

The committee convened at 8.30 am.

## MINISTER WORDEN'S PORTFOLIOS

### RENEWABLES AND ENERGY

#### DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

**Madam CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome. I acknowledge that we gather on the land of the Larrakia people and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I welcome you, minister, and your officials. Please introduce your officials, then I have some things I need to say before you make an opening statement.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Madam Chair, I also acknowledge that we are meeting today on Larrakia country and acknowledge the traditional owners past, present and emerging.

Accompanying me this morning from the Office of Sustainable Energy for the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade is the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Shaun Drabsch; Deputy Chief Executive Officer Mining and Energy, Ms Anne Tan; Executive Director of Office of Sustainable Energy, Mr Matthew Sargeant; and the Chief Financial Officer, Ms Joanna Frankenfeld.

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

I will invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by other committee members, then any other participating members. The committee has agreed that members who are asking a question on a similar train will also jump in there. Members may join us online today.

Please make your opening statement regarding renewables and energy.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Madam Chair, can I clarify that each time before I speak I will ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Not you, minister, we know your voice; just the officials with you. It helps Hansard. They get to know people, but if someone has not spoken before, it makes their life easier.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The Northern Territory Government is working hard to achieve the renewable energy target of 50% by 2030 and helping Territorians keep their power bills down. The Territory's journey of transition to renewables is responsibly designed to enable renewables to provide 50% of electricity output by 2030.

Over the past five years the estimated proportion of electricity consumed from renewable sources has more than doubled from 7% in 2017–18 to 16% in 2022–23. Consumption from renewables is projected to increase to 17% in 2023–24 and to more than 21% in 2024–25. That will be three times the level we started with seven years ago.

The trajectory to 50% renewables will accelerate as we work through to the remaining years of the decade. We remain confident that the target will be achieved by that date.

Regarding large-scale solar farms, the Darwin–Katherine electricity system plan reflects a staged approach toward the 50% target recognising that a combination of initiatives is necessary, including small and large-scale solar generation, batteries for storage, batteries which are able to provide essential system services and smaller, faster multifuel thermal generators which continue to provide baseload and secure generation.

The Territory government will continue to prioritise rigorous compliance testing processes for new large-scale generators to ensure the security and reliability of the electricity system. While everyone is keen to see the solar farms dispatching, this will not be at the expense of electricity supply security. All parts of government are working hard to ensure the farms are able to dispatch at full capacity as soon as possible. The solar farms are connected to the Darwin–Katherine electricity system and are at various stages of commissioning and testing process. Commissioning and testing involve testing and operating the solar farms at progressively higher levels of output to monitor their performance in compliance with the generator performance standards approved by the Territory's independent Utilities Commission. This process allows the fluctuating

performance of the solar farms to be assessed in a controlled way to ensure that the risk of an adverse impact on the system is minimised. It is the obligation of the developer of the solar farms to ensure they meet the standards required and approved by the Territory's independent Utilities Commission.

Notwithstanding the longer than expected commissioning and testing process, the solar farm developers are now progressing fast towards commercial dispatch. During the day of Friday 14 June 2024 52.9% of electricity generated on the Darwin–Katherine system was generated by renewable energy. The Darwin–Katherine total system demand was 121.4 megawatts met by 103.3 megawatts from gas-fired generation, that is from T-Gen, and 18.1 megawatts from four of the six connected solar farms. Those farms are Eni in Katherine with an output of 6.11 megawatts, Eni in Batchelor is 4.96 megawatts, Eni in Manton is 4.96 megawatts and RAAF Base Darwin is 2.07 megawatts. In addition, 98 megawatts were generated by behind the meter solar bringing the total power demand to 219.4 megawatts. In 2024–25 we anticipate the large-scale solar farms will finalise their reliability and system security testing and make a greater contribution to renewable energy consumption.

In terms of the Darwin renewable energy hub, while the existing large-scale solar farms ramp up their output, the government is progressing with plans to further the renewable energy transformation. The Darwin renewable energy hub will be critical to achieving the Territory government's target of 50% renewable energy by 2030. Work on the master plan and concept development for this major electricity transmission infrastructure project is under way with the aim to enable the connection of 180 megawatts of solar power supported by battery firming to the current Darwin–Katherine system by 2030. Territorians could expect generation from the renewable energy hub to begin from around 2027. In terms of the Darwin-Katherine battery energy storage system at the same time our government is investing to secure the system to support the growth in renewables.

Earlier this year a milestone was reached for the Territory's 45 million big battery known as the Darwin–Katherine Battery Energy Storage System, or DK BESS. All 192 individual batteries each weigh 3.5 tonnes have been installed for the 35-megawatt BESS with construction and pre-commissioning also complete. Government has also announced the second large-scale battery storage project. The DK BESS 2 project will see large-scale batteries distributed across location on the Darwin-Katherine power system to boost capability and assure the security of our power grid. Commissioning is targeted from 2026 onwards and the project will deliver fuel savings and enable more solar renewable energy by providing essential system services across the grid.

Together these two BESS projects will satisfy the Darwin-Katherine electricity system plan requirements for the installation of 105 megawatts of high specification batteries. Our government is also continuing with the home and business battery scheme, HBBS, with grant funding helping to cover the cost of battery installation. We are finalising the business case for remote power system strategy supporting 70% renewables in 72 remote communities. The first pilot of this strategy is the Wurrumiyanga solar infield pilot project which is currently under construction. It will see an additional 1.1-megawatt solar array and 3-megawatt hour battery energy storage system installed in Wurrumiyanga. Works are nearing completion with the solar array installed and the battery undergoing factory acceptance testing in Darwin before being delivered to the site. This project is expected to be completed in August of this year. We are also working on response to the Alice Springs Future Grid road map report, and we are working on longer-term strategies to reach net zero by 2050 with active planning for the development of hydrogen as an alternative low emission fuel.

As you can see, the Territory government is investing in clean, affordable and reliable energy for Territorians now and into the future. Renewable energy is good for the environment, good for getting Territorians into work and good for helping keep the cost of electricity down. We are not rushing projects but setting the foundation for a responsible and prudent rollout focused on ensuring energy security and reliability for all Territorians. The Territory government remains confident on achieving the target of 50% renewables by 2030 as we will continue to implement plans and strategies to support achievement of that target and improve the delivery of electricity services to consumers.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there questions relating to the minister's opening statement?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you Madam Chair. Hello minister and government representatives.

You spoke in your opening statement about the renewable percentages going from seven per cent to 16%. Where are we sitting as at today, regarding that percentage of renewables into the grid?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The proportion of total electricity consumption from renewables at the moment is at 16.8% with a forecast of 21.8% for the coming year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There was talk of 17% in the 2023–24 financial year, and I imagine from now to next July we are not expecting a whole lot more generation coming on board. You also spoke about 25% in the 2024–25 financial year. Where are you expecting the additional renewables to come from? Will that be from these longstanding solar facilities coming online?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In part, yes. I will give you further information on those. A number of steps must be completed before generators are able to dispatch electricity to their full capacity. I talked about that in my opening statement as to where we are at. We have to maintain rigorous compliance testing processes for the new large-scale generators to ensure the security and reliability of the electricity system.

The status is that all three of the Eni solar farms have been connected and energised, and they are at different stages of compliance testing. On 22 September 2023 the Katherine Solar Farm was approved to dispatch 6.25 megawatts, or 25% of its capacity on an interim basis. The continuation of this arrangement has been approved for successive temporary periods, which is good news. Eni needs to submit a request to Power and Water to approve an extension of the arrangements for that to continue. You could ask Power and Water about that later. We still have some compliance testing to be done.

Work is progressing for the solar power stations at Manton Dam and Batchelor. They have been interim dispatching, and PWC has approved Eni's request for both power stations to commence interim dispatch at 50%, subject to completion of some final testing for them to go to full capacity. We anticipate that will be finalised in the second part of this year.

Merrick's Capital Batchelor Two Solar Farm is being connected and energised and has commenced compliance testing. It is anticipated that they will commence interim dispatch at 50% as well.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Which facility?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Merrick's Capital, Batchelor.

We have compliance testing at 100% ongoing at the Batchelor Two Solar Power Farm. Once that testing is complete we will be able to full dispatch from there as well.

Darwin International Airport's 10 megawatts is compliant and generating for all behind-the-meter consumption, which is good news. Defence's solar farm at the RAAF Base, which is 3.2 megawatts, is fully operational. Robertson Barracks at 10.8 megawatts is being finalised with some minor works. It is expected to be fully operational any day.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Many would say that the compliance testing has been rigorous and has gone on for a number of years. It is good to see that we are expecting those facilities to come online in the next financial year. Some of them are already dispatching to certain degrees. We spoke about Katherine at 25% and Manton Dam at 50%. What is holding back those other facilities from dispatching at 100%? Is the need for solar ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Remember, committee members, later in the week we will have the government-owned corporations.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a question for PWC.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Not a problem. We have spoken a lot—last year we were told that there would be \$5.4m earmarked to progress electricity reforms. How much of that \$5.4m has been spent in the last financial year?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, although there is only one output for this area, you can let the committee know when you feel a question is better directed to an output if you have not talked to it in your statement. Obviously, this one only has one output.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Could you please repeat the question?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last year we were told in your opening statement that there would be \$5.4m earmarked to progress electricity market reforms. That was to achieve these renewables targets. How much of that \$5.4m has been spent in the last financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** To 31 March \$1.143m has been spent. I invite the chief executive officer to provide more information about the additional.

**Mr DRABSCH:** The \$5.4m was a budget for the reform process. The projected expenditure for this financial year, 2023–24 just finishing, is \$2.09m. We have in budget another \$3.2m occurring next year. The reform process is well under way.

We have issued consultation papers and had engagement with industry and other stakeholders over the recent months in the course of this calendar year. We are finalising the proposed drafting instructions for legislation as we speak.

The process of undertaking the market reform process has involved establishing a project team made up of industry specialists which is a rare skill in this current market. It has taken longer than we anticipated to establish that team, but it is fully established now and operating at a high level. It reports on a regular basis to the Electricity Market Reform Implementation Taskforce, which is made up of me; the Under Treasurer, Craig Graham and an independent expert, Mr Steve Edwell.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is any of the work that the Electricity Market Reform does holding back the availability or the ability for those solar farms to further connect?

**Mr DRABSCH:** No.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What work is the Electricity Market Reform doing, and what does it hope to achieve?

**Mr DRABSCH:** The electricity market reforms are complex and have an effect on industry participants and consumers. We are trying to create more stability and greater order to the process of introducing new generation capacity to the electricity system. We undertook an independent review by Mr Steve Edwell, who also did a review of Power and Water Corporation earlier and is a market regulator in Western Australia. He has extensive experience in the electricity sector.

We looked at the market structures that were proposed under the NTEM and determined that there was a requirement to have greater and centralised control over the procurement of capacity. It is that process that we are seeking to reform through legislation and appropriate regulation. That is the purpose of the market reforms.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** My understanding was in the last year you have put out a tender, basically seeking any additional proponents that would want to build large-scale solar in the Northern Territory. Was there anyone that came back seeking to build further solar as a result of those expressions of interest? You have the electricity market reform going out and you have spoken about wanting to see stability. In regard to the new electricity reform, have you actually had anyone come to you with regard to those expressions of interest?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I think you might be referring to the Jacana tender. That might be a question for Jacana. Some of that will be commercial-in-confidence I am sure, but that is a question for Jacana.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last year we also heard that money has been put aside to ensure the Hydrogen Headstart program can take place. Can you give us any further information about where we are at with the Hydrogen Headstart program? That was part of the electricity market reforms.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have Matt Sargeant here, and this is an area for him. Are you comfortable if I ask Matt Sargeant to outline all the activities that have occurred.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Certainly.

**Mr SARGEANT:** The Hydrogen Headstart program is a Commonwealth program. Basically, it provides \$2bn worth of export credits, so it is a competitive program.

In terms of the Northern Territory Government's program in relation to renewable hydrogen, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade was funded with \$5m over four years for enabling and foundational activities to support the development of a hydrogen industry in the Northern Territory. Some of the activities that we are undertaking with that funding include:

- establishing fit-for-purpose standards and regulations for the production, transportation, storage and use of hydrogen

- ensuring local workforce skills and capabilities are ready to support industry growth
- undertaking Territory-wide resources assessment, including for wind
- land use planning for renewable hydrogen
- assessing early commercial applications and economic fuel switching opportunities to help grow demand for hydrogen in the Territory
- building community trust and understanding in hydrogen.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I think this goes to the crux of what I am trying to get at. From asking the GOCs previously last year we know that they are transitioning and wanting to move towards generators that can be powered by both gas and hydrogen. We obviously have the Hydrogen Headstart program, which we spoke about last year, as part of the electricity market reforms. You have just spoken about the standards and regulations. How far realistically are we away from being able to produce hydrogen in the Northern Territory?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a good question. I will ask Matt to respond to that.

**Mr SARGEANT:** The hydrogen industry is a nascent industry, so it is still being established and working towards commercial applications. The technology is developing fast, and the demand is there. Most advanced economies are targeting net zero emissions by 2050 and there will need to be a fuel source to abate emissions in industries which are not easily transitioned to electrification. From a conceptual perspective the industry seems to have agreed that there will need to be demand for hydrogen at some stage, but the technology and commerciality is not there at present.

The Commonwealth's strategy to develop the hydrogen industry revolves around increasing the scale of the industry. We talked about the Hydrogen Headstart program which is designed to provide production export credits to a few large production facilities to build to scale, which will reduce costs and achieve commerciality and a wider application of hydrogen.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** To confirm, I believe you said there was \$5m over four years set aside as part of those programs. Has any money from the federal government been expended as part of the Hydrogen Headstart program?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I am sure your wonderful officials probably have those details on hand, but if you need to take questions on notice, we can also do that. Some of the ministers have been getting back to us during the session.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I want to qualify—is that under the Hydrogen Headstart program, which is the federal government program?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes. From that previous response it sounded like the NTG had been funded \$5m over four years. I was wondering ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** No. You are perhaps making ...

**Mr SARGEANT:** The \$5m is funding from the Northern Territory Government. We have not received any funding from the Commonwealth under the Hydrogen Headstart program.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Beautiful. How much of the Northern Territory Government \$5m that has been invested over four years has been expended?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We estimated this year to expend \$1.051m.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What has that money been spent on?

**Mr SARGEANT:** The key projects we are progressing or have progressed this financial year include the regulatory review of Northern Territory legislation to develop recommendations for amendments to make the Territory's regulatory framework fit-for-purpose.

We recently commissioned a consultant to prepare a wind measurement strategy, which we will use to firm up the Territory's wind resources and diversify our renewable resources. That is principally aimed at supporting large-scale electricity generation for hydrogen.

We have almost commissioned an electricity workforce study to advise the Territory government on strategies to ensure we have the right workforce and skills for the development of the renewable hydrogen industry. That also covers off on the Northern Territory electricity industry generally.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is quite broad. How much, for instance, did the wind consultant cost? I imagine that would have gone out to tender.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We might take that on notice. It should not take too long to get that information.

**Madam CHAIR:** Before I go through the process of taking it on notice, did you want a breakdown of all those grants?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is probably a good question. I will make note especially of the wind consultant.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That may have been available in the written questions regarding consultancies for the agency. If you give us a moment, I have my copy of the written questions here.

**Madam CHAIR:** I suggest for time, because we have a number of important portfolios to get to, that the member puts the question on the record. If you get the information quickly ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, we will take it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.1

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As part of the \$1.051m Hydrogen Headstart program, can we please get a breakdown of expenditure focusing on the commissioning of the wind consultant and how much that cost?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 4.1.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** The system plan which is set to be staged over 10 years has three key stages. In addition to the BESS there will be two more batteries brought online by 2030. Can you advise how large those batteries will be in capacity? Has any costing been done in relation to them through this office?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Is that the DK BESS 2?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes. There have been a number of batteries outlined.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I spoke about them in my opening statement.

**Madam CHAIR:** In answering this question, can you provide the capacity of BESS and can you then break it down? I have a question on this too.

**Mrs WORDEN:** DK BESS 1 is 35 megawatts ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Per hour?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, that is overall capacity.

DK BESS 2 is under planning at the moment, so it is not settled, but TGen may be in a position to answer that. I outlined in my opening statement that together the two BESS projects will satisfy the requirements for the installation of 105 megawatts, so 105 minus 35 is 70.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is that just for DK BESS 2 or is it ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** DK BESS 2. Combined it is 105. DK BESS 1 is 35 so that would be amongst the other batteries. The DK BESS 2 project would be 70.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is what I was trying to get at. Obviously the 35-megawatt solar costs \$45m. Has there been any work done on the cost of DK BESS 2 through the Office of Sustainable Energy?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes. That work is being done through the detailed business case. There will be factors that will impact—where they are situated and commissioning. For example, for the Wurrumiyanga trial we have the battery sitting in Darwin. Obviously, there are transport costs associated with getting it over to the island, which will happen shortly. There is a whole range of different factors. I believe that they are close to determining the best locations across the grid to give that reliability and sustainability for the supply. There is a range of factors that will come into play regarding costs.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I know there is a distinct crossover between the Office of Sustainable Energy and the GOCs. I am trying to make sure that I ask the relevant questions across both, so I do not miss out.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you have question about the generation of number 3? Do you not have a figure on that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There is no 3. There is DK BESS 1 and DK BESS 2, which are the names of the projects. DK BESS 1 is one battery, whereas DK BESS 2 is a number of batteries strategically put into place to keep stability. That whole business case is well and truly under way at the moment.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Who has carriage of that business case?

**Mrs WORDEN:** TGen. You could ask lots of those questions of TGen, as they will have the answers about where they are up to.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I look forward to it.

Last year we were told that \$1m would be set aside for a business case for a renewable energy hub. Where are we up to in relation to that money being spent and the delivery of the business case for the renewable energy hub?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I spoke about that in my opening statement as well. We have completed site selection analysis. That has identified a preferred site for the hub. It was identified using a multi-criteria decision analysis that considered, amongst other things, distance to existing electricity transmission assets; impact on the environmental values; conflict with water management zones; land tenure and native title status; and competing land use.

We have progressed foundational work on the renewable energy hub site, including environmental investigations, land use planning, native title investigations and sacred sites approvals. That is all under way.

Jacana Energy has released an expression of interest to identify potential proponents—as you talked about—to operate 100 megawatts of large-scale solar generators at that identified site.

This project goes across a number of government agencies, and I can report that they are working hard together. DEPWS are working on site selection and environmental approvals, along with the EPA. It is a project which involves different agencies and moving parts, including Lands and Planning to identify that land. It is well under way.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you expand on that as to the actual site which is being analysed?

**Mr DRABSCH:** The site we have identified is just north of Berry Springs, west of Finn Road and just south of the Weddell area. It is approximately 900 hectares and has the capacity to hold greater than the 180 megawatts which were identified in the Darwin–Katherine Electricity System Plan.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you repeat that figure in megawatts?

**Mr DRABSCH:** The Darwin–Katherine Electricity System Plan identified the need for at least 180 megawatts of solar generation. We have designed the site to accommodate that. We believe there is scope for additional capacity beyond that level.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You have essentially mapped out the area, worked out how many solar panels it can fit and roughly come to that figure.

**Mr DRABSCH:** Correct.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Going back to the solar farm in Katherine—we have asked questions on this before—when were those facilities built?

**Mrs WORDEN:** They were built by private businesses, not by government. I believe they have changed hands since they were built. That was way back before my time as minister and does not have an impact on this budget.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that we have the renewable hub happening in Berry Springs and those other solar farms are not hooked up yet ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are hooked up. I said clearly in my opening statement that they are all connected, energised, dispatching at different levels under a testing regime and are scaling up as they go.

**Mrs HERSEY:** When will they be out of a testing scheme and be fully operational?

**Mrs WORDEN:** When the operators meet the regulatory requirements that are set by the Utilities Commission.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What have been some of the barriers in them reaching those requirements, given that the one in Katherine has been there for five years and the others equally for that length of time?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I can assure you that the one in Katherine is connected, energised and exporting. You would need to ask Power and Water those questions because it is about the connection. They will appear later in the week.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The four solar farms have been sitting idle for four or five years. You said that they are connected and energised. What percentage of their capacity is being currently used?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I spoke about that in my opening statement. At different times they need to be connected and exporting.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** When you say 'exporting', do you mean generating ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are putting power into the grid. It goes through a testing regime, so it has to make certain milestones within that export.

**Madam CHAIR:** I think the member's question is how much.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was in my opening statement. On Friday 14 June, 52.9% of the electricity generated on the Darwin–Katherine system was generated by renewable energy. Four of the six farms connected to that grid are online and dispatching at various levels. The two not dispatching, Robertson Barracks and Merricks' Batchelor, are due to internal issues but they could have been operated for an additional 10 megawatts. The system demand for the Darwin–Katherine system was 121.4 megawatts on that day met by 103.3 megawatts from synchronous generation at TGen and 18.1 megawatts from the four solar farms, Eni Katherine was dispatching at 6.11 megawatts, Eni Batchelor 4.96 megawatts, Eni Manton 4.96 megawatts and RAAF Base Darwin 2.07 megawatts.

That is a snapshot of one given day, but it could change. Ninety-eight megawatts were generated by behind the meter solar; they are the ones on our homes et cetera, bringing that total power demand to 219.4 megawatts—52.9 megawatts were generated by renewable energy on that day. This is a snapshot of where we are at. On the next day it could change, depending on the testing and the regime. They have to meet certain requirements for them to be able to dispatch in and we also have to have the capacity to make sure that it brings stability to the system.



**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What is their full capacity? Those figures are in isolation, are they not? Is that 10% of what the energy that they can deliver, or 70% or what?

**Mr DRABSCH:** With Katherine's 6.25 megawatts is about 25% of capacity. We are working actively with them to go through hold point three testing and the potential to ramp that up to 18.25 megawatts, which will be three quarters of capacity. In terms of Manton and Batchelor Farms the 4 megawatts to 5 megawatts outputs represent half of the capacity of those farms. As the commissioning process is finalised, which we hope to incur over the coming months, the potential to go to full capacity will be there, and that will also reflect the demand for solar energy as a result of higher use of air conditioners and so forth as we get into the hotter months. At the current point in time in the Dry Season the demand for electricity is considerably lower, and also the solar radiation is a little lower because the sun is a bit further away on the horizon so the potential to generate full output is constrained in any event.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have another question relating back to something that was mentioned before. You said 16.8% of electricity is currently generated by renewables as of today. Can you break that down and tell me what percentage of electricity is generated by renewables as of today in Alice Springs and then the Top End?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that on notice.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It is so important to know because there are totally different grids.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, they are.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** To say it is 16.8% does not mean that much.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, that incorporates Alice Springs.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It does incorporate Alice Springs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Alice Springs has a high behind-the-meter take-up of solar. If you want to put that on notice, we will try to get that back to you as quickly as we can.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.2

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

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What is the percentage of electricity generated by renewables in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and the Top End—the three grids?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 4.2.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Madam Chair, I have a response to 4.1 regarding the cost of the wind study.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 4.1

**Mrs WORDEN:** The total cost of the wind study is \$167,750.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have a whole set of questions about the Alice Springs grid, but I am sure the Member for Braiiling has that on his list.

**Madam CHAIR:** Mr Guyula is also online and has questions.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have a set of questions about the Alice Springs grid, but I am sure the Member for Braiiling has that on his list.

**Madam CHAIR:** Mr Guyula also is online and has questions. Everyone is lining up.

**Mrs HERSEY:** On the solar farms. Given that the NTG encouraged those investors to construct those solar farms years ago, how much did the solar investors invest?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That would be a question for them. That is private capital investment. We would not have ...

**Mrs HERSEY:** You do not have any idea on how much they are?

**Mrs WORDEN:** If there was any contract it would be commercial-in-confidence anyway. I have no idea; you would have to ask the individual businesses.

For example, Eni purchased those from another party. You would have to go back to that original party to ask them how much it cost to privately construct it.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that we have these four or five solar farms that are not—no, are partially—working at the moment making power, and there was the expression of interest—I am not sure if this is what the Member for Braiting was asking about before—for another renewable solar farm in East Arm, has anyone taken up that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not sure. What you are talking about is a Jacana tender. You will need to ask Jacana later in the week.

I invite the chief executive officer to make some commentary about the capacity of the solar farms because it would be rare that they would all be generating at full capacity at any given point; there will be fluctuations at different times, depending on the weather and consumption. He can outline that because there is a story that they should all be generating at 100% all the time. That is not the way these systems work. I invite him to say more on that.

**Mr DRABSCH:** It is the case that some operators have thought they could just build a solar farm and throw the cable over the fence and ask where to plug it in. There is quite a detailed and complex process of incorporating those farms into the energy system. To maintain stability you need to have spinning reserve in place, reliability of connections and the capacity to respond to fluctuations elsewhere in the network.

The other point is that the farms themselves, as I mentioned, rely upon the level of radiation, which during the Dry you would think would be strong and good. It is consistent because there is no cloud but the radiation from the sun is less than it would be in end of the calendar year. Whereas in the wetter months, while the solar radiation is greater, the presence of cloud reduces the capacity of those solar farms to contribute to the system.

There is quite a lot of variability. It is called 'intermittent power'. It is important that as people are bringing this energy source into the electricity market that they understand clearly how much revenue they can expect from those processes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are working hard to get them all at capacity and able to put into the system at capacity. We want as much renewables in the system as possible, but you cannot do that at the sacrifice of reliability of the system. We are working through that and slowly raising the bar as we go.

**Mr DRABSCH:** That is the importance of getting greater batteries. Some of these solar farms have been installed without batteries so they do not have their own source of fuel. The DK BESS battery and the DK BESS 2 and any future solar farms such as those on the renewable energy hub—we will be seeking to ensure that they have battery support that can maximise the amount of power generation they can create.

**Mrs HERSEY:** With respect to Mr Drabsch, I am pretty sure these people who have invested millions of dollars in setting up their solar farms did not go in thinking they would throw a cord over the fence. I know you were just saying that, but they would not be investing millions of dollars thinking it would be easy.

I am wondering what support was put in. There were all these expressions of interest for people to build these solar farms, and here we are five years down the track, but they are not in full capacity or even 50%. What I am trying to ascertain is that millions of dollars have been invested, so why were the batteries not there to start with? It is a bit like the cart and the horse ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, not really. I have been advised that we did not go out to tender for those solar farms; they were market led and investors decided that is what they would do. Technology is changing greatly, and we have a very complicated, large system that we need to make sure is stable. That is the number one job: to keep the lights on for people. We must do that responsibly.

There have been different issues with different solar farms and connections. You will see that the RAAF base one came on very quickly because they did different things than the earlier iterations of those solar farms. A lot has been learned about it over the last five years, but the number one thing we must do is keep the lights on. The chief executive talked about firming, and that is the importance of having batteries.

That is why there was a proposal not long ago; we were told by people interstate that we should have this big battery and it would fix everything for the Northern Territory, but we are not on the national electricity grid. We have three smaller systems, and they all need to be kept reliable and sustainable. It has been a long process, but there has been a lot of due diligence and a lot of cost to other organisations. You could ask Power and Water and TGen about the cost to them of putting solar farms into the system.

It is not all one way. Government did not go out and say, 'Give us all your proposals.' It was a market-led initiative. From time to time, we see others wanting to build solar farms. It is the way of the future, but we need firming capacity. We also need spinning reserve to make sure that when there is a fluctuation and everybody turns on their air conditioners at once, we can boost the system, and the same in reverse. When the air conditioners go off because it is cooler, particularly on a grid like Alice Springs, we must make sure we have the spinning reserve. That impost falls back on government.

We have taken it very seriously, so we have done it in a measured and steady way to ensure that when they do go on, the system does not just fail, because then everybody will kick government.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Has this exposed the government to legal challenges? Are there any legal challenges ongoing with these solar farms?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not in this portfolio output; you might want to ask the GOCs that later in the week.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is also important to realise the goalposts were changed. The generator performance standards were introduced after the solar farms were built, is that correct?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite the CE to talk to that.

**Mr DRABSCH:** With respect to the farms controlled by Eni, the GPS standards were in draft form under public consultation by the Utilities Commission, and the commission has indicated that those who were purchasing or creating those solar farms should have been aware of the nature of the generator performance standards that would be introduced, as the drafts were publicly known.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** So, they were meant to know what the generator performance standards were before they came to being?

**Mr DRABSCH:** No, there were drafts in the public for consultation, which were very clear about the extent of the standards. It is important to emphasise that, as the minister has just described, our systems are quite different to the National Electricity Market, where solar farms can be built and integrate with the system, and if there are fluctuations the availability of power that is broadly across the system can fill any gaps. Ours is a smaller system—much lumpier in terms of generation capacity—therefore the availability or otherwise of individual plants has a much more dramatic impact on the system. That highlights the importance of having rigorous generator performance standards to ensure that the lights stay on.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Has the Office of Sustainable Energy done any modelling as to the actual maximum availability of solar that can be put into the grid at a sustainable level? At the moment, that must be something you talk about. You have all these solar facilities operating at different levels. What is the maximum amount of solar as a percentage that can be put into the Darwin–Katherine grid?

**Mr SARGEANT:** At some point in the adoption of renewables we will need to switch off our thermal generators during the day. Once we get to that point, the operation of the system and the expansion of our adoption of renewables effectively becomes a decision to install more solar and batteries. From that perspective there is no technical limit on how much renewables can be adopted. It is an economic decision regarding where the right point is, in terms of renewables percentage.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As we stand today with a 35-megawatt best battery at Channel Island, what is the ability for us to actually have the solar generating into the grid at a sustainable level? That is what we are all talking about today. You are investing in additional battery technology to bring more solar online. What is the current availability of the generators to allow for that penetration of solar into the grid?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is pretty technical. You need to ask PWC about that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The budget of the Office of Sustainable Energy grew from \$9m to \$24m. Can you please outline where this additional funding will be allocated within the department and if any additional FTEs will result from the increase in funding?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you have more questions along the lines of batteries and getting systems on the grid? The Member for Araluen has quite a few questions regarding that. Can we pause and go to her questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to work in wherever we can, Madam Chair.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I do not have any questions on batteries.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Which we are getting to, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The extra \$15.27m in the budget is reflected by \$5m in new Commonwealth funding for emissions reduction; \$6.1m in new funding for the Home and Business Battery Scheme and remote renewable power rollout; \$9.14m in funding for 2024–25 for various sustainable energy programs in line with program funding profile; and there was a transfer of \$4.43m from 2023–24 to align the timing of program activities. It is a timing thing across various sustainable energy programs.

That is offset by a decrease of \$2.275m in one-off carryovers in 2023–24. There is \$5.239m in funding 2023–24 for various sustainable energy programs that I presume would have come to their natural end; \$0.775m transferred to DIPL for the renewable energy hub—we have moved some across to its outputs—and \$1m one-off funding in 2023–24, which was from internal reprioritisations.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There were some large figures thrown around there for various sustainability programs. Do you have a list of the programs you are investing in, for those millions?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The \$3m is the Home and Business Battery Scheme. The remote renewable power rollout has \$3.134m attached to it. The Electricity Market Reform Taskforce has \$3.256m. The Renewable Hydrogen Master Plan has \$2.491m. The Darwin-Katherine Electricity Plan has \$2.978m.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In relation to the electric vehicle charger grants scheme, there was \$300 put out. How many people have accessed those grants? Has all the money been expended?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is DIPL, not us.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is DIPL, not part of yourselves.

**Mrs WORDEN:** No; it is infrastructure.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Alice Springs Future Grid handed down its report and road map to highlight how to achieve further renewables into what has been described by experts as solar saturation for Alice Springs. What funding, if any, is the office contributing to the Alice Springs Future Grid into the future, and when does that funding run out?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There is \$13.4m which was for a collaborative project delivered by Intyalheme Centre for Future Energy on behalf of Desert Knowledge Australia—DKA. They came under the direction of the steering committee, including DKA, Power and Water, Ekistica and TGen. Also, DITT, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation were observers on that steering committee.

The future grid project included five sub-projects focusing on power system modelling, microgrid trials, household battery and tariff trials, community engagement, and management of solar PV export to the power

system. All that work accumulated in the road map. I know the Member for Araluen is interested in that. They have recommended three phases of work to be done.

We know that the business-as-usual system operation is no longer tenable for Alice Springs. Modelling and analysis undertaken for the road map highlighted that the system is rapidly approaching several of the thresholds in relation to supply and demand imbalance.

It provides four technical scenarios for the transition of Alice Springs to 50% renewable by 2030. That includes either large-scale solar or rooftop dominating, and transformation and system security maintained with either a small amount of thermal synchronous generation on at all times or without synchronous generation for periods of time. I note that it takes two years to get a synchronous condenser, so TGen is doing amazing work in that space.

My understanding is that we are considering all those options at the moment. We have not come out with a final position against them; that work is ongoing.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Has funding to the Alice Springs Future Grid ceased or will it be continuing?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The funding was for that project. All the other ones will be considered.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That funding has now been expended, the report has been handed down and essentially the Alice Springs Future Grid ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was not all NTG funding. It was \$5m in seed funding from us, and about \$3m of that was for the delivery of the project. The project was also funded by a \$2.17m grant from ARENA and a \$3.2m grant from the Australian Government's Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund Microgrids program. It was not all our investment.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What is the office's involvement in enacting the road map and ensuring the work that the road map has done, The Alice Springs Future Grid report ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Anne Tan the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Mining and Energy, to respond to that.

**Ms TAN:** The report talks about works being undertaken across three phases. The first phase is to secure the system. In that regard it aligns with gap analysis of essential system services in Alice Springs that is currently being undertaken by the Power and Water Corporation and Territory Generation. Our expectation is that the findings from the gap analysis will identify the critical system deficiencies and enable and inform options for near-term investment required to secure the system. That work is in train through PWC and Territory Generation.

Phase two involved advanced planning and operation. This aligns with the work being undertaken through the energy market reform process to develop a regulated electricity system investment plan for each of the three regulated systems, which will include Alice Springs.

The third phase involved the acceleration of renewables deployment in Alice Springs, and this aligns with the work that Territory Generation will undertake ongoing as the provider of new generation—the sole supplier of generation within Alice Springs.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** One of the things I want to point out that the report spoke to is that for some time we have had conversations about a VPP—virtual power plant—whereby one of the trials was to put batteries into people's homes, connected with solar, then use that solar power on demand when needed. The report outlined that would not be the best way to progress. Does the Office of Sustainable Energy agree with that recommendation, and will you now move to more firming batteries that will be scattered throughout the town as part of when we progress further down this path?

**Mr SARGEANT:** Virtual power plants are essentially the operation of rooftop solar and batteries in a coordinated fashion to support the electricity system. The technology relies on there being a large amount of these systems in place, which are being controlled remotely by a centralised service provider. Whilst VPP might not make sense in some systems in the Territory, it may make sense in other systems.

Over time as more people invest in consumer resources, including rooftop solar, batteries and electric vehicles, the capacity and influence of those systems on the whole system increases; therefore, the business

case for investing in VPPs and controllability of these systems increases. If it is not a situation of necessarily now, it may be a situation that makes sense in the future.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Just to confirm, from the conversations I have had with representatives from the Alice Springs renewables roadmap, they spoke more specifically about more home and rooftop batteries not being the way forward and more to focus in on the large-scale producers of solar in our town, then attaching batteries to those facilities.

For instance, you might have a large hotel with a large solar array, and being able to control those inputs to the grid is where the money would be better spent. I find it interesting that the Office of Sustainable Energy will come in and work with Power and Water and TGen to essentially guide the best way forward, especially in relation to the Alice Springs grid, which is an isolated grid.

**Mrs WORDEN:** A number of things are already going on in Alice Springs. You might want to ask the Housing minister about projects for rooftop solar and batteries in public housing.

**Mr SARGEANT:** One of the findings of the Alice Springs future grid report was that investing in centralised solar and battery systems would be lower cost overall to achieve 50% renewable energy in the Alice Springs system. We all know that consumers are electing to invest in these systems, so whilst the pathway might be cheaper to progress with centralised solar and battery, people are investing in these systems. Where they can produce value and offer services to the system and earn revenue from that, we should take that up.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** This is a fabulous report. I commend the government for investing in this research that has taken several years. The people who have been involved are at the top of their game. It has been a collaborative work; that is why they came up with the four scenarios, as you know. None of them could quite agree on a single set of recommendations, so they have recommended four.

One of the things concerning me is that when I was briefed on this excellent report, they talked about how there has been a strong uptake in rooftop solar in Alice Springs, and this is causing problems. It is causing sudden plunges in minimum system demand during the middle of the day—usually between 10 am and 2 pm—to dangerous thresholds for the Alice Springs grid.

They talk about—I am sure you were briefed on this—9 October 2022 when there was a system overload, which plunged to a dangerous low level. The story is that we are approaching a point in the Alice Springs grid where we will have blackouts if our system is not addressed. This was made clear. You would have been told about it, minister—all of you.

Here we are with this great report that was produced earlier in the year—nothing in the budget. We were told clearly:

*Regardless of the pathway taken, achieving the transition to a 50% renewable energy power system requires investment. In the case of Alice Springs power system across the four scenarios, the order-of-magnitude modelling suggests a range of \$156m – \$216m in total net present cost, from public and private investment.*

That is an average of \$186m over the next six years to get us to 50% renewables. You have not invested according to this report. You were given plenty of time to consider adopting one of these scenarios and investing accordingly, but you have not. How do you intend to get Alice Springs to 50% renewables by 2030? It will not happen; the experts have told you.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We only got the report in March. We are considering our position at the moment. This is a good question—you have overlapped two issues. The issue about the system black you are talking about—there has been an enormous body of work done by TGen to ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I know all that. I am asking you.

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, no. Those questions are for TGen. The question about the work they have done and the investments that have been made by our government through TGen—because we own it—have been significant to make sure that does not happen again. It is a good conversation to have with TGen later in the week. It has done an enormous amount of work to make sure that does not happen again.

The second part is maturing, growing and changing the system to take all the renewables ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I do not agree with that. That is not what the report says.

**Mrs WORDEN:** In terms of?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The report says you need to adopt one of these scenarios in order to avoid further blackouts ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, but that was done at a point in time, and a lot of work has been done by Territory Generation since the beginning of that to make sure that does not happen again.

That is a question for TGen. Gerhard will talk to you about ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** We had lots of conversations in Estimates about blackouts in Alice Springs.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is right, but there has been a lot of work since this time last year to make sure that does not happen again—outside of that. We are still considering our position on what you are talking about. I anticipate it will not be long before we talk about what it is we will do. That report only came out in March.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** An average of \$186m per year according to this report for the next six years will be required to get Alice Springs to 50% renewable energy by 2030—page 32:

*This is an average of \$186m with a relatively narrow range of approximately +/-15%.*

They have done costings on how we need to upgrade our system and change it to get to 50% renewables. It is a massive investment.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Renewables is a massive investment.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** But you have not invested as yet. You have given generously \$30m some years ago.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are still considering the report as we only got it in March.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** We watch this space? It is disappointing minister.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We cannot rush when we receive a significant report coming through. We need to know what is required, and we are taking time to consider it properly. Renewables is a changing space, which is what I have noticed since becoming the minister last year.

We touched on hydrogen; the technology is changing all the time, and there are many people working in this space doing incredible things. Tomorrow we may have different solutions, but we are looking at the report properly and will come out with a thorough response. Given that it only came out in March and it is the middle of June, it will not be far away and our government is doing the work.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You put the time line of 2030 for 50% renewables. Time goes quickly.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, and I am confident we will hit that target. Things will ramp up quickly as we go forward. We have to do the hard work at the beginning and make sure we do not make systems unsustainable and unreliable in that process.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I also know how government works; if the allocation for the future grid in this budget is zero, it is coming off a low base to get to \$186m?

**Mr DRABSCH:** The work we are undertaking is to analyse the report which was issued. People like Lyndon Frearson were key authors of that, and we have had briefings from him about those issues. There are costs to delivery of energy and the investment and infrastructure to ensure the sustainability and reliability of the system, which is an ongoing reality. The question is what the most efficient cost and effective way of is achieving the outcomes.

In terms of achieving the renewable energy target, the problem in Alice Springs is that there are a lot of renewables. At some points in time, we are getting more than 50%. It is how we manage and balance the system to ensure the infrastructure is in place to deal with the intermittent reality of that energy source.

These are important issues being confronted not just the Territory, Alice Springs and Darwin grids, but around the country. A lot of work has been happening in the energy policy space as we are realising the capacity of the existing market and operating structures to deal with the advent of renewables. It has become more complex.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** But we have a road map, Mr Drabsch. I know what you are saying, but a group of experts have been working on this for years.

**Mr DRABSCH:** Yes, and we have been working on the report for the last three months.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** To confirm, in Estimates last year it was stated it would be handed down in October. What happened from October to March?

**Mr DRABSCH:** We were hoping to receive the report at that point of time. The authors of the report had a range of duties, responsibilities and obligations and were unable to deliver within that time frame. They were busy. We were keen to see the report as quickly as possible, and we are pleased we have now received the final report. It was not because of inaction by this government.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Local Alice Springs members cannot be blamed for being a bit suspicious or concerned about the commitment of this government to implement something that will cost in the realm of close to \$1bn over the next six years if it turns out to be the case, given the lack of delivery of anything in Alice Springs over the last eight years. I am not asking a question, but it concerns me that this might be shelved. Given that there is no allocation of funds for it in this budget is evidence that I should be concerned.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It has not been shelved. It is being worked on and we will have a response.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to that—it was asked last year—what happens after the Future Grid report is handed down? You spoke in detail about an Alice Springs electricity system plan. Like you said, you have had that report since March. Where are we at in regard to forming up that electricity system plan for Alice Springs?

**Mr DRABSCH:** As Anne Tan just explained, in phase 2 of our response—this is advanced planning and operation—we will be preparing a regulated electricity system investment plan, or RESIP. That has been developed by NTESMO—the Northern Territory Electricity System and Market Operator. It has been commissioned by the EMRIT task force to undertake a RESIP for the Darwin–Katherine system and the Alice Springs and Tennant Creek systems. We are actively working on those things.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is that part of that advanced planning in phase 2?

**Mr DRABSCH:** Yes. We are doing the modelling to understand the precise pieces of infrastructure we need to have in place and the timing for that to ensure that we achieve the outcomes that were identified in that road map report.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As the Member for Araluen outlined, for a long time we have been talking about additional battery storage in Alice Springs. As yet, are there any additional battery storage systems that are being looked at to be placed in Alice Springs?

**Mr DRABSCH:** That is a question for TGen which has carriage of it. That is all part of this recent planning process as well.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I am not sure where this fits in, but I am sure you will let me know. On 12 October 2023 you flew to Borroloola from Darwin and stayed overnight as per the intrastate ministerial travel report for the period 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024. The report states ‘meeting stakeholder’ and the total trip cost is reported as \$8,990, with the airfare component as \$2,247.50 and the other component is \$6,742.50. I am not clear from the report about where the output goes. Did you only meet with one stakeholder?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I rarely go anyway just to meet one stakeholder. Can you repeat the dates? It may not have been in this portfolio. There was a change of portfolio after that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** The travel period was from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024. The cost of the trip was \$8,990.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I was not the minister for this output during that time. If you can park that, I am always open about meeting stakeholders and who I met. That would be outside of this portfolio. It would not be in this



output. I do not know how you deal with those because there was a change. I am just being advised it was when I was the Youth Justice minister.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** We can work through that and get the member to repeat the question at the appropriate output.

**Mrs WORDEN:** From memory, I would have met staff who are working in the Territory Families office in Borrooloola. I would have gone out to Seven Emu, by the sounds of that. That is just my memory.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You did not go to Seven Emu.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I absolutely went to Seven Emu.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Territory Families.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, but I do not think that would have been at the cost of the agency; it would have been my ministerial and I would have taken agency staff with me.

I am not sure how that works; Chair, I am looking for your guidance.

**Madam CHAIR:** Perhaps in the break you can have a quick chat. Member for Katherine, you might need to do a written question on this.

Mr Guyula is ready online with some questions on the opening statement. We will then come back to the output.

**Mr GUYULA:** This government has made a commitment for 50% renewable energy by 2030, what percentage will we be at by the end of the next financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** At the end of 2024–25 we anticipate 21.8%.

**Mr GUYULA:** Which remote communities will have renewable energy in the next financial year? How many of the 73 remote communities and homelands will have renewable energy sources by 2030?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are in the planning phase of that at the moment. We are doing some work through Ekistica to look at 72 remote communities. Outside of that we have done the Wurrumiyanga trial, so they will be up and running I anticipate in the next couple of months.

The department has a draft report back from Ekistica about the 72 communities. We now need to work through them and work out the best fit for each of the communities before we can say which ones will be the priority. There will be smaller communities that will be much easier. We anticipate that there will be a range of options which will be guided by the size and location of the community and the ease of access to the community, so there will be a range of different systems that are applicable to each of the 72 communities.

I am happy that once the work is finalised and we know what it looks like, you would get an early briefing, Member for Mulka.

**Mr GUYULA:** The Office of Sustainable Energy had a budget this year of \$15m and only \$9m has been expended. Why is that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The figures are only to 31 March. The variation between what we budgeted and the estimate is a decrease of \$6.045m. That is because of an \$8.135m transfer of funding from 2023–24 to future years for the timing of program activities that are associated with the Darwin–Katherine Electricity System Plan, the running of the office, the Renewable Hydrogen Master Plan, the electricity market reform task force and renewables in remote communities and hydrogen trial. That money has been transferred forward. That also includes a \$0.7m transfer to DIPL for some work on the Darwin–Katherine electricity plan. That is for the renewable energy hub site.

That is then offset by an increase of \$2.275m in one-off carryovers from the previous year of \$0.87m for the Darwin–Katherine electricity plan; \$0.64m, Office of Sustainable Energy; \$0.29m for the renewable hydrogen master plan; and \$0.473m for the renewable in remote communities and hydrogen trial.

There are some additional dollars coming in, but we have forecast some of it ahead. It is a timing matter for when things can be delivered.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, can I clarify that you did not have any further questions on the opening statement or the outputs?

**Mr GUYULA:** No, I do not.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for joining us, Member for Mulka. We will be in touch with you and your team about further portfolios for the minister today.

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

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 as they relate to the Renewables and Energy portfolio. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Minister, as part of the Office of Sustainable Energy, how many EVs are part of its fleet and how many are internal combustion? I always find it interesting to find out how the Office of Sustainable Energy is getting around.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We might take that on notice, thank you.

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### **Question on Notice No 4.3**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As part of the Office of Sustainable Energy, how many EVs are part of its fleet and how many are internal combustion?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braiitling has been allocated the number 4.3.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Braiitling, that might also be a question for the minister for Transport.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am sure we can provide that information through the Office of Sustainable Energy.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The department's annual report states that the role of the office is to develop and coordinate the delivery of energy policies, including fostering renewable energy opportunities that advance the achievement of the Territory's 50% renewable energy target. The office develops policies and strategies to support emerging clean energy industries and drive electrical industry reforms that provide long-term efficient renewables and cost-effective energy for the Territory.

How many of these policies has the office actually developed in the last financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The Darwin–Katherine electricity system plan, the remote power system strategy, the electricity sector reform to facilitate the broader diversity, and the Northern Territory renewable hydrogen plan. They have also provided advice to the government on energy matters for the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council. They are also responsible under the AAO for economic regulation of energy, energy industry development, energy policy and strategy, and renewable strategic policy utilities market regulation. They also administer a number of legislative pieces.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the gateway review of the Northern Territory electricity market reforms, what were the outcomes of the report?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We spoke about that earlier. It is a task force. There are many acronyms. This is the Electricity Market Reform Implementation Taskforce. It was established; that was the outcome.

**Mr DRABSCH:** I am the Chair of the Electricity Market Reform Implementation Taskforce. It comprises three members: me; Craig Graham, who is the Under Treasurer; and Steve Edwell.

We have been working on a program of work to implement the outcomes and the recommended directions that were identified in the gateway review report commissioned by us, but undertaken by Steve Edwell. We meet either fortnightly or monthly. There is a team of four FTEs who are working actively on a range of elements for the implementation of the gateway review recommendations.

We have also been engaging in active consultation with members of the industry. Those consultation forums involved between 20 and 30 of those industry representatives. There has been active engagement and consultation about the redesign of the market to have, essentially, a centralised procurement process to ensure there is an orderly development of capacity in the electricity systems in Darwin–Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Over the years we have had reports, road maps and a range of different documents that have been guiding government investment and policy. Do we have a solid plan to guide our investment into the future in regard to renewables?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We do. I invite the Chief Executive Officer to outline that.

**Mr DRABSCH:** We already have the Darwin–Katherine Electricity System Plan. That has been in place for a number of years and it is still providing effective guidance for the broader strategic outcomes we are seeking to deliver.

The Electricity Market Reform Implementation Taskforce has commissioned a regulated electricity system investment plan. That is being prepared by NTESMO which is currently part of PWC, but we are in the process of separating them to make it a separate, independent standalone agency. They are working on that RESIP and they are on track to deliver it in the fourth quarter of this calendar year.

We are also working on drafting instructions for legislative change which should be ready for consideration in the next month or so. That will enable the drafting of legislation in time for introduction to parliament in the next term of government.

They are the key things that we are working on at the moment.

There is some detailed work happening on how NTESMO will operate. We are working in consultation with PWC and the NTESMO officers in relation to that.

Another part of this EMRIT process is to deal with the Tennant Creek and Alice Springs systems. We are designating Territory Generation as the sole supplier for those markets. Again, it is a central coordinated capacity development process.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Has that decision been made?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Anyone else who is seeking to supply electricity on a major scale will not be permitted into those other grids; is that what you are saying?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, not at this stage because of the relatively small market arrangements that are in place there. That decision has been made. That RESIP that the chief executive talked about is the regulated electricity system investment plan, so under that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How long has that been in place? When was the decision made that there would not be any other large-scale producers of electricity into the markets in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek?

**Mr DRABSCH:** That has been the outcome of the Gateway review report. It was the recommendation of that. It was accepted by government. That has been the subject of consultation with industry which has been actively under way for a number of months now.

That is not to say that TGen, as central coordinator, does not engage with the market to procure that capacity through contracts. TGen controls that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, I know of a number of proponents that were hoping to enter into the electricity market. Do you have an update on the implementation of the Territory electricity market, including time lines for the new market arrangements—the NTESMO?

**Mr DRABSCH:** Yes, we are anticipating it to be the fourth quarter of this calendar year. The engagement we had with NTESMO indicates it is on track.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In the Territory electricity market, it talks about public procurement model. Can you explain a little more about that? Is that the like of Eni and proponents like that when implementing the TEM?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I outlined already that those were market-led proposals. Public procurement is where we would go to tender and request the market. It is different to what happened in the past. We were talking earlier ...

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is that looking at privatising them?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, it is about partnerships and seeing who would like to provide those services.

**Madam CHAIR:** There are two points. If something goes to tender there is a public procurement policy. Second, sometimes people have an unsolicited proposal. They could then work with them There are guidelines about both. I am not sure if you want the minister to explain more. You are okay.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Were you involved with the gas sales agreement between the NT Government, Tamboran Resources Corporation and the Beetaloo joint venture in April?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You were not a signatory on that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I am wondering ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Is this the right output?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes, just checking. Yes. Achieving the NT's target of 50% renewable energy by 2030 will require the NT to significantly reduce the quantity of gas used for electricity generation. The Tamboran deal, however, guarantees gas usage higher than 50% of the NT's energy needs. How will the NT meet its 50% renewable energy target if this is the case?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I invite the chief executive to talk about that.

**Mr DRABSCH:** The purchase of that gas was undertaken to ensure the security of supply of gas for the Territory's energy systems in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Darwin. That is as a result of poor performance of the Blacktip reservoir. Our government determined that it is desirable to have a range of alternative sources of gas available. That is the purpose of purchasing that early stage gas from Tamboran. We are also actively engaging with Central Petroleum and Empire for similar arrangements.

While that may provide more gas than we possibly need for electricity generation in a point of time, we are connected to the east coast market and we will have the capacity to onsell that gas.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have quite a number of questions for your Environment portfolio.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is coming up later after the ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have Territory Families next.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is under Output Group 5.0.

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

## OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – MINING AND ENERGY

**Madam CHAIR:** Outputs 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are the responsibility of another minister.

### Output 1.4 – Office of Sustainable Energy

No questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.4 and Output Group 1.0.

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### Answer to Question on Notice No 4.3

**Mrs WORDEN:** In response to the EV question that was asked, the Office of Sustainable Energy has only one vehicle and it is not an EV.

**Madam CHAIR:** Lucky you drive an EV.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Three years now and counting.

**Madam CHAIR:** What about you Member for Brainting?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have my electric pushbike.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It does not get you to Darwin.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Will anyone get an EV in this department, apart from you minister?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is my private car.

**Madam CHAIR:** I would suggest that at the next estimates there will be an EV there.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The broader agency has a couple of electric cars. It is a good question for the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, as there is a policy on EVs, which is a whole-of-government initiative.

**Madam CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank the departmental staff of Renewables and Energy who provided assistance to the minister today. We will take a short break and convene at 10.25 am.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I thank the officials and the department staff who have done a huge body of work to appear today. I am grateful.

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The committee suspended.

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## PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

### ESSENTIAL SERVICES

### SPORT

## DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

**Madam CHAIR:** We will now move on to questions relating to the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Essential Services; and Sport portfolios. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I introduce the members of the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities executive team who appear with me today and will assist me to respond to all your questions. These members are Ms Emma White, Chief Executive Officer; Mr Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Housing; Ms Kim Charles, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Strategic and Enabling Services; Ms Fiona Ward, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Programs; Ms Seranie Gamble, Executive Director, Domestic, Family

and Sexual Violence; Ms Rachele McMillan, Acting Chief Financial Officer; and Mr Mitch Hardy to answer your Sport questions, should there be any.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister and officials, for joining us. Do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Essential Services; and Sport portfolios?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, I would appreciate the opportunity. It gives me great pleasure to speak of my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Minister for Sport; and the Minister for Essential Services.

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities is charged with the responsibility of delivering some of the Northern Territory's most important and impactful services and programs as we work to empower and engage communities to improve life outcomes. The budget relating to my responsibilities of the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Sport; and Essential Services for 2024–25 is \$198.7m in operational funding and \$30.3m in infrastructure funding. I am pleased to speak on each of these areas of work.

Domestic, family and sexual violence is a serious and widespread but preventable problem. Everyone—regardless of their gender, religion, race, nationality, language, living arrangements or relationships—has the right to live free from the fear of violence and be safe in public and at home.

The Northern Territory has the highest rate of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia, particularly for Aboriginal women and children. That is not good enough, which is why we are investing \$50.8m in funding to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence in 2023–24, increasing this funding to \$69.9m in 2024–25.

Since becoming the Minister for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in April 2022, I have led a coordinated effort to prevent and respond to these forms of violence. This includes working across all agencies with the Australian Government and our non-government partners. Our work is guided by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018–2028, Safe, respected and free from violence, and implemented through two very clear action plans.

That provides us strategic direction and sets out focus areas for action across the continuum of prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing for domestic, family and sexual violence. It also recognises the need for an accountable, well-coordinated and evidence-based service system. Our approach is aligned with the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–32 and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

We have the plan and we are delivering on this. Action plan one, 'Changing attitudes, intervening earlier and responding better (2018 to 2021)' was the first of those action plans under the framework, and we substantially delivered on this. In 2022 I directed the formation of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Interagency Coordination and Reform Office—the ICRO. This was a task force with senior officers with relevant expertise seconded from agencies responsible for domestic, family and sexual violence.

This task force worked to develop and reform the Northern Territory Government's approach to domestic, family and sexual violence prevention and response. It mapped out what we are investing, how much domestic, family and sexual violence is costing us, what action we need to take, and how we will know if we are making progress, as well as establishing the first Northern Territory Aboriginal advisory board on domestic, family and sexual violence.

From this we launched action plan two in August 2023, which is currently being implemented across government over the next three years to 2026. The 2024 budget invests an additional \$10m in 2024–25 and \$20m in 2025–26 to support the continuation and expansion of existing action plan two initiatives.

We are investing in crisis accommodation services for victim-survivors in 29 locations across the Territory. We have more than tripled funding for men's behaviour change programs in our communities. We have transformed women's safehouses and refuges from an accommodation model only to wraparound services that provide counselling and outreach for victim-survivors.

We do all this work in close partnership with the government, specialist sector and community. It reflects the shared nature of our responsibilities in preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. Collectively, we have made significant progress in building a more effective system to support women, children and families to be free from the fear of violence and feel safe in their communities. I work closely

with my Australian Government colleagues as a signatory to the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–32, and I welcome the decision to develop a standalone First Nations national plan to address the unacceptably high rates of violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Our government has modernised the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007*. The *Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Act 2023* commenced on 25 March 2024. The amendments modernise and improve the justice response to domestic and family violence and provide for more consistent and specialised focus on victim safety, offender accountability and the recognition of coercive control to help reduce the cycle of violence.

We know there is more to do, and we are working hard to implement the plan we created with our agency, but most importantly our community partners. Ending violence is everybody's responsibility.

I will now speak to my Essential Services portfolio.

Access to safe and reliable water, power and wastewater services is essential to liveability in any community. This is recognised by the United Nations as a human right. I am responsible for the Indigenous Essential Services program, which delivers power, sewerage and water services to about 38,000 clients in 72 remote communities and 79 outstations across the Northern Territory.

The services were delivered through Indigenous Essential Services Pty Ltd, a not-for-profit subsidiary of the Power and Water Corporation. Under the 2024–25 budget our government is investing \$87.6m to ensure the continuation of these essential services.

We are committed to ensuring the residents of remote Aboriginal communities have access to safe and secure water supply. We are investing \$28m over four years to target the highest priority water quality and security issues in remote Aboriginal communities.

This program is being used to leverage Australian Government funding from the National Water Grid Authority. This funding follows significant water supply investments to support the delivery of housing through the Remote Housing Investment Package. We are making progress.

The Laramba ion exchange water treatment plant has been established. Smart water meters have been installed at Warruwi and are now operational to report on water leaks. In Maningrida, construction of a new water main linkage infrastructure project is progressing.

Packages of upgrade projects co-funded with the National Water Grid Authority are occurring in Yuendumu and Milingimbi.

We are increasing solar-powered generation with a target of 70% across remote communities by 2030. Solar panels have now been installed—as I said in my previous opening statement—to increase solar-powered generation at Wurrumiyanga. Battery in system integration works are being commissioned.

The remote essential service working group has been formed with members from the land councils, Aboriginal peak bodies and government departments involved with essential services. Collectively, the group is working towards addressing actions outlined in the Northern Territory Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, aimed to ensure Aboriginal people receive the essential services that meet their needs.

Through delivery of Indigenous essential services, we are supporting jobs for remote Aboriginal community members who are well positioned to support the program. Essential services operators perform water quality testing, diesel-generated services and maintenance of remote assets.

I will now speak on my Sport portfolio.

As we all know, sport plays a special role within our community by delivering a range of social, health and economic benefits. Our mission is to ensure we are partnering to build safe, strong and proud communities where every Territorian is valued and able to participate with sport and recreation activities an integral part of life in the Territory.

In Budget 2024–25 we are investing \$41m to provide Territorians with more opportunities to lead more active and healthy lifestyles, through collaborating with peak sporting bodies, sport service providers and active recreation organisations, regional councils, Aboriginal corporations and other key stakeholders.

The role of volunteering in sport is of utmost importance to me. Sport and recreation activities simply do not happen without volunteers. I was proud to launch the Northern Territory Sport Volunteer Action Plan in September last year. Since then, we have launched the Volunteer Development Grant program, delivered six volunteer development workshops, created the Northern Territory Sport Volunteer Network approximately—a mobile online platform—to share content and resources and help establish a community of practice.

Our government recognises the role of our peak sporting bodies, sport service providers and active recreation organisations. We are also supporting several strategic initiatives through funding of the Darwin Salties—men’s, women’s and wheelchair basketball teams—and Australian Rules Football community initiatives.

The Northern Territory Sports Academy continues to support our aspirational athletes, coaches and officials through scholarship programs, the Foundations physical literacy program and the Northern Territory Sports Academy Futures Program.

Both financial support and specialist services provided are vital to providing young Territorians with every chance to progress their chosen sport’s pathway.

We are reducing the cost of living by continuing to fund the Sport Voucher Scheme, which decreases costs to families and supports children in being active and participating in sport, recreation, arts and cultural activities.

Our government has invested and continues to invest in creating and maintaining quality infrastructure to support physical activity. Sporting infrastructure is essential to deliver sport and active recreation programs for Territorians across the Northern Territory.

We partner with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics; local governments; regional councils; and other key stakeholders to deliver and manage infrastructure that improves availability and accessibility.

During 2023–24 planning and completion of works to supporting infrastructure included multiple infrastructure projects at TIO Stadium, including the installation of a cricket nursery and storage sheds, the installation of pathway lighting and the completion of a family toilet block upgrade and vendor power bollards. At Larrakia Park, construction of a new scoreboard and repainting of changing rooms and doors were completed. We are now installing new car park lighting to improve safety and amenity.

Master planning processes have been completed on the Mickett Creek Shooting Complex and the Hidden Valley Motor Sports Complex.

The \$9m redevelopment of Purkiss Reserve in Tennant Creek is under construction. In our remote communities, we work alongside regional councils where we funded construction of lights at Gunbalanya Oval and Ntaria. We have Yuendumu softball and football oval upgrades to lighting, ablutions and shade facilities.

During my response to budget appropriation last month I spoke about our new investment in Budget 2024–25 of \$4.65m at the Hidden Valley Motorsport complex; \$6.45m to undertake staged upgrades to Woodroffe oval to create a multisport facility; and \$3m to Football NT to upgrade Tracy Village sporting precinct playing fields. That helps to match federal funding as well.

In closing, we have made significant across the sector to ensure all Territorians are safe, respected and free from violence. We will continue our efforts in this space in 2024–25. I acknowledge the extreme hard work of our services and frontline workers every day to prevent and respond to domestic family and sexual violence.

We are continuing to invest in the wellbeing of Territorians to improving opportunities for community participation in organised sport and active recreation. I am happy to now take questions.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Thank you, minister, for your opening statement. Thank you to the staff who are here for all the work they have done getting ready for today.

Can you state what the rate is of domestic violence in the Northern Territory?



**Mrs WORDEN:** This came from the ICO mapping report of May 2023. The homicide rate in the Northern Territory is seven times higher than the national average. The assault rate in the Northern Territory is three times higher than the national average. The sexual assault rate in the Northern Territory is 1.2 times higher than the national average.

It disproportionately affects women in every state and territory. The assault rate for women is between 1.7 and 2.8 times higher than the rate for men, with the exception of the Northern Territory where the rate for women is 3.7 times higher.

The homicide rate for women in the Northern Territory was 5.8 times higher than the rate for men. A total of 78% of all assault-related victims in the Northern Territory were female; 100% of all sexual assault victims were female; and 100% of all related homicide victims were female.

The most recent statistics are from 2021–22. They are dated, but obviously there is a lag. It shows that since the age of 15 there is a percentage of women in the Northern Territory who had experienced physical violence and the percentage who experienced sexual violence were respectively 37% and 27%.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Sorry, minister, could you repeat a little of that? Did you say 100% of homicides involved women?

**Mrs WORDEN:** All female. Thank you for asking that important question because we often do not get to talk about that publicly. We need to have a conversation with the community about it.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Did you say those rates were from 2023 and the 100% homicide for females was 2022? There is nothing more recent?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The 2021–22 ABS public safety survey—since the age of 15 the percentage of women in the Northern Territory who had experienced physical violence and those who experienced sexual violence was 37% and 27% respectively.

That is quite dated information, but the other came from the mapping that was done by the ICO in May 2023.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How do the rates compare with other jurisdictions?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We do not necessarily have all the jurisdictional information of others. We have a national average and that is what I was referring to. Our rates are seven times higher than the national average for homicide and the assault rate is three times higher than the national average. They are the statistics I gave you up-front.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many deaths per year are due to domestic violence?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a question for the Police minister. The stats I have given you were done by ICRO, but in general the other stats are either done by the Attorney-General or Police.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that the recent statistics that came out of domestic violence assaults across the Territory over the last eight years is an 81% increase, what is being done to address the terrible incidence of domestic violence?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Can you tell us what document you have for the eight years?

**Mrs HERSEY:** They are from the ones that we get from Police.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I do not have the police data in front of me, but I can tell you the work that is going on. I outlined a lot of it in my opening statement.

We have the 10-year framework that was developed in partnership with the service sector that provides all the services that we underpin. Every year we invest more and more funding. This year an additional \$10m and next year an additional \$20m has been put into the budget. I have a note here and it is a very important fact. We expect to see an increase in reporting as you invest more into a whole-of-system response. That is a fact with this area. The more you invest the more awareness you get and the more you get people reporting. Initially we expect the figures to go up.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given the more you invest, are you saying the rates will go higher ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** You expect the reported rates to rise, yes, and that is nationally.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Anecdotally, do you know how much under-reporting is happening in this area?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We would not know. How would you know what under-reporting is going on?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think the member is asking on behalf of the committee that we have seen an increase in reporting which might indicate why we have seen an increase in statistics.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a fact that the more awareness there is of what domestic family and sexual violence is you will see an increase in reporting. We built a system across all agencies to ensure the under-reporting reduces, so there is more accessibility.

In 2023–24 where our investments went into the following. There was \$6.53m for crisis accommodation services for victim–survivors in 29 locations. By the end of December last year, women and children had accessed those services on 3,207 occasions, resulting in 23,426 bed nights.

We have more than tripled the funding for men’s behaviour change programs in the community with more than \$6.8m over two years committed to those programs.

We have transformed women’s safe houses from more than just being refuges; they can have wraparound services, counselling and outreach. That was through a \$3m enhanced specialist services grant.

We have allocated almost \$3m towards meeting the national partnership agreement 3 in flexible support packages so that women escaping violence can have access to basic services, such as food, transport, furniture and bill assistance when and how they need them.

We have invested \$1.5m in place-based community-driven prevention projects to stop violence before it starts.

We have partnered with national experts, such as Our Watch, and that is \$0.214m to support our growing primary prevention workforce with the latest evidence and practice skills.

We have worked hard to support and strengthen our exceptionally skilled workforce with \$1m dedicated to implement the Northern Territory Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Workforce and Sector Development Plan.

We have trained over 1,500 workers, which I think that is a significant number, in the risk assessment and management framework—we often refer to that as the RAMF—the Northern Territory standardised evidence-based practice framework to guide workers in identifying, assessing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. That includes police officers.

Funding has also gone to partnering with NTCOSS to support the sector and provide professional development for the workforce through the Sharing and Strengthening Our Practice sector conference.

We support our frontline services with implementing the RAMF through \$2.03m under the NPA, including creating RAMF champions in universal services so that victim–survivors do not fall through the cracks.

We aim to address gender inequality as a key driver of violence with \$300,000 to implement the Gender Equality Action Plan, including funding men’s places grants. We intervene with young people starting to use violence with \$1m grant funding for four years to establish an early intervention grant program and a further \$2.1m under the NPA, so we are leveraging the Commonwealth funding to sit alongside ours.

We have invested almost \$1m in the Aboriginal Advisory Board and Aboriginal community-led prevention initiatives. We have established a brand-new housing pathways program so that victim–survivors can have a safe and supported household in the rental market through \$2.5m under the NPA.

We recognise that frontline services are experiencing an increase in demand. We have allocated \$3.83m from the NPA to supplement their baseline funding to make sure that they are funded to do the job that we were asking them to do. We have allocated the NPA funding for 18 new frontline workers, 12 of whom will provide specialist support to children who are victim–survivors.

We have allocated further NPA funding to the new risk co-responder model in Alice Springs, where police and specialist workers work side by side to respond to incidents.

We are establishing a systemic death review process so that the tragic circumstances of women who have been killed are the foundation of learning how to stop this happening again.

We have enhanced the Territory's first specialist approach to domestic violence in the Alice Springs Local Court to better support vulnerable survivors as they navigate the justice system. This is a \$1.27m investment.

It is a lot.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What was the \$1.27 in Alice for?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is additional. You will remember a few years back we stood up ...

**Mrs HERSEY:** What was the position called?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is at the Local Court in Alice Springs. It is now fully embedded in the Alice Springs court. We have given them an additional \$1.27m in the budget to enhance that.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is a specialist court model, so it has separate entrances.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Do you want more information on that?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Seranie Gamble to give you more information on that.

**Ms GAMBLE:** The specialist court in Alice Springs has been operated as a trial. It is set out in our action plan. Essentially what it means is there is a dedicated registrar who oversees the different applications for domestic violence orders and presides over those matters so that there is a specialist judge with expertise and understanding of the services coming together and the way that they need to operate. There is dedicated funding for support workers supporting the people going through those courts.

It is not just the people representing in court; it is the victim support services coming together and working around how to address those referrals through men's behaviour change programs. In conjunction with Tangentyere Aboriginal Corporation they have been operational since action plan one in 2021 to provide a dedicated service for men committing acts of violence. Through the specialist court service, they have a team of experts working together to make sure the right referrals can be made and supports put in place for people who are not only experiencing domestic violence but also those who are perpetrating.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many men have been through that behavioural change program that the executive director was talking about?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have a number of men's behaviour change programs. We tripled the investment into that this year so that they could have improved capacity. I think we have some numbers.

We have 120 places at any given time, but it is not linear, so you would have some people on the program and some would come off it. We have expanded it to 120 places. We are only working with two providers at the moment. Men's behaviour change is—I do not like to say it is emerging, but it is fairly untested.

In terms of our grants going out, we are now providing additional funding for evaluation, which is very important. It is one of the ways our grants have changed over the last 18 months. We make sure evaluation is done on all of them.

We are also doing standards. We have some standards for men's behaviour change in place now. We are working with the two established ones and giving them more capacity.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Tangentyere and—who is the other one?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Tangentyere and CatholicCare provide for 56 participants currently.

**Mrs HERSEY:** One hundred and twenty with Tangentyere and 56 with CatholicCare?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, between Tangentyere and CatholicCare they currently have 56 participants, but our investment will go up to 120 places, which is basically an additional 60, so we are doubling the capacity. We also have to invest in enough trained staff in the program and ensure they are evaluated. Nationally, there was no standard for men's behaviour change programs in the Territory. We have moved to some standardisation of what we expect.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What processes are in place to measure how this program will work, given you have 56 at the moment working towards 120 places? How many of those would come through that program? How long is the program?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will give a bit more context for you. Men's behaviour change programs within Australia are a highly specialised emerging program area, with the evaluation being even more specialised. Previously, there were no evaluations in the Territory and only one national evaluation undertaken by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. They were nationally recognised as the experts in domestic, family and sexual violence research and knowledge generation.

The evaluation outcomes will all have national significance, so whatever we do here will have national significance and contribute to the evidence base for men's behaviour change programs. Our evaluations commenced in May 2023, so only a year ago. The Australian national research initial time frames for the project have changed significantly due to the compounding impacts of unavailability of key staff from each men's behaviour change program.

The coronial inquests have been prioritised by those programs and ethics approvals were required by Tangentyere Council, which was achieved in January this year. Those final reports are due by the end of July, with the summary paper expected to be published. Does that make sense?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes, thank you, minister. Given that has been going for 12 months, do you know how many people have been through those programs in the last 12 months?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I think we have to take that on notice because it is being provided by our partners, and I am not sure. There would be some reporting. I invite the CEO to speak, to save her writing me a note addressing that issue.

**Ms WHITE:** We can definitely take that question on notice, noting there is a continuum of men's behaviour change and healing programs. As the minister talked about, we have been investing in and focused on standing up the whole system for a coordinated evidence-based domestic, family and sexual violence system. Across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing, you will see men's programs across that continuum.

The court-ordered ones that we are focused on, and your questions on the standards, where there is emerging evidence, that is a smaller cohort of more serious offenders and people perpetrating violence at the more serious end. We will take on notice providing you that data on how many men are in each of those programs, if that is helpful.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Thank you, Emma. If I could put that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.4

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many men have gone through the court-ordered Men's Behaviour Change Program, and how many have volunteered to go through the program?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.4.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** Minister, what is the dollar investment attached to achieve the 120 spaces that you spoke of?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The whole program in Budget 2024–25 is \$4.579m.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many domestic violence offenders are on bail?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That question would be for Police. I do not have bail data.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not sure if you want to provide more detail when someone is court ordered whilst they are incarcerated or a part of their sentencing.

**Ms WHITE:** I would have to take on notice the question of the exact number. Through action plan two, we provide some investment into the Attorney-General's department to run the Men's Behaviour Change Program within the men's prison. We are doing that in partnership because we are keen for those programs to be applied to the same standards, as the minister referred to before.

We are uplifting the quality of those programs. For men who perpetrate violence, they might start a program in the community and if they are sentenced within the intervening weeks or months, there is an opportunity to pick up and continue that program whilst in prison. For some men in prison, there is an assessment process, through being incarcerated, that might result in them accessing that program. There are a couple of different pathways, but it came through those standards for men and women, who might benefit from behaviour change, to come in and out of that system depending on where they are.

**Mrs HERSEY:** When the people leave the prison system, what support mechanisms are in place for them?

**Ms WHITE:** I will be drawing on my best information. I think the Attorney-General or Correctional Services, would be best placed to give you a fulsome response in terms of case management which might be in play through their throughcare programs.

In my experience, it is a combination of intensive case management, sometimes through non-government and Aboriginal community-controlled providers, which may assist people leaving prisons with practical support in terms of housing; psychosocial support; continuing on some of the programs like domestic, family and sexual violence; alcohol and other drug addictions; or family reparation work. There are different programs in the system.

They can access support to help them step back into the community and sustain, hopefully, the gains they had from their time in incarceration. The evidence is strong, particularly for men, that if they have jobs and secure housing they are much more likely to not reoffend. That is true in the case of domestic, family and sexual violence.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will also ask Seranie to discuss the programs that are being funded via our budget into Corrections.

**Ms GAMBLE:** Under action plan two, which was agreed and commenced in 2022–23, there was a total allocation for Corrections through the Attorney-General's department to expand those programs in correctional settings. That is a \$3.81m investment that has been transferred to the Attorney-General's department. That is the suite of programs that are still in the design and development stage that will be delivered in those correctional settings.

In addition there is a component of \$1m investment that goes to specialised counselling services and healing options for women in prisons. That contrasts with the investment for men's behaviour change programs that Territory Families administers, which is in community settings. That is the work we are doing with CatholicCare and Tangentyere in addition to the existing programs that have been operating since 2021.

The new investment the minister spoke about was recognising the demand for those programs and that they now align with sentencing reform. It only commenced this year in March 2024. The numbers of completed participants for those community-based programs are unclear because it has only been operational since March.

In addition to those programs in community settings, there is also work to explore a new program that will be based in the Katherine region. That is an effort to keep expanding these programs that are now also being

declared specialised programs for the purposes of that sentencing reform, so they follow particular standards in how they operate to support those people committing violence ...

**Mrs HERSEY:** Sorry. Before I forget, can you please expand on those programs that will be starting in Katherine? There was \$3.81m transferred to Corrections. You spoke about them still coming up with some of those programs. When will they be fully functional?

**Ms GAMBLE:** The programs that are being commissioned to be run by Corrections are still in the design phase for this financial year. The Attorney-General's department would have to respond to the detail of when they expect them to be fully functional.

In addition to that, you asked about the programs being developed in the Katherine region. This is a new initiative under the national partnership agreement. It is a just over \$2m investment over three years for that program in Katherine. It is designated under the national plan as an innovative perpetrator response. It is not just a program for men; this will specifically be looking at the impacts of colonisation and the impact of alcohol as a fuel to domestic, family and sexual violence.

This is a new type of program that does not exist. We have been working with stakeholders in the Katherine region to identify who would be best placed to deliver that service. A recommendation has been made about that and the program will still go through a commissioning process and procurement. We expect it to be operational in the second half of this year.

**Madam CHAIR:** Can I get you to talk a little louder or perhaps bring the mic closer. Some of them are a little temperamental. It is for Hansard.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You are saying in the second quarter of this year that program will be commissioned. When will it be made public who is running that program?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Commencing in Katherine the first half of the 2024–25 financial year—so it is new money. You will have to wait for the money until 1 July, but very quickly after that we will put the tender out and know then.

**Mrs HERSEY:** So, there has been no tender. I assumed you have spoken with people.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The specialist sector is not broad. You can talk to people directly about things. You may end up just knowing there is one organisation there, although I do not know if that is the situation at the moment with capacity. Do you want me to give you a bigger snapshot for the Big Rivers region about the DV investments, Member for Katherine?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes, you can.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are investing \$515,356 over three years with the Jawoyn Aboriginal Corporation through the Safe, Respected and Free from Violence Prevention Grants. They are delivering the Ngalmuka Healing time and place program—they are the healing programs we talked about. There is a very big difference between behaviour change and healing.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is that through Banatjarl?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is through Jawoyn. We are investing just over \$8.5m over five years with the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre. That is new investment in action plan two. That is a risk assessment and management framework implementation worker, flexible support packages, supplementation to operational funding, and a specialist children's worker.

We are investing \$1.654m over four years with Katherine West Health Board; that is new investment from action plan two for a risk assessment and management framework implementation worker, funded through the national partnership agreement.

We are investing \$463,000 over five years with Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Indigenous Corporation. That is new investments under action plan two for a risk assessment and management framework implementation worker and flexible support packages funded through the national partnership agreement.

We are expanding the men's behaviour change program, commencing in the first half of 2024–25.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Despite the national spotlight falling on the Territory in recent months, the NT remains underfunded by the federal government to address our high levels of need. We have some amazing organisations in the Territory doing good work to fight the scourge of domestic violence, but they are devastatingly underfunded, as we would all agree.

Do you think the NT organisations are adequately funded?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In terms of the work they are doing, they have funding according to the programs they are delivering. We gave them additional funding this year to ensure that as the costs go up they can meet them, particularly in regard to staffing.

I have repeatedly said that with more we can do more. For what they have at the moment, we are slowly building capacity. We welcome their investment into the 18 new frontline working positions that came from the federal government. That is about \$10m over a number of years.

We will never step away from it. We are literally in tandem with them, and we could do with some more because that would increase capacity. For what we are delivering at the moment, we are supporting them with additional money for their workers. We are ensuring the programs we run have enough money to do that. A lot of our funding goes out in grants; in fact, the largest proportion of our funding in this area goes straight out the door to those organisations in grants.

It was \$7m the federal government gave us for those frontline positions. Initially they told us we could have 20 workers, but the funding is only available for 18. We welcome that. They will be across the Northern Territory. If we get more federal funding, we can do more. Our sector tells us that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You spoke of the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre before. When it is full—it only has 25 beds—it puts victims of domestic violence in a hotel. Can you tell me if this is a common practice across the Territory? Do you have data as to how often this happens?

**Mrs WORDEN:** From time to time, those organisations across the Northern Territory and Australia—I have just recently been to some women's shelters that have not seen a lot of women coming through those shelters in remote areas—go out to those organisations. It has those beds there for times when it might need them.

We have significantly invested in infrastructure. We are doing a new project with Dawn House, for example. There is some infrastructure money there for Katherine. Very recently we agreed with Katherine on the design for a new space to increase its capacity. We have done the same in Alice Springs, but, from time to time, there is a lot of work that needs to go in regarding safety planning. You cannot predict whether you will be full or not. You go to some at some times and they have barely any women and children in the shelter. At other times they will be stretched, depending on what is happening in that community at that time.

It is not a strategy across all of them.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How much funding is going towards infrastructure for the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre? Is it something that is budgeted for?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is budgeted for. They have an allocation of infrastructure. We have been working hard with them to find a solution.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is that securing land for that infrastructure?

**Mrs WORDEN:** They have the land. The figure is \$3m.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Domestic violence is increasing. What used to be enough at the women's crisis centre with one staff member and one coordinator is now not enough. The coordinator position has not been filled for over 12 months. How is the government supporting these services and working with them to provide full service to victims?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is not the information that we have. You cannot just say domestic violence is increasing. The reporting of domestic violence is increasing. That does not mean it has not been there previously, and it does not mean that women have not been going to refuges. They just have not necessarily reported that in the data to police.

In terms of Katherine, for accuracy rather than ferreting around and losing time, we can take that question on notice. We will have to get it from them as they work independently.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.5

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** Figures for domestic violence are increasing. What used to be enough at the women's crisis centre with one staff member and one coordinator is now not enough. The coordinator position has not been filled for over 12 months. How is the government supporting the women's crisis centre and working with them to provide full service to victims?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 4.5.

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**Mrs WORDEN:** Member for Katherine, I might take a moment to explain about your budget question about national funding.

Currently the federal government has a pie, if you like, of funding. It breaks it up on a population basis. It has been that way for a long time. I have noticed across lots of different portfolios—not just in this space—that tends to be the way the federal government provides funding.

Under NP1 we have a couple of other agreements, one of them being the new workers agreement which gives different layers. It is not based on need; it is only based on population. We get 1.9%, I think, of the national pie in that first NP1, which is obviously not enough.

It is a difficult space for the federal government because other states and territories do not want to give up their portion of that pie. It has always been population-based, but I have been able to negotiate with the federal minister that it will move towards a change in methodology to needs-based funding. It will take the will of every state and territory to do that, but the federal minister, Amanda Rishworth, has indicated to me that she is willing to look at change to the methodology, which we welcome, as does the sector.

When you are on a 1.9% base, overall in the different streams of funding—that is on the base funding—we get 4.6% now. A lot of that has now come through advocacy. We secured an additional one-off—I want to make that clear—\$10m payment on the change of government when the Albanese government came in. That was a one-off; we need—that is why it is called needs-based funding—for it to be changed to look at what we need. We need the pie to be carved up differently or for it to be made bigger or, as we have advocated for on a number of occasions, a one-off bilateral agreement with the federal government which would suit us well in this area.

We are also hoping, with the development of the First Nations national plan, that the Northern Territory will get more under whatever funding the federal government decides to give out. We are quite hopeful in that space as well. Obviously, Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory are disproportionately affected by domestic, family and sexual violence.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Across the Territory we have facilities for domestic, family and sexual violence victims. Can you tell me how many beds are in each of these facilities?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that on notice because we do not have bed data with us today.

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** Across the Territory we have facilities for domestic, family and sexual violence victims. Can you tell me how many beds are in each of these facilities?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I thought the Member for Katherine said a lower number. There are 29 facilities. That is the Northern Territory ones, because there are safe houses that are federally funded in remote as well. That 29 figure is in total. Do you want the federal ones as well as ours?



**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes, thank you, if you can.

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**Question on Notice No 4.6**

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** Across the Territory we have facilities for domestic, family and sexual violence victims. Can you tell me how many beds are in each of these 29 facilities, regardless of whether they are Territory or federal?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.6.

**Mrs HERSEY:** As part of the Barkly Regional Deal, the need for an audit and review of services in the Barkly region was identified. Why has this audit never been completed, particularly in light of the fact that there are only eight beds at the women's refuge in Tennant Creek?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The Barkly Regional Deal was done under Chief Minister and Cabinet.

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister said that some things were agency-specific and that we should ask those agencies the questions.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Ms Gamble to talk on that point.

**Ms GAMBLE:** In general terms in the last number of years since the Office of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction was created, there have been a number of service system reviews. A particular focus of those reviews has taken place in the Katherine Big Rivers region as well as the Barkly region. Over a period of time that review originally identified in 2021 that a hub of domestic violence services would be useful for the Barkly region. When the services on the ground got together as part of the review, they identified that they needed to work together and have additional top-up funding to them, rather than creating new different types of bespoke initiatives.

There has been a concerted effort over time to work with those local providers through creating a domestic, family and sexual violence network where they meet on a regular basis to identify the issues and work together on how they can address those different issues in the Barkly region. There has been an ongoing investment towards the Tennant Creek refuge, and in addition we have some emerging investment in targeting the Barkly region.

This has experienced some delays because of the different service issues of local providers in the region. It has now been allocated for an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to pick up on a published researched report in 2022 by Julalikari, on the service responses needed. We are now working with some new providers in light of those service issues in Tennant Creek,

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given the review identified that a hub would be useful, are you now saying that is not the case? There will not be a hub for domestic, family and sexual violence?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes. It was clear during that early work that when the services got together, they did not want a hub. They did not feel that the model would work. We have a department-employed coordinator in the region, and they pull together the services. They are working in a more coordinated way versus a one-stop shop. We now have additional funding going into the region to do more.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Has there been an audit and review of the needs of the victims of domestic, family and sexual violence in Tennant Creek to identify needs, and is that the review you were talking about?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is the work that was done by Julalikari. It was called the Tennant Creek and Barkly region report on family violence; I do not know if you recall that. They held a family violence workshop and a march in Tennant Creek in October 2022, which I attended. They identified a preference for the community-

led approaches and culturally appropriate services. We sought and were provided approval to allocate an additional \$500,000 funding to deliver recommendations from that report. That funding was carved out of some national funding in response to that report.

**Mrs WORDEN:** To clarify a question by the Member for Araluen about the homicide rate, in terms of domestic violence-related homicides, it is 100% women; that is not all homicides. I think we were talking at cross-purposes ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Oh, that is what I ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** I do not know if that is a fact. I wanted to qualify that for you and us as I did not realise we were talking at cross purposes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that Tennant Creek only has eight beds at the women's refuge, is it identified that more infrastructure will be built there? It seems a low number given that there was the Barkly Regional Deal and a whole lot of findings that came out over the last few years.

**Mrs WORDEN:** There is no infrastructure funding to that service at the moment. We are working through some governance matters with them. That is all I am prepared to say about that, if that is okay.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Sure. Given the additional \$500,000 funding has gone there, what then has the funding gone towards in Tennant Creek?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is for the new Aboriginal community-led organisation. The contractual stuff is occurring, so I cannot talk about that. We were trying to move with another organisation, but that did not eventuate so we found a new organisation to fund to provide the services.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is that not with Julalikari that you were talking about before?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, it is not Julalikari. We have other investments. We have an investment of \$972,341 over five years with the Barkly Regional Council for the Ali Curung and Elliott safe house. There is a lot of domestic, family and sexual violence funding going into the region.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Are the safe houses in the process of being built, or are they houses that have been identified in the communities already?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, they are operational, and we have upgraded their security in the last 12 months.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What educational programs are there regarding domestic, family and sexual violence for perpetrators in the men's behavioural program?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Under action plan one we invested \$1.114m in the Men's Behaviour Change Program in Alice Springs, delivered by Tangentyere Aboriginal Council Corporation, and Darwin and Wadeye via CatholicCare. Under action plan two we have committed an additional \$5.32m over 2023–24 to 2024–25 to increase the capacity, as noted before, because the inability of them to meet demand was highlighted for several years, and that came out in our consultations for action plan two. That is a total of 120 places, which is 60 additional. We have also developed the minimum standards for those programs. It is a five-year agreement that we have with Tangentyere and CatholicCare, and they take priority places for persons ordered to participate by the court under sentencing reforms. They also have to align with minimum standards and with the outcome of the evaluation program.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Did you say the cost of the programs was \$1.114m?

**Mrs WORDEN:** For next year's budget it will be \$4.579m for Men's Behaviour Change. There is the NO MORE campaign. The programs are done under the grants we have provided. We have a whole list of different grants under the Safe, Respected and Free from Violence Grants. You would have a list of those in the written questions.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** All the programs being delivered by grants are there.

**Mrs HERSEY:** When funding the men's behavioural change program do you take into consideration the turnover of staff, given that the training costs are quite high for the facilitator of that program?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have the workforce plan that came from action plan one. It was a part of that. It is about investing in the staff and their skills to make them feel safe doing their job.

We also gave them top-up money to ensure they could be paid well enough to stay within the industry. It is a bit like the childcare; those service sectors are always paid the least amount. With the cost of living rising we have been able to do that. I believe that it has had a good impact on workforce retention.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that the men's behavioural change program is designed to have tertiary-qualified staff, in the future will the funding take into consideration self-determination by employing non-tertiary Indigenous people to be mentored and trained to become qualified in leading men's behavioural programs?

**Ms WHITE:** Workforce development, as the minister has signalled, and action plan one and the development of the Northern Territory workforce plan was the beginning of laying a foundation for what we know is quite a large and enduring challenge. We are investing in and are focused on getting everyone in the DV and sexual violence sector having a base level of capability, capacity, knowledge, skills and experience and then we top up when it comes to some of those more specialist areas like men's behavioural change. There are other areas where deeper knowledge and expertise have been beneficial.

In terms of the workforce profile and design, independent organisations that the department funds will have made their own decisions. For example, it may be the same position with different opportunities for qualified or non-qualified and you may have different arrangements for someone who may come with a non-university qualification but who has a lot of relevant experience, knowledge, and professional-based training. Of course, there would then be a pathway to receiving qualifications in the department. As an example, we run the Learning and Development Centre which has a lot of programs available to non-government and Aboriginal community-controlled funded organisations to draw down on.

I think in getting the right workforce diversity is key and being able to have sustainable funding and support for the right workforce. We have a good plan and we are beginning to see the benefit of that, but we still have a way to go.

I think workforce in the community services generally is a challenge. It is a challenge across the country. It is something that the Australian Government and all jurisdictions have joined forces on. We have long since accepted teachers, nurses, police and so on need a pipeline of workforce in order to have sustainable delivery. This is something that we are catching up on and that we need to be focused on in the Territory and beyond for us to keep delivering quality services across these critical areas.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I would say we are doing very well in those 18 frontline workforce positions. Other states and territories are finding it hard to recruit to them. We have three and we are undergoing recruitment for others now, so we are doing quite well.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Are you undergoing recruitment for 15?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have 18 positions in total funded by the federal government of which we have filled three already. Other jurisdictions have filled none and they are much larger.

We have a very small percentage. Nationally the pool was 500 workers. We were allocated 20 originally, but the funding was not enough for 20 and we would not have attracted people. We were able to negotiate that back to 18. The positions make a living wage, otherwise we would have not been able to attract people to those positions. We have already attracted three and we have recruitment under way for the others, well and truly.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What investment is being put into community development for men's behaviour change programs into the future, other than a mandated program? I think we just touched on this.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Our government has a policy on moving towards it. That really is a question for the Attorney-General in regard to Community Corrections. There is a lot of evidence which says that if people undertake those programs in their communities they get a better outcome. There is a lot of movement towards that. It obviously takes significant investment over time in regard to infrastructure and staffing remote, but it is what we are working towards.

I will ask Seranie to add a bit more to that.

**Ms GAMBLE:** Action plan two, which was launched in 2023, contains a number of actions that talk to a number of initiatives, including community awareness campaigns and an education focus through the Department of Education to provide early understanding and awareness of domestic, family and sexual violence in the school curriculum. That initiative is under way with that department.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I meant to ask that earlier, so I am glad it is happening.

There was a media release with the men's behaviour change programs recently, with some grants. The Alice Springs Town Council had the men's wellbeing at the Alice Springs aquatic centre for \$10,000. Is that for swimming lessons or—what is it for?

**Ms WHITE:** Technically this is under Minister Ah Kit's portfolio, in our Gender Equity and Diversity output, where we have prevention grants that also include men's places grants. If communities like Alice Springs council want to do place-based, local awareness-raising and other educative projects, there is a grants program available for that, but it is under Minister Ah Kit's outputs.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I have another question on that, so should I ask them of Minister Ah Kit.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, if you could.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Back in 2022 and 2023, we saw a doubling of the rate of domestic violence in Alice Springs and Central Australia, when the Stronger Futures legislation expired. What are the rates like now in Central Australia? Have they returned to a pre-doomsday chaos and crisis level that we saw back then?

**Mrs WORDEN:** At the time I remember seeing some data. It did not spike and coincide with what you are alluding that it did. The police keep that data, so if you could ask the Police minister, it would be more appropriate.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I guess my concern is that the Police minister was on radio in Alice Springs this morning saying that 35 communities in the Territory are entering into negotiations about turning on grog through alcohol management plans. What we saw in Central Australia from July 2022 to February 2023 was horrendous in terms of domestic violence. What preparations or input are you having as the Minister for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in regard to preparing these communities for what could be another literal bloodbath like we saw about two years ago in Alice Springs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** A lot of what you are talking about is alcohol policy. You will need to speak to Minister Potter about alcohol policy.

Dating back to the Riley review there was a suggestion that it should be investigated. We have seen communities with alcohol outlets—for want of a better word—for many decades. There is one on Tiwi and others. There is a process for that to occur which includes plenty of consultation, particularly with women and children in communities.

In 2024 it is my view that Aboriginal people need to be self-determined. Over many years, things like the intervention had a significant impact when places like Canberra have made decisions for Aboriginal people. I am comfortable to be on the record to say that Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have the right to determine their futures and what happens in their communities. We need to hear their voices.

There is a process of an application for that, about which you could talk to the Alcohol minister. There are community management plans. Aboriginal people do not want—the days of telling Aboriginal people what to do need to be over. We cannot stand over ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It was not my question.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It all pertains to your question. There was an undertone that Aboriginal people cannot self-determine ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I will jump in. The member asked a question to which you responded. It is better placed with the Minister for Alcohol Policy.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No. My question was: as the minister responsible for domestic and family violence, what input do you have into these plans on communities that could potentially decide to have alcohol, given what we saw happen in Alice Springs and Central Australia in recent history ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** My answer is there is a process ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Let the member finish, then to you.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I do not have a problem with self-determination or self-controlling what happens to them, but I have a major concern about what will likely happen to women and children, as we saw in Central Australia two years ago, if it is not managed properly. What input do you have in making sure we do not go down that horrific path again?

**Mrs WORDEN:** My understanding is alcohol management plans, by their nature, are determined by the community at the community level initially. Those plans eventually come to Cabinet. As a Cabinet minister, I would have my say.

I have spent a lot of time with Aboriginal women and children across the Northern Territory. Those Aboriginal women have plenty to say at the community level that will inform those plans. Their voices will be heard. That is my point today; they are the most important ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** They were not given a lot of importance in 2022 and 2023, were they?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Their voices need to come through. There is a plan in process which is a mature process to have. The Riley review indicated that is something that the government should consider. That is where we are at. I fully anticipate that those plans would come through a future Cabinet and there would be an opportunity to have a say.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** At this point are you not having input into those plans?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The process is clear. They are community-led action plans that are developed in the community space where those community voices need to be heard.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Given what we saw in 2022 and 2023 in Central Australia would you push or advocate for having shelters and DV services in those communities where grog might be turned on? Is that something for consideration?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We already have a number of shelters in a number of communities, with a varying degree of use. Some of them are federally funded through NTRAI and some by us with their own staff. They do a good job where they are. As I said in my opening statement, we changed them from being just a shelter to having wraparound services. It is a model that works.

It is about community education and making sure people understand the impact of alcohol. Those implementation plans take that into account.

I might ask the chief executive officer to speak more broadly about what the agency, rather than me as an individual, might have to say on these matters.

**Ms WHITE:** I can add an operational perspective which is both through the governance that is in place with domestic, family and sexual violence that brings together multiple government departments, along with the specialist domestic violence sector and Aboriginal community-controlled providers.

Going forward with any alcohol management policy and/or planning cycle in community, that governance stream becomes really important in terms of advice, information, providing communities that might be interested to know what service footprint in community might be available that might be of use should alcohol be on or off.

Through the alcohol management policy and planning cycles within government, we are definitely at those tables. Part of our job is to support bringing the lived experience and hard data together from women and children as well as men in those communities to the discussions through the evidence, the funding story, some of the other community education, the research reports and reviews that we have spoken a little about today, to make sure that, most importantly, the community has all that information as they make some of those decisions.

We are at the table in the operational sense. There is the planning cycle. I am not close to it, but as I understand it, there is that long lead-in where you need all that information brought together so that people can understand what it is they are deciding about and how they might want to bring that to life. Our job is to provide that advice and/or access to sector experts within domestic, family and sexual violence, along with the unit that the department is responsible for.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Did your department learn a lot of lessons from what happened back in 2022–23? It was horrific, sitting back and watching what happened from those people's perspective. Was there a lot of evidence and learnings gleaned from that carnage?

**Ms WHITE:** I personally was not within the department during those dates. But nationally and in the Territory, there have been lots of learnings and evidence regarding the interrelationship between alcohol management and domestic, family and sexual violence, including the kind of opposite instinct to what we think will be the case when there is a restriction or a management policy of some kind.

Often reports go up. Sober witnesses provide more accurate statements that hold up in court. Over time, since 2022–23, not just in domestic, family and sexual violence but the related universal services, family support services et cetera, there has been quite an increase in the sheer number of services available—for example, the awareness regarding domestic, family and sexual violence and the relationship with alcohol management and the impact not only on adult victim–survivors but also on their children and the extended family and that men and women perpetrate violence.

It is a different scene now. It is only a short 10 years ago, nationally and locally, there has been a huge learning from there, particularly regarding safety planning, knowing that it is not just about a women's refuge or safe house; it is an overall system and everyone has a part to play both in prevention and response.

In communities in the Territory, broadly and locally, and about domestic violence generally over the last 34 years, awareness amongst kids to adults is changing. We are still on that journey. There is a long way to go but there has been a lot in the last decade, nationally and locally from an operational point of view.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have another question which you probably will not want to touch but it needs to be addressed. At the very top of the Northern Territory public service, there is an alleged domestic violence scenario playing out publicly. It is with the ICAC Commissioner and his wife. I am saying alleged. I am not accusing anyone of anything. As an agency, it impacts on you, indirectly, because it is an area of your responsibility. Minister, have you been consulted on this matter? If so, in what manner?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is inappropriate for me to respond.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not sure it is related to the opening statement.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It begs the question, when these sorts of allegations present themselves within the Northern Territory public service, how it is generally managed and dealt with. It obviously affects you. Minister, you have been outspoken about other members of parliament having dealings—for example, staff with a DV history. You have a peculiar situation in the Northern Territory where you are the minister responsible for prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence and one of the most senior public servants is dealing with DV allegations.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, I am not sure that is a question to the minister's opening statement. We are talking in that theme, but that matter has been addressed through a report from the ICAC inspector.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I do not think you need to answer as Chair. I think the minister ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I do not think it is an appropriate question right now. I will let the minister, if she wishes, to say something, but we need to be careful. It is an allegation and a private matter. The matter of the role of the ICAC has been referred to the ICAC inspector, who has provided a draft report which is on the public record.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It is an issue for the Northern Territory public service generally, and it has been raised by your government ...

**Madam CHAIR:** You can rephrase your question, but your question has a specific naming of an individual and I urge caution ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Madam Chair, you do not have to caution me. I am well capable of ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I know you are protected by parliamentary privilege, but we do ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No, I am not hiding behind parliamentary privilege, and I take exception to that.

This is an issue—it is an elephant in the room—for this government and agency. It is relevant to ask: what is your input? How does this impact what you do? How is it dealt with within government?

**Madam CHAIR:** You can rephrase your question to be broader, such as asking the agency what they do across government. In your rephrasing, you made reference again to the matter with the ICAC. Could you be clear that your question is asking the department what role they take more broadly in the public service.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I just did.

**Madam CHAIR:** In answering the question it is around the broadness to the public sector.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I think the whole nature of the question is a little grubby. To draw an analogy where the Member for Barkly knowingly hired a DV perpetrator, who had been convicted ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, we will not get into a personal tit for tat. You or your agency may wish to respond more broadly about the role of domestic and family violence. I have ruled the Member for Araluen out of order and I also will pull you up on that point.

**Mrs WORDEN:** According to the ruling on the broader public service, we have in action plan two funding which sits with OCPE. You can ask the OCPE commissioner about promoting greater awareness and understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence in the workplace.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As part of the crime and chaos in Alice Springs, \$250m of funding was put forward by the federal government. Has your department—domestic, family and sexual violence—put forward a submission, and were you successful, to attain further funding?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will take that question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.7

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Did the department of domestic, family and sexual violence put forward a submission to access funding as part of the \$250m which was put forward by the federal government in relation to the crime and antisocial behaviour that occurred in Alice Springs at the visit by the Prime Minister of Australia to Alice Springs?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braiiling has been allocated the number 4.7.

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

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 that relates to the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Essential Services; and Sport portfolios. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

No questions.

**OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – FAMILIES**  
**Output 2.5 – Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence**

**Madam CHAIR:** Outputs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 are the responsibility of another minister. The committee will now consider Output 2.5, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Are there any questions?

**Mrs HERSEY:** According to the Australian Institute of Criminology's latest report tracking homicides in Australia, the NT has a death rate five times higher than the national average. The 2022–23 figures show that of the 11 Territorians who lost their lives to homicide in the last 12 months, 45% were attributed to domestic violence. Budget Paper No 3 shows the 2023–24 budget of \$55.104m, a revised 2023–24 budget of \$50.787m and a 2024–25 budget of \$69.922m.

I note that in the footnotes there is a variation due to the transfer of funding. Given your government has stated that preventing violence, providing support to victim-survivors and keeping women and children safe is a priority of the Territory Labor government, how can you explain the underspend when the need across the Territory is so great?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Those figures are only until 31 March. Also, one of the issues here is there might be a lag on the reporting. I can give you some detail on underspend and carryovers if you like, because most of it is timing. Some program money will go out between now and the end of June. There is also infrastructure money that I believe has been transferred.

There is a range of movement of money in and out, and additional spending.

**Mrs HERSEY:** It was about the carryover of that underspend, sorry.

**Mrs WORDEN:** There was a carryover of \$400,000 from the Aboriginal community-led prevention initiatives from the 2023–24 allocation. That is the timing; we are in the planning process for that fund, so it was carried over so we could commission those. It is just a matter of timing and where we are in the process.

A whole-of-government coordination mechanism is a carryover of \$1m from 2023–24. The majority of that funding is for 11 fixed-term new positions. We were not able to fill all those positions. Basically, it is staffing money. We are now up to 10 of those positions being filled, but the reporting was only until the end of March, so we were not able to fill all those positions straight away into the new structure.

There is a carryover of \$75,000 in relation to the death review. That is half the allocation from last year. That is a timing issue again, with the death review project manager coming on. It was only advertised in October and started in January, so it is only half the financial year for that money.

There is a carryover of \$380,000 from the RAMF review and expansion. That is because that project has not commenced due to resourcing capacity, and it will commence once the staff are in place.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is that resourcing capacity as in there is no staff to run it?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have not been able to recruit staff. It takes about five months for procurement for that review. It will commence in the second half.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Why is it five months?

**Ms GAMBLE:** In relation to the RAMF review that is a specific allocation in action plan two that involves a formal review of the existing training that is rolled out to people providing services in the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.

Currently, we have been recruiting a team to implement the overall plan for domestic, family and sexual violence. The team comprises 21 staff. We have just filled the final 10 positions, so we will now move to procuring the review to happen independently. The process to do that is what takes time, up to five months, to have a panel put together of independent assessors who will look at the requirements for this review.

Being something unique in this service system there are no other modules out there to easily compare how you would do that procurement work. The time it takes to bring specialist services together to form a panel and provide advice on how the review will be undertaken is what takes the anticipated five months to do it properly.



**Mrs HERSEY:** How long will that review take or you are allocating it to take?

**Mrs WORDEN:** About six months. I have a final carryover—if you would like—of \$130,000 for the family safety framework portal. That project is being managed in conjunction with DCDD. A scoping project is already being undertaken to develop the business case which will inform that procurement. We have the money there for it. It is just a matter of timing. Not everything aligns with the end of the financial year in any portfolio.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Over the last eight years domestic violence assaults have risen by 97% in Tennant Creek. What happened to the \$450,000 promised on 23 May 2018 to develop an integrated and specialist domestic, family and sexual violence hub model for Tennant Creek to support women and their children in the Barkly?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have repeatedly answered that question on the floor of parliament and we have outlined today that money has been spent in the region in the space of domestic, family and sexual violence. An additional \$500,000 has been added to that in the budget, but it did not eventuate in a hub because local organisations and people who know what they are doing on the ground said that a hub would not work and that they wanted us to invest in better services to do more than create a one-stop-shop opening the door.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes, thank you. Sorry; we did go over that before.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a question I have repeatedly answered for the Member for Barkly on the floor of parliament and I have given him a fulsome answer over time.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Thank you for repeating it for me as well.

The domestic, family and sexual violence coordinator position in Tennant Creek was scrapped over three years ago. Has the position been reinstated and filled? If so, is the position temporary or full-time ongoing? What level is the position?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a full-time fixed position. It was filled in January and we expect them to be there, hopefully, for a long time. They are doing a great job. Did you ask for the level?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is AO7. There are coordinators in every region.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Thank you for pre-empting my next question. Every region has one.

**Mr GUYULA:** At the Galiwinku Women's Space, DIPL failed to properly oversee that project. The contractor used poor-quality recycled materials, leaving an ongoing problem for that service. This means there will be more significant ongoing maintenance issues. What funding has been budgeted to meet these things?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will speak on some of the issues. I will then invite the Chief Executive Officer to provide you with some extra detail.

There were some issues regarding leaking from the ceilings and the walls that were only reported in February this year. We have had no further reports of leaking. Money has been spent to fix that. We are currently looking for a quote to replace other roof sheets, and that will come from budget depending on the cost of that. It will be paid for in the next financial year and definitely before the Wet Season arrives.

Since February we have not had any further reports of any issues. There were some issues regarding mould. A contractor has been there to have a look at that. There were some design issues regarding gutters. They were asked for the local group. They wanted gutters. DIPL advised that probably was not a great idea. There is a lot of buildings that do not have gutters because of the Wet season. It causes overflow. That is exactly what happened. There is some consultation happening at the moment.

There have been some issues regarding the fencing. Advice to me is that has been fixed. There has been some local damage done to the fencing as well and we do not consider that to be a building defect but we will continue to work with them to make sure it is fixed.

There have been upgrades to the disability room already. We have added a new doorway. There are some security discussions happening regarding that.

We also talking to them regarding some requests about height extensions and other bits and pieces associated with the external perimeter fence that does not meet any of the standards that we could provide. That was a request from the community.

We are still talking with them, making sure that routine maintenance is undertaken. The person that raised a number of those issues is welcoming. We have people going out there on 24 June to have another look at it. From my understanding, all the issues that have been raised with us have been responded to within our repairs and maintenance budget. That would be the situation going forward.

**Ms WHITE:** Regarding your original question about how much money is in the budget for these repairs, I can confirm it is \$2.5m to continue to do the work that the minister was outlining.

If I put my operational hat regarding the Housing portfolio, it is good that there are more Aboriginal and local repairs and maintenance companies coming online because they know the materials and building requirements better than some of the construction companies that we have worked with over time.

The new laundry system has come online so that gutter problem and the proximity of that laundry service with the safe house has meant that some other maintenance issues have come up. We will continue to work with the team at the women's safe house and DIPL in order to get the repairs done.

**Mr GUYULA:** In 2022 the NT Government developed the interagency coordination and reform office to look at caps in the funding for domestic violence. That group called for an urgent \$180m over five years for services such as women's shelters, behaviour change programs and policy reform. I understand the government committed to \$50m over three years. Why has such little funding been provided when the government-appointed group outlined the need for so much more? Why is there not a longer-term commitment to bring certainty, program development and long-term change?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a good question. It requires a fulsome answer, so I ask the chief executive officer to respond. I add up-front that this is why we continue to call for the federal government to give us more funding based on need, as I outlined earlier, not just on a population basis. I hand now to Emma White.

**Ms WHITE:** My understanding regarding the business case that was developed by the ICRO team at the time, in consultation with the sector and others, about the \$180m was that it was based on the mapping exercise that was completed. The mapping exercise focused on the specialist domestic, family and sexual violence service system. It did not have the opportunity to look at the investment already made in some of the universal systems like health and education or even some of the secondary service systems like family and child support services. The priority from an operational and departmental point of view on ongoing funding is achieving, with the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Government, that sustainable and ongoing investment.

As we have been talking about during the hearing, in the Northern Territory we are building the foundation of that system. There are a lot of new things happening for the first time. Once that foundation is strong, future investment—hopefully \$180m and beyond—will have the right set of arrangements with the sector for procurement, standards and a good co-design with the sector on specialist programs and with our workforce in order to expend that money. Building that foundation will help us support that ongoing investment into the future.

**Mr GUYULA:** I talk about *raypirri* programs a lot because they are a Yolngu education process that teaches young people how to live on country with respect for country and their community. It prepares young people to be part of a respectful relationship. How much funding is going into *raypirri*-style programs on country for boys and young men to learn from their elders about developing respectful relationships? How much funding is going into men's spaces to help develop respectful and caring relationships?

**Mrs WORDEN:** This is about community and place-based partnership grants in this space. Obviously a component of what you are asking about falls into youth justice and the early prevention space. I acknowledge there is some overlap in that.

I am looking for an overall budget figure that is going into this current financial year. Funding of \$1m was allocated for a partnership grant program and then we added \$348,000 to that. At the moment they are non-recurring grants, however, we have strong support to source additional funding, and we have expanded things like the part training in there. It is \$1.348m into the community and place-based partnership grants which are about early intervention and prevention.

**Mrs HERSEY:** The opposition strongly opposes domestic, family and sexual violence, and we are committed to implementing measures that prioritise safety and accountability. I understand the objectives of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence output is to develop policies and provide programs to prevent, reduce and address domestic, family and sexual violence. I note from BP3 that the only key performance indicator for this output group relates to domestic and family violence workers completing risk assessment management framework training. Where can other performance indicators relating to the development of policies and the provision of programs under this output be found? If there are not any, how do you know whether anything is being achieved?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Action plans one and two are reported online every six months. We have been waiting two-and-a-half years for a policy that we were told would be a week later from the CLP, so it would be good to see your policy. I can assure you that the action plans and the framework were fully developed in partnership with the specialist sector. What you see from our government is informed not by us but by the specialist sector on what needs to be delivered and what can be delivered. It is all right to have a value, but you need to have a framework and then a delivery action plan that sits under that and our government has that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In BP3 the 2024–25 budget allocation for 2024–25 is \$69.922m, a \$19m increase on the revised 2023–2025 budget. The increase is explained as being primarily due to additional funding to support the continuation and expansion of action plan two initiatives. Within the new initiatives identified in BP3 there is \$22.135m allocated for the domestic, family and sexual violence action plan two, which includes Commonwealth funding and \$9.863m for responses under the national partnership agreement.

Can you explain under action plan two what efforts have been undertaken in primary prevention and early intervention, knowing that societal changes are often long term and generational, and are you aware of any early results or evaluation outcomes that can indicate the success or otherwise of your efforts in primary prevention and early intervention?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is extremely hard to gauge. As you just admitted, this is a generational plan that we have. Action plan one, as the chief executive officer outlined beautifully before, is in terms of investing in early prevention but over a period of time you would see that change.

When you do the early awareness raising and campaigning, you expect those figures to go up. I will ask Seranie to talk about those investments and how we anticipate it to be done through evaluation rather than raw figures.

**Ms GAMBLE:** It would be helpful to explain that action plan one was described as setting the foundation. The review has been done on the total actions that have been completed. Following the review of action plan one, which is now published on the website, it had 78 actions across five outcome areas under the framework. The review identified that there was primarily a focus on the responses to domestic, family and sexual violence, and that is why action plan two, which commenced last year, has more investment directed at prevention.

With action plan two, we have continued and expanded on specific prevention grants. One of those is the new prevention grant that will be overseen by the Aboriginal advisory board. That is a \$400,000 grant per year over two years, which is still in the initial stages. As the minister mentioned earlier, prevention is big, new and all-encompassing. Finding the appropriate ways to do that in partnership with Aboriginal people to lead those solutions takes time to determine the best place, the target group, and whether it is for young people. There are a number of considerations and factors.

That prevention initiative is in addition to what was already allocated under action plan one.

**Mrs HERSEY:** On that \$400,000 grant, is that over two years, or per year for two years.

**Ms GAMBLE:** That is per year for two years, in addition to the existing prevention grants that are under way. What has been done through the work of the ICRO is a monitoring, evaluation and accountability plan which identifies how the different domains under the action plans should be measured and performance tracked. Where we have the action plans with particular initiatives like prevention grants, we are building into each of those individual grant programs the requirement that they have measures that can be evaluated either by the program specifically, or some of them will be independently evaluated.

The specific initiative of men's behaviour change programs will have an independent evaluation. It is a complex juggling of what can be evaluated within and what will require an independent evaluation. A lot of

those programs, like the men's behaviour change, are identified as a response to domestic, family and sexual violence but also an early intervention program, because the sooner there can be an intervention or response, it becomes a preventative measure as well.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is the independent evaluator an outside agency or someone you choose to use, not in government?

**Ms GAMBLE:** The independent evaluator is something from outside of the department. That will be an external evaluation for that particular program. Where we have existing programs, we are building capability into those programs so they can review and reflect on their own programs to show the performance, because they have not been done before. That was an outcome of the review of action plan one as a whole, that we need to build in these new measures to increase capability of these new providers that are predominantly Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to have a better mechanism to track progress and measure their success.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Would a key performance indicator for a men's behaviour change program not be whether he then went on to offend again and conduct family violence?

**Ms GAMBLE:** Yes, that would be correct.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What supports have been maintained and improved for victim-survivors to reduce the impact of domestic, family and sexual violence?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will give you a good example—the co-responder model in Alice Springs. We are putting funding directly into that. That is a result of the ICRO. We are trialling that. We have workers from Territory Families and support workers. The police will respond to the initial callout. Obviously, Territory Families workers and support workers would not go out with them. There was an expectation that they would, but police have to make sure there is no risk to workers. I believe this partnership is coming together well.

WoSSCA has partnered with them and will put the specialist providers in there. They will have three workers. One will respond for the perpetrator but the other two will respond to victim support. It is the first of its kind. It is one of the things that police talked about when I was Police minister; they would go out and would have to deal with the perpetrator, which is right, but what does that leave for the victim?

There is immediate follow-up with the victim and support for them to be safe and then make sure they have wraparound programs to support them. They are the programs that we are not just looking at but are implementing. It is a trial. If it is successful, then the Police Commissioner is already on public record saying that he will roll it out across the Northern Territory.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am sorry to interrupt. It is 12.30 which is our nominated time to break. We will reconvene at 1 pm.

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The committee suspended.

**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome back. We are taking questions on Output 2.5, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Do we have more questions?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I can respond to two questions that were put on notice.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 4.7**

**Mrs WORDEN:** Question 4.7 was about the \$250m in Central Australia. You could ask that more holistically through Minister Ah Kit for a whole-of-agency response. However, the Australian Government has chosen, other than the funding that was directly provided to police, to use that funding to directly fund organisations on the ground, so that money is not coming through the agency. There was no opportunity to put up funding submissions. There was some early discussion, but that is the vehicle they chose to deliver that funding.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 4.5**

**Mrs WORDEN:** The question was about Katherine crisis care and what we were doing to support that service delivery. As of 1 July last year, a five-year funding agreement was started between the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities and the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre. That was a five-year funding agreement of almost \$1.9m per annum.

The recurrent funding is to support them to deliver outreach, client advocacy and support services, accommodation services, counselling and wellbeing services, organisational governance and practice supervision.

In addition to that, we have provided them non-recurrent funding of almost \$350,000 to assist them in the first year of that agreement, recognising they need an additional hand to get going properly. We recently recruited a coordinator position there, which will provide assistance to the service directly, including working with them to address their priorities.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** Whilst we are on the position of coordinators, is there a position in Central Australia for domestic and family?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** And is that currently vacant?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is the one that is vacant.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How long has the position been vacant for?

**Mrs WORDEN:** They were only ...

**Madam CHAIR:** It was advertised in January. We talked about that before.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Because these are very specialised positions, as you would appreciate, we have done a couple of advertising rounds but not found anybody suitable at this time.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** When did the position become vacant?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a newly created position.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** When was it created?

**Mrs WORDEN:** October last year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Since October last year there has not been ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have been through two recruitment rounds and are currently looking. In some circumstances in other places we have literally had to approach people directly, and that may have to be the case in Alice Springs.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What grants have been provided under action plan two, to which organisations and for what projects? What is the total value of the grants provided? Are there any documented outcomes of the funded projects?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have a list of the grants for action plan one and action plan two; there is some overlap. Do you only want action plan two grants?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Could you advise if they overlap?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take the question on notice. Some information was provided in written questions on grants, but we have separate information not specific about action plan one and action plan two.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.8

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** What grants have been provided under action plan two, to which organisations and for what projects? What is the total value of the grants provided, and are there any documented outcomes of the funded projects?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.8.

**Mr HERSEY:** Action plan one had allocated \$4.3m to elder abuse responses. We know through research that commonly recognised categories of elder abuse include physical, psychological, financial and sexual abuse as well as neglect. Older people can experience one specific type of abuse but can also experience multiple forms concurrently. Older Indigenous people, whether in remote communities or urban areas, can be particularly vulnerable to elder abuse. Can you provide details of what outcomes were achieved with \$300,000 under action plan one, and what has been allocated and planned under action plan two? Is this funding for personnel or operational grant funding?

**Madam CHAIR:** That is a question for Minister Ah Kit.

**Mr HERSEY:** Budget Paper 3, page 117, footnotes two and three state there is a transfer of funding from 2023–24 into 2024–25. How much was transferred?

**Ms McMILLAN:** You are asking about the transferred funding to the next financial year?

**Mr HERSEY:** Yes.

**Ms McMILLAN:** An amount of \$2.7m under the National Partnership Agreement into the next financial year and \$2.14m in relation to action plan two into the next financial year.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is about timing.

**Mr HERSEY:** Domestic violence is a scourge on our society. Why is the money not being spent in the year it is available rather than transferred to the next year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We cannot align when a program might start. You have heard extensively today that some program areas are new, and we have to ensure that the programs are done properly and find the right service providers, which then have to recruit workers. It is a timing issue.

At the beginning of the year you get as much money as you can into those programs. Sometimes it might fall a month later or three or four days after the new financial year when those milestone payments can be made. There is accountability for grants or when those grants can be paid. We do our best to get everything out the door within the financial year, but in reality we are talking about a high number of grants; people on the ground; capacity and building workforce.

Not everything starts and finished on 1 July, end of June. That is the reality. As I said, it is a timing issue about that money. It does not mean those programs will not be done or the staff will not be in those positions, it is just a matter of when you can get them across the Northern Territory.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In Budget Paper No 3 again, on page 118, there is a new initiative of \$22m for domestic violence. If you add that \$22m to the budget allocation of \$55m to make a comparable figure, there is almost a \$7m reduction, even before taking account of the transfer from 2023–24 to 2024–25. Is there an expansion in the 2024–25 of \$22m or does the new initiative funding simply represents a low forward estimate?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No. To be clear, Cabinet allocated an additional \$10m into the 2024–25 year and \$20m into 2025–26. That is brand new money going in on top of what we already have. Rachelle, would you like to provide more information on that, thank you?

**Ms McMILLAN:** The transfers I spoke about before about were for action plan two and our national partnership funding. There are also transfers related to some capital works that we transferred into DIPL of \$36.5m for capital upgrades and \$4.2m for shelters in Darwin and Katherine moved into 2024–25 but into

DIPL. We have \$10m that was in for action plan two, plus another \$10m that was allocated for next year which is the \$20m-odd, which is the total bucket for action plan two for next year.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Did you just say how much money was for the shelter?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The infrastructure money?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes, that was transferred.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was \$4.2m to DIPL.

**Ms McMILLAN:** That carried over to 2024–25.

**Mrs HERSEY:** If I want to ask any questions, I need to ask in DIPL about those shelters?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It depends on the question. The agency works incredibly hard with each of them about that infrastructure money. We secured the infrastructure money and there has been a lot of planning and process along the way. Obviously, DIPL would provide the physical infrastructure. For example, there have been several ideas about the expansion of Dawn House. We have now settled on a plan; we have the detailed plans coming. It would naturally then move to DIPL. It is the same with Katherine.

**Mrs HERSEY:** When you are talking about those shelters in that Katherine area, is that what you are talking about for the women's crisis centre, or is that a separate one?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Correct. They have additional money. It has taken them a long time to determine what they want ...

**Mrs HERSEY:** That is one of those shelters.

**Mrs WORDEN:** ... but that money has now been moved to DIPL. I will ask for some clarification on that.

**Ms WHITE:** To confirm the \$4.18m for the shelters in Darwin and Katherine we are talking about are expended through a capital growth grants program. They are still within our budget and have been definitely subject to delays, mostly in working with the shelter, its board and community members about how they want to utilise that grant. Some of that has required different assessments of what is feasible or not. Some of that has taken a little time.

To confirm and clarify, the \$6.5m for the Dawn House capital upgrades is what has gone over to DIPL.

**Mrs HERSEY:** On BP3 page 120 your objective for the families output is:

*Individuals and families have the skills and resources to protect their safety and wellbeing, and can access services to enhance their lives.*

How do the key performance indicators below help you decide if you have achieved your objectives?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is child protection and you need to ask Minister Ah Kit, the Minister for Territory Families.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Can I ask you about the children and family centres, that comes under you, does it not?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, children and family centres are Minister Ah Kit. They are not domestic violence shelters; they are family centres.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.5 and Output Group 2.0.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – HOUSING**

#### **Output 3.6 – Indigenous Essential Services**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Housing. Outputs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 are the responsibility of another minister.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have the answer to question on notice 4.4. I will ask Seranie Gamble to provide that answer.

#### Answer to Question on Notice No 4.4

**Ms GAMBLE:** This question related to the number of completed participants through the men's behaviour change program.

According to the validated data we received from the provider's most recent report for the period July to December 2023, the total number of voluntary referred participants to the Tangentyere Aboriginal Council men's behaviour change program is six. The total number of mandated referrals is 58. That is a total of 64 accepted referrals for the program in that period.

For CatholicCare in Darwin the total number of voluntary referrals accepted was 18 participants and the total number of mandated participants is 35, which brings the total number of the CatholicCare Darwin-based referrals through the men's behaviour change program to 53 for the period from July to December 2023.

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**Mrs HERSEY:** Can I ask a further question on that?

**Madam CHAIR:** We have moved on, but I will allow latitude for one question to be asked of the minister.

**Mrs HERSEY:** We have not moved on because she was just giving me the answer.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have because we have formally completed that output group. We are at Output 3.6, but it is all right; you can ask a follow-up question.

**Ms HERSEY:** From July to December 2023 the number voluntarily referred was only six and mandated was 58. How many domestic violence reports were there or people who went to court if there is only ...

**Madam CHAIR:** That is probably a question for the Attorney-General. You can follow it up as a written question. I am sure he would be happy to also offer a briefing on it. It is a specialised program and it has a lot of evidence behind it.

We are at Output 3.6, do you need to change your officials?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have one swap.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for your time with the committee.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I welcome Brent Warren, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Housing, to the table.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are at Output 3.6, Indigenous Essential Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There has been correspondence between you and the Member for Barkly regarding the Ali Curung generator. I am inquiring as to what the current status of the Ali Curung generator is, and whether or not it has an automatic changeover switch associated with it so that it can continue to provide sustained power when they lose mains power at Ali Curung.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a technical question which can be put to Power and Water later in the week.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** When it comes to Indigenous essential services, are there any communities that are currently relying on bottled or trucked water for their water supply in the Northern Territory?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Earlier this year the power at Wandangula, the small community in Gulf of Carpentaria community, was reported as being not operating at full capacity. There was a solar and battery system there. Has that been resolved since reports late last year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is very specific, and we will take that on notice, and it may be a Power and Water question. We will have to qualify that and get back to you.

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### Question on Notice No 4.9

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Has the power issues at Wandangula in the Gulf of Carpentaria community been fixed? Has a resolution been found with reports that the batteries and solar system are running at 50% capacity?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 4.9.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** A lot of these questions will run into Territory Generation and Power and Water, so I am happy to move on.

**Madam CHAIR:** We appreciate that. If there is anything that was inadvertently meant for the minister, she will accept a written question.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, acknowledging there is a big crossover because the funding for Indigenous Essential Services comes from Territory Families. As I outlined in my opening statement, it then moves across to Power and Water, and that service is delivered by Power and Water. Power and Water should be able to answer your questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.6 and Output Group 3.0. We thank the officials and the minister for their contribution.

### OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – COMMUNITIES Output 4.3 – Sport and Active Recreation

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0. Outputs 4.1 and 4.2 are the responsibility of another minister, which leaves us at Output 4.3, Sport and Active Recreation. Minister, please introduce the officials accompanying you.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I welcome Mitch Hardy, General Manager, Sport, Recreation and Strategic Infrastructure.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any questions?

**Mrs HERSEY:** On 6 August you undertook a day trip to the Tiwi Islands to attend the Tiwi grand final. In a report we received in relation to intrastate ministerial travel for 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024, an airfare cost of \$1,250 and other costs of \$5,000 were reported. This totalled \$6,250 for a day trip to the Tiwis. Can you explain what the other cost of \$5,000 covered.

**Madam CHAIR:** Can you clarify whether we are talking about two trips or one trip?

**Mrs HERSEY:** I am talking about one day trip.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is likely to be a charter.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Probably or it is?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you want to seek some advice?

**Mrs HERSEY:** The airfare cost \$1,250. The other costs were \$5,000.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That does not sound right to me, but I am happy to check. From memory, the \$5,000 would be a charter.

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### Question on Notice No 4.10

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** Minister, on 6 August, you undertook a day trip to the Tiwi Islands to attend the Tiwi Grand Final. In a report we have received in relation to intrastate ministerial travel 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024, an airfare cost of \$1,250 with other costs of \$5,000 were reported, totalling \$6,250 for a day trip to the Tiwi Islands. Can you please explain what the costs of \$5,000 covered?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.10.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I will give you a bit of background which, I am sure minister, you are aware of. In 2015–16 the Department of Sport and Recreation reported in its annual report that there were 62 staff working in the department. There is no longer a Department of Sport and Recreation. The NT Government website states:

*The Northern Territory Government supports the delivery of sport and active recreation services to the community through a suite of grant programs aimed at increasing the number of Territorians who participate in sport and active recreation, and in turn receive physical health, wellbeing, social and community benefits.*

How many staff in 2022–23 were directly employed by the department to deliver sport and active recreation programs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have a Sport, Recreation and Strategic Infrastructure branch. It is not that they do not exist.

As of March 2023 there were 37.24 FTEs. In March 2024 there are 41.01 FTEs in that area.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Can you provide a list of grants provided to sporting bodies this financial year by grantee amounts and purpose? It was recently reported in the NT Independent that the Darwin Salties basketball team received government grants. What grants, if any, were received by the Darwin Salties from your department last financial year and this financial year?

**Madam CHAIR:** You asked two questions. You would like a full list of all grants but, specifically, would you like her to speak to the Salties, which she spoke about in the opening statement?

**Mrs WORDEN:** All the grants were listed in the written questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister's response is that all the grants are in the written questions. Specifically to the Salties, can you provide the member with further information?

**Mrs WORDEN:** As of 31 March, under the Northern Territory Sports Academy Grants program, we had 449 grants—that is dollars that we spent on those programs.

**Madam CHAIR:** The member was happy that all the grants were provided in the written question. She wanted you to speak to the Salties.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I can confirm that we provided a grant to the Salties over three years. During 2023 it was \$400,000. That was their 2023 season.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Who signed the Darwin Salties grant application or applications?

**Mrs WORDEN:** As in, who applied?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you mean the minister who signed off?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Officials from Basketball NT would have done.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Do you know who that was?

**Mrs WORDEN:** John Mitchell. He would have been the CEO at that time. Ministers do not sign off on grants.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that one of the employees at the Salties worked as a senior adviser in the Gunner government, is there not some discrepancy there?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not sure who you are alluding to. I do not know any employees of BNT who worked for the Gunner government.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Craig Rowston is or was the president—did not work for ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is not an employee, for starters; that is a volunteer board member. Our primary discussions were always with John Mitchell as appropriate, who is the Basketball NT CEO.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Did the Salties receive more than one grant?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, they received \$400,000, as I outlined.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Just the one?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What was the funding over three years that you spoke about earlier?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, there is a forward going, but they have to acquit previous ones before they get any other payments.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Will that be \$400,000 for the additional next two years?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, it is a reduction. The agreement was for it to reduce as they become more sustainable themselves, as was the whole idea. There are some big imposts on the Salties. We need to understand that in the first few years of their agreement, the Salties had to pay for all the visiting teams, which is extraordinary. There was some discussion about assisting them over those first few years.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Who approves the grants that go to teams like the Salties? You do not sign off on these, but is it you or the department?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The general manager would sign off on those grants at an operational level.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That was John Mitchell, who you spoke about earlier?

**Mrs WORDEN:** He is the appropriate person. He was employed as the CEO at that time. I think he has since retired.

**Mrs HERSEY:** The general manager would approve the funding, but do they have to sight audited financial statements to receive that funding? How does it work for them to receive that \$400,000?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the general manager to explain the process for that, because it is not unusual.

**Mr HARDY:** Yes, at the end of each financial year, organisations acquit their funding to release future funding for subsequent financial years. Basketball NT has submitted its audited financials for 2023. That was tabled at an annual general meeting recently. In order to release subsequent payments, financials need to be produced on an annual basis. Not only financials but also season reports, coach reviews and seasonal plans on sponsorship and membership numbers must be submitted as part of the reporting framework that is in place for not only the Darwin Salties but Basketball NT as the peak sporting body for basketball.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How much is the further two years of that contract worth? You said it was reducing, but we did not get to the bottom of how much it was worth.

**Mr HARDY:** For the 2024 season it is \$350,000 and for the 2025 season \$300,000.

**Mrs WORDEN:** If you have the opportunity to see the Darwin Salties, it is at a new level and has given an opportunity for young kids to aspire to play with them. It has also resulted in an increase of participation in the sport which is the number one driver for supporting such initiatives. It has been a massive undertaking for Basketball NT and the Darwin Basketball Association. They have worked together collaboratively over

many years to get the Salties up, and there have been some tremendous outcomes for the sport. They are paving the way to show how elite sport can work.

Our government would like to see them more sustainable, but in the first years of an agreement there have been imposts that other teams do not bear. In terms of that particular competition, it has been quite difficult for them over many years and nationally there have been some shifting sands. The results speak for themselves as they have been incredibly successful. There has been a large number of athletes which came in year one and have stayed in the Northern Territory and are passing on new skills. From all reports, as a result of the level of play our domestic competition has taken off. They are the things we hope for with such an investment.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You spoke about some of the imposts for the Darwin Salties, could you elaborate?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The major impost is travel. We have airfare costs, which cost approximately \$25,000 for every trip. It is an expensive exercise, and that is not a big group with everybody and their dog; it is for a conservative small group, as small as they can make it.

The Salties also have the biggest viewing of any NBL1 side across the nation live and in people turning up. I have sat with the parents of some of our imported players, who have come here for games, and they noted that at some of their children's home games they have never seen a crowd such as in the Northern Territory; that is a credit to the supporters of the Salties. The effort they have made to build that brand and get it out there with young kids running around in their team shirts is huge.

Originally, they had an early setback because there was a lot of travel booked ahead and then there was a schedule change which impacted them. There has been a flow-on effect of that.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Were they booked on Bonza?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No. It was a scheduling of the NBL1, and the Salties had already locked in the afares and they did not get the money back at one point. They also increased the number of games they had to play away. They had some good budgets up-front and the forecast what they could, and the NBL1 changed what they had anticipated.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I have been to some of the Salties games and the stadium has been full—I may be going on Saturday.

You talked about the impost of travel on the Salties, as a team. We are talking about an AFL team in the future, possibly five to 10 years down the track, and these things need to be taken into consideration. Whether it can be afforded is a relevant point. It is not to say we do not want it—we want it—but it has to not be a huge burden on the taxpayer.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a good point you make. Having been a co-chair of the task force for a future AFL club for the Northern Territory, it is one of the big considerations we had along the way. Different sports attract different sponsorship levels and broadcast rights. I have heard figures of approximately \$7m per game for an AFL game. They are different concepts. An NBL1 side does not attract—although the Salties have done well attracting some great local and bigger sponsors. I think Tamboran sponsored them last season. They were happy.

The considerations for AFL and basketball are different. There is a lot of social licence in both, though, in putting back into the community for organisations. With some of the modelling we have done and the business case for the AFL for any future teams. The Territory is ready if there is an opportunity for a licence. They are different beasts because you are looking at a complete club. You obviously then need feeder teams to go in; we would have to change all our seasons. There are a lot of different considerations in both of those.

Plus basketball nationally is not the same construct. NBL1 is not the same as the NBL; they are different organisations, whereas the AFL comes under one umbrella of the AFL nationally. They are different. There is a funding gap for all of them. It has always been the same. I can remember the exact same situation when we had Pearls and Stingers for hockey. There is always a funding gap because we are located so far away to participate—there is a cost.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Can you provide a list of grant recipients, the amounts received and for what purposes under the grassroots grant program?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Grassroots grants program: Casuarina Rugby Union Club, \$5,000; DMCC Incorporated, \$5,000; Jingili BMX, \$5,000; Litchfield Polocrosse Club, \$3,727; Nhulunbuy Amateur Swimming Club, \$3,880; Nightcliff Swimming Club, \$2,131; Noonamah Polocrosse Club, \$3,435; Palmerston Boxing Club, \$5,000; Palmerston Game Fishing Club, \$3,600; and Waratah Hockey Club, \$5,000.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Do any acquittals remain outstanding past the acquittal due date? If so, what has been done to obtain acquittals?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will have to take that on notice because it will change from day-to-day. Do you want to specify as of 31 March or something like that? It would be good to have a specific date you want that for.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is that the reporting period you are finishing?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is the reporting period in general for the whole of Estimates.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.11

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** As of 31 March, can you provide a list of which grant acquittals remain outstanding past the acquittal due date? If outstanding, what has been done to obtain acquittals?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 4.11.

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**Mrs HERSEY:** The Sport Voucher Scheme opened on 1 July 2023. Since then, how many urban sports vouchers and Learn to Swim vouchers have been redeemed? What is the total value of each voucher?

**Mrs WORDEN:** As of 31 March, 19,628 vouchers have been redeemed.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many go out in total?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will not know until the end of the financial year. For the same period last year, there were less. There were 19,348 vouchers. There were lots, approximately 27,000 annually.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Out of that 27,000, there have been 19,000 redeemed.

**Mrs WORDEN:** At that date. That is not a full year. That is only until 31 March. We anticipate that the extras will go beyond that. Remember that there are different seasons and they do out in two rounds. You can get two per year.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In the reporting of the year prior, do you have the number of how many went out in that year and how many were redeemed? So that there is a full picture.

**Mrs WORDEN:** For this year to date, we have 27,965 redeemed. That is almost a full year. We are halfway through June. We might hit 28,000 in a few days.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What was the amount you gave me before?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That was up to 31 March. On top of that, there are 5,000 Learn to Swim vouchers.

**Madam CHAIR:** The vouchers are done in the financial year. When you apply for a voucher in the July to December school period, you have a full year to use it. You can use it straight away in August or keep it all the way through. If you apply in January, it is only valid until the end of the financial year with the rationale behind that being a point of frustration—maybe this is a statement rather than a question, but I am keen to hear the answer—is that you have generally enrolled your kids. They have to be enrolled in December or January, but you cannot get the voucher until February. Effectively, you have kids that cannot use their

voucher in that first semester of the school year because the voucher expires June 30, but they cannot enrol in the next sport until after that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Following on from that ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Is it a two-part question between you both?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes. We did not plan this either.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I am just thinking that when you get that voucher, you generally have to pay up-front. It is not like you—for example, swimming lessons. You do not get to the end and then you pay for your swimming lesson. You have to pay for it up-front. That is where ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** It depends on when you join and when you apply for your voucher. There are two rounds.

**Mr HARDY:** With respect to sports vouchers, annually we get some 35,000 requested vouchers, but the process in redeeming them relies on the parents registering the child, or the carer or guardian registering the child, but also the activity providers applying those vouchers against their respective registrations.

We have an historical lag between vouchers being requested versus vouchers being actually redeemed by the activity providers and by the parents who request them. That could be due to a timing issue in respect of the seasonal times that sports take place, or it could be to do with an activity provider issue where they are not applying the voucher against the designated fees of that participant.

There are definitely gaps in the system that could be addressed from time to time, but we try to cover off all scenarios for all parents and children wanting to participate in sport in the Territory. If there are different scenarios, we encourage individuals to contact our department to work through those issues. Our staff would be more than happy to address any concerns that parents or guardians may have with their children participating.

**Mrs HERSEY:** At what time of the year do the vouchers go out? For example, the swim voucher—given that they may be starting in the later part of the year. When is it available for the parents?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think the issue is the voucher for Term 2 is valid for a year, and the voucher for Term 1 is only valid for six months, but most kids are already enrolled in their sport for Term 1 before they can get their hands on their voucher, because registrations close in January. Therefore, they cannot use that voucher because it expires on 30 June, before the registrations for the next sports are open.

One is valid for 12 months, which is terrific because if you have already paid to enrol the kids you can just hold onto it, because generally sports are done in six-month chunks. The first semester of the calendar year—but it is the second sport voucher from your perspective and only valid for six months, which means parents cannot use it. They have enrolled their kids in basketball, which has to be done by the end of January; they do not play another sport until AFL, which does not open until July, so they have effectively lost out on their voucher.

I am happy to provide some details offline, because I think it is important.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What time of the year do those sport vouchers come out?

**Madam CHAIR:** Usually, when school goes back.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is aligned with the schools going back.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What about the swim voucher?

**Mrs WORDEN:** All year.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is it \$100 or \$150?

**Mr HARDY:** Two lots of \$100.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The key dates are July applications open for the first voucher; January applications open for the second.

**Madam CHAIR:** And the January application closes 30 June?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Applications for both vouchers close on 24 May, and on 31 May they expire for both vouchers.

**Mrs HERSEY:** That might be a follow-up for the minister to rearrange the dates of the voucher.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Noted.

**Madam CHAIR:** No, it is just a practical thing.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will look at that issue. I would like to answer a question on notice.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 4.10**

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have an answer to question 4.10 regarding the charter to Tiwi. It was about the 6 August charter. I am not sure how that was reported to you, but the full cost of the charter was \$6,250, inclusive of GST.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not sure how it was reported to you like that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** That was what I asked you. In a report we received in relation to intrastate ministerial travel, an airfare cost of \$1,250 and other costs of \$5,000 were reported. The total was \$6,250.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not quite sure how that was reported like that, but the whole cost of the charter was \$6,250. I am just qualifying that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Was that just for yourself or with other people as well?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, that would have been with others.

**Mrs HERSEY:** It was a charter?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was a charter, which is how a lot of people get to Tiwi for the grand final. It is a very busy day for the airlines.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many remote schools have been supported with funding to provide sport and rec programs under the Sport Voucher Scheme?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Remote sport vouchers are currently available to all remote schools with a budget allocated on \$200 per enrolled student and there is a minimum of \$10,000 available to schools with fewer than 50 enrolled students. As of 31 March 56 remote school programs were funded.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Do you have a breakdown of those school areas?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Can I have one, please?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You can ask the question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 4.12**

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

**Ms HERSEY:** Of the 56 school programs, can you give a breakdown of where they are?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 4.12.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Of the \$6m allocated to the scheme, how much still remains unallocated?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There is \$1.6m allocated to the scheme.

**Mrs HERSEY:** It is \$1.6 allocated.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I believe so, yes. As of 31 March \$550,000 has been paid out for remote sports, but there would be more after that as well.

In terms of question on notice 4.12 did you want individual schools or can I give you the regional councils, because we pay it through the regional councils as well as schools? I have a number of regional councils noted.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Just leave it as it was.

Going back to the \$6m allocated to the scheme and how much remains unallocated, you said that only \$1.6m is allocated to that. There was a media release on 9 January that says:

*We're investing \$6 million under the Sport Voucher Scheme to provide affordable access to sport for school-enrolled children and core aquatic skills for children under five.*

That was different. I think you answered ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is all the vouchers, so that is the sports vouchers, the individual sports vouchers, the learn to swim vouchers and it is the remote.

**Mrs HERSEY:** So how much of that ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Of the total?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I can only give you the figure to 31 March, acknowledging that there are other sports that have started since then and more vouchers would have gone out. As at 31 March it was \$2.787m. Obviously, after that there is another three months of sports and vouchers going out.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Would that last three months generally bring in another \$3.5m, which would be the ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is not \$3.5m.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Of the \$6m allocated ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is two-point something; it is not \$3.5m.

**Mrs HERSEY:** No, but the remainder. Like in the next three months.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have a budget of \$5.229. What figure are you starting with? What does it say?

**Mrs HERSEY:** It says \$6m under the Sport Voucher Scheme to provide affordable access. You said up to 31 March \$2.787m has been redeemed.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** My maths is not amazing, but it is about \$3.5m or \$3.3m left over. Is that likely to come in the next three months?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We anticipate yes that lot of funding will go out in three-month period, but traditionally it is an undersubscribed program which is why we have done a lot of work over the last few years to get more



out to the remote space. A few years ago, when I became minister, it was very undersubscribed in the remote areas, and we have done a lot of work through councils and schools to get the money out. It will definitely get picked up, but traditionally it is an undersubscribed grant, remembering it is a grant pool, and we need to make sure there is enough money in there for everybody. It grows each year.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What initiatives have you done to make sure more people get involved in this?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Promotion through every school and every sporting organisation. We have increased the number of sporting organisations. This year there was 373 registered sport voucher scheme activity providers whereas last year there was only 347. It has grown in the number of organisations that can use it. A couple of years ago we extended it to cultural activities and language, to ensure that the kids who do not want to undertake, say basketball, but were interested in other areas that they could still use it. We spoke to Floss Roberts regarding Learn to Swim, and we have made sure that schools can now use them for Learn to Swim in the school. There were kids who were missing out but now the parents can use the voucher for that, and there has been a bit of an uptake for it. We look at the vouchers each time to see if we can extend it to other things. There is a lot of promotion through peak sporting bodies to their clubs. Under my tenure we rolled out community sport and rec officers for the first time back into communities and they are the ones promoting the scheme in the regions.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In the media release it says \$6m, and you said \$5.2m was the actual budgeted allocation.

**Mrs WORDEN:** No. This year we anticipate spending \$4.4m.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Why does it say \$6m in the media release?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is the budget.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In 2019 Labor released a tender for the first stage of works on Richardson Park to provide an upgraded oval, including change rooms which would be available for use by the Nightcliff Dragons and Brothers Rugby clubs and the broader community. It is now just over two months out from the election and now there is action through the award of a construction tender to a local company. Will this latest upgrade provide facilities to enable the ground to be used to host NRL NT rounds, such as canteen or bar and change rooms for referees?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a question for the DIPL minister regarding the building and rebuilding of Richardson Park, but my understanding it is good for training facilities. We invested significant funding into the new facility in the three grounds at Marrara. NRL games are played at TIO and will continue to be because that is our premier ground, and we have invested a lot of money to make it compliant.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Will lighting be put up there so that it can be used at night?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You need to ask the DIPL minister about that program. I have no visibility of the funding for Richardson Park because it was not predominantly redeveloped as a sporting ground under my area.

**Mrs HERSEY:** The Palmerston Raiders home ground is in Bellamack which is surrounded by a residential area. This is regarding the lights, which probably is with the DIPL minister.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Were you going to ask a question about light overflow?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The technology on light overflow in the last 10 years has become very advanced. There is no cumulative halo effect anymore. An example is the Nightcliff Oval in the middle of a residential area. As a former electrician, the Member for Braintree is nodding his head about technology in lighting. It has come ahead leaps and bounds.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that Richardson Park is in ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are capable of putting lighting without a halo effect on all grounds in the Northern Territory. It is called disturbance, but it does not happen because of technology changes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I would like that done on the Katherine Sports Oval because we do not efficient lighting for the AFL.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Who owns the ground? Is it the council? Perhaps you could ask the Katherine Town Council to invest in their sporting grounds. Over the years, we have invested significantly there.

**Madam CHAIR:** Could I refocus our attention to parliamentary Estimates. Do you have further questions?

**Mrs HERSEY:** The upgrade on the Richardson Park Oval has not been utilised to provide a home ground for the two local clubs, Dragons and Brothers, which do not currently have one. Home games are currently hosted at Marrara and gate takings go to the host club and the canteen and bar takings go to NRL NT at Richardson Park. If that is their home ground, can the money go to those clubs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You will need to ask the DIPL minister.

**Mrs HERSEY:** The Nightcliff Dragons were displaced when you initially bulldozed Richardson Park. Why is there no intention of providing them with the use of the facility to host home games and generate revenue?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have never seen a proposal for that. The redevelopment of Richardson Park has been with the DIPL minister, not me.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Where is the Nightcliff Dragons' home ground?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I believe they train at Sanderson Middle School and there is ongoing discussions with Sanderson about their home base and redevelopment of those two magnificent ovals in the heart of the Sanderson electorate.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What consultation did you do with Alice Springs sporting groups before the goalposts of Anzac Oval were ripped out?

**Mrs WORDEN:** They were removed and uplifted to Jim McConville Oval. I went there a couple of weeks ago and that work is under way to accommodate them for when the season starts. I initially met with the clubs in Alice Springs on possibly two occasions, and afterwards there have been ongoing discussions. I will ask Mitch to give you further details. There has been a long history of discussions directly with the two sporting codes that are affected.

**Mr HARDY:** In respect of the codes of rugby union and rugby league that have been using Anzac Oval, our community support officer in Alice Springs has been meeting with the groups weekly for some considerable time. It includes not only the Farewell to Anzac Oval event organisation but also the relocation to Jim McConville Oval.

I have been involved in several discussions and meetings with both groups over the last 18 months that I have been with the agency on the relocation and the Anzac Oval move, plus the redevelopment with Kilgariff sporting oval facility that is being developed. There has been extensive consultation and ongoing dialogue weekly to make sure their needs are accommodated. Both peak sporting bodies in rugby union and rugby league are supporting those organisations with development programs and engagement at school level and top level.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you explain who you have been meeting with weekly? It is my understanding that those meetings have not been occurring.

**Mr HARDY:** Community support officer Katie Knappstein has been meeting with Aaron Blacker, the president Sarah Franks, Jodie Summers, as well as Chris Blacker. I have seen correspondence between the Alice Springs Brother Rugby League Club and the CEO of Rugby League NT, Tony Crowe, ensuring that the Alice Springs Brothers Rugby League Club is well supported for their preparations leading into the 2024 season.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** With regard to the two ovals at Kilgariff that were promised, where are you up to in delivering on those?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I prepared something earlier. There was an initial budget of \$28m for this project. As you understand, it is not just about providing the fields, it is also about the headworks for the land release and a lot of headworks for the Kilgariff Estate and the expansion of that. The funding is \$18m for the new rugby field with \$10m for the headworks. The remainder is towards an interim facility. Obviously that is lights and things that need to be done at Jim McConville Oval.

There has been a lot of planning on design concepts. We made it clear that with all the stakeholder consultation we wanted to hear from them and that the commitment from our government was like-for-like, plus an additional oval.

The time lines for the art gallery were moved somewhat, so towards late last year we agreed with the Alice Springs Town Council on an interim facility heading for the Jim McConville Oval, with funding to make sure the interim facility was fit for purpose. We allocated \$1.8m to those projects.

We have worked with the design architect on a series of concept designs. A project design control group will continue to work towards the facility and project. That is where we are up to.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** To confirm, minister, there is \$10m for headworks and \$18m for the rugby ovals. You have also had to spend however much moving the goalposts and the scoreboard and removing the concrete cricket pitch in the middle of Jim McConville Oval. How much has that cost?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I just outlined that there is an allocation of \$1.8m for those works which will see a vast improvement in the facility. It will provide lights for future sporting endeavours at Jim McConville Oval. We consider it a good investment into sport in Alice Springs. It provides another oval that can be used after dark for a larger group.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Does the \$1.8m come out of the \$28m or is that additional funding?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I should add that we have secured an additional \$9.4m to ensure that project delivers on everything it needs to at Kilgariff.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Let us just make sure the numbers are adding up here. We have \$28m initially: \$10m towards headworks and \$18m for the two ovals. You have an additional \$1.8m for Jim McConville, and then where is the \$9.4m going?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That has been secured for it in the last couple of months—\$27.4m for Kilgariff.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For the ovals?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes. Correct.

**Mrs HERSEY:** When are those ovals meant to be operational?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a question for DIPL, because they will be doing the building, and they need to do the headworks first. That is why we agreed to do Jim McConville, to make sure they have an appropriate place until then, so they are not displaced.

It is nice to have sport questions, because in the past in Estimates we have run out of time. I never get to answer questions; it is some good stuff.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to remote community sporting upgrades, I think I heard you mention Hermannsburg—Ntaria—in your opening address. Recent meetings with AFL NT have outlined that they are looking at investing in infrastructure in Papunya and Ti Tree. Have you had any ongoing conversation in regard to infrastructure upgrades to those communities, and how will your office be supporting the Central Australian football league community competition to host more games out bush?

**Mrs WORDEN:** AFL Northern Territory has secured some additional funding from the federal government to support that. They would be discussing their priorities with the federal government. I will ask the general manager to talk a bit more about the planning in Central Australia for AFL to be played remote.

**Mr HARDY:** AFL NT is leading a piece of work, of which I am a member of the working group, with key stakeholders, regional councils and community members to improve infrastructure across Central Australia for remote communities. We are not only looking at AFL facilities but also community infrastructure that will enable whole-of-community use and approach to participation in a variety of sporting activities.

They have completed stage one of the planning to look at essential services and identified seven communities in Central Australia, five of which they will focus in on. Those five communities will have detailed planning done for further funding consideration and development. This is in conjunction with the plan, A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia, in which a number of facilities have been identified so far.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We talked about this earlier; AFL NT has made a direct pitch to the federal government under the \$250m for Central Australia.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Are you able to outline the five communities?

**Mr HARDY:** Apologies, not off the top of my head, but I can provide that information.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I think I have been told in the past.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Are there any time frames for that work?

**Mr HARDY:** The expected time frame for completion is June 2025 for the planning, but there is considerable work that needs to be done.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Before we move on, I did not ask where the additional \$9.4m had come from in regard to the ovals in Alice Springs. Are you able to expand on that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was asked of Cabinet to make sure it was done properly.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** NT Government money—thank you.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Just before we move away from Sport—I am not sure if it is for you or someone else—but there was a media release about the motocross that is coming and \$1.65m to build a permanent track in Budget 2024. Am I in the right area?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that I am from a motor sport family, we are excited about this. However, the funding to build a world-class motocross track for next year does not seem anywhere near enough funding when this attracts millions of people in viewing and thousands of people to come to the Territory. It is a fantastic event that is nowhere. Will we be ready for this, or will we just have some...

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are contracted, and we will deliver that project 100%. It is great for the Northern Territory, and I am glad you agree.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I think it is fantastic. I just think the budget for that seems skinny for what needs to be done.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not a track builder. I know that we have liaised extensively with the proponents, and some of the costing would have come from them. DIPL will deliver that track, and we will deliver that event, particularly the world championship motocross GP for women. I think that is the most exciting component of it. Being a rev-head myself, I totally agree with you, Member for Katherine. I cannot wait.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Has somebody got the contract to build that already?

**Mrs WORDEN:** My understanding is that they have their own track builders and have to meet a certain specification. They will be working with DIPL because Hidden Valley belongs to the NT Government, and that work would be done together. They have specialists who go around the world and build tracks, and they know what they are doing.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I want to ask about the mountain bike trails in Nitmiluk.

**Madam CHAIR:** It was Parks last week.

**Mrs WORDEN:** You could do a written question to the Parks minister on that. Could I give an answer to a question on notice?

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 4.9**

**Mrs WORDEN:** Regarding the battery and solar system capacity, Wundigalla—community ID 996—is actually a homeland, not a community, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is not part of the Indigenous Essential Services program; however, it receives funding from the Department of Territory Families, Housing and

Communities Homelands Program which falls under the responsibility of Minister Uibo. The department contributes \$12,983 in 2023–24 to Aboriginal Enterprises Australia—AEA—to provide homeland services to one dwelling in Wundigalla. The department is aware of power issues at the Wundigalla homeland with the older power system at the end of its life, and it does require replacement. The department is working with AEA and residents of Wundigalla to submit an application for the power system's replacement as part of the upcoming 2024–25 Homelands Capital Program which opens in August each year.

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**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 4.3 and Output Group 4.0. This concludes consideration of output groups relating to the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Essential Services; and Sport portfolios. On behalf of the committee, we extend our sincere thanks for the advice that you have provided today.

The committee will now move on to consider outputs related to the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Madam Chair, I express my gratitude to all the staff members in Territory Families, Housing and Communities who have provided the extensive information to all their ministers. I wish them luck later in the week, and I thank them very much for their time and effort in supporting me today.

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The committee suspended.

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## **ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND WATER SECURITY**

### **DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, PARKS AND WATER SECURITY**

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I ask you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Madam Chair, I am accompanied today by Joanne Townsend, the Chief Executive Officer; Rikki Lee Goldfinch, the Chief Financial Officer; and Dr Alaric Fisher, Executive Director Flora and Fauna. Also here from the department is Amy Dysart, Executive Director Water Resources; Collene Bremner, Executive Director Bushfires NT; Maria Wauchope, Executive Director Rangelands; Amy Dennison, Executive Director Environment Regulation; Paul Purdon, Executive Director Environmental Assessment and Policy; and Nerida Horner, Executive Director Office of Water Security.

I am pleased to highlight the important work of the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security. The department has continued to deliver on its responsibilities to manage the Northern Territory's natural resources. The department undertakes programs that monitor and protect our land, water and biodiversity, and it regulates environmental and natural resource matters across the Northern Territory, playing a key role in facilitating government's goal of balancing development objectives with its environmental management obligations.

The department has continued to deliver on its mandate for environmental reform, which saw legislative amendments to the *Environment Protection Act 2019* passed in November 2023, and which established a new regime to manage the environmental impacts of mining and a tiered licensing system based on risk.

These changes will commence on 1 July 2024 and apply to all mining activities, including exploration and extractives. To deliver this regime, the responsibility for mining regulation along with staff from the Mining division will transfer from the Minister for Mining and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade to me, the minister for Environment, and the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security.

This meets a longstanding commitment of our government that the minister and department with the responsibility for environmental matters will regulate the environmental impacts of mining in the Northern Territory. It also ensures the Mining minister and Industry department can proactively and robustly promote the Northern Territory's mining opportunities and facilitate resource development.

These reforms follow the commencement of a new environmental impact assessment regime for projects with a significant environmental impact, which was effected through the *Environment Protection Act* in 2020. Territorians can have confidence in the Territory's approach to impact assessment, which is the most contemporary, transparent and rigorous in the country.

Since 2020, 31 proposals have been referred to the independent NT Environment Protection Authority under the *Environment Protection Act*, and I or my predecessor granted 14 environmental approvals covering diverse and complex projects across mines, major infrastructure projects, marine dredging, gas pipeline and housing estates, to name but a few.

The *Environment Protection Act* has delivered on expectations by providing for a more efficient environmental assessment and approval process, and I can advise the committee that the average time taken to complete an assessment under the current act is 60% shorter than it was under the former act.

With respect to onshore petroleum activities, 46 environment management plans have been submitted since the responsibility for the environmental risks and impacts of onshore petroleum activities were transferred to the minister for Environment in 2019, resulting in 37 EMPs approved over that period.

While the community focus is on the approval of EMPs, the department is also very active in the compliance and enforcement space, with 27 site inspections conducted across 17 active petroleum sites in the first nine months of the year. This ensures that proponents are complying with their approved EMPs and the very stringent requirements applicable to onshore gas activities in place.

The Beetaloo region is now also the most comprehensively investigated and scientifically documented area of the Territory, achieved through the completion of the Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessment, or the SREBA, last year. The SREBA provides an evidence-based foundation to regulate development in the Beetaloo region and a strong baseline for future monitoring.

Budget 2024–25 has committed \$2m ongoing to develop and implement a regional environmental monitoring program in the Beetaloo Basin from 2024–25. This program will monitor for potential cumulative impacts from the development of an onshore gas industry based on the environmental understanding provided by the SREBA. Monitoring and reporting will be at arm's length from government and delivered through Charles Darwin University, which also helped build local research capability.

Climate change continues to dominate the public area in the Northern Territory and nationally. The Northern Territory Government is committed to net zero emissions by 2050 which is why it released its Climate Change Response: Towards 2050 and the three-year action plan in July 2020. Most of the actions identified in the action plan have either been delivered or are close to being finalised and our government has reported annually on its progress in responding to climate change.

The Territory government is leading by example and looking at our own emissions. We have committed to reducing our own emissions by setting an operational greenhouse emissions reduction target of 47% on our 2021 emissions by 2030. Initiatives to reduce government's operational emissions are being pursued with all agencies working to identify their major emission sources and emission reduction opportunities. This work is being coordinated by the department's Office of Climate Change.

As in previous years, water continues to be a highly emotive issue. It has been 12 months since the Territory Water Plan was released and work on each of the priority actions is progressing with all 16 actions on track. Some of the highlights include:

- drafting of new safe drinking water legislation scheduled for introduction later this year
- accelerating progress for the Darwin Region Water Supply Infrastructure Program led by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics with Power and Water Corporation on track to commence construction of Manton Dam return to service project this year for completion in 2026
- work on the reform of the *Water Act 1992*, which is well under way.

Of significant note, is the work of the Office of Water Security which has coordinated the work to secure over \$59.7m in funding from the National Water Grid Authority for critical construction projects to improve water security in the communities of Yuendumu, Milingimbi, Numbulwar, Maningrida, Yulara and the Gove Peninsula, which includes Yirrkala and Gunyangara.

The Territory is the first jurisdiction in Australia to be awarded funding for the remote First Nations communities water infrastructure. This investment is being supported by a cross-agency remote water team to inform communities who want to know more about water quality, security and infrastructure investments.

Additionally, \$23.2m in water grid funding was awarded to Yulara Water Supply Project, the primary service centre for the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and the wider NPY Lands and \$1.5m for water science projects to build on the Northern Territory's Government long-standing program of water resource and underpin evidence-based water resource management.

I will shortly be releasing the annual progress report on the Territory Water Plan which identifies the key achievements over the first year of the plan. This will be released with a monitoring and evaluation plan which outlines how progress towards the plan's longer-term outcomes will be tracked.

The implementation of the actions under the plan are coordinated by the Office of Water Security, which government committed \$13.5m over three years for implementation. The department has continued to progress planning and licencing activities throughout the year, finalising the Georgina Wiso Water Allocation Plan 2023–31, releasing the draft Mataranka Water Allocation Plan 2024–34 and progressing the development of a water allocation plan for the Western Davenport Region.

Significantly, the background work for developing a water allocation plan for the Adelaide River Catchment, where the AROWS project will be located, is progressing, supported by an injection of \$7.1m funding over four years from the Australia Government.

In May 2023, an Independent Controller of Water Resources was appointed. Since that time the controller has made more than 80 statutory decisions, more than half of which have been made within target time frames. These decisions include new and increased water licences, renewals and permits to interfere with the waterway.

In balancing the government's environmental and economic objectives, it released the surface water take Wet Season flow policy in February of this year. This policy, which is highly precautionary, balances the interests of all Territorians by increasing environmental and cultural protections to maintain free-flowing rivers whilst also providing industry with clear guidance on how much surface water can be extracted in any given Wet Season, supporting the Territory's economic development.

The important work of the Water Resources Division within the department was heavily relied upon during the flood events of the last two years and, in particular, over the first three months of 2024. The department maintains a floodwater monitoring network for the Bureau of Meteorology, comprising 64 sites located at strategic locations across the Territory. This network provides critical data used in flood forecasting models which inform flood predictions and warning advice for communities in flood-prone areas. It is also DEPWS water monitoring team which sometime brave wild weather to go into the field to repair and replace failed and faulty gauging stations.

The second half of 2023 saw unprecedented levels of wildfire across the Territory, in particular around the Barkly region which resulted in an estimated 2.8 million hectares burning for 57 days declared a registered disaster event under the disaster recovery funding arrangement at a Category B level of assistance.

The Tennant Creek Bushfires NT Volunteer Brigade is one of the smallest bushfire brigades in the Northern Territory. The assistance provided by other volunteer brigades from across the Territory to support the Barkly fire operations exemplifies the camaraderie and generosity of the bushfires volunteer community.

The event declaration was later expanded to include local government areas outside of the Barkly area and saw significant resources deployed across the Northern Territory and assistance from over 100 interstate personnel, Australian Defence Force personnel and pastoralists.

In a first for the Northern Territory, water bombers were dispatched and utilised alongside other aerial assets to protect Tennant Creek, Canteen Creek, Barkly pastoral leases and Alice Springs. When in previous years the use of aircraft was limited to the Top End on an average of 100 to 110-day stand-by contracts, last year water bombing aircraft and helicopters were used across the Northern Territory for 293 consecutive days.

At the time of the Barkly complex fires, the Top End was still experiencing high fire danger periods which meant resources sent from the north increased the pressure on the Top End resources. A reimbursement program for pastoralists, in recognition of the support of Bushfires NT with fire responses, has been developed and a number of payments have been made.

The year 2023 was one of the biggest year on record for the number of bushfires attended or managed by Bushfires NT staff and volunteers, with twice the reported wildfire incidents over that fire year. The increased

workload is likely to continue this year and potentially be exceeded due to the high level of rainfall received following the fires, leading to increased fuel loads.

Bushfires NT continues to actively work with landowners to prepare their property fire management plans to manage an emerging fire risk. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge and thank our volunteer bushfire brigades which play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of our rural communities. For this, I thank them on behalf of all Territorians.

Aerial firefighting remains an integral component of bushfire mitigation and response in Australia. It is no different in the Territory. Last year's budget committed \$2.5m ongoing to enable our government to commit to a new five-year agreement with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre providing certainty to Bushfires NT that it has the aerial firefighting capacity to support bushfire response.

This year's budget allocated a further one-off \$1m to Bushfires NT. One of the key reasons for the increasing wildfire risk is associated with high fuel loads which can be impacted by high growth rates of invasive weeds and grasses, specifically gamba in the Top End and buffel in the Centre. We recognise the risk that the spread of these grasses has on fuel loads and have provided funding to resource programs to manage both gamba and buffel.

In this year's budget we have committed an extra output appropriation of \$1m ongoing for weed management, of which \$750,000 will be allocated to managing buffel in Central Australia and \$250,000 to manage gamba in Litchfield National Park. This additional investment in gamba is on top of the other investments directed towards managing gamba in the Top End, including dedicated weed management programs on the parks estate, the highly successful gamba army and gamba action program.

We recognise buffel grass cannot be readily managed in the same way as other priority weeds due to its extensive distribution in Central Australia and value to pastoralists. Areas of cultural, environmental and conservation significance must be protected while our pastoral industry is supported to grow their business in an environmentally sound manner.

As such, I sought the views of many Central Australian landowners and occupiers before forming a buffel grass weed advisory committee. This committee is currently developing a buffel strategy to shape and inform an approach for declaration and management of buffel.

There has been an increased focus on land clearing in the Territory, particularly from some environmental advocacy groups who have touted that the Territory needs to stop the widespread land clearing taking place. However, I will put land clearing in the Territory into perspective. Only small areas of the Northern Territory have been cleared to date, with total land clearing less than 1% of the Northern Territory. It includes clearing for agriculture, urban areas, roads, dams and reservoirs.

In the first nine months of 31 March 2024, five land-clearing applications totalling less than 5,000 hectares were approved. I confirm with the committee that this government takes land clearing and the development of the Territory seriously. This is demonstrated through the department undertaking compliance and enforcement actions for uncommitted land-clearing this year.

I was pleased to recently launch the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee's 2024 Darwin Harbour Integrated Report Card. It is the second of its kind. The report card uses a broad set of indicators that encompass social, economic and Indigenous values in addition to biophysical ones to give a holistic view of the health of the harbour.

I thank the Larrakia Rangers who are instrumental in collecting and reporting the information incorporated in the report card. Work continues on implementing the actions under the Northern Territory Circular Economy Strategy, released in 2022. The strategy is a five-year plan to transition the Territory from a linear approach, 'Taking, making, using', and simply disposing resources to a circular economy and builds on the success of the Territory's container deposit scheme and the plastic bag ban.

Crocodile management has been topical. I recently released the new 10-year management program for the saltwater crocodile in the Territory. The program represents a shift of focus in the management of the crocodile population from recover towards maintenance and containment, with a strong focus on public safety whilst assuring the conservation of this iconic species.



Our government has committed new resourcing of \$0.8m in 2024–25 and then \$1.5m ongoing to enhance public safety through an increased focus on the removal of crocodiles in designated management zones and the deployment of new technologies to detect and monitor crocodiles.

The department has, over the past eight years, managed to deliver on what is nothing short of an outstanding volume of reform, key initiatives and programs, as well as continuing to undertake its regular advisory and regulatory functions. It has done this professionally, diligently and with a high degree of enterprise and capability.

I acknowledge the staff members here and the broader department's resilience and reinforce its commitment to ensuring the Territory's resources are sustainably managed for all.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the highlights of my portfolio in more detail.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that you were talking about the land clearing and that there has been commentary from the Environmental Defenders Office regarding this, how much do you fund the Environmental Defenders Office?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The Environmental Defenders Office is funded \$100,000 per annum.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Do you support the Environmental Defenders Office manipulating traditional owners in decision-making?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given the manipulation that happens with traditional owners, is that not deemed a breach of contract?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No. You may have missed the public commentary and the comments I made regarding the EDO. The funding that we provide it is purely in an educative space. It is not used for provision of any legal services. However, I had a robust discussion with that office and called on it to make a public statement because there was an absence of that, particularly regarding our funding. It did that as a result. I am satisfied that the funding that we give them is not for the provision of legal services. I do not condone the action they took.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Would you continue to fund the Environmental Defenders Office?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The EDO is required to acquit its funding in accordance with what it gets the money for. It does that. It was a policy decision to fund it and a number of other community-based organisations. Our funding is acquitted in terms of an educative space.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You touched on talking about the Beetaloo as well. How many members of Cabinet voted to keep the moratorium on fracking?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will never ever talk publicly about decisions of Cabinet. It is a stupid question. Sorry, Member for Katherine. I have to call that as I see it.

**Madam CHAIR:** We all feel passionate and have different views, but let us not critique questions, just answer them.

**Mr KIRBY:** Do you support fracking?

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Katherine, the questions ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** You are asking for personal opinions. We are talking about the budget.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I am chairing. The questions need to relate to the minister's opening statement and to the budget we are considering. There is latitude to look at previous decisions and funding, but please keep the questions in order.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Madam Chair, I support our government's position on fracking, yes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Thank you, minister. You were talking about the bush fires and the catastrophic bush fires in the Barkley recently. Bushfires NT provides fire management support in the fire protection zones across the Northern Territory, and there are four fire protection zones: northern protection zone; Alice Springs; Katherine; and Tennant Creek. Within those zones Bushfires NT is responsible for supporting land holders in managing and mitigating bush fires, providing support and training to volunteer bush fire brigades across the Territory and coordinating and managing aerial firefighting capability across the Top End. What is the annual budget for the Bushfires NT?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is \$11.728m.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What is the operational budget and personnel budget?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The employee budget for 2024–25 is \$4.634m. Purchases of goods and services is \$5.739m, grants and subsidies is \$503,000 and there is a figure in that budget of \$852,000 for depreciation and amortisation.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Of that \$503,000 for grants, how many grants are given?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Collene Bremner to respond to that question.

**Ms BREMNER:** We have 20 brigades that we provide grant funding for.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many FTE staff are in Bushfires NT?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Collene Bremner to give you that figure.

**Ms BREMNER:** Our staffing number goes up and down depending on the fire season. As of 31 March, there were 31 funded established roles, plus three trainees to operation and one administration. Up until 31 March we also had 10 supernumerary seasonal fire management officers, from June 2023 to April 2024, who we sent to Alice Springs gradually as the Top End season eased.

**Mrs HERSEY:** The annual report 2022–23 states 46; you are one under.

**Ms BREMNER:** We also bring in extra incident management team staff depending on what they might be. Last year, with the Central Australian fires, we had to bring in extra finance and planning staff on top of that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many extra staff were brought in for the bushfires?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the chief executive officer to respond to that.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** The way Bushfires NT is set up is that it has a core staff of 31. It has a surge capacity with the employment of a seasonal firefighting workforce who work around the country providing seasonal fire responses. There are also volunteer brigades and the work we do to boost that support and have them ready for fires. There is also a very sophisticated and effective national firefighting collaboration.

Regarding the Central Australian fires, in addition to the additional seasonals that we brought on, we were also able to draw on those national arrangements and we had 117 additional resources from New South Wales and South Australia firefighting services in addition to some capability we got from the Defence Force and other parts of the department whether it was Parks and Wildlife who had firefighting capability or other parts of government.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Minister, how is the fatigue managed during the bushfire seasons?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I invite Collene Bremner to respond to that from an operational point of view.

**Ms BREMNER:** Managing fatigue can be challenging. We do have a standard operating procedure that we follow to try and give people 10 hours break between shifts. We have implemented a seven-day week being six days on and three days off for both our incident management team and our operational staff. We have a lot of fires over weekends as well as Monday to Friday and we manage that with our extra seasonal staff coming in.

We monitor how many hours they do with staff, but it can be quite challenging for the fires like the Barkly complex, especially if it takes you 10 hours to drive to Tennant Creek before they even get to the fire line and then two hours to the fire line to start. We are literally implementing fatigue management before they start.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given travel to the Barkly, is there an issue regarding those particular fires that potentially some people would not have that 10-hour break between shifts?

**Ms BREMNER:** Probably in the first week or two that certainly was the case. Those breaks were missed and it was picked up once we were able to get an incident management team into Tennant Creek to help manage some of the fatigue and getting extra resources in. The first lot of resources we got from interstate were from South Australia Country Fire Service. That was a real boost to our capability and our capacity and it allowed volunteers and staff some respite from the fires.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In the last bushfire season, how many times did the NT Government request assistance from interstate?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Collene to respond.

**Ms BREMNER:** I put in at least five requests because I initially requested through South Australian Country Fire Service not just for firefighters but for equipment, because we could not afford to move equipment from the Top End while it was going through such high fire danger periods. Some brigades were able to release some vehicles, but we needed extra ones.

South Australia sent two contingents. They actually had two strike teams, of which they sent two lots. One of those teams stayed in Alice Springs to support the volunteer brigade and the firefighters in the Alice Springs area. I then asked South Australia if they would leave their vehicles behind. When we got other contingents from New South Wales, they were able to use the South Australian vehicles.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Was it just from New South Wales and South Australia that we got interstate assistance? Did Queensland also come, given they are quite close?

**Ms BREMNER:** Queensland was also undergoing high fire danger periods as well. Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory were under the pump, whereas South Australia and New South Wales were less so. We also had offers from elsewhere, but we managed with those two jurisdictions.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Out of those five requests for assistance, how many times did they come to the Territory?

**Ms BREMNER:** They came five times. Every time we had another strike team, it was an official request. New South Wales also offered some other technology we had not used before, such as a citation jet, which is able to take line scanning of the fire front. That is a Learjet capability. With that, they also provided a fire behaviour analyst to review that data and provide us with information on the hotspots. While they were there, they were able to go over the Tanami fires and a few of the others. It is a very efficient and amazing bit of technology.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You mentioned they came for the Tanami and the Barkly. Were there any other fires they assisted with, or were they the main ones?

**Ms BREMNER:** When the Barkly fire was going on we had—I am trying to remember the number. There were more than 20, probably more like 40 fires across the Territory at the time, and we were able to use those fire behaviour analysts to develop radar spread maps to share with pastoralists and landowners. We might not have been able to provide resources but we could give them information about where the fires would potentially travel in nine, 12 or 24 hours. That intel was useful for landowners.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What was the overall cost of bringing interstate assistance to the Territory to support Bushfires NT, and can you provide a breakdown of that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a bit complicated because you would claim some of that cost back through the federal scheme, so we would not know the true cost until after that claim is processed, and I do not believe that is finalised yet.

**Mrs HERSEY:** When would that be finalised?

**Ms BREMNER:** We actually do not have an invoice from New South Wales. I have not been mentioning that. We will send it your way.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The bill will come to you, Member for Katherine. It is a tricky process. It can take up to 12 months to settle those things, so you respond at the time, get the resources and then work that out afterwards. There are thresholds with the federal government in terms of what claims you can and cannot make, and we are going through that process at the moment.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that we do not want to mention we have not received anything, is it maybe sometimes a reciprocal arrangement? Is that sometimes how it works, that they will come and support you if you go and support them?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Does that happen often, more often than not?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I think it happens every year that I have noticed. Would that be right, Collene?

**Ms BREMNER:** This was the first time in about 12 years that we have asked for assistance, but the Northern Territory has provided assistance interstate for flood or fire for a number of reasons. We have well-practised arrangements across Australia, so my request went through the National Resource Sharing Centre through the Australian interstate arrangements. It is a useful arrangement through the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council or the group that we are a member of.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Has Bushfires NT requested an increase in funding to employ more staff to decrease the need to request assistance from interstate?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not specifically for that, but we have given them an additional \$1m one-off funding this year.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many requests for support were received from landholders last bush fire season?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Collene Bremner to respond, but I am not sure if we kept exact figures on the number.

**Ms BREMNER:** We received more requests than we could provide. I can say that up front. In the end for the Central Australian fire season, we made a time at 3 o'clock every afternoon using the NTCA, Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association, to dial in to get an update on what the fire status was across the Territory and answer any questions about fires. There were more fires than we had staff.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** On that line of questioning, you spoke about the NTCA; were there any things in particular that were advocated for? VHF towers in these sorts of scenarios are quite beneficial. Can you explain whether things that were being asked for during the bush fires that were happening, was there advocacy work to try to improve the communication on the ground during this time?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was operational, so I will invite Collene to respond.

**Ms BREMNER:** We provided some funding to the NTCA to do an assessment of the VHF network to expand the network. Currently Bushfires NT look after the VHF network within the fire protection zone; that is where we have a lot more landholders and assets, but it is also where our volunteer brigades are situated. It is a network mainly to talk directly from the fire ground back to the headquarters. We were provided with some extra government funding a couple of years ago to increase our VHF network so we could link up Katherine, Alice Springs and the Acacia office. The Northern Territory is a large jurisdiction, and communication is a challenge for us.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Have there been a number of VHF towers that have been decommissioned in that area that has limited the availability of communication on the ground?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not aware, but I will invite Collene to add some context.

**Ms BREMNER:** Prior to me working with Bushfires NT—we are probably talking over 10 years ago—the VHF network outside of the fire protection zone was handed back to pastoralists, or the landholders that were on, as part of the asset transfer, and the landholders were advised to maintain that network. With the drought in Central Australia one of the last things they were concerned about was having VHF network internally for fire when there was little grass to burn. We are still investigating. I have not heard back from NTCA about the

outcome of that, but we are exploring that there might be better technology than the towers that were put in place over 40 years ago.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is the government considering transferring Bushfires NT to Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Definitely not?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not to my knowledge.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** A further question on what I was asking before. Is it true that pastoralists need to be contractors to get money for work completed? If they are out working creating firebreaks, doing backburning possibly on other land other than their own, do they have to be contractors in order to be paid for the time and work they do for Bushfires NT?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not that I am aware, no. I invite the chief executive officer to provide more commentary.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** There was no doubt through the Barkly complex fire that the roles the pastoralists played was incredibly important. They were also disproportionately affected. That was recognised in lots of discussions with the NTCA and with pastoralists directly.

We worked with pastoralists and asked them through the formal arrangements to help us with certain clearing. In recognition of that I have approved a reimbursement program for pastoralists who assisted in working with Bushfires NT through the complex fire. We received seven applications and reimbursed five.

The guidance for that is clear. I have a copy here and this is on the Internet. It is clear about the eligibility. They need to be providing services on behalf of Bushfires NT; it cannot be for operations or matters that would ordinarily be covered by insurance. It does not cover wages.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Are you able to put a dollar figure to date of that pastoralist reimbursement program?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** So far we have reimbursed—they need to have a business number—\$210,000 for five claims and we have two further claims we are in discussions about.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I would like to take a moment and table a previous question answer.

**Madam CHAIR:** Before you do that, the Member for Mulka is on the line and would like to ask a question. You have precedence. I will go to the minister to table the answer, then to the Member for Katherine and Member for Mulka we will try to get to you soon.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 4.2**

**Mrs WORDEN:** It has lots of tables. I will not waste the committee's time by reading them all—although I could. It is question 4.2 relating to what percentage of renewable electricity in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Darwin and Katherine electricity systems?

It has some tables so I will table it.

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**Mrs HERSEY:** The bushfire that impacted at least 1.3 million hectares in September 2023 and resulted in an emergency being declared for the entire Barkly local government area had a devastating effect on the region. What were the learnings from this emergency for government?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was a first for the Northern Territory, with water bombers being dispatched and utilised, along with other aerial assets to protect Tennant Creek, Canteen Creek and the Barkly and Alice Springs township. During the height of the response we had three helicopters, seven water bombers and a single-engine spotter plane that were on contract responding to fires across the Territory.

We had to put aerial support into place to support the emergency response area in Tennant Creek and surrounding areas. Support facilities for the aircraft were identified, including a hangar and procurement.

These are all things we learned along the way that we needed and had to install. We have installed four 25,550 litre water tanks for future events.

We also learned that there are landing fees involved in excess of \$330,000 for using the managed air field in Tennant Creek that were charged to aviation contractors and later invoiced to Bushfires NT. I do not think we had much idea that would be the case.

Bushfires NT also utilised a remote airstrip in Canteen Creek for water bombers, identifying the need to invest in remote filling capacity in the future. There were major learnings regarding aerial capacity should we have to use it and that important infrastructure.

The chief executive officer has some additional information.

**Mrs HERSEY:** With that additional, where were those tanks that you ended up putting in?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Alice Springs Airport.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** As someone who has been partly responsible for Bushfires NT for the last eight years, this was the largest single event that we ever had. We are working through a formal review of the Barkly complex fire and how it was managed, which is part of our reflection and continuous learning. There have been some discussions with affected landowners, other government departments and some people in the Barkly community regarding that.

My view from some of the things that we learned were that this was a fire at such a landscape scale. We are very good at dealing with large fires across multiple properties, but this was across multiple, multiple properties.

We struggled to catch up with logistics. While we had good firefighting capability, excellent aerial capability and training within, it was about logistics, getting people there and in accommodation and getting new tyres for earthmoving equipment. It was the logistics capability that we will need to strengthen into the future.

There are also some internal lessons for government regarding the emergency management arrangements and how they apply to fire which is such a fast-moving thing. It is not a cyclone or a flood. Every day was a new day. There are some lessons. We have never had an emergency response for fire before.

We will share the learnings of that fire. In the end, that fire was pulled up by us closing the Barkly Highway up to 48 hours to use it as a firebreak. There was nothing else to pull that fire up. It was quite extraordinary for us to do that, but that was what pulled it up.

It was also caused by illegal ignitions at certain times. We were working against people relighting that fire as we were putting it out.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Have any charges been laid on that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is incredibly difficult to identify a particular person at a particular time doing that. Not at this stage. You could also ask police that question.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many other agencies supplied staff to work? For example, Heli-Muster and companies like that. How many agencies supported in that fire?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I invite Collene to give you some context regarding that question.

**Ms BREMNER:** We tried to pull together quite a concerted list. There was a statement done in the Legislative Assembly after the fires. There was the generosity of the local businesses in Tennant Creek, the community-based organisations, the neighbouring stations, other government agencies that provided assistance, NT Fire and Rescue which sent its volunteers. In the end, we were cognisant of the fact that we might miss somebody out if we went through and named them all because—I was in Tennant Creek when the situation was unfolding and I would turn around and see another bunch of people turn up with welfare or they would say, 'The local Bay Leaf Cafe has free coffee for the firefighters'. The Memorial Club put something across the bar. It was an amazing effort all around.

I am sorry, Member for Katherine. I probably cannot give you an honest answer, but it was an amazing effort of support.

**Mrs HERSEY:** It is great to see people coming together. Do you have any idea about how many volunteers were involved?

**Mrs WORDEN:** From interstate we had 107 teams from New South Wales and South Australia. You were asking specific questions about volunteer numbers?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We can take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 4.13

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

**Ms HERSEY:** How many volunteers were involved in the emergency in the Barkly?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 4.13.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Katherine, do you have further questions? I would like to pass to the Member for Mulka in the next couple of minutes for a couple of questions if that would be all right.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I have one more question. What was the overall cost of damage caused as a result of the fires, including the costs of bringing interstate crews and equipment from interstate?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think we touched on that in that it was difficult. Do you have anything more, or do you want to take something on notice, minister?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We may have it. I have a broad figure for wildfires across the Northern Territory for 2023–24 of \$17,740,000 of which \$9.34m related to a claim to the federal DRFA, but as at 31 March 2024 costs associated with the Barkly complex fire event are estimated at approximately \$4.8m.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Mulka has questions on this topic.

**Mr GUYULA:** This budget provides \$2m to CDU for the Beetaloo basin regional monitoring program. How can the government guarantee independence of CDU for that, given the university regularly receives money and gifts from industry and has failed to disclose conflict of interest in the past?

**Mrs WORDEN:** CDU will be managed through a partnership agreement for them to undertake data collection. The program needs to be entirely independent of industry. Whilst I understand the premise of your question, in some ways that would be a question for CDU. However, large organisations like CDU would do a number of things.

This would be them providing a program that is independent of all the other activities they have. They also have some good capability for engagement and design, and they would be able to get that data collected. I have a lot of faith that CDU will provide that independently.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, the minister is suggesting you contact Charles Darwin University for that information.

**Mr GUYULA:** The NT Government has just given approval to Tamboran to begin fracking in the Beetaloo Basin. Where is the environmental approval for this project?

**Mrs WORDEN:** To qualify, that is for exploratory undertakings. If they were to move to production they would have to apply for a second EMP.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you want an official to elaborate for the member?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will change officials quickly.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Member for Mulka, could you repeat the question for Amy Dennison?

**Mr GUYULA:** The NT Government has just given approval to Tamboran to begin fracking in the Beetaloo Basin. Where is the environmental approval for this project?

**Ms DENNISON:** All approvals for environment management plans are published on the department's website, so you can see them all there. In the event the company transitions to production, another approval will be required and will go through a similar assessment process, and that will also be published on the website.

**Mr GUYULA:** Thank you. The rising seawaters are a threat for communities like Milingimbi and other communities across the Top End. What is the government doing to address the possibility of these kinds of problems.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Paul Purdon, from the Office of Climate Change, is joining us. I invite him to respond to that question.

**Mr PURDON:** Climate change is a global issue, not just one for the Territory to respond to. Any comprehensive response to climate change involves trying to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that are the cause of a changing climate and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change. The Territory government is approaching its climate change response on both fronts.

The minister noted in her opening statement that the Territory government has a climate change response with a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050, and it is very close to completing implementation of the three-year action plan that addresses emissions in various ways. We heard earlier about the renewable energy target and how it is being implemented amongst other actions to address climate change emissions.

In terms of climate change impacts and building resilience, we are doing a range of work. We have developed a climate change resilience framework, which the department will provide to government for consideration. That is a high-level strategy that outlines principles et cetera for how the Territory government should be responding to climate change impacts.

To support that, we are close to finalising a climate change risk assessment for the Northern Territory, which is a first-pass risk assessment on impacts and risks to the Territory from changing climate, which no doubt does include some consideration of rising sea levels. That is the starting point for identifying risks, prioritising those and working with community in identifying what actions should be taken to respond to those climate change risks.

**Mr GUYULA:** In north-east Arnhem Land, we have dedicated volunteers and rangers who clear the beaches of rubbish which is swept into our beaches from across the world. What is the government doing to address the problem as there needs to be a regular response that includes other countries?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Dr Fisher to respond to the question.

**Dr FISHER:** Similar to climate change issues, there is a vexed issue of marine pollution that is affecting many countries and northern Australia is particularly badly affected by rubbish arriving from the north, including large ghost nets trapping turtles and other marine life and a lot of plastic rubbish. Response on an international scale will have to come through the Commonwealth Government because it is a matter of international negotiations with other nations.

In terms of the immediate response, there has been substantial funding for ghost net removal programs and rubbish removal programs both from the Commonwealth Government and also through the NT's Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program. In the past we have funded Dhimurru Rangers to provide them extra resources for beach cleanups. The coastal ranger groups can continue to apply for future ranger grant funding for that purpose. I invite them to do that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Recently a media release on bag limits for waterfowl hunting. How often has the hunting stakeholder reference group met in 2022–23 and during the reporting period?



**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 4.14**

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

**Mr HERSEY:** How often has the hunting stakeholder reference group met in 2022–23 and during the reporting period?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.14.

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**Mrs WORDEN:** It may be a question for Minister for Parks and Rangers.

**Madam CHAIR:** If it is a question for Parks and Rangers, they will let you know and you can do it as a written question. Parks did not get a chance to speak.

**Mr HERSEY:** How many gamba grass enforcement orders have been issued?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There have been 82 intentions to issue a pin this year, but none yet.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is there a process to that? Do you give them a final warning?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, there is a process to that. There were 82 intentions issued to fine. I will ask the Chief Executive Officer to provide you that accurately.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Given that there were 82 intentions, no infringements or enforcements have gone out?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** It is a compliance process. As of 31 March, we did 1,106 roadside inspections. As a result of that we issued 430 orders. Then we go back and do further inspections, 82 properties had letters to say we are intending to pin you. We will go back and if they have not done the right thing, they will get a pin.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What is the time frame between them receiving a letter from you to say ...

**Ms TOWNSEND:** How long to fix it up?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Maybe four weeks. What will start to happen now is we will finalise our compliance process because we are coming to the end of our weed compliance season, but at the same time we will be doing inspections for fire breaks and fire compliance.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What is the process from start to finish when you look at 1,106—what did you call them?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Roadside inspections.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You did 1,106, 82 enforcement orders from the start of that to the finish.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** After the roadside inspection the property will be notified and then we will go back in four weeks and if they have not done it, they will get an order. Then there is another period of time and then we start the infringement notice process.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What is that time frame?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is eight weeks in total.

**Madam CHAIR:** You did a thousand-odd inspections, wrote to a bunch of people, then you had to issue 84 'hurry up and do it', and then of that you are about to get to the next step ...

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Yes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Is that an eight-week period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You are allowing time.

**Madam CHAIR:** We want them to clean it up is the ideal ...

**Ms TOWNSEND:** We also wrote a hundred letters recognising people's efforts to address their gamba. We try to reward them as well.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many concerns have been lodged with the Gamba Fire Mitigation Unit as part of the Gamba Fire Mitigation Compliance Policy?

**Mrs WORDEN:** What are you calling concerns—do you mean complaints? How many complaints about gamba has the agency received? Is that your question?

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many have been lodged?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We do not count them.

**Mrs HERSEY:** You get lots.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Loads.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What is the government doing about cleaning gamba on government property, or property that is even then gifted—for example, I have been to a school where land was gifted to them, but there is a lot of gamba on that land. What is the onus on the government to clean up the gamba before or during or while they have that land?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are responsible for cleaning our own gamba. We then put additional funding into the continuation of the gamba army. There is a range of those, depending on where the land is and who owns it. There is a compliance framework if it is not done on private property.

**Mrs HERSEY:** With the money that has gone to the gamba army in the budget, was any consideration taken of the fact that poisons are a lot more expensive?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes; that is why we gave some additional funding.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are nearly out of time. Did you have any answers, minister, you wanted to respond to?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I add that every season for gamba it is all captured in a final report. Those reports are released every September. It will all be online.

We have an answer from the hunting reference group if you like.

**Mr FISHER:** That reference group was an arrangement with parks. It was started in 2012, a long time before parks was part of this agency. It was about putting arrangements into place to allow hunting activities on parks.

That group no longer meets because those arrangements have been well established and have been running for long enough.

**Madam CHAIR:** Terrific. Thank you. That brings us to the end of our time. Thank you to the committee members, the minister and all the officials who have supported her. We will see everyone at 8 am tomorrow.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I put on the record my thanks to all the staff. We only had a short amount of time today, but a lot of preparations were done by a lot of public servants. I appreciate their efforts to support me today. Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** We appreciate them, too.

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The committee concluded.

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