next city, and do it properly. It is a great opportunity for this government to talk to people like Troppo, who did some original plans for that area. When I look at places like Northcrest, which I know will have a lot of people in a small area, I think we can do better in design.

Getting back to the issue of the RR. All I am saying is, that for most people in the rural area, the idea of RR is that it is a one hectare rural block. We do not go below that when you call it RR. The simple way for the government to make it clear that the two zones are not the same—because that is what you have—a zone that says RR inside an activity centre which is 0.4 hectares and one outside the activity centre which is one hectare.

That does not make sense to me, you could change the zone to large urban, LU, or another name like big block, BB. I think that would satisfy most people and would save us from any confusion about the zone. I understand from talking to the minister previously that the government will probably not be supporting this, but at least it gives me an opportunity to point out that the rural residential zone has long been fought for. A number of major petitions were sent to government as recently as 2011, asking that it stays that way. I put my case and I will happily listen to the answer.

Ms MANISON (Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Nelson for bringing forward this motion which highlights what has become an inconsistency in the Northern Territory planning system. That is, the minimum lot size for zone RR, rural residential of 0.4 of a hectare, or an acre, across the whole of the Northern Territory, with the exception of Litchfield where it is one hectare, which is a substantial difference.

The Member for Nelson is a staunch advocate for protecting the rural area and lifestyle, which is something I have great admiration for. He has done a lot of work in the time I have been involved in this parliament in pursuing governments of all persuasions to hold them to account in a lot of constructive debate on matters of rural planning. It is something he is passionate about and deeply engaged in his community with, as it is very important to them.

Like the Member for Nelson, I welcome the opportunity to revisit the issue of minimum lot sizes for zone RR in Litchfield. Whilst I cannot support this motion, I want to assure the Member for Nelson that the minimum lot size for zone RR in Litchfield remains unchanged at one hectare, except within the rural activity centres where the minimum lot size is 0.4 of a hectare in line with the planning policy that applies to the rest of the Northern Territory.

The rural activity centres are intended to service a growing rural population with commercial, industrial, community and residential land uses. The minimum 0.4 hectare lot size in zone RR provides a transition from these higher density, non-rural uses to surrounding rural areas. Ultimately, this is about protecting the amenity of these established rural areas and protecting the rural lifestyle. I believe the zone RR is a very important tool to ensure we can cater for demands in services, keep families and connections close together in the one area, and protect the rural area and the larger lots.

This effectively ensures we will reduce ad hoc planning and decisions, using a greater set of rules and working with the planning commission.

We understand that our rural areas are under pressure from urban expansion. You just need to drive down the Stuart Highway and see Palmerston on one side of the Stuart Highway and Howard Springs on the other. More people are looking to relocate to the rural area as a lifestyle of choice. The dramatic changes at Coolalinga are a true testament of what these changes mean.

The fact that we have had developers there investing in major shopping centres—and lo and behold I never thought I would see numerous takeaway outlets and a Kmart along the Stuart Highway. Sunny Coolalinga has changed dramatically since I was a child driving out to Bees Creek to visit friends on the weekends.

Spot rezoning and development proposals have caused great concern in rural communities, undermining community confidence in planning processes and the future of the rural areas they call home, as well as the increased pressure on the natural environment. There are some serious questions about ground water resources and the infrastructure necessary to service our rural communities. This impacts on amenities and that is the overwhelming message I am hearing from rural residents, yourselves and concerned community groups.

I firmly believe that if we get the planning right we can preserve our rural areas, making sure they stay rural and yet still accommodate the changing needs of a growing community. We need to keep our rural communities intact, but provide affordable housing options for young people as well as options that are easy to maintain for seniors. We need to ensure that we can provide the necessary community services like schools, childcare centres, medical facilities and other amenities while still maintaining the rural amenity.

We are well on our way, working hard through the NT Planning Commission, to get this balance. It is going to be a fine balance, but it is important this conversation with the community continues. This has been much of the focus of planning attention over the recent years.

I suspect I will have more conversations about rural planning over this term of government. Whether that be in the greater Darwin area or in Alice Springs, because the advocacy from the Member for Namatjira, or from yourself or Madam Speaker, is that people are very worried about densification on their doorstep, urban sprawl and what that means in terms of protecting and preserving the rural lifestyle.

There has been a lot of work from the NT Planning Commission's perspective under the former government. They did the higher level Darwin Regional Land Use Plan 2015 and then the Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan 2016, which they incorporated into the Northern Territory Planning Scheme.

The planning framework set out where future rezoning and development in the rural area could possibly occur. It had the intention of stopping ad hoc spot rezoning and development in rural areas by limiting future changes to the identified rural activity centres in Howard Springs, Coolalinga, Humpty Doo and Berry Springs and it earmarked what they described as peri-urban potential development in Hughes and Noonamah.

This government has spoken about Weddell. Again, it comes back to what the Opposition Leader asked me in Question Time the other day about planning the rural area. We will be releasing a document to consult with the communities so we can get clear directions from Territorians about what they see as acceptable development and what they do not.

It will look at the greater Darwin area, Palmerston, Weddell and the rural areas. It will ask questions to gain feedback which will give me a far greater understanding of what people, particularly in the rural area, feel is acceptable and not acceptable development to help guide some of the decisions we need to make going forward to ensure sound planning.

I have no doubt there will be some fiery, passionate debates, but I want to assure the Member for Nelson that I am very committed to listening and engaging in genuine consultation with people. I take this responsibility of the decisions I make and the consequences they have very seriously, especially on future land use sites.

I want to go back to these area plans and the processes that have continued through the Planning Commission. I endorse the work of the Planning Commission on activity centres. It gives greater protection to the rural area by undertaking sound planning and getting it right, ensuring there are very clear guidelines and rules on where densification is acceptable and where it is not. It has some science and rigour around it. There has been some work on what the infrastructure is, what is available there and what it is capable of.

Looking at the rural activity centres is the way to go. There has been a lot of work on the Howard Springs and Coolalinga activity centres. Humpty Doo and Berry Springs will follow. I thank the Planning Commission for its work in engaging the community. I made it clear from the moment I became minister that I expected them to engage on a deep level. Wherever there has been the opportunity to provide you with briefings I hope you have received them, or at least the opportunity to have one if you like. I have advised them that this was the case—and to engage heavily with the Litchfield Council to give people on the ground an opportunity to have their say.

It is important that the consultation is genuine and based on real feedback from real people. This has continued to progress and the community response to the area planning work to date has been encouraging, but we have found it indicates broad support for the 0.4 hectare minimum lot sizes and zone RR within the rural activity centre. That is just within that zone. I do not think people will find it acceptable outside that zone, within the shops, near the school, near other businesses. People see that as a logical place for densification where you can have smaller lot sizes.

If someone is getting a bit too old to do the work that it takes to maintain a rural lot, they can move in, stay in the same area as their family and have a greater range of appropriate housing choices. That may be a young person who does not want to take on the responsibility of having a large lot, but still wants to be close to their

family connections and friends—that might be in the rural area—to give them some more affordable housing choices.

I genuinely believe this gives a planning minister, whether in this government or a future government, greater tools at hand to protect the rural lifestyle. I am passionate about this because I believe it will give housing choices and set very clear rules on what is acceptable in the rural area for development and what is not. That is why I believe this is a good process. Ultimately, it is about setting the rules on where densification is acceptable and where it is not.

It is a requirement that all zone RR lots within rural activity centres will need to be serviced by reticulated water, which is an important point, particularly with the groundwater pressures in the rural area. The provision of reticulated water services to the rural area activity centres is costly. The smaller 0.4 hectare lot size—a system of making the provision of these services more cost-effective. That is a very important condition of this.

These policy objectives around housing options, infrastructure provision and environmental sustainability are the reasons zone RR became planning policy in the early 2000s, including the 2002 Litchfield Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives. Policy work in the late 1990s identified a need for greater housing choice in the rural area, in particular a demand for smaller, more affordable lots with less upkeep.

Zone RR, with an absolute minimum lot size of 0.4 hectare, provided a much more sought after lifestyle in a natural setting—semi-rural one could almost say—where it is appropriate to do so, given land constraints, serviceability and included restrictions on traditional rural-related activities. These specifically exclude agriculture, horticulture and keeping of animals and other domestic pets.

I understand it was under these restrictions on rural uses, particularly in keeping of animals other than domestic pets, that prompted people, including the Member for Nelson, to lobby government to increase the minimum lot size for zone RR from 0.4 hectares to one hectare for the purpose of the 2004 Litchfield area plan.

The inconsistency in the minimum lot size of 0.4 hectare across the NT but one hectare for Litchfield carried through to the consolidated planning scheme in 2007 and exists to this day. It has been almost 20 years since the government first identified the need for a zone RR 0.4 hectare product so it is appropriate that we debate this long-standing anomaly in the planning scheme.

It is important that the discussion is had, because in the Litchfield area there is a place for it, but that is within the activity centres. This way we can ensure greater housing choices for people and we can protect and preserve the rural lifestyle. When a planning minister has rezoning applications thrown on their desk they have a greater set of rules on what is appropriate to say yes or no to. There is a lot of grey matter in planning and the minister has a lot of discretion.

The most important thing I have found so far is to ensure we are consistent and look at the rules. Having these sound plans in place gives a planning minister the ability to be able to listen to the people. Also, when someone buys a property outside of the activity centre, and the zones where a zone RR would be appropriate at the 0.4 hectare size, they have certainty of what will be next door. Rather than the situation at the moment, it is easy for a planning minister to agree to ad hoc rezoning applications.

I really do mean that, Member for Nelson. This sets out some very clear rules. It means that the community has been consulted and this will ultimately mean the better preservation and protection of the great rural lifestyle that is a very important part of the Northern Territory and it should be protected because it is special.

I am putting out some documents about planning reform, planning visions and what the community see as acceptable development. I look forward to your feedback as part of that process and hope to have as many people from the rural area engaged as possible, to send their views to government and make sure they are very clear with us about what they believe is acceptable, what they value and what they see for the future of their very special part of the Northern Territory.

I cannot support the motion that the Member for Nelson has brought forward tonight, because I believe the RR zone at 0.4 hectare size in the activity centres is the right thing. I thank him for bringing this debate to the House and we will be having many more planning debates into the future.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): I will sum up very quickly. There are a million issues I could respond to. I do not think it should be an issue of preserving the rural area. I think the rural area should be expanded and many a government has said they are doing thing to preserve it. I want to see the opportunity for other people, young people, to have more land. I especially think there are great opportunities in the area between the prison and Holtze.

Be that as it may, minister, I fully appreciate what you say. I think you are a great minister. I might not always agree with you but you always listen to what I have to say and give it serious attention, and I appreciate that. We will differ from time to time, but I will try to give you positive outcomes. Your government, some time ago under Paul Henderson, the Member for Goyder and I put forward our own version of plans. We were trying to be proactive then, and always will be. One thing I can say is, if you want to raise a family, the best place is in the rural area ...

Members interjecting.

Mr WOOD: Nightcliff used to be rural; people kept saying to me, 'look what happened to Nightcliff', and I am saying, 'That is what I am trying to stop'.

Motion not agreed to.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Proposal to Rescind the Decision of 9 May 2017 Adopting

Recommendation 5 of the Report of the Select Committee for Opening Parliament to the People

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent me from moving a motion to rescind the decision of the Assembly on 9 May adopting recommendation five of the report of the Select Committee for Opening Parliament to the People which requires the Assembly commence sittings on Wednesdays at 2 pm.

I would like to suspend standing orders so that we can rescind that motion. It is straightforward. I felt dramatic using the words, 'standing orders be suspended'. I have spoken to the opposition and Independents.

Inadvertently, when we accepted the Select Committee for Opening Parliament to the People's recommendations, we considered what would happen if there was no committee business for parliament on a Wednesday morning. Knowing how much we all love parliament we would have never intentionally done so.

I would like to suspend standing orders to rescind that motion.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION

Rescind the Decision of 9 May 2017 Adopting

Recommendation 5 of the Report of the Select Committee for Opening Parliament to the People

Ms FYLES (Attorney General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I thank the House for allowing me to suspend standing orders. I will be moving a motion that the Assembly rescind the decision of 9 May 2017 adopting recommendation five of the report of the Select Committee for Opening Parliament to the People, which requires the Assembly to commence sitting on a Wednesday at 2 pm.

Parliament passed a motion that the Assembly would commence sittings at 2 pm on Wednesdays to enable the portfolio scrutiny business to conduct business on those mornings. Recommendation five was adopted on the understanding that a routine of business would need to be developed for Wednesday. Such a routine could detail that the Assembly meet on Wednesday morning if there was no committee business.

As the Standing Orders Committee considered its referral in more detail, it became apparent that we needed a rescission motion which would be required to ensure that an appropriate routine of business could be developed for a Wednesday if there was no committee business before the House.

I do not suspend standing orders or rescission notices lightly, which is why I have taken the opportunity to speak to my colleagues. It was not the government's intention that we should not meet on a Wednesday morning if there is no committee business. As I have indicated this has come to my attention through the

Standing Orders Committee. We have been considering the matter in more detail and I will table a report to the Assembly tomorrow with the revised proposal which will address the Wednesday scrutiny committees.

We want to make sure that we have the provision for the parliament to meet as Territorians would expect.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Ms LAWLER (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I will talk about my attendance at Garma in its 19th year. Garma brings together business leaders, political leaders, intellectuals, academics, students, journalists and politicians. There was a large number of politicians there this year.

Garma is one of those amazing festivals. It is more than a festival, it is a wonderful gathering of Indigenous people in the Territory. People come from all around the world. If you have never been to Garma, make sure you go. We all come away having learned something.

The theme for Garma this year was Makarrata, a traditional resolution process. It followed on from the gathering earlier this year that resulted in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. I was privileged to be invited this year to speak at the education forum chaired by Djawa Yunupingu and Yananyamal Mununggurr and participate in a panel discussion facilitated by Professor Marcia Langton AM.

Garma is coordinated and programmed entirely by the Yothu Yindi Foundation. It is fantastic that an entire day—and it is always the first day—is devoted to education. This recognises the importance of education in improving the life outcomes of Indigenous Australians and it recognises that education provides the foundation for a child's future. It is fitting that the forum began with a panel of young Indigenous people speaking to the attendees about their experiences and how education connects us all.

The keynote address was delivered by June Oscar AO. She is the first Aboriginal woman appointed in the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, at the Australian Human Rights Commission, in 30 years. This is an amazing achievement. June emphasised the importance of a strength-based approach and a focus on the early years, saying she was encouraged by our Families as First Teachers initiative, a program many families and young children benefit from across the Territory.

Another key message from June is that learning needs to be two ways: words are no measure for action; and proper implementation when it comes to improving education and life outcomes for Aboriginal people. This is a message I keep in mind as we move forward.

I was pleased to follow June's keynote address by outlining this government's agenda and the actions we have taken to support the learning outcomes of young Territorians. This includes putting children at the centre of our decision-making, expanding the Families as First Teachers program, reinvesting in education, focussing on exceptional leaders, quality teachers, strong relationships with community, and returning decision making in remote communities to Aboriginal people through our Community Led Schools initiative.

I was also able to outline how our investment in education has supported the expansion of secondary options, with young people and their families having more choices through local programs, distance education and regional or interstate boarding. This is something that has been very well received by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

Yirrkala School also participated in the forum, sharing the progress and outcomes of the Learning on Country Program operating in five large Arnhem communities. Yirrkala School and their partners, including the Dhimurru Rangers group, shared the key components of their program where Indigenous country knowledge and traditions of caring for country are used as the foundation for students to achieve a qualification in conservation and land management.

It was excellent to hear the acting co-principal of Yirrkala School, Katrina Hudson, unpack the rigorous teaching and learning program that underpins the delivery of this two-way education approach. Yirrkala School was very well represented at Garma with co-principal, Merrki Ganambarr, also participating in panel discussions.

It was a lovely combination of having the student panels first, then having June Oscar, then myself and then the practical demonstration of some of the work happening in our schools. It was a great day. Students and staff from Yirrkala School, as well as Nhulunbuy Primary, Nhulunbuy Christian College, Nhulunbuy High School, and the Dawurr boarding facility, joined students from across Australia at the Garma Education Fair.

The education fair is in its second year and is a fantastic initiative. It is a normal school day with a difference for the local and interstate youth to learn about Yolngu language, culture and seasons as well as the theme of Makaratta. I had the pleasure of joining classrooms at the Bunggul grounds and seeing how engaged the young people were in learning about the kinship system, learning basic Yolngu Matha words and exploring the Yolngu seasons. It was fantastic to see local Aboriginal people sharing their knowledge with such a broad cross-section of young people from across Australia.

I looked around and saw school shirts from every capital city in Australia. There were kids from ACT and Victoria. For most of them it was their first time in the Northern Territory, let alone being in an environment such as Garma.

The opportunities for young people continued across all four days of Garma through the youth forum. The forum was championed by the University of Sydney, along with other official partners, including the NT Music School. Students participated in debates, leadership development, group work and problem solving as well as cultural activities such as spear making and basket weaving.

The award winning Sticks & Stones performance explored themes of bullying and strategies for conflict management, assertiveness and breaking the cycle of violence. Workshops were also held in music, storytelling, visual arts and science. There was so much to see and do.

It was wonderful to see Chris Tayler, a member of the Expert Reference Panel for the development of the Early Childhood Development Strategic Plan, at Garma as well. It is important that we continue our focus on the early years and our policies, ensuring they benefit all children including those in remote Indigenous communities. It was wonderful to see Chris there; like me, she was listening and talking to people, hearing what is going on and what are the great things we can do in Indigenous education and in that early childhood space.

My colleague, the Honourable Ken Vowels, Minister for Primary Industry and Resources, was at Garma with me and officially opening the Gulkula Mining and Training Centre. This is the first Aboriginal owned venture to establish mining operations on their own land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Northern Territory Act*. This is a great achievement for Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu and all the Gumatj people, and it is a strong example of our government's commitment to supporting economic development led by Aboriginal people.

The NT Government was well represented at the Garma expo and it was great for me to see the Department of Education staff, including Rob Picton from the Transition Support Unit, and Regina Thompson, the director of the Families as First Teachers Program, speaking with stakeholders about the great things being done in Education in the Territory.

The Department of Education has a strong relationship with the Yothu Yindi foundation to deliver education programs across the Arnhem region. Garma provided an excellent opportunity to further explore the foundation's learning pilot project currently being developed. I have had meetings with the Yothu Yindi Foundation—I like this concept, it is about developing Yolngu students to be future leaders and it will be great to see this program hit the ground, start to run and flourish.

The project is a collective impact approach, led by Yolngu, providing flexible learning for the future leaders at the risk of disengagement. The project incorporates the values of leadership, high expectations, culturally responsive, supportive environment and practical Yolngu learning. The Department of Education is on board to support the pilot, and Garma provided the opportunity to support the additional partnerships to get the pilot up and running.

I thank the Yothu Yindi Foundation once again for presenting a fantastic Garma event. I also acknowledge Denise Bowden and Peter Solly, from the Yothu Yindi Foundation, who championed the education forum day and made sure I got around to all the key education events. It was wonderful to be there. The Chief Minister was also there, and most of you would have seen the Opposition Leader, Bill Shorten, and the Prime Minister, Mr Turnbull, there on Friday and Saturday. It was a big space filled with politicians.

Tomorrow we have the condolence motion for Dr G Yunipingu. Part of the opening ceremony of Garma was a tribute to Dr G Yunipingu, as well, which was very touching and moving. Some of you may have seen the amazing photograph of the Prime Minister's wife hugging one of the Yolngu people in *The Weekend Australian* on that weekend. It was a touching ceremony and lovely to have the opportunity to be there just to see how powerful the whole days were.

Next year will be the 20th Garma and I look forward to increasing NT education's engagement with this amazing event. It is a good opportunity for education to share and showcase the great work that is happening in our remote schools, not just in our Arnhem schools but across the Territory in our remote communities.

Garma attracts many people from across Australia who have a strong interest in education. It was wonderful to be at Garma and hats off to the Yothu Yindi Foundation that runs Garma. It is a huge event and there is a large number of people who attend; it is a great event.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, in July this year the *NT News* reported on the findings for the death of Mr Melbourne, who hung himself in Holtze prison.

Mr Melbourne lived in the Territory from about 1990, moving from Mount Isa, although he lived in Darwin for a while prior to Cyclone Tracy. At 55 he obtained a disability pension because of his alcoholism. He suffered from depression and his only contact with police was through drink-driving.

In 1995, he had an altercation with his neighbour in Millner and stabbed the neighbour to death. On 30 June 1996, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder; he was not eligible for parole until 27 July 2015.

The Coroner's report says:

While in prison he was well behaved. It was said that he posed no security risk, and worked extremely hard without complaint. He was said to be "quiet, courteous, clean and very private in his habits".

On 20 May 2014 he achieved an open security classification, the lowest classification available. This permitted him, with approval, to undertake work in the community without accompanying security. He was eligible for that status because he was in the last two years of his non-parole period and was a low security risk.

On 30 October 2015 the Through Care officer checked on Mr Melbourne to see how he was feeling after he cancelled his own parole. He gave her a number of reasons for his decision. At the end of the conversation he said he would consider writing to the 2016 Parole Board meeting in March and might be more prepared the second time around. He thought he might put his name on a wait list for aged care facilities in Darwin as a backup plan.

On 6 November 2015 testing on his blood suggested he may have chronic myeloid leukaemia and further testing was recommended. Blood samples were taken on 10 November 2015 and on 13 November 2015 Mr Melbourne's security classification was changed from open to Low1. The reason was said to be because he no longer met the criteria for open due to the change of procedures relating to prisoners convicted of murder, as per the Executive Director's directive.

The directive followed the Minister for Correctional Service's statement of government policy on 10 November 2015. The minister stated that no prisoner who had been convicted of sexual assault or the offense of murder, was to be assigned an open security classification. That change followed in response to the escape of the prisoner, Edward Horrell, from the Datjala Work Camp. I will come to that issue later.

On Tuesday, 17 November 2015, Mr Melbourne spoke to a fellow inmate and told him that he rejected his parole and said, 'By the looks of it, I will end up dying in here'. The following day, Wednesday, 18 November 2015, Mr Melbourne retired to bed before 8 pm. At 7³⁰ am he was not sitting in his usual spot near the window, his door was locked and there was a towel over the window. The guards were alerted and Mr Melbourne was found hanging from the fan in his room by a sheet; he showed no signs of life and was unable to be revived. He was 81 years of age.

I read this and wonder whether public's opinion, fuelled by media headlines and the politics of this parliament, in a roundabout way, led to this. I also wonder how a good man like Ken Middlebrook was made the sacrificial offering to keep a government in power. All this leads back to the issues around the prisoner Horrell, a 62-year-old Aboriginal man, absconded from the Datjala Work Camp on 9 November 2015. The work camp is 40 kilometres from Nhulunbuy.

Now for a bit of history. In early 2012 the prisoner Horrell was involved in a one-off project at Larrimah. The prisoner participated in community work from 15 August 2012 until 10 September 2012, preparing for the Garma Festival. The prisoner had been at the Datjala Work Camp since its inception in June 2013 and was sent back to Holtze in September 2013 because of a decline in work ethics and attitude. He returned to the work camp in January 2014.

Before all of this he had completed the Sex Offender Treatment Program, SOTP, in March 2010 and commenced treatment for violent offending behaviour in September 2012 which was completed in December that year. As he had served 21 years of his life sentence he was eligible for parole on 29 August 2014. That did not happen and an application to extend his sentence was submitted by the DPP and at that time no decision had been made by the court. His placement at the work camp was part of a plan to transition him back into the community.

As mentioned in the news item, the program facilitator of the Violent Offender Program, Ms Natalie Walker, made five recommendations on 21 May 2013 of how prisoner Horrell could be integrated back into society. One of these recommendations was for Mr Horrell to engage in greater exposure back in the community. This could include working supervised in the community, working unsupervised in the community and leave of absences. Prisoner Horrell had been participating in external programs since early 2012, such as getting a white card, first aid, forklift, scaffolding, deckhand and bobcat certificates.

A report from the Parole Board around that time states:

Mr Horrell has been a very compliant prisoner whilst on the mobile work camps. He has never displayed aggression and is a respectful prisoner with a high degree of common sense. He has shown strong leadership skills to the advantage of the work camp and has mentored young indigenous men and guided them to achieve successful outcomes. Unfortunately prisoner Horrell, on the evening of Monday 9 November 2015, absconded from the work camp. Horrell surrendered himself to the police 48 hours later. He caused no harm while he absconded. The advice since received was the prisoner absconded because he was incorrectly advised by an officer that he was to be transferred back to Holtze prison.

After that there was a great hullabaloo; media headlines read, 'Axe-murder rapist on the loose.' Immediately Mr Horrell was sent back to Darwin. The opposition hammered the Attorney-General, looking for blood. The Attorney-General blamed the Commissioner of Corrections, Ken Middlebrook, for what happened. The Chief Minister, under pressure, made a decision to sack either the Attorney-General or the commissioner. Naturally, the path of least resistance was Mr Middlebrook. The government was already short on numbers.

I have no doubt the issue of reintegration of murders and sex offenders was a difficult issue because, whether you agree or not, those offenders will be released at some stage and they are more than likely to be a problem—if there is no problem integrating them into society.

This is what Mr Middlebrook was trying to do. Unfortunately, when the press and the opposition are firing bullets for political purposes with no knowledge of the circumstances—add to that, some people in corrections did not agree with the commissioner's directions—any explanation by the commissioner as to whether he disobeyed the Attorney-General's direction, the reason behind his support for prisoner Horrell, went out the door.

Mr Middlebrook did have an explanation and it related to confusion over the instructions by the Attorney-General. It was that there should be no sex offenders on the program related to those who have completed the SOTP course and had worked in work camps. Regardless, what has since come out of this mess, there is no chance of any murderer or sex offender being integrated into the community, as was the recommendation that Ms Walker had from Mr Horrell.

Also mentioned in the news item, the program facilitator of the violent offender program, Ms Natalie Walker made five recommendations—I have made a mix up in papers there, Madam Speaker. I might have to leave the final part of that to tomorrow night, I believe I can continue my—for some reason I have brought in the same pages twice.

Mr PAECH (Namatjira): Thank you Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about three outstanding events that have recently occurred in the electorate of Namatjira.

Held annually at the Harts Range Racecourse, set in the beautiful East MacDonnell Ranges, is the Harts Range bush weekend and known to many as the Harts Range Races. The Northern Territory August picnic race weekend, or the Picnic Day public holiday, stems from the 70-year-old tradition that started at the Harts Range racecourse, two-and-a-half hours east of Alice Springs on the Plenty Highway.

The meeting was a huge success all those years ago. It was decided to make the annual event a Public Holiday as agreed to by the administrator and gazetted as we know today, Picnic Day. The Red Centre Campdraft later joined the Harts Range Bush sports weekend and together they form one of the greatest bush weekends in the Territory. I go a step further to say it is the best bush weekend in the Northern Territory.

I thank the committee member from the Harts Range Committee and the Red Centre Campdraft Committee for their outstanding efforts, hard work, long hours and commitment to keeping these great events alive in regional and remote parts of the Northern Territory. I attend the weekend from Friday to Sunday, as I have since I was a little kid, and I have had an absolute ball every year. I encourage everyone in this Chamber to put the dates in your diary; you will not regret it, I promise.

I want to place on the *Parliamentary Record* the names of the hard-working people who make these events possible for everyone to enjoy. From the Harts Range Race Committee: Mark Coffey; Liz Bird; Jo Fogarty; Mark Nietzsche; Bec Cadzow; Peter Nicholson; Steve Cadzow; and Peter Mostram. From the Harts Range Campdraft Committee: Steve Cadzow, Bec Cadzow, Jane Baldwine, Anita McCarthy, Blythe Stafford, Ley Kunoth, and Dennis Kunoth.

Those people just mentioned make events, like the Harts Range Bush Sports weekend, great for people in Central Australia to be able to come and experience bush life, see the campdraft and the rodeo in action. It also brings many people together in the pastoral sector to share a great event, see what makes the Northern Territory such a great place to live, work and participate in our great lifestyle.

I also place on the record the outstanding work of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, known to many as the ICPA. The Alice Springs branch was formed in 1979 and supports people living in the outback. They aim to look at how they can improve education and telecommunications for students living in the bush, advocate and lobby people, hold a range of conferences, and meet with relevant politicians or education department personnel to achieve the best outcomes for isolated children and students.

They recently had their federal conference in Alice Springs. I was able to attend a range of forum topics and discussions at the conference. We were honoured to have Ms Jan Heaslip OAM open the event. Ms Heaslip is a very passionate advocator of education for children in remote areas, and she is the patron of the Northern Territory ICPA. She is an outstanding woman and a good advocate for people in the bush. She is always making sure those services are available to people in the bush.

I thank the Alice Springs ICPA committee: Amber Driver; Sarah Cook; Bec Cadzow; Tiani Cook, who I know Madam Speaker is familiar with from Horses for Courses; Emma Chalmers; Leza Cook; Vikki McGlynn; Lisa Kimlin; Jodie Solczaniuk; and Ameer Porter. They did outstanding work putting the event together. It was magnificent and I was very proud to support all three of those events in the electorate of Namatjira. Events like this enable us to share in these experiences and learn so much about some wonderful organisations in the Northern Territory.

The conference for the ICPA was very full on, with many topics being discussed. I think they debated about 98 motions looking at equitable access to education for children living in rural and remote areas. They also put together the conference dinner, which I was able to attend at the old quarry in Alice Springs. It was a well-organised event with lots of fundraising opportunities. I managed to snaffle myself a beautiful painting. Tiani Cook has a decent boot collection and was instrumental in providing boots for the table decorations.

I am happy to support these events in the future. I cannot stress enough the importance these three outstanding events play in the Northern Territory community. They are part of our lifestyle and I encourage elected members to get behind the Isolated Children's Parents' Association. The Members for Goyder and Karama have recently participated in the fundraiser Horses for Courses to ensure we highlight the work we need to do on telecommunications and education to make sure it is fair and equitable for people in the bush.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, tonight I speak about a small community in my electorate, Manyallaluk, which is located on the Central Arnhem Road just south of Katherine. The other name it goes by is Eva Valley; people may know the community by that name.

Two exciting stories happened earlier this month in this wonderful, small community with a population of about 100 people. The first one was big for the small community; mobile phone and broadband service has now been switched on. Manyallaluk is officially connected on the Telstra network thanks to the \$30m co-investment program between the Northern Territory Government and Telstra. It is really exciting news for Manyallaluk.

They are a small community, about 36 kilometres off the Central Arnhem Road, and they now have this service which is very important for relationships and connections in the region. I look forward to my next visit and being able to share in the excitement in the reception, and talking to residents about what plans they may have with the broadband fixed service they now have access to.

It is wonderful news and it relates to the co-investment program. NTG and Telstra have committed \$5m per year over the next three years to build at least eight new mobile base stations in remote communities across the Territory. It is exciting for bush members but also for our colleagues and fellow members of parliament who may travel to these communities from time to time.

Government are having regional caucuses and being able to have that connectivity in small places makes a big difference. Hearing from locals about that connection is exciting, and our ministers will be going to small and large communities in remote parts of the Territory to make sure the government is representing all of the NT.

It is also exciting for Barunga. They were already connected to mobile reception, and now they benefit through the fixed broadband service along that Central Arnhem patch. Even though it is close to Katherine they have missed out on a bit. It is wonderful they are now receiving these services. Thank you to Telstra and to NTG for pushing this service. I thank Minister Moss, her office and the departments she works with under her portfolio for making sure that even small places are getting connectivity.

Another small, but exciting, story was the news from the Manyallaluk school about letters they have been writing to various people overseas and interstate. They are receiving responses to those letters. Minister Lawler, our Education Minister, put out a press release on 11 August in regard to this great news.

The Manyallaluk students wrote letters to the Queen of England, and the Essendon Football Club. I like their priorities. Essendon is my club, so it is great that they picked the right club to write to. Junior, secondary and primary students wrote to these recipients and received responses from both. The excitement of receiving snail mail as we now call it—I remember receiving letters when I was doing activities in school and practicing my writing skills.

I still love receiving letters. Now they tend to be bills and documents, but on the odd occasion I might get a postcard or a letter and love reading them. I appreciate when people have taken the time to write back to me. I make the effort to ensure that when people write to me I do the same. As an example, I had some letters written to me by some Ngukurr school students. They were pretty chuffed when I responded to them and I sent it in snail mail, so they would have gotten the hard copy letters.

They received responses from Mary Robinson, the Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Elizabeth, and the Essendon Football Club. I put on record my congratulations to the teaching principal of Manyallaluk School, Ben Kleinig, who said that through this activity students have been gaining confidence in their writing skills. It is important to note that for students in this community, English is not their first language. It is wonderful they are gaining confidence in English writing and reading skills and seeing a chain reaction. They have sent a letter and now have received a letter. They have been excited to tell their family and friends of their skills. It is very cute.

I will finish with the quote from what young Year Two student Alice wrote to the Queen. This is what she wrote:

Dear Queen Elizabeth. Did you have a birthday cake? Old Berry was sitting down drinking a cup of tea, watching the dogs chase a buffalo, but don't worry, she can run fast. From Alice.

Great effort from Year Two, Alice. If she is writing that in Year Two on her own then we have hope for the future with the literacy and numeracy in our schools and, of course, the confidence students get from seeing their hard work recognised. It is wonderful that both recipients of the letters wrote back to the little lovely Manyallaluk Community on the Central Arnhem Road in the Arnhem electorate.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise this evening to talk about one of the organisations in my electorate that provides a wonderful and very important service across the greater rural area of the Top End.

I am referring to the Toy Library or, as it is also known, the Smile a Mile services. They are located in Bees Creek, next door to the Freds Pass Recreational Reserve.

It is a much beloved organisation as many Darwin and rural parents can attest to. For almost 30 years, the Smile a Mile has been an operating service; originally it was under the sponsorship of the Humpty Doo Child Care Centre. The committee received funding from the Department of Community Services and Health in June 1987 to operate a mobile service for the rural Darwin community. This community stretches to the Darwin River Dam area, out to Berry Springs, also down to Acacia, out to Marrakai-Corroboree.

The aim of the service is to provide children living in remote areas with access to resources that would facilitate a child's emotional, physical and intellectual development. A sub-committee was formed with three dedicated mothers: Betty Shoobridge; Tracy Wilkins; and Julie Jacobs. These ladies set out to employ staff, set up policies, purchase equipment and the first Fun Bus venue was held in October 1987 at Berry Springs Playgroup.

By April the following year, the Fun Bus had nine venues and the Toy Library had 51 members—which means families. The events held by Smile a Mile, such as the annual Toy Fair, bring children separated by distance together and educates parents on critical skills needed to care for their children at home. Access to books aids the development and literacy of young people Territory-wide. This complements the fun aspects of the Smile a Mile program with a practical educational merit.

By 1990, the Fun Bus and the Smile a Mile program had expanded to 61 venues with more than 200 members. This service continues to provide an invaluable resource to rural families and has won both the NT Education and Care Award 2015 for Outstanding Service in a Budget-Based Funded Service and the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect: NAPCAN Play Your Part Award 2016, which recognises organisations that make contributions to supporting strong communities.

Today there are over 13 Fun Bus venues, which not only provide toys and equipment aimed at both fun and cognitive development, but also arts, craft and learning activities for the young people across the rural area. The three founders of the Toy Library who formed the first committee—Betty Shoobridge, Tracy Wilkins and Julie Jacobs—can truly be proud that their legacy is not just one of hope, but one of triumph for having such a positive and proactive impact on Darwin and the Northern Territory.

Thanks to the efforts of the Toy Library, the aptly named Fun Bus, the Smile a Mile program and its dedicated staff, the Northern Territory has continued to be enriched by the joy and happiness presented by Jacinta McInerney and her hard-working team.

I have had a little to do with this group over the last three or four years. Many of you who have travelled down the Stuart Highway, past Freds Pass, will see them on the right-hand side. They have a large number of activities they embark on. Apart from the activities and the school bus, they have a children's day at the Humpty Doo Village Green. I attended with Trish and we gave away icy poles; I have never seen so many icy poles disappear so quickly. Little pre-schoolers come for that day and there were hundreds of them there, it was a lot of fun, if not a bit scary.

This year they had their 30th birthday. Unfortunately I could not attend as I was interstate. They held it at Freds Pass and had a lot of participation not only from community and families, but a lot of people came along to put on stalls and presentations.

On another day they have a special time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at their centre. They also get involved with all of the regular community activities and put on displays at Freds Pass Show, get involved with activities at the Royal Darwin Show and do many good things. I have gone out sometimes when they have taken the bus and activities to the Uniting Church Op Shop at Humpty Doo. They have gone to Marrakai to let people know.

Many people know them, like them and appreciate what they are doing. They are providing a valuable service for young mums, dads and carers—it is not always a parent; it may be a grandparent. It is so important that children learn to read, write, be engaged and learn social nuances from the start of their life.

I thank Jacinta McInerney, the manager of the centre, and Teneile Merkel, Lynley Wilson-Nichols, Viki Ross and Judy Wilson. They are the staff with Smile a Mile and the toy library. I also thank the management committee: Sue Lowry; Rebecca Byers; Sim O'Callaghan; Kelly Horn; Lisa Stewart; and Ilona Martin. Thank you for giving up your time and volunteering on the management committee to ensure this service continues to grow and prosper.

They put in every six months for the community benefits grants, and they have been successful. I keep encouraging them to improve and add to their activities, equipment and things to do with the bus. Well done to Jacinta. She is a lovely person and has really brought the centre to the forefront of the rural committee of the Top End. Congratulations, one and all, to the staff, the committee and the families who participate.

Mrs WORDEN (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I place on the record the contributions of Grant Hamon to motorsport in the Northern Territory.

Grant is the face of motorsport in the Northern Territory and has recently stepped down as the president of MotorSport NT after more than 10 years of service. Grant has a history in motorsport for more than 35 years as a competitor and a sports administrator, and I will speak about a few of his achievements tonight.

Grant is a firefighter and he is now a constituent of mine, but he is more than that. He is a friend who I have a long history with from when I was a former Labor government sports adviser. Grant was born in Alice Springs, a Territorian through and through. He became involved in speedway in Tennant Creek in 1982, where he first raced super sedans and, not surprisingly, took over the administration of the speedway when it was in trouble. Grant was able to turn the club's fortune around in just one year.

In the early 1990s Grant was instrumental in establishing the famous Tennant Creek go-kart grand prix. This event attracted hundreds of competitors from around Australia, and it was Tennant Creek's premier event for 13 years and won a number of Brolga Awards.

Over a 20-year period, Grant raced go-karts with his son at the Darwin Karting Association track at Hidden Valley. He was approached to become the vice president of the club in 1999 and then president in 2000, which he remained as until 2008. He put in place a range of initiatives and programs which have all come to fruition.

Grant has a strong background in administration and management practices. He brought many of these approaches to organising the club members to be successful. Grant's achievements in the Darwin Karting Association are so extensive I cannot mention them all this evening, but here is a snapshot.

He determined that the club should be self-funded and stand on its own two feet. He organised for a commercial hirer to use the track for a fee. This allowed the club to fund its own improvements to facilities such as toilet blocks and other infrastructure, including a world-standard race timing system.

The list of Grant's achievements is exhausting. He also installed remote electronic flag points, lighting towers to enable night racing, and a website to improve communications. He also introduced the junior development program—we all know how important they are—with renowned Australian karting champions to improve driving skills of young kart racers.

Grant introduced an emphasis on family participation. This led to a 20% increase in racing participants and a 30% increase in club membership. Women competed equally with men, and Grant has encouraged their participation. As a result the club became overwhelmed with volunteers, a very nice problem to have. Grant has also introduced a modern system of governance and administration, which would serve him well in years to come. I hear the majority of other motorsports at the complex have modelled their plans on those provided by Grant.

He joined the NT MotorSport Council in 2001 and served until 2007. The council was a pseudo peak body, at the time, for motorsports operating at the Hidden Valley complex. In the late 1990s problems arose with administrative arrangements and Grant was approached to become the president due to his known leadership qualities. Grant set about bringing to the attention of government problems which resulted in the sacking of the then Northern Territory Sports Board and putting in place an interim board. I remember those days well.

For five years, Grant worked tirelessly in bringing the various entities together to restructure motorsports with a view to introducing a peak body for Territory motorsports, and that was no easy task. This included ongoing negotiations with the interim board for a new lease and hire agreements that still operate at Hidden Valley Motorsport Complex today.

Grant was involved in a new management plan for the complex addressing non-compliant building structures which saw \$3.5m in government funding being allocated to ensure assets for the facility met required building standards and ongoing maintenance. This was followed by another report into the essential services at

Hidden Valley, which were failing due to age, resulting in a further \$8m being allocated. I remember seeing some of those set ups for essential services firsthand.

Grant was a driving force behind the innovation of MotorSports NT Incorporated as a recognised peak body for the Northern Territory. He was instrumental in all major decisions that related to Hidden Valley for many years and he wrote the new MotorSports NT constitution.

In February 2007 MotorSports Incorporated officially became the peak body for motorsports across the Territory. Grant increased the number of affiliated clubs from six to 20 and increased licenced racing competitor, pit crew, official and volunteer numbers from 1000 to 10°500. Due in great part to the work of Grant, motorsports in the Territory now attracts well over 180°000 participants and spectators every year, and it is estimated that \$80m to \$100m is generated back in to the Territory's economy.

Most recently Grant has led a self-funded trip for MotorSports NT to Asia, investigating the potential for international participation between countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. Grant was instrumental in seeing the return of the Australian Superbike to Darwin after a four-year hiatus. He has ensured the ongoing success for many of the Territory's best motorsports events such as Nitro up North, the Desert Nationals, Kamfari, NT Cart Titles, Motor Cross Titles and the Chariots of Thunder series, amongst other events, through appropriate funding and support.

MotorSports NT has grown and flourished under his leadership. He is greatly respected by not only government, but by the motorsport community. Over time Grant has lobbied the government to commit in excess of \$80m across the Territory into motorsports since the formation of MotorSport NT. It is widely acknowledged that Grant has been the most significant and influential person in Territory motorsport for some time. All motorsport participants have benefited from the work of Grant and for more than 35 years this has been provided at no cost as a volunteer. Grant's services to sport has been exceptional and he has spent inordinate amounts of time mentoring and coaching administrators and committee members to better their clubs.

In 2008 Grant was rightly made a life member of the Darwin Carting Association and in 2016 he was made a life member of MotorSports NT. Earlier this month Grant, sadly, stood down from his role as the president/chairman of MotorSports NT as a result of personal illness, but I hear he will be staying on in an advisory role.

There is no doubt that motorsport in the Northern Territory would not be in such a fantastic position, as it is today, without Grant's contribution. I wish him and his wife Mary all the very best in the next chapter of their lives and I sincerely thank him for all his contributions to Territory motorsport.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Tonight I stand to deliver an adjournment to acknowledge the achievements of local Karama resident and musical extraordinaire Miss Caiti Baker and to speak about the seniors garden awards event that I attended earlier this week.

In February this year I spoke about the achievements of the amazingly talented Caiti Baker, who also happens to be a proud Karama resident. In my previous adjournment, I mentioned that Caiti had been awarded a \$20°000 arts grant to showcase her talent in the USA and I wished her well for her upcoming appearance at WOMADelaide. I also congratulated her on releasing her debut single, *Heavy On My Heart*, in August 2016.

Caiti is not one to rest on laurels; instead she has continued to go from strength to strength in her musical endeavours and won big at the sixth annual NT Song of the Year Awards held on 8 July in Darwin. Caiti took out three awards that night. Her song *Heavy On My Heart* won in the best blues and roots category, while her song *Make Your Own Mistakes* won in the pop category and took out the top gong for the overall song of the year. Congratulations, Caiti.

Being an assistant minister is a challenging and rewarding role, one I feel very privileged to work in. As the assistant minister for seniors, I often receive meeting requests from senior Territorians. Earlier this year I was able to meet the wonderful Mr Ken Kohalen, who is a proud and active senior Territorian. He works hard to improve the lives of other seniors and he is on more committees and boards than I care to remember.

During our meeting Ken mentioned that he would like to get a seniors gardening competition up and running. I told Ken that I had been working with Heimo Schober from Keep Australia Beautiful Council NT and I would provide Ken's details to him to facilitate contact. I am pleased to say Ken was able to bring his wonderful

initiative to fruition with Heimo and Keep Australia Beautiful Council NT's support. I was honoured to be able to present the 2017 Seniors Beautiful Garden Competition awards at a special presentation on Monday.

My congratulations to the inaugural award winners who were Sheryl and Dita Conrad, the winner of the large garden category, and Ms Jo Anderson, the winner of the small garden category. It was also great to see commendations being awarded to other avid gardeners, Ms Judy Wright, Patsy Forsyth and Val De La Fevre. Thank you to Ken and Heimo for organising this wonderful competition and I look forward to supporting you in future competitions.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.