

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

MINISTER EDGINGTON'S PORTFOLIOS

HEALTH

Mr CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to today's Estimates Committee hearings. I welcome you, minister, to today's hearings and I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you. Once you have finished that, I will hand back over and run through today's schedule before your opening statement.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am pleased to introduce officials from NT Health who are appearing with me at today's hearing: Ms Susan Bowden, the Acting Chief Executive Officer; Ms Kim Charles, on my right, Deputy Chief Executive, Enabling Services; Ms Cecelia Gore, Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and System Improvement; and Ms Fiona Renshaw, Deputy Chief Executive, Regional Health Service. We will call on any other officials as needed during today's Estimates.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, I now invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 20 minutes. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on the output.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Health? I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

I ask that all phones be put to silent for the minister's statement.

Mr EDGINGTON: Mr Chair, before turning to the details of reporting period, I acknowledge and thank the people who work across NT Health. The Northern Territory has some of the best health professionals in Australia. I am consistently impressed by the expertise, experience, professionalism and depth of local knowledge that exists across the Northern Territory.

I continue to witness firsthand the collaboration across the agency which employs more than 7,500 staff who work across five regions, six hospitals, 49 remote health clinics, eight urban health centres and several department offices across the Territory.

Earlier this year our Northern Territory Health staff showcased their extraordinary dedication, adaptability and ability to get on with the job as they experienced system-wide pressures due to simultaneous emergency responses to weather events occurring across the Territory. Their commitment to improving the lives of Territorians is what makes our Health system so strong.

Delivering healthcare in the Northern Territory can be demanding and complex, but also extremely rewarding. I am immensely proud to represent this portfolio and the dedicated people who serve within it.

Northern Territory Health remains committed to investing in and growing its workforce. We want our people to have the skills, support and opportunities they need to thrive, while empowering them to apply their expertise, drive innovation and develop practical solutions and improved services for Territorians.

Whether they are based in our hospitals, remote clinics, urban health centres, community programs, corporate services or support services, they are united in their passion and dedication to provide high-quality care for Territorians.

Staff and patient safety remain our highest priorities. Over the past year NT Health has taken decisive action in response to violent incidents within our healthcare facilities. Violence and aggression against healthcare workers is unacceptable. Our staff deserve to come to work knowing they will be safe, and our patients deserve to receive care in a safe and secure environment.

We have continued to work closely with staff to address safety concerns and boost security and protection arrangements. This includes the upcoming rollout of personal duress alarms in the emergency departments

at the Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston Regional Hospital, with the capacity to expand these arrangements across other hospitals in the future.

Worker attraction and retention also remains a key focus. Like health systems across Australia, the Territory continues to face workforce challenges. In response, NT Health has implemented the range of long-term recruitment and retention strategies designed to reduce reliance on agency labour and strengthen our permanent workforce. This includes the recruitment of about 300 nurses and midwives, enhanced onboarding processes, relocation support, targeted attraction initiatives, expanded graduate programs and the introduction of a casual locum nurse scheme.

At Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston Regional Hospital 130 internationally recruited nurses and midwives have been sponsored to fill critical workforce gaps across emergency, intensive care, renal, oncology and perioperative services, as well as to support the opening of the new 32-bed ward. In Central Australia a further 39 nursing staff commenced employment during the reporting period through sponsored visa arrangements.

Within the first three months of this year, we also had 72 graduate nurses and midwives join the NT Health workforce, with more on the way. NT Health provides up to 300 graduate nursing and midwifery positions each year across the Territory. Every graduate nurse and midwife who chooses the Territory strengthens our healthcare system, improving care for patients while helping to build a sustainable health workforce that keeps Territorians healthier.

NT Health has introduced a new fast-track pathway to transition undergraduates students into graduate nursing programs, while improving the structure of the graduate program to increase career pathways and opportunities.

We are also continuing to invest in Aboriginal workforce development including through the Groote Eylandt Aboriginal health practitioner training pathway which is creating opportunities for local employment while bolstering our health workforce into the future.

In regard to hospital care, the demand for healthcare services in the Territory continues to grow. Emergency department presentations have increased over the past five years while the acuity and complexity of patients presenting to our hospitals continues to rise. During the reporting period, there are more than 173,933 presentations to Territory emergency departments, which is an increase of over 1,200 on the previous year.

These pressures are not unique to the Territory, they are being experienced across Australia and internationally. In response to high demand and capacity challenges, six code yellows were enacted during the reporting period, including four across Royal Darwin and Palmerston Hospitals and two at the Alice Springs Hospital. To address demand, NT Health continues to implement a range of strategies to improve patient flow and capacity management. Daily multidisciplinary capacity meetings are held at all Territory hospitals, supported by comprehensive demand escalation framework that enables staff to respond quickly and consistently when pressures emerge.

I attended one of those daily meetings last week and witness firsthand the level of coordination, professionalism and calm leadership that underpins our hospital system. I saw clinicians, nurses and operational staff working together in real-time to assess demand, manage beds and respond to emerging pressures, including code yellows. It was an impressive example of our health workforce at its best. Highly skilled, deeply committed and working together to ensure Territorians continue to receive the care they need when they need it.

NT Health is also reviewing transfer of care processes and strengthening escalation protocols to support safe and efficient patient flow. Construction of the new 32-bed multipurpose ward at Royal Darwin Hospital is complete. Once operational, it will increase bed capacity and support and improve patient flow across the hospital system. A significant contributor to hospital bed pressures remains the shortage of aged-care places.

On any given day up to 80 older Territorians remain in hospital beds because suitable residential aged-care placements are unavailable. This represents about 10% of available hospital bed stock and creates flow-on impacts across emergency departments and in-patient wards. Aged-care is primarily the responsibility of the Commonwealth and the Territory government continues to advocate strongly for additional aged-care services and support. NT Health has successfully secured an increase in transition care places from 49 to 72 across the Territory. In addition, I was pleased when the Commonwealth Government announced on 27 January 2026 that Ozcare had been selected as the preferred provider to build the new 120-bed residential aged care facility at the Palmerston Regional Hospital precinct.

We had an incredible end to last year and start to this year, with a number of extreme weather events not seen in decades across the Territory, from Cyclone Fina to severe flooding across greater Darwin, Daly River, Katherine, the Barkly and Central Australia. We are a tough Territory, and Territorians are tough people. NT Health teams across our hospitals, remote clinics, primary healthcare services and corporate areas sustained significant operational pressures during these severe weather events.

During Cyclone Fina conditions were challenging, especially at Royal Darwin Hospital which sustained damage to the roof of the building. Staff across every area, from clinical teams on the wards to engineers and cleaners, worked tirelessly, adapting readily to response plans.

In February 2026 flash flooding across Central Australia and parts of the Barkly caused damage to NT Health staff accommodation in Alice Springs while the Alice Springs 20-bed residential rehabilitation treatment facility was also significantly impacted. Staff worked to set up a temporary service at the Alice Springs Hospital to ensure continuity of care for patients while relocation to a medium-term facility was sourced and undertaken. Work to identify a new sustainable long-term facility is underway.

During the flooding Alice Springs Hospital experienced extreme demand pressures over several weeks, with staff showing their resilience and commitment to ensuring high-quality patient care. In March this year the Katherine Hospital was evacuated on two separate occasions due to significant flooding. This required a remarkable coordinated response, with hospital staff establishing emergency treatment services, including a mini-emergency department in the Katherine township on higher ground. The mini-emergency department had 264 patient presentations and 30 patient transfers to Royal Darwin Hospital for care across nine days.

When Katherine Hospital was evacuated for a second time, the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre established an AUSMAT field hospital to provide essential healthcare services to the community. There were 300 presentations to the field hospital across seven days, with 35 patients transferred to Royal Darwin Hospital to receive care.

Royal Darwin Hospital provided additional support during this time, with the Corella Ward at the Darwin Private Hospital utilised to provide care to patients from the Big Rivers region and support patient transfers. NT Health staff also worked closely with emergency services to support the evacuation and repatriation of people from the Palumpa and Nauiyu communities due to flooding.

The Nauiyu health centre has proudly reopened, restoring vital services to the community. Reconstruction at the Palumpa health centre is already underway following flood damage. In the meantime, a dedicated temporary health hub has been established to ensure the community continues to receive consistent and accessible care.

Responding to emergencies of this scale requires calm decision-making, professionalism and strong teamwork. These events highlighted the adaptability and dedication of our workforce under extraordinary and challenging circumstances. I extend my sincere thanks to every staff member who contributed to these emergency responses. I thank everyone for their hard work, commitment to the cause and passion for patient safety.

This government has also delivered on its commitment to expand the scope of practice for pharmacists, making healthcare easier and more accessible for Territorians. Territorians can now visit participating local pharmacies for diagnosis and treatment for up to 21 common health conditions, saving time, reducing costs and avoiding unnecessary trips to the doctor.

The continued rollout of the expanded scope of practice empowers pharmacists to deliver more frontline care while improving access for patients and easing pressure on GPs, primary care services and hospital emergency departments. This is about restoring our lifestyle, making it simpler for Territorians to access the care they need close to home when they need it.

The continued growth of Medicare urgent care clinics is improving access to healthcare and contributing to reducing demand pressures on our hospital emergency departments. There are now nine urgent care clinics operating across the Territory, including the recently opened Darwin Medicare Urgent Care Clinic. Between July 2025 and March 2026, there were 44,510 presentations to urgent care clinics across the Territory highlighting the need for these services and the impact they have had in meeting demand. In the first 18 months of operation more than 10,000 potential emergency department visits have been avoided, with patients receiving fast, appropriate care in their local urgent care clinics.

In Palmerston and Alice Springs the majority of people who would have otherwise gone to an emergency department—more than 80%—have been treated in Medicare urgent care clinics, reducing the pressure on our emergency departments. We are also seeing clear results in our hospitals with non-urgent emergency department presentations to these hospitals dropping by up to 16% during urgent care clinic hours. Six of the urgent care clinics are located in our remote communities and are working to meet the demand for services, which has seen a 9.4% rise in presentations in addition to increased complex patient needs. These services provide care closer to home and help ensure emergency departments remain available for those requiring the most urgent of care and treatment.

Restoring private maternity services remains a priority, and this government has been working to secure the future of Darwin Private Hospital to ensure Territorians continue to have access to private healthcare close to home. The loss of maternity services has had a major impact on Territory families and healthcare workers. We have been holding talks with potential operators, encouraging them to participate in the process and consider opportunities to invest in the long-term future of private healthcare in the Territory. Our message is simple: if you are prepared to back the Territory, we are prepared to back you.

As part of any future arrangements for the Darwin Private Hospital, restoring private maternity services must be a priority. In the interim, NT Health continues to work closely with private health insurers to provide alternative private models, including a hotel accommodation package and a return home sooner package. These packages provide additional flexibility and support for Territory families and include daily midwife visits, 24-hour, seven-days-a-week phone support, a home-delivered meals package and a gift hamper for mother and baby. The return home sooner package also includes house cleaning. As of 31 March 2026, 85 families have utilised the postnatal packages, including 40 families using the hotel accommodation package and 45 families using the return home sooner package.

We are continuing to invest in maternity infrastructure at Royal Darwin Hospital and have spent almost \$300,000 to enhance amenities for patients and their families. This includes painting, maintenance and repair work to improve functionality, amenity and comfort of the maternity ward. NT Health has been working to secure \$10m from the Commonwealth Government to further restore and refurbish maternity services infrastructure at RDH. While this was considered as part of the 2026–27 Commonwealth budget, no funding has been provided.

When it comes to community care, mental health, alcohol policy and community treatment services continue to be important priorities. Construction of the new \$94.3m mental health facility at Royal Darwin Hospital is progressing and remains on track for completion later this year. This includes an investment of \$64.3m from the Northern Territory Government and \$30m from the Commonwealth. The facility will provide additional inpatient capacity, dedicated support services and a stabilisation assessment and referral area to improve access to mental healthcare for Territorians.

The \$58.8m bilateral National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, including \$17.5m in NT Government funding continues to deliver important services across the Territory, including Medicare Mental Health Centres, youth mental health initiatives, suicide prevention programs and enhanced aftercare services. NT Health and the NT Primary Health Network are also investing \$300,000 to support community led suicide-prevention initiatives, with more than 239 projects already delivered across multiple grant rounds.

We have also continued our work to reduce alcohol-related harm. The Health department advised me that alcohol-related emergency department presentations have decreased during the reporting period while community-led alcohol management plans continue to expand across the Territory.

In December 2025 legislative amendments came into effect to increase seven-day police-issued banned drinker orders to 28 days to further tackle antisocial behaviour and alcohol-related crime. As of 31 March 2026 there were 5,212 adults on the BDR, a 25% increase from March 2025. Enhanced access to alcohol and drug services in regional, remote and correctional settings has included new treatment programs ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! I think the time has expired.

Mr CHAIR: It is 18 minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr PAECH: Quick then.

Mr EDGINGTON: ... to change behaviour and reduce alcohol harm.

Primary healthcare remains the cornerstone of a strong and sustainable health system. We are also continuing to invest in disease prevention and chronic disease management. Preventing chronic conditions by addressing key risk factors is critical to reducing and managing future demand and improving the health of Territorians.

The Northern Territory faces some of the highest rates of chronic kidney disease and type 2 diabetes in the world, far higher than the national average. Across the Territory 7.4% of adults are affected, but in remote communities that rises to nearly one in three Aboriginal adults, with Territorians four times more likely to be hospitalised with diabetes-related kidney disease.

The Territory continues to face longstanding Commonwealth funding challenges across primary healthcare, aged care and aeromedical retrievals, with an identified \$195m Commonwealth funding shortfall in this space. In 2024–25 Commonwealth Government expenditure on aged care in the Northern Territory was \$6,746 per person, substantially below the national average of \$7,895 per person.

Territorians deserve the same access to healthcare as every other Australian.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, time must be up now.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Mr EDGINGTON: On behalf of the Northern Territory Government thank you to all the staff for your commitment.

I am happy to take questions.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

I will now hand over to the shadow minister. Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: How many code yellow declarations have occurred across Territory hospitals for the reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think I said six code yellows ...

Mr PAECH: Yes, sure; rather than just being told, I would like the actual information if that is possible.

Mr EDGINGTON: I think I told you. If you opened your ears you would have heard that I said six code yellows ...

Mr PAECH: I would prefer it if your CEO gave us the information.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why don't you listen? When I am talking to you ...

Mr CHAIR: Gentlemen! Listen to what I have to say.

Mr EDGINGTON: ... listen to what I have to say, rather than asking questions that you already know the answer to.

Mr CHAIR: Minister!

Mr PAECH: I do not; I am genuinely asking ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja!

Everyone will be silent—apart from the babies, of course.

Mr PAECH: I would like a breakdown of where those code yellows were, the locations.

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me go back to my opening statement. Perhaps I will reread the opening statement for your, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: If you want to fill time and waste it, that is your prerogative.

Mr EDGINGTON: You obviously were not listening ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja! I will ensure your questions are asked with silence from everybody else, and you will give the minister silence with his answers.

Mr EDGINGTON: Member for Gwoja, let me repeat what I said in the opening statement. I will make it clear for you. I know you are struggling to hear. You are struggling to comprehend what goes on in the Health system ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! There is no need for the sarcastic nature of the minister.

Mr EDGINGTON: What I did say ...

Mr CHAIR: Minister! We do not need commentary on members of the committee. Gentlemen, let us have a respectful session.

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me reread from my opening statement, so the Member for Gwoja can listen.

In response to high demand and capacity challenges six code yellow were enacted during the reporting period, including four across Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals and two at Alice Springs Hospital.

Mr PAECH: How long did those code yellows stay in place at each of those six locations?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not have that information in front of me, but when it comes to code yellows ...

Mr PAECH: You can take it on notice.

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to code yellows, Member for Gwoja, the important thing to understand—as I said, we have the Royal Darwin in code yellow at the moment. I was there just last week to look at the situation ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! Standing Order 110; relevance. I am asking a particular question: how long did those code yellows stay in place for?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is what I am getting to.

Mr PAECH: A sharp, succinct answer would be appreciated.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am not sure what the commentary is all about Mr Chair, but I am answering the question. The current code yellow at Royal Darwin Hospital has been going since last week, and they are expected to come out of code yellow today. At the Royal Darwin Hospital we are talking about a period of roughly six days. I can detail that the first ones at Royal Darwin and Palmerston Regional Hospitals were from 9 July and were lifted on the 14 July 2025. They have experienced capacity challenges due to an increase in the number of patients requiring ongoing acute care.

There was a code yellow on 22 July 2025 at Alice Springs Hospital. That was lifted on 29 July; that lasted for seven days. Alice Springs experienced capacity challenges due to complex medical presentations and an increase in patients with flu-like symptoms.

On 3 November 2025 The Royal Darwin and Palmerston Regional Hospitals had a code yellow, which was lifted on 10 November 2025. The Royal Darwin Hospital experienced capacity challenges due to an increase in the number of patients requiring ongoing acute care.

On 5 February 2026 the Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals had another code yellow, which was lifted on 10 February. That lasted about five days. The Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals experienced capacity challenges due to an increase in the number of patients requiring ongoing acute care.

On 17 March 2026 the Alice Springs Hospital went into code yellow again, and that was lifted on 22 March. Alice Springs Hospital experienced ongoing and escalated system-wide capacity pressures due to an increase in the number of patients and acuity of care required, further impacted by a severe weather event and flash flooding.

On 17 March there was a code yellow called at the Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals, which was lifted on the 26 March. That lasted nine days. The Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston hospital experienced capacity challenges due to an increase in the number of patients following ongoing emergency responses to floods.

On 17 April another code yellow, which was lifted on 30 April—this one lasted for 13 days—Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston hospitals experienced capacity challenges due to an increase in the number of patients and acuity of care required.

As I started to say before I was rudely interrupted by the Member for Gwoja, on 9 June a code yellow was called at RDH due to experiencing capacity challenges from an increase in the number of patients and acuity of care required. That remains ongoing. The latest information I have is the possibility of that code yellow being lifted today.

I was there last week with the assistant Health minister to see firsthand the work that goes on at the frontline—the ‘huddle’ as it is called—all of the clinicians coming together to work through access to beds in emergency and throughout the hospital. Seeing firsthand—the clinicians, doctors, nurses, St Johns in the ED—the number of patients there is incredible. The work that is being done—the commitment and professionalism by our staff going about their work under the most significant pressure—is incredible, and I thank those staff.

Mr PAECH: How many elective surgeries have been delayed or deferred because of code yellows across the Territory’s Health system over the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Whilst the minister gets that information, I will let the shadow minister know that we will go for a follow-up question with the Member for Johnston and then we will come back to the shadow minister.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.1

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many elective surgeries have been postponed or deferred due to a code yellow over the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.1.

J DAVIS: What is the current process and criteria for activating a code yellow in the hospital system?

Mr EDGINGTON: A code yellow is used to manage any internal incident that may overwhelm or disrupt a hospital. Each NT hospital has a code yellow internal emergency infrastructure plan which describes the emergency management arrangements and structures for an incident that is internal to the hospital and that adversely affects service delivery within the location.

NT Health calls a code yellow for issues, including bed capacity which is all hospital beds, including overflow beds, are fully utilised and no additional beds are available. It could also be called for infrastructure—a breakdown in infrastructure such as power loss, lifts and communication and information technology systems.

All hospitals across the NT hold daily huddles where patient flow is reviewed and monitored. These huddles are essentially clinicians coming together to manage capacity, demand and patient safety by enhancing situational awareness across multidisciplinary teams and identification of potential risks, alignment of resources with demand and planning for discharges.

In January 2025 NT Health implemented the demand escalation framework which sets out consistent staged responses to mitigate risks to patient care and development provision and staff fatigue resulting from bed

demand. At the moment NT Health is reviewing the demand escalation framework to include triggers for escalation and stand down to improve its capabilities to predict capacity demand—for example, increase in acuity in emergency departments, increase in unexpected staff leave and winter and seasonal surges. The review includes analysis of recent codes to identify root causes and support enhanced responses to escalated demand and reduce the incidence of code yellows.

J DAVIS: I am actually interested in the process of calling a code yellow, whose responsibility it is and how it happens.

Mr EDGINGTON: The overall responsibility is the chief executive officer.

J DAVIS: Can you outline how many requests for code yellow from within the hospital system in the reporting period were not actioned?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not have that in front of me. I ask Fiona Renshaw, deputy chief executive, to give you some information on that question.

Ms RENSHAW: I can confirm that each of the code yellows that were escalated through to the chief executive for that time period have been enacted.

J DAVIS: When you say 'each' does that mean any code yellow requested by staff had been enacted?

Ms RENSHAW: Through the demand escalation framework, yes, I can confirm.

J DAVIS: I know the minister talked through the demand escalation framework before. That is a process of assessing whether it meets the criteria for a code yellow. Can you say how many did not meet the criteria under that framework?

Ms RENSHAW: I would have to take that on notice.

J DAVIS: That would be great.

Question on Notice No 5.2

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: How many code yellows were requested but not enacted against the demand escalation framework?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.2.

J DAVIS: What is the average time between a recommendation for a code yellow and the declaring of it? The average time and the longest time as well.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask the chief executive to give you some answers in regard to that.

Ms BOWDEN: I can give the example of the most recent code yellow when it was within a number of hours. If it has escalated and there is a need, it is immediately drawn to my attention. That is my recent experience. Then we respond as swiftly as we can.

Part of the work we need to do, though, is when we start to see some increasing pressure is to ensure that we get public information out that there are other options for people other than the hospital emergency wards, so we can ease that pressure moving forward.

I will check if Fiona Renshaw, deputy chief executive, has anything further on that. I feel, from the information I received, that if code yellows are requested, they are enacted.

Ms RENSHAW: There is generally a lead-up to enacting a code yellow. There is a defined process that now goes with that. This now occurs in a timely way, with the escalation up through to me as the deputy chief executive, with a quick flow-on to our chief executive. At an IMT meeting—a demand meeting—we will quickly assess against the criteria. Once that criteria is now met, we enact that straight through to the chief executive to ensure a timely enactment of the code yellow.

J DAVIS: Thank you, Ms Renshaw. Thank you, Ms Bowden, and congratulations on your new role.

Yes, I heard that the most recent code yellow was enacted quickly. I heard you say now this is how it happens. I am interested in over the reporting period, what is the longest period of time between a request for a code yellow and it being enacted. I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr EDGINGTON: We will need to investigate that further. When it comes to code yellow, we are seeing significant pressure on our emergency departments. As I have said many times, there are 60 to 80 aged-care people in our hospitals. That is 10% of our beds across the Northern Territory ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! Are we taking this question on notice or are we just talking?

Mr EDGINGTON: ... that are taken up by aged-care patients. That affects bed flow in our emergency departments.

Mr PAECH: I want to be clear. Are you taking the question on notice about the times from when a request is met—the schedule—to then a code yellow?

J DAVIS: The specific question is: what is the longest period of time in the reporting period between a request for a code yellow and it being enacted, not the most recent but over the reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: We are happy to take it on notice, yes.

Mr PAECH: That was the original question.

Question on Notice No 5.3

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: What was the longest period between the request for a code yellow and it being enacted in the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.3.

Mr PAECH: During the reporting period were any patients transferred interstate due to code yellows or bed capacity?

Mr EDGINGTON: I refer that question to Fiona Renshaw, the deputy chief executive.

Ms RENSHAW: Throughout the code yellow periods that have been called we would go through a number of predefined strategies to best put our hospital in the position to be able to come out of a code yellow. That would not mean removing or transferring any patient without the appropriate clinical assessment occurring.

We look to see where we may be able to return a patient to their home in a more timely way, if it is clinically safe to do so; otherwise, any transfer of a patient from Royal Darwin Hospital to another hospital would be clinically assessed appropriately.

We would not shift a patient due to a code yellow; we would use predefined strategies.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, you are saying no-one has been transferred over the reporting period due to bed capacity issues?

Ms RENSHAW: No.

Mr PAECH: I acknowledge we have some of our youngest consumers of the health system in the room. The Darwin maternity ward is supporting now, I believe, an additional 250 extra births a year, following the closure of the private maternity services. What additional funding is in the budget to meet this demand, and how many additional maternity staff are being funded?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will give you a bit of an outline of the number of births at Royal Darwin Hospital over the last five years. In 2021 it was 2,266; in 2022 it was 2,110; in 2023 it was 2,008; in 2024 it was 2,088; in 2025 it was 2,173; and up until the reporting period we had 2,337. Overall, we have seen a slight increase in the number of births at Royal Darwin Hospital. When it comes to capacity, I am happy to give you an overview of the staffing we have, but that capacity has been managed within the services at the maternity ward in Darwin.

Mr PAECH: How many dedicated staff are funded to operate the Darwin birth centre full-time?

Mr EDGINGTON: It might be best if I give you a broader picture of how many midwives we have. Are you talking about the birth centre itself, the two birthing suites downstairs or maternity wards? Maybe I can give you a breakdown of what we have. We have a total of 78 midwives, plus 17 midwives in the maternity group practice, 13 doctors and 24 beds in maternity with a surge capacity of 28. At the moment, 15 of those beds are occupied.

Mr PAECH: What is the average wait time for an ultrasound in Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not think I have the actual wait time for ultrasounds, but I will give you a bit of background. Generally what happens is women attend their GP as the first contact point when they are identifying they are or may be pregnant. A dating scan may or may not be offered by a GP, pending uncertainty around gestation. This scan is undertaken with a private provider.

Women may also be offered a nuchal translucency scan at 11 to 13 weeks based on their risk factors. This scan provides early identification of some fetal anomalies that particular cohorts of patients may be at greater risk of. This one is an optional test, usually undertaken by a private provider.

NT Health has the capacity to perform pregnancy ultrasound; however, it does not offer the nuchal translucency scan at Royal Darwin Hospital. RDH accepts patients from 14 weeks gestation for antenatal appointments. Women may be seen at RDH earlier than 14 weeks if they have increased risk factors that need management.

Generally, some women book scans at Royal Darwin Hospital, and others book through private providers. It is based on personal preference and availability.

Mr PAECH: At the moment it is hard for the department to provide a generalised wait time.

Mr EDGINGTON: RDH currently performs more 6,060 pregnancy scans per year, which is increase from 5,086 in 2020.

Mr PAECH: Just to be clear, you are talking about scans; that it is obviously not limited to ultrasounds. Are mothers able to request that the department does the morphology scans? It is a different scan, and I am interested if there is a wait time on that.

Ms RENSHAW: The scans can be offered, but the scans at RDH can have a wait time for them. We can refer women to the Katherine Hospital. Again, it is the women's choice.

Mr PAECH: I cannot hear; can you speak up? Did you just say that there is a wait time?

Ms RENSHAW: There is a longer period for that particular ultrasound, which is done through a private provider, but women can be offered a referral and access to the Katherine provider, which they can access in a more timely way.

Mr PAECH: It is still private; it is not a government-funded service?

Ms RENSHAW: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: Minister, for remote women having babies, for these types of scans, can they only be done in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Gove, Palmerston and Darwin?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: Have any studies been done to understand what it would cost to do ultrasounds in remote community clinics for expectant mothers?

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to those scans we would need to look at the data to understand what numbers were are talking about. These things are constantly looked at, but without the numbers in front of me—the number in those remote areas is what drives demands. It would be a decision made based on the numbers.

Mr PAECH: The department would have the numbers because you would pay for a repatriation into Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine or Gove for a mother to have an ultrasound or part of the perinatal service. How much is the department spending per year on bringing remote women in for this particular type of medial service?

Mr EDGINGTON: We would need to take that on notice. We have a number of patients travelling. We would need to break that down specific to travel related to maternity.

Question on Notice No 5.4

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Please provide a breakdown and a reflection of the costs for Territory mothers to travel from remote locations to receive pregnancy-related health services.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.4.

J DAVIS: You may have answered this. Is the nuchal scan not available through RDH?

Ms RENSHAW: No; the scan that you have referred to can be offered at the 11 to 13 weeks gestational period based on their risk factors. It can provide early identification of some fetal abnormalities. The answer is yes.

J DAVIS: It is available in Darwin?

Ms RENSHAW: Yes, based on risk factors.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm how many staff are currently qualified to facilitate a water birth at Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital?

Mr EDGINGTON: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.5

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many staff are currently qualified to facilitate a water birth at Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.5.

Mr PAECH: I have noted here that, for the last reporting period, there were 2,107 births. In this reporting period, there have been 2,307 births. That is an extra 200 births. What staff have been put on to deal with additional births, or is this being managed within the existing staff resources?

Mr EDGINGTON: If you go back to 2021, there were 2,266. On average, we are looking at roughly somewhere between 2,200 and 2,300 over time. It is clear that there have been some additional births this year compared with last year. All those births are managed within the current staffing arrangements.

Mr PAECH: The government has now committed \$500,000 to air conditioning across Territory health services because poor Territory mums were having to bring in their own fans to keep cool. Will that \$500,000 fully upgrade the entire air-conditioning service in all the maternity and birthing suites?

Mr EDGINGTON: The Northern Territory Government has committed \$500,000 to upgrade the air conditioning at Royal Darwin Hospital. The average temperature across the hospital floors is roughly 23.5 degrees. The air-handling unit that services floors 2 to 7 on the A side of the hospital are the ones being upgraded at the moment.

Mr PAECH: Could you please confirm that?

Mr EDGINGTON: Floors 2 to 7 on the A side of the hospital have had problems, but the \$500,000 will remove and replace air-conditioning coils across several hospital floors, including the maternity ward. This is in addition to work already being done to install a replacement fan for the air-conditioning units.

Mr PAECH: Will that upgrade the air conditioning across all the maternity suites, knowing that there are two suites downstairs and a ward upstairs?

Mr EDGINGTON: The issue with the air conditioning is floors 2 to 7 on the A side of the hospital. That is what is being looked at.

Mr PAECH: How many funded nursing positions are currently vacant across NT Health?

Mr CHAIR: While the minister is looking, I have a follow-up to a maternity question which I will take after this one, then we will go back to the shadow minister.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is a 10% vacancy rate at Alice Springs Hospital the moment. Are you after all hospitals?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: Alice Springs Hospital's vacancy rate is 67.6 (10.72%); Gove hospital, 4.7; Katherine Hospital, 18.7; Palmerston Regional Hospital, 55; Royal Darwin Hospital is okay; and Tennant Creek Hospital, 17.8 variance. There are roughly 208 vacancies across the board.

Mr PAECH: That is the hospital, but what about the hardworking Health public servants in non-hospital-related areas? I acknowledge the Chair has a question, and he will probably cut me off to ask it.

Mr EDGINGTON: We will need to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.6

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many funded positions are vacant across the Department of Health?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Sorry; to clarify, is that nurses?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: You left out the word 'nurses'.

Mr PAECH: I will come back to the other Department of Health after the Chair has his question.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.6.

Apologies, minister, I did not confirm; do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Of course he does.

Mr EDGINGTON: For nurses, yes.

Mr CHAIR: Can you confirm as of today what federal funding has been given for maternity services in the Northern Territory?

Mr EDGINGTON: It is fair to say absolutely zero; that is the short of it. The Northern Territory Government has been back and forth with the federal government for quite some time. Originally, we put two options to the federal government which was a \$35m and a \$10m scenario. Basically, the federal government encouraged us to write back with a \$10m submission, and we did that with an expectation that would be funded by the federal government, but, sadly, come budget time there was no \$10m in the federal budget. I heard commentary from the Member for Solomon suggesting that in some way the \$10m is on its way, but you cannot trust those sorts of words saying that it is on its way. I check the mail every day and I still have not seen the \$10m that the federal Member for Solomon has promised on the radio, suggesting that it is coming—so is Christmas. We simply have not seen it.

Mr CHAIR: Has the Member for Solomon or the Health minister provided anything in writing to you regarding the \$10m?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, not at all. There has been nothing in writing to guarantee that \$10m is on the way, despite the commentary from the Member for Solomon. We cannot go on the Member for Solomon making commentary in the media. We can certainly act on a cheque produced to the Northern Territory Government for \$10m, but we cannot act on speculation that the Member for Solomon keeps mentioning through the media. I tried ringing the Member for Solomon, but I have not heard back from him yet.

Mr KERLE: I have a follow-up on the air conditioning ...

Mr PAECH: Are we done with the Dorothy Dixers or what? Come on, quick, hurry up then.

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not think they are Dorothy Dixers.

Mr PAECH: You are in the same team, so I am assuming you talk to each other—or is this the first time that you are doing it?

Mr EDGINGTON: These are important questions for the Northern Territory ...

Mr CHAIR: Gentlemen! We will have one question from the Member for Blain, then we will go to the shadow minister.

Shadow minister, please withhold your interjections.

Mr KERLE: Can you comment on the age of the air-conditioning units in question? I have heard that they are of the same vintage as RDH itself.

Mr EDGINGTON: I cannot specifically comment on how old they are, but obviously RDH has been there for quite some time. We had a Labor government for 19 out of the last 23 years, and it is clear to me that what we have is an ageing system and there was obviously no work done by the former government. We are investing \$500,000 to ensure that the hospital maintains a temperature that is suitable for all patients attending.

Mr PAECH: Could you provide the number of shifts across the NT Health system that were filled below the requirements during the financial year, broken down by hospital and remote clinic?

Mr EDINGTON: We can take that on notice, but it is a broad question and will be quite an administrative burden. If you would like to narrow the scope down, that is fine, but I alert you that this will take significant resources to find that information.

Mr PAECH: I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.7

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide the number of shifts across the NT Health system that were filled below rostered requirements during the last financial year or reporting period, broken down by hospital and remote clinic?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.7.

Mr PAECH: How many funded medical officer positions are currently vacant across Territory hospitals?

Mr EDINGTON: There are currently 48 doctor vacancies in Alice Springs; 12 in Katherine; 6.9 in Palmerston; 5.6 at Royal Darwin; and Tennant Creek is fine. That is the average year-to-date as at pay period 20.

Mr PAECH: On how many occasions were agency nurses used to fill workforce shortages?

Mr EDINGTON: Agency nurses are used across the board, breaking it down to shifts and vacancies—do you want to know how many ...

Mr PAECH: To provide some context, I would like to know how many agency nurses have been used across Territory hospitals and remote clinics?

Mr EDINGTON: This was a written question from your office, Member for Gwoja. Agency labour that we used during the reporting period included 279 nurses, 70 medical locums, 12 visiting medical officers and 42 for 'other', with a total of 403 across nursing and doctors during the reporting period.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide the total expenditure on agency nursing to the end of the reporting period?

Mr EDINGTON: The total when it comes to nursing, 279, is about \$66.211m.

Mr PAECH: That is \$66m on agency nursing; okay.

According to your answers to written questions you supplied this morning, as of 31 March the Department of Health had 6,334 frontline full-time employees. That is down from 8,211 the previous year. I am trying to understand how the Department of Health has lost almost 2,000 frontline workers in 12 months. Is there a reason for that significant decline?

Mr EDINGTON: I will refer that question to Kim Charles, Deputy Chief Executive, Enabling Services.

Ms CHARLES: The reported difference is actually a change in the reporting methodology, which was reset by the Department of Treasury and Finance during the period. Perhaps a more accurate number would be the number that the agency captures for our frontline staff, which we can give you broken down in different professions, if you like?

Mr PAECH: Sure; thank you.

Ms CHARLES: At 31 March 2025 there were 7,485, and at 31 March 2026 there were 7,724, which is an increase of 239 frontline staff.

Mr PAECH: How many staff worked overtime? What is the total overtime bill when it comes to our health services?

Mr EDGINGTON: We have some of the agency labour numbers doing overtime; I am not sure we have the actual bill. We can tell you what those numbers are that were doing overtime.

I ask Fiona Renshaw to explain that.

Ms RENSHAW: We have a breakdown for the overtime and the FTE conversions by regions. That is year to date 2026. The FTE conversion for the Barkly region is 25; Big Rivers is 44; we are looking at Central Australia at 129; and East Arnhem was 22. I will go to the national critical care response, if you would like, with two. That is the breakdown.

Mr PAECH: What does that convert into a dollar value?

Mr EDGINGTON: We will need to take the dollar value on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.8

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many staff worked overtime and what was the total overtime bill for NT Health by region?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.8.

Mr CHAIR: I will hand back to the shadow minister. After this line of questioning I will see if the crossbench has any questions before morning tea.

Mr PAECH: What was the median emergency department wait time across each Territory hospital during the reporting period?

Ms RENSHAW: The ED performance across all of our hospitals and emergency departments for 2026, with a target of 80% to depart within four hours, was at 46.8%. For our 'not admitted' it was 58.9%.

Mr PAECH: How many patients waited longer than four hours?

Ms RENSHAW: We would need to take that on notice to give detail like that.

Mr PAECH: Minister, may I read you a question and then you can determine whether you want to take that on notice or not? How does that sound?

Mr EDGINGTON: Go for it.

Mr PAECH: How many patients waited longer than four hours, eight hours or twelve hours for admission or discharge from an emergency department?

Mr EDGINGTON: It is like some of the other questions; we can take that on notice. It will quite an administrative burden to take that on, but we can do our best to look at that for you.

Mr PAECH: Thank you, I think this is really important information for the Territory public.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is very important—given the underfunding—that we have it.

Mr PAECH: Maybe work harder.

Question on Notice No 5.9

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many patients have waited longer—across Territory Emergency Departments—than four hours, eight hours or twelve hours for admission or discharge from emergency departments?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, we do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.9.

Mr PAECH: How many ambulance ramping events occurred across the Northern Territory during the reporting period?

You can take it on notice if you need to.

Mr EDGINGTON: We do not have the specific number, but what I can say is that St John reports the presentations that were unable to be offloaded within 30 minutes—this may help you—21% waited longer than 60 minutes, and 6% waited longer than 120 minutes. I do not have the actual...

Mr PAECH: You do not have the data.

Mr EDGINGTON: No.

Mr PAECH: Do you not have the ability to collect the data?

Mr EDGINGTON: We can. The only additional information we have is that 72.25% were transferred to care within 30 minutes. If we look at that from a national average; only 50% in the Australian Capital Territory; 70% in Tasmania; 47% in South Australia; 67% in Western Australia; 55% in Queensland; 65% in Victoria; and 78% in New South Wales. Overall, we are doing pretty well to ensure that patients are transferred within 30 minutes.

Mr PAECH: Do you have the information available on the number of occasions where there were no ambulances to respond immediately to calls in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Palmerston?

Mr EDGINGTON: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.10

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: On how many occasions were no ambulances available to respond immediately to calls in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Palmerston?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.10.

Mr PAECH: I did not forget about the Barkly.

J DAVIS: Coming back to a question on notice from the Member for Gwoja in relation to staffing numbers for nurses, could that include the vacancy number of midwives? Can you pull out that specific information?

Mr EDGINGTON: Perhaps that needs to be a separate question. We can take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.11

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: What is the vacancy number of midwives?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.11.

Mr PAECH: While we are talking about patient support and travel, you mentioned in your opening speech supporting that process over the financial year. How many Territorians have been sent interstate to receive care that was not offered in the Territory?

Mr EDGINGTON: During the reporting period there were 2,975 travel requisitions for patients travelling interstate.

Mr PAECH: What was the cost of that to Territory taxpayers?

Mr EDGINGTON: We would be able to find that information. We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.12

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Could you provide the cost to the taxpayer for interstate travel for Territorians receiving medical treatment?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.12.

Mr PAECH: Could you also provide the cost to Territory taxpayers and the number of people who have had to travel in from remote communities to receive health services in the Territory?

Mr EDGINGTON: In the Barkly region during the reporting period there were 3,099 patients who travelled; Big Rivers region, 9,098; Central Australia region, 6,814; East Arnhem region, 8,744; and in the Top End region there were 12,027 patients who travelled. The expenditure up until 31 March is \$27,700,000.

Mr PAECH: Minister, I know you are as interested as I am in remote health. Do you have a breakdown de-identifying what those services were? For instance, was it for travelling for an X-ray, surgery or an infection?

Mr EDGINGTON: Being a remote member like yourself, Member for Gwoja, I know there would be a range of reasons. It could range from surgery, specialist appointments and maternity. There is a whole range of things. We do not have that breakdown in the data.

Mr PAECH: How many remote community clinics can do an X-ray?

Mr EDGINGTON: We can give you a breakdown of NT Government-controlled clinics. As you know, there is quite a number of Aboriginal community-controlled clinics. We would have to take that on notice to get the detail.

Question on Notice No 5.13

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Could you provide a breakdown of the number of Northern Territory Government-operated remote community clinics that can provide X-rays?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.13.

Mr PAECH: When a Territorian is sent interstate for health reasons, does the jurisdiction that they go to then pick up the health-related costs while the Territorian is interstate, or do they invoice the Northern Territory Government?

Mr EDGINGTON: They invoice us the costs.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide me with the invoiced costs for people who have been sent interstate for services?

Mr EDGINGTON: We can try to get that data. It is not as simple as allocating that against a particular matter, but we can try to get that for you.

Question on Notice No 5.14

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: What has the Territory government been invoiced for interstate health services?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.14.

Mr PAECH: How many remote clinics were forced to reduce services or close due to workforce shortages over the reporting period? How many remote community clinics are currently closed?

Mr EDGINGTON: The information we have is that during the weather events, Palumpa and Nauiyu were closed. I do not have any information of other clinics closing during the reporting period. I have been to Haasts Bluff. I believe that the former government closed that service quite some time ago and the service is being delivered from Papunya. I am not aware of any clinics closing during the reporting period other than through the effect of floodings.

Mr PAECH: Are you aware of any clinics reducing hours due to staff shortages? That was the second part of the question.

Mr EDGINGTON: No, we do not have any data in front of us today. We could try to get that for you if you want it.

Mr PAECH: Sure.

Question on Notice No 5.15

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Could you confirm how many remote communities were forced to reduce health services due to workforce shortages over the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.15.

J DAVIS: What are the current full-time equivalent staffing levels and vacancy rates in remote clinics across the NT by role or service type?

Mr PAECH: Do you need to take it on notice? I am mindful of time.

A member: I might have a follow-up question.

Mr PAECH: You will be out of time at this rate.

Mr EDGINGTON: I have eight pages of data. I am happy to work through line by line if ...

Mr PAECH: Chair, he could table it.

Mr EDGINGTON: We could take the question on notice and give you the accurate information.

J DAVIS: I would appreciate that.

Question on Notice No 5.16

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: What are the current full-time equivalent staffing levels and vacancy rates in remote clinics across the NT by role or service type?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.16.

J DAVIS: How do actual staffing levels compare with targets in the reporting period? What specific measures are in place to meet those targets going into the future?

Mr EDGINGTON: Obviously, as a Health department our target is to always try to get to 100% staffing. We want to ensure that. There is a number of workforce challenges across the country at the moment when it comes to nursing and doctors.

NT Health is focused on national and international recruitment campaigns to attract suitably qualified health workforce and, in turn, reduce the reliance we spoke about before on agency and locums.

Some specific initiatives we have include participating in the Northern Territory Government Global Worker Attraction Campaign, promoting NT Health work opportunities. For example, it generated more than 40 leads in April 2026 through a UK and Ireland event. We have more than 100 registrations for healthcare work opportunities from June 2026 from a Melbourne event and planning NT Health delegation for further events.

We are actively constantly running recruitment campaigns to ensure that we have 100%. We have partnered with a specialist recruitment provider, CCM Recruitment Australia, to source skilled nurses, midwives and pharmacists from domestic and international markets. Since March 2025 more than 200 nurses and midwives were found suitable, of which 17 commenced and a further 40 will commence by December 2026. Five pharmacists were recruited, of which two will commence this month.

Recruitment processes are ongoing. We have promotions of all available employment options, whether that is casual, job share, fixed term, part time and ongoing. We are actively working through that, and we have strengthened the NT Health value proposition through relocation accommodation support across all health professions for both domestic and international students.

We have recently seen improved retention of junior medical workforce from 49% to 70%. All up, there is constant recruiting focused on attraction and retention across the workforce, and we will continue to do that. The reality is that we are in competition for health services across the country.

J DAVIS: Could I confirm that the question on notice will answer the other part of my question, which was, what is the comparison between targets of employment and the actual employment?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: The Member for Gwoja will be very happy because we are kicking off two minutes earlier.

I will hand to the Member for Johnston with some follow-up questions. I will then go back to the shadow minister. I have some questions on the Palmerston hospital specifically, but I will do that when the shadow minister has finished his line of questioning.

J DAVIS: With elective surgeries, could you give the breakdown on wait times by specialty and category for elective surgery?

Mr EDGINGTON: Given that the question relates to a breakdown for each specialty, we need to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.17

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: Can you give the breakdown on wait times by specialty and category for elective surgery?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.17.

J DAVIS: What is the average time a patient waits for a bed on a ward after being allocated one by ED?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask Fiona Renshaw to provide you with the details of that.

Ms RENSHAW: The wait time for admission following being triaged in an emergency department is within the same definition of the emergency department, within four hours directly related to admission. That is variable depending on the acuity of the patient, the triage assessment and the ability to be admitted to the specialty ward that is required. I could answer that if I had the defined admission that is required.

J DAVIS: Do you mean the defined admission as in what kind of admission it was? Is that what category they were admitted under? Is that the terminology you use? Is that enough information?

Ms RENSHAW: Yes.

J DAVIS: Do you need that on notice or can you answer it?

Ms RENSHAW: If that is what you would like; otherwise, we have the data for the admissions within four hours which is as reported for 2025–26 at 46.8%.

Question on Notice No 5.18

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: What is the average time a patient waits for a bed on a ward after being allocated one by ED, broken down by specialty?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.18.

J DAVIS: I have one other follow-up question on behalf of a constituent. This relates to the nuchal screening. You said it is available in Darwin. Is that through the public health system?

Mr EDGINGTON: Could you please repeat the question?

J DAVIS: Earlier we heard that the nuchal scan is available in Darwin. Is it available through the public health system?

Mr EDGINGTON: Fiona Renshaw can answer that question.

Ms RENSHAW: It is due to the high risk. If there is a presentation to the emergency department that would be facilitated at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mr PAECH: I know that the Member for Johnston asked a question that you have taken on notice regarding elective surgeries. Can you provide that breakdown by the regions? I think the Member for Johnston asked for an overall number, but I ask for regional. In the reporting period, how many elective surgeries across the Territory?

Mr EDGINGTON: You are asking by region?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: We would have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.19

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Across the reporting period, could you please provide a breakdown of the elective surgeries by region?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.19.

Mr PAECH: Minister, can I get a breakdown of how many Aboriginal Territorians are employed in the Department of Health?

Mr EDGINGTON: Whilst we are finding the data, I might ask one of our officials, Samara Hanley, to come forward and provide some answers. Samara is the Executive Director of Aboriginal Health, Engagement and Workforce.

Ms HANLEY: We currently have 599 First Nations members working across the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH: How many funded Aboriginal health practitioner and Aboriginal health worker positions are there in the Northern Territory Government?

Mr EDGINGTON: We can provide a breakdown of that. When it comes to Aboriginal health practitioners, we have 62. I can ask...

Mr PAECH: Thank you for answering, but I just want to know how many are funded and how many are vacant?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask Ms Hanley to give some further information, but, according to the information in front of me, there are 63 Aboriginal health practitioners, and we have 62 at the moment.

Ms HANLEY: The approved FTE for First Nations is 134.53. We currently have 62 Aboriginal health practitioners. We currently have 118 vacant.

Mr PAECH: Okay. Just to be clear, that is Aboriginal health practitioner, not Aboriginal health workers? Do you have the numbers on the Aboriginal health workers?

Ms HANLEY: No, but I can get that for you.

Mr EDGINGTON: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.20

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwojja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide the funded number, actual number and the vacancy number of Aboriginal health workers?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.20.

Mr PAECH: How many Aboriginal liaison officers and interpreters are funded across NT Health?

Ms HANLEY: I do not have the actual numbers for the Aboriginal liaison officers and interpreters close by; sorry.

Mr EDGINGTON: We can break it down further, but we have approximately 600 Aboriginal employees in the department now. We can get a breakdown of positions if that is helpful for you?

Mr PAECH: That would be great, thank you.

Mr EDGINGTON: We can give you the broad information of each position. As of 31 March 2026 there were 62 Aboriginal health practitioners, 290 administrative employees, one executive contract officer, 39 medical, 71 nursing, 94 physical, 22 professional and 20 technical, bringing that to a total of 599 Aboriginal employees.

Mr PAECH: Are the interpreters NAATI qualified?

Ms HANLEY: We do have interpreters, and the majority of them are NAATI qualified.

Mr PAECH: When we talk about the Aboriginal health practitioner and the Aboriginal health worker, what is the ratio or urban versus regional or remote? Do we have that number?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will take that on notice. We do not have that breakdown in front of us.

Question on Notice No 5.21

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide the ratio of Aboriginal health workers and practitioners, urban to remote comparison?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.21.

Mr PAECH: Minister, I want to understand, from your position are you intending to commence building a new Darwin hospital this term of government?

Mr CHAIR: I just remind everyone that you should not ask the minister to announce new policy of the government, but you may seek an explanation regarding current policy and its application.

Mr PAECH: Is your department currently in the planning stages of building a new hospitals in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs?

Mr EDGINGTON: I am not sure I mentioned it in my opening statement, but I am happy to answer your question. Mr Chris Hosking has commenced in a new role as the Executive General Manager of Strategic Healthcare Investment which will lead the establishment and function of health investment. The role will focus on developing more long-term strategic infrastructure plans addressing health structure needs across the Territory. As you know, as well as I, we have significant ageing infrastructure across the board, not only our hospitals in the regional centres but particularly in remote we have a number of ageing health clinics in the regions. The work that he will be doing is developing a long-term master plan to guide future infrastructure service delivery and to look at system capacity across the Territory over the coming decade.

Are we building a hospital? I think the short answer is no. We have two-and-a-half years left in our term of government, and no hospital could be built in that short timeframe. We are looking at the long-term infrastructure needs of the Northern Territory concerning all of our regions and remote areas.

Mr PAECH: I am asking about this infrastructure because in your opening statement you spoke about pressures on patients and staff in the current network, so the position that Mr Hosking has been put in to do this work, could it not have been done with the current internal staff whose job it is to look at critical infrastructure and planning?

Mr EDGINGTON: This is a big piece of work which has been neglected for a number of years, particularly under the former Labor government. These have been longstanding issues for a long time.

We have a number of ageing clinics across the board, and this requires some dedication and commitment from a position to focus on getting to the bottom of these issues. Particularly in remote areas, as you know, it is not just the health clinic; there are housing needs that go with that. We need to look at how best we can deliver health services across the Northern Territory over the next five, 10, 15 years. We need a strategic infrastructure plan to do that, and having a person dedicated to that is a significant investment by our government.

These are longstanding issues. It is not just the infrastructure; we face some longstanding issues across the Northern Territory with funding as well. As I say quite often, we are \$200m short from the federal government. We have aged-care long-stay patients in our hospitals, which is costing the Northern Territory \$40m a year, which is a federal government responsibility. We are also \$95m short for remote primary healthcare and ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! This was a particular question. We would appreciate a succinct response by the minister, who is giving me a novel. I do not want the novel; I want the answer.

Mr EDGINGTON: We are currently paying aeromedical services across the Top End, so across the Northern Territory we have quite a substantial ...

Mr CHAIR: Gentlemen, stop! There will be no interjections.

Minister, have you finished answering the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, I have not finished answering. I am trying to answer, but there are injections coming from the other side of the room which are quite disturbing. I am not sure why they do not want to hear the answers to this.

The Northern Territory health infrastructure is ageing, and the funding is declining. There are some significant impacts on our health system across the Northern Territory. We are roughly \$200m underfunded just in primary healthcare, aeromedical services and aged care; that is without looking at other funding agreements. The work that Chris Hosking will do around infrastructure is important for the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH: Mr Hosking has taken on this role. As part of that role, will there be identified sites in the Northern Territory to build new hospitals?

Mr EDGINGTON: Mr Hosking has been in that position one day.

Mr PAECH: Mr Hosking is not the person I want to talk to.

Mr CHAIR: I will make a ruling in this. As there has not been any announcement as such of any new infrastructure, it would be considered a new policy of government. I will rule it out on that ground.

Mr PAECH: That is fine to rule it out. Is part of the role that this individual will be undertaking to look at part of the planning process around the future of health services in the Northern Territory's locations?

Mr EDGINGTON: Of course it is—health needs across the Northern Territory. We need to look at where best to deliver health services across the Northern Territory, whether that is remote, regional or our capital city of Darwin. We need to ensure that we do the proper strategic planning which was never done under the former Labor government. I do not know why it was not done, but we are getting on with the job. We are doing the work that is necessary to ensure that we have health services in the Northern Territory that will deliver for our population for the next five, 10, 15 years. As part of the planning and assessment of current infrastructure and location wise we need to identify where best should those services be delivered from.

Mr PAECH: Part of that role will be ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I will hand to the Member for Johnston who had a follow-up on a previous question.

J DAVIS: What funding has that new role and project been given, and where is that in the budget?

Mr EDGINGTON: The funding for the position is from within, and the position will sit with Treasury.

J DAVIS: Can you say what the amount is?

Mr EDGINGTON: That will be a question for Treasury.

J DAVIS: Missed it. I have two other quick follow-ups from previous things on behalf of the Member for Mulka in relation to interpreters. You gave a breakdown of Aboriginal staff but not specifically interpreters. Are interpreters embedded in the hospital system?

Mr EDGINGTON: AIS provides a rostered interpreter service Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 12.30 pm at Royal Darwin Hospital. Languages available vary according to workforce availability. NT Health additionally funds the Aboriginal communicating for safety interpreter service, which comprises six part-time interpreter positions. They also operate Monday to Friday.

J DAVIS: The second role you described is embedded in the hospital; the other are AIS staff? Is that correct?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is right.

J DAVIS: How many FTE interpreters are embedded in the hospital system—on behalf of the Member for Mulka, to be clear?

Mr EDGINGTON: You are saying just RDH; the number of interpreters embedded at the hospital?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: Six.

J DAVIS: One other follow-up question in relation to hospital infrastructure, also on behalf of the Member for Mulka. For the 2026–27 budget, are there any increases or losses for the funding of the Gove District Hospital?

Mr EDGINGTON: There has been no change. The money on the program at the moment is for the upgrade of the fire system at the Gove District Hospital.

Mr CHAIR: I will now hand back to the Member for Gwoja. Member for Gwoja, once you have finished your current line of questioning I will take some electorate-specific ones for me.

Mr PAECH: On the position that has been taken about planning. Will this position produce records on the lifespan of Northern Territory Health infrastructure, being buildings, and will it also provide lifespan on critical health-related infrastructure, CT scanners and PET scanners across the Territory?

Mr EDGINGTON: The investment priorities and long-term healthcare master plan is to guide the future of infrastructure, service delivery and system capacity across the Territory over the coming decades. The main focus is on the infrastructure at the moment. That is what the focus will be on.

Mr PAECH: How much funding has been allocated to produce a master plan?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is a matter for Treasury.

Mr PAECH: How can it be a matter for Treasury. Aren't you the Health minister? Isn't this Health infrastructure?

Mr EDGINGTON: I just said that before ...

Mr PAECH: You are dodging the question again, are you?

Mr EDGINGTON: ... I think you are ...

Mr CHAIR: Gentlemen.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is something wrong. You cannot seem to hear what I am saying ...

Mr PAECH: No, you cannot seem to answer a simple question on Health infrastructure ...

Mr EDGINGTON: I said before ...

Mr CHAIR: Gentlemen!

Mr PAECH: Health infrastructure is not a matter for Treasury; it is a matter for you ...

Mr CHAIR: Gentlemen!

Mr EDGINGTON: I did say before. Listen ...

Mr PAECH: ... it is your job.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja! We will do this respectfully. We have staff here. We will maintain discipline in this committee and not speak over each other. The position is clearly as stated in a different department. Questions will relate to this department.

Mr PAECH: Again, is there funding within the Department of Health to produce a master plan?

Mr EDGINGTON: The funding sits with the position. We put a senior public servant in the position, and his role is to develop the infrastructure.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide me a breakdown of how much of that is for wages and how much of that is to produce a master plan?

Mr EDGINGTON: That will be a question for Treasury and Finance. As I said, the position sits there. The position is responsible for developing the infrastructure master plan.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, this is an actual Health-funded position and project—yes? You would already have the money in Health?

Mr EDGINGTON: As I said—once more—the position sits in Treasury and has a specific piece of work and that is to develop a health infrastructure plan for the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH: Given the ongoing health workforce retention crisis that we are having, exactly how much of the \$18.3m of the annual operation budget is projected to be absorbed by agency nursing and locums rather than the creation of new frontline positions?

Mr EDGINGTON: It is not about replacing frontline positions; it is filling positions that we cannot fill. We have already spoken about the number of agency positions that have been in the Northern Territory. I am not sure what information you are after beyond what we have already spoken about.

Mr CHAIR: The line of questioning has changed, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! It is still related to health infrastructure.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, Member for Gwoja. I will ask a couple of electric questions and then I will hand back to you.

The following questions will relate to just the Palmerston Regional Hospital. How many ED admissions over the reporting period were there at the Palmerston Regional Hospital? Importantly, I want to try to make that number make sense to me. Is there a national figure or something I can compare that to for me to understand what the demand is at the hospital?

Mr EDGINGTON: We have seen a substantial number of presentations through Palmerston for 2024–25, being 32,345 presentations. That has been fairly consistent for a number of years. If we go back to 2021, there were 34,101; 2021–22, 32,493; 2022–23, 32,965; and 2023–24, 31,762. There has been a consistent number coming through Palmerston. For comparison with the RDH, in 2024–25 at the same time, Palmerston had 32,345 and RDH, 68,862.

Mr CHAIR: Can that number be given as a per capita rate? The reason I ask the question is to try to establish the demand through Palmerston ED and the resourcing required. I want to understand if Palmerston is having much higher emergency presentations per person and what needs to be done with primary health et cetera to alleviate that pressure. I am trying to understand what the admission rate is per capita at Palmerston.

Mr EDGINGTON: We can look at what data we can collect in regard to that. When it comes to Palmerston ED, depending on the acuity of care, some patients may need to go directly to Darwin anyway if it is a significant matter which might involve ICU, for example.

We have the urgent care clinic at Palmerston. We can do some analysis regarding the numbers that have been through the urgent care clinic versus the Palmerston ED. We can look at that sort of information, but when it comes to per capita, it is difficult to pull that together, given that a number of patients may go directly to the Royal Darwin Hospital emergency department.

Mr CHAIR: Okay. Are you happy to take on notice potentially: what is the demand at Palmerston ED proportionate to the national average?

Mr PAECH: Why not just extend that to all?

Mr EDGINGTON: We can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.22

Mr CHAIR: I will restate the question for the record. Can you provide figures as to the demand pressures on Palmerston ED and compare that with either national or other Northern Territory ED demand figures?

Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.22.

Mr CHAIR: What specialist services are available at Palmerston Regional Hospital?

Mr EDGINGTON: There is a number of services delivered through Palmerston Regional Hospital—emergency medicine, general services, medicine, surgery and critical care, women’s, children and youth.

I ask Fiona Renshaw to give a broader breakdown for you.

Ms RENSHAW: What I would like to highlight for the Palmerston hospital is the expertise that is attributed to the aged-care services. We have a number of geriatricians there and nurse practitioners through to nursing and allied health and doctors. From a specialty point of view, there is Palmerston hospital’s ability to support our aged-care services. We have a number of specialties associated with our theatres and other areas of specialty.

Mr CHAIR: Can you table or take on notice a list of the specific specialties that are available at the hospital?

Mr EDGINGTON: We can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.23

Mr CHAIR: I will restate the question for the record. Can you provide a list of specialist services available at Palmerston Regional Hospital?

Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.23.

Mr CHAIR: You spoke of the impact aged-care services are having on the health system. You stated it is \$40m per year. Is Palmerston hospital carrying some of that burden?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes. Long-stay patients, as we know them—aged care people—unfortunately, there are roughly between 60 and 80 per day across the Northern Territory staying in our hospitals because of the absence of aged-care facilities in the Northern Territory.

Mr CHAIR: If interstate jurisdictions bill us for health services, do we bill the federal government? Have we billed the federal government for the overflow in aged care—aged care being the federal government’s responsibility, but the NT system is picking up the bill? Have we ever billed the federal government for that cost?

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to a bill, there has been plenty of discussion with the federal government regarding the cost of \$40m. We are seeing that nationally. It is an issue that up through health ministers’ meetings nationally. The average is 10% of hospital beds around the country now are being filled by long-stay patients which is aged-care people with nowhere else to go. It is 10% of beds across Australia. In the Northern Territory it is costing us \$40m. We have had many conversations with the federal government, and so have the other states and territories, about the cost and impact that it is having.

We spoke about code yellows before and they come about many times because of the lack of access to a bed. We have approximately 800 beds in the Northern Territory and about 80 of those are filled with aged-care people who should be in better facilities.

The federal government announced recently that there will be a new facility built in Darwin. We have offered the Palmerston grounds as a place where it can be built and we have also committed to funding the headworks for that facility.

When it comes to a bill—\$40m. We are constantly having conversations with the federal government about that.

J DAVIS: In relation to Palmerston Regional Hospital and the hydrotherapy pool, what is the current level of access and use of it, including operating hours, patient numbers, referral volumes and wait times?

Mr EDGINGTON: The Palmerston Regional Hospital hydrotherapy pool provides critical allied healthcare for both inpatients and outpatients, including those who require cancer, orthopaedic or paediatric therapy as well as long-stay patients who have complex rehabilitation needs and geriatric patients who need ongoing management and care.

Casual classes and private provider usage was previously introduced to Palmerston Regional Hospital to provide temporary respite while facilities at the pool in Palmerston were undergoing refurbishment. Palmerston Regional Hospital returned to normal operating arrangements as a hospital pool on 28 February 2025.

Referrals can be made by eligible people to use the facility by a medical specialist, a GP or a private practising allied health professional. All referrals are assessed by NT Health clinicians and if eligible, the individual becomes an outpatient at Palmerston Regional Hospital and is scheduled for a block of goal-directed therapy. The therapy block can be extended if needed.

There is a range of other services that provide heated pools and rehabilitation swimming areas for the community in Darwin and Palmerston. For example, Darwin Private Hospital also has a hydrotherapy pool for use by private inpatients and outpatients.

J DAVIS: Can you tell us the operating hours and the patient numbers using the facility, and the referral volumes, plus wait times for people?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not have the operating hours in front of me, but in 2025 the Palmerston Regional Hospital hydrotherapy pool recorded 1,606 inpatient and outpatient attendances averaging approximately 30 visits per week.

J DAVIS: Can you share the wait times for a referral?

Ms RENSHAW: The wait time is variable against an outpatient and an inpatient and is also variable given the clinical need and assessment. My understanding is—I check on this regularly—that the wait times are minimal at present for inpatients.. The outpatient rate may be variable depending on clinical need.

J DAVIS: Minimal means?

Ms RENSHAW: Within a two-week period, from a clinical perspective.

J DAVIS: When changes were made, you said that at one point this was available for private allied health use and the community. What consultation did you do before making those changes?

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to consultation, all of the participants at the hydrotherapy pool were advised about the changes. I will ask Fiona to expand on that.

J DAVIS: Just to be clear, advising is not consultation.

Mr CHAIR: We are not having arguments or pop-shots.

Ms RENSHAW: Consultation was undertaken, and it was undertaken—particularly at that point in time—internally with the key stakeholders. That did include users of the hydrotherapy pool. On review, I think what we should do moving forward is always look to consult with our community and our user groups more broadly.

Mr PAECH: Minister I would like to touch on the Mental Health Impairment Unit. I acknowledge that you made an announcement recently around 24 beds and I would like to confirm—you said that there were 24 beds and a six-bed stabilisation assessment area...

Mr EDGINGTON: Eighteen plus.

Mr PAECH: Sorry, eighteen plus the six to make 24? Thank you for clarifying that. I would like to understand what the model of care in the new ward is, and how it is going to create that seamless step that everyone is talking about.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will say that it has not opened yet. I will ask Cecelia Gore, the Deputy Chief Executive, to provide an update on what that latest care model will look like once the new facilities open.

Ms GORE: The team at the Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals are working through that model of care now. I think the two key things to note are that the new beds will form part of the overall service; it is one service provided in four different wards—if you like. The idea currently is that the six-bed short stay—or stabilisation referral area—will enable people to come in for up to three days and to have a non-ED environment where their needs can be assessed better. That will then result in the clinical teams working out what the best placement is for those people across the three different areas.

The new build will be the primary admit point for the majority of patients coming to the hospital. The Joan Ridley Unit (JRU) will continue to be the secure area for those who are either involuntary patients or those who have been transferred in from other custodial settings. That is a secure unit. Cowdy Ward—which is currently the main space—the team are currently working on the ability for that space to move into more of a longer-term slow-stream rehabilitation mode. With an increase in overall bed numbers, the pressure for people to come in and be discharged—so that there is availability—will be reduced and Cowdy Ward essentially becomes a place where longer-term stay is enabled. That will be continually worked through; the teams have been working through the data looking at demand from remote areas, the demand for young people and we still have a few more months to get the flowcharts exactly right.

Mr PAECH: On 30 August 2024 the Northern Territory Government put a contract out for safe drinking water in the Northern Territory. What recommendations have come out of that report?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask our Chief Health Officer, Dr Paul Burgess, to provide you some further information about that.

Dr BURGESS: We have a collaboration with the Power and Water Corporation and Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. We are committed to safe drinking water for all Territorians. Territory Water Plan 2023 to 2026 set out a three-year approach for the strategic water policy and to strengthen the NT's long-term water security.

There are commitments in that plan for a safe drinking water. The details of that plan we are working with other NT agencies including the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment and Power and Water to partner in the national water grid to invest in water infrastructure projects that deliver safe drinking water to homes. Close to \$140m is now secured and projects being delivered in 18 remote communities across the NT.

This year funding has been secured for water supply projects in Galiwinku and the Gove Peninsula, with better bores for communities completed in Gapuwiyak already, developing regional and remote community water infrastructure that lists continued capital delivery and providing greater transparency about what works are being considered. Improving water security outcomes for Aboriginal homes homelands through the delivery of knowledge programs to build capacity for the service providers is also part of that plan.

Mr PAECH: There is currently work under way for a safe drinking water act. Is that right, minister?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, it has been mentioned at last Estimates. Drinking water quality in the NT is managed through a memorandum of understanding through NT Health, Power and Water Corporation and Indigenous Essential Services.

Mr PAECH: How many communities across the Territory would be currently considered by the Department of Health at risk because of their water quality?

Dr BURGESS: NT Health is the effective regulator with the Power and Water Corporation where we operate under a memorandum of understanding about water quality.

We have a number of communities where currently we are working in a collaborative fashion with Power and Water Corporation to improve water quality. I have in front of me a table with seven communities where there is currently water issues that we are working to secure and improve water supply as part of that improvement program.

Mr PAECH: Is the Department of Health's level of concern for risk for these communities great in terms of implications for their health because of the quality of their water?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask the Chief Health Officer to speak about those seven communities in regard to the quality of water and any health issues.

Dr BURGESS: I can work through those communities with you. First, we spoke last year about Alpururulam and Nyirripi that have minor instances of fluoride in water. Fluoride is an important part of our water system in terms of dental health. In these two communities, naturally occurring fluoride in the water table is slightly higher, so bottled water has been provided in those communities. That is under us as per young children and for pregnant mums.

In more recent times there has been a noted excess of barium in the community of Bulla, where they have increased barium in their water supply. Barium is not an acute health risk, but over a long-term exposure it can provide some minor health risks. We use barium in a lot of our medical procedures in our hospital.

However, we are working collaboratively with the community of Bulla and the Power and Water Corporation to provide alternative water supply while we work through the technical issues of improving the culmination of groundwater and surface water to have a safer potable drinking water supply for that community.

There are minor exceedances that may be also measurement areas in the communities of Ti Tree, Willowra and Wugularr. Those three communities are under constant regular monitoring with Power and Water Corporation and, where there are exceedances sometimes are temporary, we are providing alternative water sources while we work on longer term technical fixes with the water plants to have safe water supply.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, is it only three of the seven communities that are being supplied bottled water at the moment?

Dr BURGESS: We have Nyirripi, Alpururulam and Bulla. Those are the ones, to my knowledge, where we have those alternative water supplies. The other ones we are undergoing monitoring programs and working the Power and Water Corporation to get the technical water plant solutions in place because those exceedances are fluctuating but are sitting around the limit to where we would start to think about alternative water.

Mr PAECH: We have high rates of renal failure in remote and regional locations. Is work being undertaken to understand if what is causing that is also through remote community water?

Dr BURGESS: I have been a long-term health practitioner in the Northern Territory for decades in remote regions of the Northern Territory. It is a good question. We see a large proportion of our renal dialysis patients coming through diabetes as an important pre-determinant of renal failure rather than the potable drinking water supply.

Mr PAECH: Are you able to provide us with the context of what the current vaccination rate across the Territory is?

Mr EDGINGTON: Vaccination rate for diphtheria or ...

Mr PAECH: I am happy to hear the diphtheria rate, but I want to understand if you are noticing a decline in overall vaccines across the Territory?

Mr EDGINGTON: It is a general question, not about any specific ...

Mr PAECH: You have given me the chance now because you have asked me about diphtheria, so I will ask you about it.

Mr EDGINGTON: We have that information ready for you.

Mr PAECH: Look at that; you are ready to go. It is like you thought I would ask you. Can I start with the overall vaccine rates and then go to diphtheria?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will hand over to our Chief Health Officer to provide that information.

Dr BURGESS: To address your question globally regarding vaccination, we have had historically a strong vaccination program, particularly in our remote communities. You will be familiar that our rates historically have been very high; in fact, it had been some of the best in the country, and that has been a strong participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians and a lot of hard work by our remote primary healthcare teams.

Sadly, around the globe and nationally through the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an explosion of disinformation and misinformation around vaccination—a lot of fear. Sadly, globally vaccination rates are falling, and the Territory is not an exception to that. Vaccination rates have been declining—at about our five-year-old cohort was one of our key performance indicator targets. Vaccination rates are now sitting about 90%, and previously they were about 95%. We have some work to do in terms of working with communities, with messaging and working hard with our primary healthcare staff to increase the vaccination rates.

Mr PAECH: Is there a decline across the board in terms of other ages groups?

Dr BURGESS: The short answer is yes. Nationally and in every state and territory, vaccine fatigue is a phrase that is often used to explain this phenomenon where people had many vaccines during the COVID pandemic and then were reluctant to continue to do so. We have many immunisation programs and participate in the National Immunisation Program in the Northern Territory and under the CLP government we had an additional program for the meningococcal B vaccine which has had quite a successful roll-out.

To talk briefly about diphtheria, the vast majority of us have had a primary vaccination during our childhood and adolescence through the National Immunisation Program for diphtheria. There is a strong level of immunity in the population already, however that immunity does wane over time and a booster is needed.

Mr PAECH: What was the vaccination rate before 31 March and what is it now for diphtheria?

Dr BURGESS: We have changed our vaccination schedule during the outbreak response to diphtheria. There is not an easy comparison to make because we have changed the goalpost, if you like.

Mr PAECH: Why has that changed?

Dr BURGESS: We have changed it because vaccination is the most important method for us to boost immunity while there is an active outbreak. We have not seen an outbreak of diphtheria for many decades in this country and this is quite unusual and we do not fully understand the reasons for that yet. That will come in time. However, we know the most effective public health response, in addition to finding cases and treating them, is to provide a boost to immunity. The vaccine does not necessarily 100% prevent transmission but it prevents the severe illness from diphtheria.

Very pleasingly over the last six weeks, we are close to over 20,000 vaccines have been given across the Northern Territory. It has been a fantastic response from communities and just under 9,000 of those have been Aboriginal Territorians. There has been a strong response from a very targeted messaging and media campaign in Aboriginal languages to communities.

Mr PAECH: That is a great number but minister can you provide the breakdown of the vaccinations by regions. I am mindful that about 9,000 Aboriginal Territorians have had them, but are they from remote communities or in our urban and regional centres?

Dr BURGESS: The data for vaccinations is fragmented, some of the data will sit within Aboriginal community controlled health services and they exert the rights with data sovereignty to record their own data and share it, if they wish to do so, and we respect that.

Speaking for Northern Territory Health, you heard the minister state in his opening statement, we have 49 remote primary healthcare sites. We collect that data about diphtheria coverage against our new recommendation following this outbreak. We are seeing improvement in vaccine uptake and coverage rates across those communities.

Mr PAECH: If I am in an Aboriginal community controlled health service, which are amazing and they do a fantastic job, their medical records and the medical records which I have with the Department of Health can be separate records?

Dr BURGESS: This is getting more technical, but I have a long history and understanding of the data infrastructure in the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH: I am wanting to understand from a continuity of care perspective, the minister highlighted a number of our clinics are transitioning, or already have, to AMS. How do we make sure that we know what vaccinations have been done. I got vaccinated for diphtheria at Congress in Mutitjulu, will that be on my NT health record?

Dr BURGESS: Your immunisation details are uploaded to the Australian Immunisation Register, which is a national record. That will also flow through your National My Health Record. That data can be accessible no matter where the patient goes. In addition to that, in the Northern Territory for a long time we have had a mechanism called the shared eHealth Record. We provide continuity of information across community controlled settings and also government clinics so that important information does not get lost. People do not get over-servicing or multiple vaccinations if they have already had one in another setting.

Mr PAECH: That is for vaccinations but for a general health blend the systems do not talk?

Mr BURGESS: They do not exchange information in real time but through the Northern Territory shared electronic health record, a repository where clinicians, no matter where they are working, can look and see whether the patient has touched the health system be it in a community-controlled setting or a Northern Territory government clinic.

We have a line of sight about what care has been initiated and what medications people are on and what allergies they have. Through the My Health Record, the immunisations data as well. This is a national issue in terms of fragmentation of health data in the Northern Territory because we have fewer systems but it is better placed than most other states and territories.

Mr PAECH: Statistically speaking, is the Northern Territory the sickest population or jurisdiction? It is not hypothetical ...

Mr EDGINGTON: We are getting off track.

Mr KERLE: I have a follow-up on the line of questioning about vaccinations.

Mr PAECH: Is he going to refuse to answer my question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Nobody is refusing, but it was not part of the opening statement. I am happy to pick up a lot of these issues when we get to outputs but we have not moved beyond the opening statement.

Mr PAECH: A point of order. You have just spoken about health services. Understanding if we are the sickest population or not will help us understand where the investment is needed and what questions need to be asked.

Mr CHAIR: On the question of are we the sickest. I do not have an issue with the question. It is an opinion, but I think it is seeking a statistical and medical opinion of those statistics.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask the Chief Health Officer to provide information because there are critical issues that he can enlarge on concerning chronic diseases. It is important to recognise that we put this into the context of the NT being \$95m underfunded when it comes to remote primary healthcare. I am sure the Chief Health Officer will give some example of things like rheumatic heart fever where we are significantly underfunded.

Mr BURGESS: Yes, the Northern Territory, in the national landscape probably has the sickest population. The way we measure that in a technical fashion is called the burden of disease. I am happy to explain another time the technical nature of that definition but generally it looks at life expectancy and the years lived with ill health during life.

Sadly, in the Northern Territory our burden disease is 1.8 times the national average. If we were to compare our NT Aboriginal population with the national average it is 3.96 times the burden disease and it is an enormous burden on our health system. It certainly does explain our high health service utilization and the pressure on our hospitals.

In the last few years, we have seen a strong growth in very complex medical conditions taking up a lot of our beds and they are sick people. What is driving that are a raft of chronic conditions which are high rates in the Northern Territory compared to the nation. Particularly, as you have mentioned, renal failure that is underpinned by diabetes. We also have disease related to overcrowding and poverty, rheumatic heart disease clearly one of those. It is a timely reminder that in the current diphtheria outbreak that is also accelerated by overcrowded living conditions.

Mr PAECH: How many remote community clinics are scheduled to be transferred to community controlled for this reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: There are none scheduled to be handed over. I have had discussions with AMSANT about the transfer of health clinics to the Aboriginal Community Control sector but there are none scheduled now but those conversations are happening through congress and AMSANT.

Mr PAECH: And if they are to be transferred, how does the funding work? Does the Northern Territory government come to an agreement where there is a certain amount transferred for the running of that or is it directly Commonwealth funded once it is an AMS?

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to the funding, it is not an easy answer to give—which funding transfers, which does not. At the moment, there is a difference in the way that Aboriginal community-controlled health services are funded in remote areas compared to the ...

Mr PAECH: That is just relationship-driven by the Commonwealth and the Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is. That is where we are currently \$95m underfunded by the Commonwealth Government when it comes to primary health services because this is something that the former government had eight long years to address but it failed to do it.

Mr PAECH: You did not ask many questions in estimates, did you?

Mr EDGINGTON: This is the thing. It was not just eight years. It was probably 19 out of the last 23 that the Labor government ...

Mr PAECH: You were in for four between those 19.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr EDGINGTON: ... failed to address the longstanding health issues that we see in the Northern Territory. As the Chief Health Officer said, some of these are driven by overcrowding and conditions in remote areas. It is ...

Mr PAECH: It is a shame that housing has been delayed.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja.

Mr EDGINGTON: ... shame that the former Labor government did not turn its mind to addressing these issues.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja and Minister. I will hand over to the Member for Wanguri with a follow-up question.

Mr SMELT: Chair, just to confirm, lunch will be at 12pm not at 12.30pm.

Mr CHAIR: Yes. Thank you, Member for Nightcliff. A correction to what I said earlier. We will break at 12pm for lunch. We will just push through to 12pm.

Mrs CARLSON: I have a follow-up question to the Member for Gwoja's line of questioning with the vaccines. I am interested in specifically the meningococcal B vaccination. How many vaccinations have been done in this reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: Providing free meningococcal B vaccines was an election commitment under our government. It started on 1 January 2025. At the moment, more than 18,000 young people are now protected through the free meningococcal B vaccine. It is the legacy of young Skylar, aged two, who sadly passed

away from meningococcal B in 2017 and of the hard work of her parents, Sally and Ash Lawrence. I am proud to say that we now have given over 18,000 free vaccinations to young people in the Northern Territory.

Mrs CARLSON: You have probably answered a couple of my questions in the total. That is a great number. Are there still any patients presenting with men B in the Northern Territory?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask the Chief Health Officer to provide an update on that.

Dr BURGESS: Sadly, we had two presentations in the reporting period of people who had meningococcal B. There are various strains of meningococcal disease and they are of great interest to us. No other strains have been notified in the report period, just the two. Both of those were meningococcal B.

Mrs CARLSON: In regard to the two presentations, how is the men B vaccination then accessed to ensure that we do not have any more presentations going forward?

Dr BURGESS: The meningococcal B program works through two age cohorts. We vaccinate adolescents and of the 18,386 vaccines given in the reporting period, 8,601 have been given to adolescence mostly through a school-based program. We also provide through the childhood immunisation program which articulates the national immunisation program, 9,785 doses to non-Aboriginal children under 24 months of age and additional 2,791 doses for Aboriginal children under 12 months of age via the national immunisation program in the reporting period.

We have two ways to answer your question—through school-based vaccination, but also through articulation with the childhood immunisation program.

Mrs CARLSON: My last question. Is that a cost to the parents? Is it still free?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, it is free, but it is important to realise that previously families were paying about \$130 to \$180 per vaccine for infants under two requiring three doses, and adolescents needed two doses.

The program we are running has made significant cost savings for those parents who were previously paying \$130 to \$180 per vaccine. Savings have been well and truly recognised by families across the Northern Territory.

Mr CHAIR: I will now go to the Member for Blain with a follow-up on vaccines, then Member for Johnston, then back to the shadow minister.

Mr PAECH: I only have two questions left; he can wrap then.

Mr KERLE: I will try to be quick. My questions probably goes to Dr Burgess, as it is on the vaccine. I cannot remember the word you used, but I have heard it previously referred to as vaccine hesitancy.

How long does the diphtheria vaccine last?

Dr BURGESS: Diphtheria vaccine is part of our childhood national immunisation program. Children get between five and six immunisations during their childhood up to adolescence for diphtheria, and then the adult program.

Prior to this outbreak adults would receive a booster at the ages of 55 and 65.

To answer how long it lasts, immunity lasts a long time from childhood. However, in the setting we now face, we are boosting people prior to those predetermined vaccine points in the national program. Our current settings are 10 years for adults who are not in settings where there has been active transmission. For adults who are in an area where there has been active transmission of diphtheria, we are saying in the last five years will be adequate in boosting their immunity.

Mr KERLE: When we did the VAD inquiry last year, we noticed there was a significant amount of public concern about receiving needles. Is there anything we can do about addressing vaccine hesitancy in these areas?

Dr BURGESS: The short answer is yes, there is lots we can do. A lot of that is mythbusting—dispelling myths, misinformation and disinformation.

The diphtheria vaccine is a long-serving vaccine, well-trusted. We have been using that since mid-last century. It is completely safe to give to children and pregnant women during pregnancy.

A lot of our approach to hesitancy is to combat misinformation and disinformation with the facts and promote the benefits of the vaccine. Thankfully, in the current outbreak we have been seeing strong response from Northern Territorians coming forward to be vaccinated.

J DAVIS: In relation to the water questions, talking about environment health. What is the cost of the NT public hospital system for preventable environmental diseases such as skin and respiratory conditions?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not think we have a cost on that, Member for Johnston. It would cover quite a number of elements of the health system. Do you want to be more specific or ...

J DAVIS: Sure. What is the department's annual investment in environmental health programs specifically addressing water quality, sanitation, home conditions, particularly in remote communities, noting that, for example, skin condition is a pathway to rheumatic heart disease. I have seen figures from an NJA research that it costs \$72m a year for preventable environmentally caused diseases.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask our Chief Health Officer to provide some answers to you in that context.

Dr BURGESS: Thank you for citing the *Medical Journal of Australia* article that we worked very hard to get published. We think this is a really important piece of work to help with advocacy and also to drive programs for betterment of environmental health conditions. The figure—from my recollection—is about 70m or so—and that is an annual cost to the Health system. I think that provides a really useful benchmark for better programs for prevention that we are very keen to see expanded coming in.

J DAVIS: Is there a budget figure around working on preventative disease?

Dr BURGESS: Yes. I think in the context of an underfunded Health system, more generally, it is always difficult to argue the case to get prevention funding. Whilst we would love to do more with more, currently our budget is about \$28,705,000; but there are prevention measures abroad that cover primary prevention and health promotion, seeking prevention for a chronic disease in particular which is an enormous burden that we have previously talked about in this hearing. That money does not go far, and we need to do more.

Mr CHAIR: I am going to call lunch, there. We will come back and the Member for Johnston can finish her questioning, then it will be the Shadow Minister following that.

Mr PAECH: After the Member for Johnston, we are happy to wrap health.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you. We will now pause for lunch. We will return at 12.30pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back, everybody. We have had a changeover of some positions. Thanks for coming in.

I have been advised that there are some responses to some questions taken on notice.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.6

Mr EDGINGTON: As at the end of March 2026 there were 390.61 FTE nursing vacancies across the Department of Health. The breakdown of each region: the variance in the Barkly region is 33.79; Big Rivers region, 22.36; Central Australia region, 147.18; East Arnhem region, 18.94; and the Top End, 154.66; the whole of the system is one; commissioning and system improvement, 2.02; enabling services, one; National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre is 1.82; NT-wide services, 2.57; and Public Health Division, 5.27.

This vacancy rate does not account for the agency labour hire which is 278.44 year to date which equates to a true vacancy rate of 144.58.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.8

Mr EDGINGTON: The question was, how many staff work overtime, and what was the total overtime bill for NT Health by region.

As at the end of March 2026 there were 381 overtime FTEs across the Department of Health, which is \$43.8m.

The year-to-date overtime for the NT Regional Health Service is 379.75. To break that down further by regions and divisions, it is 8.32 in the Barkly; 14.29 in the Big Rivers region; 99.28 in the Central Australia region; 8.13 in East Arnhem; 11.99 for NT-wide services; and 237.74 for the Top End region. For commissioning and system improvement, 0.08; enabling services, 0.03; National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, 0.34; Office of the CEO, zero; Public Health Division, 0.54; and whole of agency, zero. That is a grand total of \$380.75 overtime for FTE.

The total expenditure was \$43.849m. For NT Regional Health Service, the overall total was \$43,590; Barkly region, \$944,000; Big Rivers region, \$1.596m; Central Australia region, \$11.071m; East Arnhem, \$1.217m; NT-wide services, \$1,063m; Top End region, \$27.698m; commissioning and system improvement, \$28,000; enabling services, \$4,000; National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, \$58,000; Public Health Division, \$69,000; and whole of agency, \$99,000. The total is \$43.849m in overtime for those 381 positions.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.13

Mr EDGINGTON: The question was in regard to the breakdown of how many remote community clinics can provide an X-ray. Six NT Health-operated community clinics are equipped with X-ray capability, and are located in the following communities Wadeye, Borroloola, Numbulwar, Papunya, Wurrumiyanga and Yuendumu.

Madam CHAIR: That is the end of responding to some questions taken on notice. We are still on the opening statement.

J DAVIS: Continuing from my questions earlier in relation to preventive health, can you say what proportion of the health budget is currently spent on prevention and early intervention?

Mr EDGINGTON: There is obviously a whole range of health services regarding prevention that are provided throughout the Northern Territory, and many are related to early intervention and prevention. Some services are in response to health problems. Breaking it down will be a difficult task, but we could take that on notice if you would like us to, but it will involve quite a significant amount of resources to break that down specifically how it is categorised across the board.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Johnston, would you like to take that on notice?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Question on Notice No 5.24

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

J DAVIS: What proportion of the health budget is currently spent on prevention and early intervention?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.24.

J DAVIS: What modelling has the department done on the long-term health and fiscal benefits of increased investment in prevention, particularly in relation to chronic disease, mental health and child wellbeing?

Mr EDGINGTON: I have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.25

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

J DAVIS: What modelling has the department undertaken on the long-term health and fiscal benefits of increased investment in prevention, particularly in relation to chronic disease, mental health and child wellbeing, and could you table that modelling?

Mr EDGINGTON: When you say table that modelling, we can answer the question.

J DAVIS: My follow-up question was: if that modelling exists, could you share it?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Johnston, maybe the best thing is to ask the first question and then we can have a secondary question. The first question we will take off the modelling part at the end.

Minister, do you accept that question.

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.25.

J DAVIS: The follow-up question is, could you share that modelling?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: Will you share it through a tabled document or ...

J DAVIS: Whatever way works, I am happy.

Madam CHAIR: Talk through?

Mr EDGINGTON: I can only assume that is in response to the question on notice. As part of that question on notice, we can answer the question and provide any modelling as part of the answer to that question. I think that is what the Member for Johnston is getting at.

J DAVIS: Yes; thank you, minister.

I have a series of questions from the Member for Mulka, they may not all be against the opening statement, but if you are happy to bear with me when I ask them, minister.

On behalf of the Member for Mulka, in August 2024 the Coroner provided a report in relation to the death of Mr Marika, who was 38 years old and passed away while family tried to obtain emergency patient retrieval for him in the Laynha area homelands. His death was highly distressing for the family as they drove all the way to Gove District Hospital and at some point on the trip he passed away. Family felt very let down by the lack of emergency response. The report made several recommendations. Which of these recommendations have been adopted by the department?

Mr EDGINGTON: We do not have the full details of that Coroner's report in front of us, so we would have to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.26

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

J DAVIS: Which recommendations from the Coroner's report in relation to Mr Marika have been adopted by the department?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.26.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up to that, which you may have to take on notice.

The final recommendation of the report was for extra resourcing for Nhulunbuy for emergency patient retrieval. Has this happened, and is there an increase in the 2026–27 budget?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask Kim Charles, the deputy chief executive, to provide a bit of detail on retrieval services out of Nhulunbuy.

Ms CHARLES: The scope for the new aeromedical tender—which you may have heard is under negotiation at the moment—does include that area and includes different aircraft to get to smaller airstrips. What happened in the last contract is that area was covered; however, the CASA regulations changed and being able to land the aircraft on smaller airstrips became a problem. That has been considered in the configuration of aircraft for the new contract.

J DAVIS: Thank you, I had a question exactly about that from the Member for Mulka. The second part of that question—which you may or may not be able to answer—was: under the new contract with RFDS, how many more aircraft will be available for aeromedical retrieval? How many of these have the capacity to land in homelands with shorter landing strips?

Mr EDGINGTON: We are finalising contract negotiations with the preferred proponent. At this stage we would not be able to provide the details.

J DAVIS: Do you have a timeframe for when those will be finalised?

Mr EDGINGTON: The end of June.

J DAVIS: I continue the Member for Mulka's questions. We have not even touched on alcohol and other drugs, although you made reference to it in your opening statement. What AOD residential rehabilitation facilities exist on country for remote community participants? Are these facilities managed by community-controlled organisations? How many people can they support?

Mr EDGINGTON: I ask Cecelia Gore, Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and System Improvement, to provide some of those details for you.

Ms GORE: The only place that we would consider remote—or not direct—is Tennant Creek. Tennant Creek has a funded residential rehab called BRADAAG.

In terms of other options for remote, we do fund—through the community—alcohol plans, responses which enable community members and local service providers to take people out on country for respite or healing experiences. They are not physical buildings like the rehabs are, and that people might otherwise know. That is a very variable figure in terms of how many of those happen in any given period. In the reporting period we have uplifted the types of supports that are available outside of the urban centres so that people do not have to come to town if they want to have treatment. Treatment can be everything from day program attendance to group programs, rather than residential beds per se.

J DAVIS: Is there a number of people that those programs are able to support?

Ms GORE: It is more that there is money available for people to be supported, rather than a cap on the total number of people. Some of the programs where particularly younger people have been take out on country have been done in group settings, with three or four young people at a time.

We do not have a number which says it would be 100 people in a year, but we could provide information on what has previously occurred. The planning is to make sure it is available in lots of five regions of the Territory for community-led initiatives to strengthen people's wellbeing and get them off the cycle.

J DAVIS: I am sure the member would appreciate that. Do you want that question on notice?

Question on Notice No 5.27

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

J DAVIS: Sorry, Ms Gore, what did you say? You could supply ...

Ms GORE: We are able to provide information for the reporting period for how many people have accessed the community healing program funding to enable on-country rehabilitation.

J DAVIS: That is the question.

Madam CHAIR: We need you to repeat what you are asking for, thank you.

J DAVIS: How many people have been able to access healing programs on country in the reporting period?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.27.

J DAVIS: A follow-up to that, you said there is not a number of people but there is an amount of money. Are you able to say how much that money is for that work?

Ms GORE: Yes. Specifically for the East Arnhem region, coming into this period, the funding that is available for restorative day programs, which is administered through Yalu in Galiwinku, Miwatj in Milingimbi and the Aboriginal Health Corporation on Alyangula—the total is \$550,000.

J DAVIS: Is that for the previous period of into the next period?

Ms GORE: Into the next period.

J DAVIS: One more question for the Member for Mulka. For the community of Nhulunbuy, what GP services will be available when the only GP service closes at the end of this month? What is the government doing to ensure that people have access to continuity of care through a general practice service, rather than having to present to the emergency department?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask Fiona Renshaw to provide some details.

Ms RENSHAW: I can provide you with an update in regard to the GP services for Nhulunbuy moving forward. They are currently working through the expressions of interest that has gone out for the preferred provider. In the interim, we are working with our emergency department to be able to respond appropriately about coordination of care. We also have our community health services that are also providing an extra level of service to ensure coverage throughout that period.

The access to GP care will still be provided whilst we are going through that process. The emergency care can provide appropriate responses. That is predominately through Category 4 and Category 5 levels of care for our patients.

J DAVIS: To clarify, the access to GP care in the interim will be through the emergency department?

Ms RENSHAW: Yes.

J DAVIS: That is the end of my questions for the Member for Mulka. I have some questions on mental health but I am happy if other people have questions first, then I can come back to that.

Mr PAECH: We are happy for you to skip through those questions. I am mindful that the minister still has Aboriginal Affairs and Housing, Local Government and Community Development.

Madam CHAIR: Output 3.2 is mental health if you want to come through there when we go through the outputs.

J DAVIS: It was mentioned in the opening statement, so I am happy with it here.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, go for it.

J DAVIS: I am also mindful of time, minister. You have a lot of important portfolios. I am interested in moving through these quickly, if you are comfortable with that.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am happy to answer any questions.

J DAVIS: The budget shows mental health output has been reduced from \$135.049m to \$130.912m. Could you explain the reduction?

Mr EDGINGTON: There has been no direction from our government to reduce any services across health or mental health. I am assured there is no reduction in mental health services being delivered. The current bilateral Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement has been extended for 12 months while a new agreement is being negotiated with the Commonwealth. I am advised services provided by contracted non-government organisations will not be impacted and services will continue to be delivered under the overall envelope of our record \$2.56bn health budget.

Regardless of minor variations, in particular line items, we have the new mental health inpatient unit coming on board at the Royal Darwin Hospital later this year. This work is progressing with the fit-out in the new inpatient unit underway. Unlike Labor, we make sure there is budget to operate new wards.

A new 24-bed mental health inpatient unit will improve mental health service capacity in the Top End for acute patients. We also have the new Stabilisation Assessment and Referral Area coming online. This new area will provide short-term care for people presenting to the emergency department with mental health concerns. These investments and upgrades will make a real difference to mental health service delivery in the Top End.

We are also boosting funding for the Northern Territory Suicide Prevention Community Grant program as part of our commitment to reducing suicide rates. We remain committed to delivering high quality mental health care for Territorians.

J DAVIS: My specific question was where has the \$5m gone?

Mr EDGINGTON: The variation, which is \$3.99m for 2026–27, relates to the implementation of the bilateral agreement which the NT budget provided in 2025–26 only. With the bilateral agreement, as I have said many times in parliament, it is the timing of the funding. I can assure you, Member for Johnston, that in real terms NT Health has assured me, and I can assure you, that there will be no reduction in services. It is more a timing of when the funding comes on board. We are using the existing \$2.56bn to ensure that mental health services are delivered consistently the way they were previously.

J DAVIS: How many patients spent a day or more as an outlier awaiting a specialist mental health bed during the reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will Ceical Gore to provide some information in regard to your question.

Ms GORE: We do not have in front of us the full count. What we have been doing in looking at the model of care development for Royal Darwin is mapping daily and weekly what the total number of outliers are at any given time. At the moment, we would say that it averages about four people a day who are in the tower of Royal Darwin, but it varies in terms of pressures and other system issues. We could not give you the unique number of patients but we could give you the number of beds occupied. Across the period it is data that is collected to help with service planning in the future.

J DAVIS: Are you able to give a full count for the reporting period?

Ms GORE: We could do bed days rather than patients, does that make sense?

J DAVIS: Whatever you are able to provide on notice?

Ms GORE: Yes.

Question on Notice No 5.28

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: In the reporting period how many patients spend a day or more as an outlier awaiting a specialist mental health bed?

Mr EDGINGTON: By bed days?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.28.

J DAVIS: How many mental health patients received intramuscular or intravenous sedations during the reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: We do not have the data in front of us. We can take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.29

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: How many mental health patients received IM or IV sedations during the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.29.

J DAVIS: How many mental health patients were placed in induced comas during the reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: We will take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.30

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: How many mental health patients were placed in induced comas during the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.30.

J DAVIS: What is the longest period a person experiencing acute mental health illness has spent in an emergency department holding area or other non-specialist setting awaiting admission to a mental health bed in the reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: We will have to take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.31

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: What is the longest period a person experiencing acute mental health illness has spent in an emergency department holding area or other non-specialist setting awaiting admission to a mental health bed in the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.31.

J DAVIS: How many bed days were unavailable to mental health patients due to correctional officers occupying space in the JRU or Cowdy Ward?

Mr EDGINGTON: The presence of correctional officers does not take up bed days. Do you want to clarify that a bit?

J DAVIS: As a result of accompanying someone, does that have an impact on beds that are available for people?

Mr EDGINGTON: No.

J DAVIS: Corrections has recorded that several people were waiting for beds in the CBU. There was also a suicide death in custody this year. Despite the cognitive behaviour unit first being built as a forensic mental health unit, it is still not staffed or funded by Health; is that correct?

Ms GORE: The CBU has never operated under Health. It was built and has always been a correctional facility, and continues to be so.

J DAVIS: Given the increasing rates of people in the correctional system and the pressure that also places on the health system—I am trying to think of how to phrase this as a non-opinion question—has there been any analysis of the funding of the forensic mental health unit within Health?

Mr EDGINGTON: We have made it clear that the CBU is part of Corrections. Anything related to that would need to be referred to the Minister for Corrections. Is there some way of reframing the question that might relate to the Department of Health?

J DAVIS: Maybe more explicitly. Why has the Minister for Health not funded a forensic mental health unit?

Ms GORE: The services provided through the forensic mental health team and the forensic disability team work with people in the system without running the unit inside the wire. One of the things that the CDU currently provides in our system is a space inside the wire run by Corrections, which provides the opportunity for therapeutic involvement respite from the general prison population and for a place for a people at risk. Those people do not necessarily have chronic mental illness; they may be experiencing situational stress or a range of things. At the moment we do not have sufficient data to suggest that need should be removed for what is quite a small cohort of people who would meet the other definition of unfit to plead which is often what forensic mental health means.

The resources are stretched, and we work very closely with Corrections teams and their therapeutic teams with our more formal clinical teams to support people as best we can and use the resources constrained by the various environments that we are in.

J DAVIS: I know we are under acute strain across all our systems. My understanding is we are the only jurisdiction to not have a forensic mental health unit in health. Is that correct?

Ms GORE: We are the only jurisdiction which does not have a dedicated forensic mental health separate residential facility.

J DAVIS: With the expanding prison population, does it place more pressure on that unit?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is more a question for Corrections, given the number of people in the prison system. I think it lies with the Minister for Corrections.

J DAVIS: Although mental health is run by the Department of Health, not by Corrections, is that right?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask the Deputy Chief Executive, to go back to some of these issues once more for you.

Ms GORE: It is a complicated patchwork quilt. Within the prison system, Corrections does employ psychologists and other therapists to look after the wellbeing of prisoners. They make specific referrals to the specialist clinical end of the mental health service system which the Department of Health holds. As I said earlier, we do have a forensic mental health team which works in that way.

It is a complementary joined-up approach but your question about is the number of prisoners increasing pressure on the CDU I think is a matter for Corrections. We do not have a say over that.

J DAVIS: Understood.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal strategy?

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 TO OUTPUT GROUP 2.3

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – COMMUNITY TREATMENT AND EXTENDED CARE Output 3.1 – Alcohol and Other Drugs

Mr KERLE: Given how alcohol is contributing factor to lot of things that ail our Territory, can you tell the committee what the rate of alcohol related ED presentations is and can you explain how your government's alcohol reform is geared to reduce the harm caused by alcohol in our community?

Mr PAECH: It is your government too, isn't it?

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to alcohol-related presentations I have some interesting statistics. Look at some of the work that has been done by this government. I will talk about ED presentations.

I have some statistics in front of me relating to the period June 2024 to May 2025 as a comparison with the period June 2025 to May 2026. We have seen a general reduction of emergency-related presentations at the hospitals, and I will give some examples.

Overall, there has been a reduction of about 19.2%. When we look across the board we see that the change in Alice Springs has been particularly impressive, 24.4%. In Gove it has not been as good; it has gone up 4.2%. The numbers are very small in Gove. Between June 2024 and May 2025, there were 287 presentations versus 299 the following year. Katherine had a 21% decline; Palmerston, 6.1%; Royal Darwin Hospital, 16.9%; and Tennant Creek Hospital, a reduction of 22%. The numbers vary over quite some time.

I need to make it clear that whilst we are seeing a reduction and doing a lot of work managing the effects of alcohol, there is still a lot more work which needs to be done. These statistics are encouraging, but we are working on what can be done to make sure that we see a consistent approach across the board. We have introduced changes to the Banned Drinker Register. We changed the initial seven days to 28 days, and introduced nuisance public drinking offences. Overall when we look at the impact of some of those changes, we have seen some encouraging statistics, but a lot more work needs to be done.

We have also invested in delivering alcohol and other drug services across the Northern Territory which includes assessment; residential rehabilitation; and sobering-up shelters which includes case management, counselling and support and education services. Through this budget we are providing \$13.4m for 159 residential rehabilitation beds; \$5.7m is allocated for 96 sobering-up shelter beds; \$4.3m is allocated for tailored support to Aboriginal people from remote communities through support and healing, reach and connect and continuing care programs; and there is also \$3.6m allocated for treatment programs.

Overall, the statistics from the emergency departments are encouraging, but we have a lot of work to do. We have been left with many longstanding outstanding issues from the previous government. This included the effects of the Stronger Futures legislation, which lapsed in July 2022. The Labor government failed to introduce any legislation that would have an impact on the loss of the Stronger Futures legislation; in fact, it was not until February 2023 when the Prime Minister had to come to Alice Springs to instruct the Labor government of the day to make changes. It brought back interim alcohol-protected areas. We are still trying to work through some of the issues in town camps because of the damage that was done with the lapse of Stronger Futures, particularly across Alice Springs. Alcohol flowed through those areas for a good seven months before the Labor government acted and brought in legislation to try to restrict the amount of alcohol going through town camps and some of the other areas across the Northern Territory.

The work is happening; there is a lot more to do. The statistics are encouraging. I thank our frontline workers who are making a difference out there at the moment. We have given them the tools to do what needs to be done. We provided the funding to assist with alcohol treatment, rehabilitation and sobering-up beds. We will continue on that course and hopefully, we will see some further encouraging statistics as we go.

J DAVIS: The minister knows I am interested in this area. I have many questions but I will put them in as written questions in the main. I seek an update on the alcohol road map.

Mr EDGINGTON: We are putting together an alcohol plan which we are working on. I thank you for coming to meet with me, I think a couple of months ago now, for the discussion we had about the alcohol plan for the Northern Territory. There is still work in progress in regard to that. We are making some headway and it is getting closer.

As I touched on before, we have implemented a range of programs to deal with the effects of alcohol across the Northern Territory. We will be consolidating that into a plan and we hopefully, will be in a position to release that soon.

J DAVIS: Any date, minister?

Mr EDGINGTON: I cannot put a date on it. I am happy to catch up with you again at some point to brief you as we move further with that.

J DAVIS: I appreciate that.

Mr EDGINGTON: Madam Chair, I have a couple of response to questions taken on notice, if I could provide those at the moment.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, go for it.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Chair! Given the time and the hardworking public servants waiting out the front from Housing, perhaps the minister could just table those?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I will give you the option to table those or respond to them publicly now.

Mr EDGINGTON: These are important. It is important to get them on the record ...

Mr PAECH: So is housing.

Madam CHAIR: If you could make sure you repeat the question number?

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.2

Mr EDGINGTON: The question was how many code yellows were requested but not enacted during the reporting period under the escalation framework and the average time between recommending and approval of enactment, as well as longest time between request and enactment.

The answer is nil code yellows were requested but not enacted during the reporting period under the escalation framework.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.3

Mr EDGINGTON: The average time between recommending and approval of the enactment is 266.5 minutes, which I am told is four hours, 43 minutes.

The longest time between a request by the CE and enactment is 926 minutes, which was, basically, overnight.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.23

Mr EDGINGTON: I have the answer to question 5.3. The question was: Could you provide a list of specialist services available at the Palmerston Regional Hospital?

The answer is the Palmerston Regional Hospital delivers the following specialist services: emergency department; overnight inpatient services which includes geriatric medicine, acute and sub-acute; rehabilitation sub-acute; interim care; non-acute patients awaiting nursing home placement; renal dialysis, same day; elective surgery same day and up to 23 hours post-operative which includes plastics, gastroenterology, general surgery, ophthalmology, gynaecology, urology, dental, ear, nose and throat and renal vascular access.

We also provide outpatient multiple specialties including anaesthetics; endocrinology; gastroenterology; general medicine; general surgery; geriatric medicine; obstetrics and gynaecology; hepatology; immunology; infectious diseases; orthopaedic surgery; paediatric medicine; palliative care; rehabilitation specialist medical; rehabilitation allied health; renal nephrology; respiratory rheumatology; and urology.

We also have a sexual assault referral centre, medical imaging, cognitive and delirium, pharmacy, pathology and Aboriginal liaison.

Output 3.2 – Mental Health

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Mental Health. Are there any questions?

J DAVIS: The *Mental Health and Related Services Act* is the oldest operative mental health legislation in Australia. A revised draft Bill was prepared in 2024 to modernise the framework and bring it into line with contemporary principles, including rights-based practice and less restrictive care. Can you provide an update on the status of the 2024 draft Bill?

Mr EDGINGTON: On 16 June 2025 a consultation report highlighted the recommendations for further amendment to the drafting instructions for the Bill. We are considering the Bill in its current format.

J DAVIS: Just to clarify, a year ago, there was a consultation with amendments.

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, there was. The consultation report came out in June 2025 and highlighted recommendations for further amendment. We currently have the Bill before us to consider.

J DAVIS: Is the government committed to introducing replacement mental health legislation during your term?

Mr EDGINGTON: We are currently considering what has been put before us so that we can move forward with the legislation.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Aged Care

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – DISEASE PREVENTION AND HEALTH PROTECTION

Output 4.1 – Disease Prevention and Health Protection

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – NATIONAL CRITICAL CARE AND TRAUMA RESPONSE
Output 5.1 – National Critical Care and Trauma Response

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 6.1 – Corporate and Governance

No questions.

Output 6.2 – Shared Services Received

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 6.2, Shared Services Received. Are there any questions?

Mr SMELT: We had a number of questions from the government throughout the Health outputs. Are we able to move on to other topics? The minister has a very wide brief.

Madam CHAIR: There is an opportunity for everybody to ask questions. It is not just for opposition. If you will allow other people to ask questions, that would be great.

Mr PAECH: The government has been asking questions. Hurry up.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Member for Gwoja. I would love it if everybody just stayed a bit calm while we finish Health.

Mr PAECH: We are waiting for him to ask his questions.

Madam CHAIR: If you guys are quiet, we can do that quickly.

Mr KERLE: Given that we have been discussing bed pressure that the NT health system is under and given the increasing demand on Territory hospitals, can you comment on what you are doing to deliver more hospital beds and improved capacity? I believe you and the assistant minister opened up a new 32-bed multipurpose ward recently.

Mr EDGINGTON: We have a record \$2.56bn Health budget, which is a \$231.8m increase from the 2025–26 budget. The budget includes \$18.3m to open and operate the new 32-bed multipurpose ward. Getting out there and having a look—me, the Member for Casuarina and the assistant Health minister, the Member for Wanguri—inspected that ward. It has been completed, and commissioning it is underway for bringing it to an operational stage.

Unlike Labor, we have a budget to operate these new wards. There is the new 24-bed mental health inpatient unit progressing for delivery later this year. The total funding for the mental health ward is \$94.3m, which includes \$30m from the Commonwealth. Construction is anticipated to be completed in about August this year.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.2 and Output Group 6.0. It concludes consideration of all outputs related to the Department of Health. On behalf of the committee, I thank officers who provided advice to the minister today.

Minister, would you like to quickly thank your department?

Mr EDGINGTON: I thank Chief Executive Susan Bowden. I also give a special thanks to all the executives here today and all the staff who have been in the background, spending lots of time preparing for Estimates. The work that you have done—whilst some questions were not asked today—has been absolutely impressive and informs us in many ways about the Health system. Thank you very much.

Mr CHAIR: We will have a quick break whilst we change departments. We will come back in five minutes at 1.26 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: I welcome you as the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development and the Minister for Essential Services, and I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development.

I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mr EDGINGTON: Thank you. I would like to introduce the Members for Housing, Local Government and Community Development who appear with me today to assist me to respond to any questions.

On my left is Mr Tom Leeming, the Chief Executive; Ms Josie Kerr, the Deputy Chief Executive, Practice System Improvement and Reform; Ms Ruth Lantzki, Acting Deputy Chief Regional Delivery Officer; Ms Margaret Close, Deputy Chief Executive of Corporate Strategic and Enabling Services; and Ms Tamara Biro, Acting Chief Financial Officer.

It gives me great pleasure to speak of my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development. The Department has an operating budget of almost \$1bn and an FTE of almost 600.

The department has a board footprint across each region of the Territory delivering services directly to Territorians through housing, community development, interpreter and translator services, and local government. It is also the custodian of some of this government's significant reforms. Across this portfolio, the government's priorities of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle are being turned into practical action. We are making public housing neighbourhoods safer and more accountable. We are driving housing, local government and community reforms that support jobs, investment and stronger regional economies.

We are working to restore liveability amenity and confidence in the communities across the Territory, The department is taking on issues that were allowed to drift for too long and making decisions that support Territorians now and over the longer term.

There are three major reform priorities I want to highlight at the outset, because they go directly to what Territorians rightly expect from this portfolio: safer neighbourhoods; stronger communities; better services; and housing systems that works.

The first major reform priority is a public housing reform and tenant accountability. Public housing should provide safety, stability and opportunity. It is not a licence for repeated antisocial behaviour, property damage or rent avoidance that undermines neighbours and communities. We inherited a legacy of watered-down accountability leaving public housing tenants who caused repeated disturbances, threatened their neighbours and each other and blatantly disregarded community standards to remain in public housing with little to no repercussions. Too often it was other tenants and nearby resident who were the ones paying the price.

This government has changed that. We have made it clear that public housing comes with responsibilities, pay the rent, look after the property and be a good neighbour. Where those obligations are ignored there will be consequences. Our government is here to continue cracking down on crime and focus on the root causes of antisocial behaviour to restore our beautiful Territory lifestyle. In February of this year, we released the Tenant Accountability Policy statement reaffirming our commitment to growth, certainty and security.

This will help to reduce homelessness, support economic participation and ensures access to essential services. It sets out a clearer, firmer and more honest approach to tenant accountability and antisocial behaviour. It is why the department has increased compliance and enforcement activity, backed strong frontline action and used tenancy tools more decisively where necessary. This is a deliberate shift towards a system that better protects tenants who do the right thing, and it is already producing results.

Between 1 July 2025 and 31 March 2026 there were 40 terminations and voluntary relinquishments as a result of the department taking strong compliance action. This is from the efforts of the frontline staff with a government that backs them to do their jobs, streamlining processes to take effective and sustainable action.

We have also amended key operational settings and are exploring legislative amendments. Those outcomes show when government sets clear expectations and backs them up operationally that behaviour changes.

They show that reform is not just being announced; it is being implemented. They show what delivery against the government's crime reduction pillar looks like in this portfolio.

The second major priority is the empowering the bush agenda. At its core this is about shifting from top-down decision-making to stronger local voice, stronger local governance and more place-based development in regional and remote communities. It is about ensuring communities are heard, local aspirations are respected and reforms are shaped in a way that is practical, locally appropriate and sustainable. This work goes directly to rebuilding the economy.

In the Barkly that work is already well underway. As at 24 April 2026 the department has engaged with 210 traditional owners, residents and community members, along with the Barkly Aboriginal Alliance, Aboriginal corporations and all three levels of government to understand reform priorities and community aspirations. This is serious groundwork for serious reform. We are working with communities as they consider pathways to stronger representation, better service delivery and, where they are seeking it, de-amalgamation options.

This government is committed to strengthening local government through targeted, practical reforms and improved governance, transparency, capability and community confidence. Communities rightly expect councils to be well governed, responsive and able to deliver. That is particularly important in regional and remote areas where local government is central to everyday liveability and local service delivery. Stronger local government supports safer communities, more resilient regional economies and the quality of life that Territorians expect in the places that they call home.

That reform is now being backed by legislative change. Parliament passed the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Code of Conduct and Other Matters) Bill 2026 in March with the first parts commencing in April. The remaining parts will commence from 1 July 2026. These reforms strengthen election processes, delegations, training requirements, conflict-of-interest provisions, the code of conduct framework and government support arrangements. They reflect a practical and staged reform agenda designed to strengthen confidence in the sector and lift standards across local government.

The third major reform project is the development of the Northern Territory housing strategy. The Northern Territory Government is focused on building a safer, stronger and more prosperous Territory, one where more people choose to live, work, visit and invest. Housing is central to that ambition. It underpins workforce growth, supports safer and more stable communities and helps make the Territory a more affordable, liveable and attractive place to call home.

The Territory's housing system is shaped by unique geographic, climatic and market conditions. Across the Territory work is already underway to increase supply, improve affordability and strengthen housing responses in urban, regional and remote communities. The housing strategy will bring all that work together because housing challenges in the Territory are system wide and they require a coordinated response across government, industry, communities and the non-government sector.

Government undertook extensive consultations on the strategy across the Territory between March and May this year through industry briefings, peak body workshops, regional and remote workshops, one-on-one meetings and a public Have Your Say survey. Stakeholder consultations highlighted several consistent messages for the housing strategy, and these include housing as essential economic infrastructure. The NT needs place-based solutions. Regional planning is critical, investment needs certainty, better information will drive innovation, government investment is lifting supply and stronger coordination will unlock delivery. The government has listened to that feedback, and these will be addressed in the housing strategy.

In relation to public housing, we are looking at things like how we can reduce the density of public housing in key areas, recycle and renew assets and look at mixed tenure redevelopments. The objective is straightforward: to replace aging public housing with modern, mixed-tenure communities that reduce concentrations of disadvantage, improve neighbourhood amenities and support better outcomes for tenants and surrounding communities.

We are also taking significant action to bring viable public housing stock back online—a legacy left behind by the former government—and taking a more strategic approach toward asset management. Many long-term vacant properties are aging or uninhabitable, require major repairs or upgrades or are affected by workforce logistics and procurement constraints. In Alice Springs, this includes targeted work to return around 70 vacant houses to service. More broadly, it means reducing backlog, improving turnaround performance, focusing on electrical safety and making clearer decisions about what properties should be repaired, upgraded, redeveloped or disposed.

The community housing sector has been heavily involved in discussions around the Housing strategy. Community housing is an important part of the Housing ecosystem, and I want to be clear that the government has not walked away from working with community housing providers.

The sector manages a substantial number of homes. Our position is that any further transfer of assets must be based on the right policy settings, the right delivery model and confidence that it will improve outcomes for tenants and for the Housing system.

We are considering this properly in the context of the broader Housing strategy, and the wider reform agenda. I look forward to releasing a strategy early in the coming financial year which addresses that and provides a roadmap for reform over the next three years.

We are making significant progress in remote housing. The NT Government remains committed to the \$bn remote housing agreement and to working constructively with the Commonwealth, the Joint Steering Committee for remote housing, land councils and Aboriginal housing partners.

Early delivery has been positive with over 300 homes delivered, and a strong pipeline supporting local jobs and reform. However, we will also continue to advocate strongly for the Territory's interests.

As you would expect in an agreement of this scale, there are ongoing discussions about scope. We are currently working through points around land servicing and program management costs. We are awaiting confirmation that the NT Government can spend its own investment on land servicing and program management. Homes cannot be built without serviced land and program management, which includes design, consultation, procurement, contract management and tenancy support. I have had positive discussions with my Commonwealth counterpart about this, and I hope that it will be resolved soon.

It is important that we do get this resolved as soon as possible.

Recent flood and fuel crises are diverting contracted capacity and increasing prices. These flood crises have hit many of our remote housing tenants hard and are impacting our housing assets across a number of communities. We acted quickly by confirming we would provide rent relief for affected tenants through an emergency rent rebate, which would reduce rent payable by eligible tenants to zero. That approach was designed to get support to tenants as quickly as possible, rather than waiting for a perfect administrative solution. This was within difficult operational circumstances including limitations on the tenancy management system. The department has since reviewed the process, listened to feedback, and will make sure that rent received during the pause can be returned to tenants. That is the responsible thing to do, and it sits alongside the much broader practical assistance provided to displaced communities during and after those events.

We have written to tenants recently about the High Court decision in December 2025 around the remote rent framework. Essentially, the High Court found the remote rental framework—introduced by the former Labor government—as invalid. We respect the High Court's decision and acted immediately to ensure rent would continue to be set lawfully and that there would be no immediate change to the amount remote and public housing tenants currently pay. This has provided continuity and certainty whilst dealing with the consequences of the decision.

At the same time, we have engaged financial specialists to assist us to review rent payments made between February 2023 and February 2026 and advise us of options for repayment where required. Once we have worked through this process we will be in contact with tenants to discuss the way forward with their accounts.

In parallel we will soon be engaging in widely on a new remote rent framework with a view to having a new framework confirmed by the end of 2026. The timing of this will, in part, be guided by our key stakeholders and how they want to be involved in the process.

In relation to homelands, we are working with land councils, Aboriginal Housing NT and the Commonwealth to develop a new homelands policy and strengthen longer-term arrangements. The NT is home to about 600 homelands. Most of these are located on Aboriginal land under the Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976, and the dwellings are privately owned.

Each year the NT Government invests approximately \$40m to ensure homeland residents have access to essential services such as power, water, sewerage and municipal operations, including waste management and road maintenance. I understand how important homelands are to residents and the need to get clarity

on their future. I want to make sure that people understand that the tenure arrangements for homelands are very different from communities and involve a different set of considerations.

The government is also working to address concerns about town camps and the department's role in providing housing-related services. It is important not to reduce a complex set of issues to the simplistic claim that delays occur because the department is not signing off work quickly enough.

Town camps involve complex land tenure, service delivery and governance arrangements, and those complexities can affect how quickly issues are resolved. That is exactly why the department has been undertaking consultations with key stakeholders and is working with contracted partners to improve and better integrate tenancy services, repairs and maintenance and municipal services.

The department will also work through the joint steering committee for remote housing to redesign contracts so that service delivery is clearer, stronger and more responsive, while also supporting local workforce engagement in a staged transition to greater community control. Better service delivery in town camps is essential to safer communities, improved amenity and stronger community confidence.

We are addressing complex issues in this portfolio. Many reflect longstanding structural challenges across housing, local government and community development in the Territory, but this government is not pretending they do not exist. We are addressing them through practical reform, stronger accountability, careful policy development and sustained engagement with communities, councils, the Commonwealth and the sector. Today, the budget before the committee supports that work.

I look forward to answering the committee's questions.

Madam CHAIR: I remind everyone in the room to be respectful, not jump in, not talk over the top of each other and go through the Chair for your questions. I will give warnings if I need to.

Mr SMELT: In a press release in July 2025 you claimed that you were building 102 new social and affordable homes across the Territory. Can you update us on the progress made on those 102 houses and where they are located?

Mr EDGINGTON: I ask our chief executive to give you an update on the progress of that announcement.

Mr LEEMING: I believe that the 102 homes you referred to were successful bids by NT-based community housing providers for funding under the second round of the Housing Australia Future Fund.

There were 102 successful social housing project bids put up by community housing providers supported by the NT Government and our department through that process. There were 14 by Community Housing Central Australia; six by Venture Housing; and 82 by Community Housing Ltd. As is the case for almost the entirety of the Housing Australia Future Fund—the way that the Housing Australia Future Fund is being delivered and the investment mandate that they have under their legislation—the investment and the delivery of those projects happens through community housing providers. It is Community Housing Central Australia, Venture Housing and Community Housing Limited are responsible for delivery of those projects. We work with them to check in on how they are going. I do not have details on exactly where those projects are up to, but we work actively with those community housing providers to understand and work with them on those projects.

Mr SMELT: We do not have any progress data, completions or locations for those 102 houses?

Mr EDGINGTON: We have the location data if that is what you are after.

Mr SMELT: Yes, please.

Mr LEEMING: We can also give the progress to you on notice if you require it, but we will need to talk to the people delivering those projects.

Mr SMELT: Shall we take it all on notice?

Mr EDGINGTON: We can take it all notice and get an update from the community housing providers exactly where the program is up to.

Question on Notice No 5.32

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, please restate the question for the record.

Mr SMELT: Can you give us an update on the progress status—in terms of under construction, completed or not yet started—for the 102 new social and affordable homes across the Territory and where they are located?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.32.

Mr SMELT: Minister, in terms of the total urban social housing stock, according to the budget papers, there was a target of 5,280 for 2025–26, and the current estimate is 5,260. Has total social housing stock dropped by 20 houses?

Mr LEEMING: Indeed, in comparison to the estimate by the end of this financial year, it is 20 homes less than the target and five homes less than was the actual at 30 June 2025. This is mostly because of the cessation of social headleases. The government entered into around 10 years ago a number of headleases with private developers and owners of properties around the Territory, particularly in urban areas, for us to have long-term headleases over those houses that we could use in social housing. As those leases have now expired, because they were 10-year leases, some but not all of those private landlords are choosing not to roll over and continue to offer them to us as social housing dwellings. There has been a fall of 43 of those over the period as a result of those private landlords not choosing to renew leases. That fall of five is 43 of those offset by other new stock coming on.

Mr SMELT: There is a total drop of 43 from the reporting period; were there any new long-term contracts entered into for social housing through private providers in the same type of procurement?

Mr LEEMING: I do not believe so, no.

Mr SMELT: Minister, does the department have any plans to enter into new long-term agreements or will they slowly drop away, reducing our overall social housing stock?

Mr EDGINGTON: The latest investment will be through HAFF in the SHAP program. Headleases, as the chief executive said, were entered into quite some time ago. Now some of those are expiring, but the current investment we are looking at is the HAFF and the SHAP program.

Mr SMELT: So, there are no new engagements with those head leasing. Minister, are you selling off social housing?

Mr EDGINGTON: The houses we have sold include one to a person occupying the house. There are options for those tenants who can meet the criteria to buy it. We also had two other applications in regard to that.

When it comes to selling off in general, we have not been selling off social housing. We have continued to open that up to tenant who are occupying social housing. We are giving tenants the best opportunity, as a start in life, to purchase the homes they are living in.

Mr SMELT: There is only one sale during the reporting period? Are there any plans for public housing sale in 2026–27?

Mr EDGINGTON: Not in regard to selling. In my opening statement, I spoke about renewal and those type of programs.

We are getting to the latter stages of putting the housing strategy together. That will include looking at all different housing mixes across the board. When it comes to selling, as you put it, in regard to social housing, we are looking at the best way to redevelop some existing stock into mixed use. We are looking at all of those options across the board.

Mr SMELT: Is there any funding in the 2026–27 budget for those type of renewal projects you have just mentioned?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask the Chief Executive to give you an overview.

Mr LEEMING: Some of the funding in the budget for proposed projects under the third round of the housing strategy and future fund will be renewal of land we already own through to housing providers.

As was discussed during the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet's Estimates hearing, they have an allocation to progress some elements of the housing strategy and the work that we do jointly with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet on de-densification, which was clear and had strong focus on next year's redevelopment and renewal of old public housing complexes that are nearing the end of their economic useful life.

Mr SMELT: There is no standalone funding outside of the HAFF program?

Mr EDGINGTON: No. As we said, we are focused on reviewing densities and providing alternative housing models. All of that will be considered, particularly through our new housing strategy. When it comes to HAFF we are looking at how to maximise the funding in those areas when it comes to urban public housing.

We currently have \$5m in the budget to focus on a rolling program to refresh public housing stocks.

Mr SMELT: Will there be any new urban social houses constructed next financial year? Can you give us a breakdown by region?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will ask the Chief Executive to provide that for you.

Mr LEEMING: There is a combination of different programs that will fund new public housing stock in urban areas across the Territory, and each has its own approaches and timeframes and so on. I can run you through some of that. There is the Social Housing Accelerator Payment, which is constructing 79 new dwellings, of which 36 have been completed. Most of the balance of that will be completed in the financial year coming. They are all contracted. That is what is coming on SHAP—I should say 77 new and two upgraded.

Then there are the various HAFF rounds. That is the 102 we spoke of before. Depending on the outcomes of Housing Australia's consideration of the various bids being put in by some combination of our department and community housing providers who are the proponents for those proposals, we will be getting the significant number—I hope at least 200—of additional houses, although noting that given the timeframes involved in HAFF funding, they are unlikely to be completed by the end of the coming financial year.

In addition to that, there is the \$5m rolling program the minister referred to, which is a longstanding rolling program of \$5m that the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure manages on our behalf because either the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure or community housing providers do all the actual construction and contract management of builds for us. We do not, as a department, build our own houses. We get either community housing sector or Department of Logistics and Infrastructure to build houses for us.

On top of that—but not yet known because we are still doing the work on the strategy and the densification analysis—there may be some additional work to implement densification, including mixed-use redevelopment of existing assets that are nearing the end of their economically useful life.

J DAVIS: Thank you for those numbers. How many people are currently on the urban social housing waitlist?

Mr EDGINGTON: We have applications for urban public housing as at 31 March 2026. That varies across 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom or greater. Regarding general wait times, we have a total of 3,225 applications for urban public housing. That includes Darwin, 1,194; Palmerston, 512; Katherine, 375; Nhulunbuy, 147; Tennant Creek, 125; and 182 in Alice Springs. We also have a priority waitlist, which has 2,262 people applying for priority housing at the moment.

J DAVIS: There is 179 new houses projected over the next year, with two being refurbished. Is that correct?

Mr LEEMING: Apologies, Member for Johnston, because there are so many programs involved, each with different rules and different delivery people, it can get a bit complicated.

In the coming financial year there will be the 43 remaining social housing et cetera co-payment houses come online. There will be a significant proportion—I do not have the details on exactly whether they will all be delivered this financial year, but I suspect most will be—of the 102 Housing Australia Future Fund round 2.

There will be some from our \$5m rolling program. I do not have the number on that, but given it is \$5m, it will be less than 10.

J DAVIS: It will be about 150.

Mr LEEMING: That kind of magnitude, yes.

J DAVIS: There are just over 4,500 people on the waiting list—sorry, 5,000.

Mr LEEMING: The sum of the two numbers is 5,487, which the minister mentioned, yes.

J DAVIS: You talked about the NT housing strategy. The previous one expired in 2025 and included a commitment to evaluation at the end of that period. Has that evaluation happened?

Mr EDINGTON: We are in the progress of developing the new strategy. Obviously, we pick up learnings from the previous strategy, but the development of the new strategy has been underway from March till May. All those consultations and learnings from the previous housing strategy but also learnings from the sector themselves from the interested stakeholders that have contributed have given us lots of information to work with.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I am following up on the density issue raised by the Member for Johnston. I have mentioned many times in parliament that we have a major issue in Karama and Malak regarding an over-density public housing. For example, Mistletoe Circuit in Karama and the large housing complexes in Malak around Fawcett Court, Magdelene Court and Tabletop Place—complexes that unfortunately really are feeling like ghettos. What is the approach that you and your agency are taking to address this density issue?

Mr EDINGTON: As I touched on in the opening statement, we are working on a review of all social housing densities in key suburbs, which include your suburbs, Member for Karama, and options to address the areas and suburbs of high density. We will be doing that in consultation with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

NT Government is investing \$1.5m to explore options, the economic feasibility and marketplace testing, including conceptual designs, resulting in redevelopment of current social housing sites. The social housing redevelopment, which I touched on before, is to deal with ageing public housing. The intention is to look at de-densification, provide alternative housing models, increase private investment, address mixed housing needs and provide positive social and improved community outcomes.

We are in the early stages. The housing strategy clearly picks up on those very issues that you raised. You are right; these have been longstanding issues that have not been addressed by previous governments. We are looking at these closely because, at the end of the day, we want good neighbours and we want people to pay the rent and look after their house. We are looking at trying to get the best outcomes for not only the tenants living in social housing but also the neighbours living in those areas.

Yes, it is early, but I can assure you that the work is underway and will be dealt with through the housing strategy.

Mr SMELT: Could you update how many houses underwent repairs and maintenance in the reporting period?

Mr EDINGTON: Urban or remote?

Mr SMELT: A breakdown of each please.

Mr EDINGTON: I will touch on urban first. We deliver repairs and maintenance and minor new works programs across the Territory. With the urban housing portfolio, our focus is on maintaining safe, functional and appropriate housing. Regarding urban orders, this does not give a breakdown of each number of houses, but overall for the period up to 31 March, the number of orders raised, I have them by region. There were 17,806 orders raised regarding repairs and maintenance across urban housing.

With urban public housing, minor new works, 217; general repairs and maintenance 3,881; due to disaster repairs and maintenance, there were 388. The overall cost on minor new works was \$8.638m; and repairs and maintenance \$19.395m, which is a total of \$28.33m.

Mr SMELT: Could you quantify how many outstanding requests or orders for R&M you currently have for urban housing?

Mr EDGINGTON: Given the number of houses, there would be a number of open work orders on any given day. Minor new works as at 31 March total less than 30 days 150 and greater than 30 days 5; repairs and maintenance, the numbers of open orders by region greater than 30 days 235. In total we have a total of 2,923 orders open as at 31 March 2026.

Mr SMELT: Could you advise what the average wait time is for an R&M request to be actioned?

Mr EDGINGTON: Up until 31 March, the average business days to complete repairs and maintenance work orders by region are: Casuarina, four; Darwin, five; Palmerston, four; East Arnhem, seven; Katherine, 51; Tennant Creek, 16; and Alice Springs, 23 days. On average the total days to complete repairs and maintenance is 14 days.

Mr SMELT: We obviously have this massive waiting list, as was identified through those previous questions. Can you explain why only one in four social housing houses are being turned around in that 70-day timeframe? That is the goal in the budget papers.

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to urban public housing dwellings occupied within 70 days of vacancy, in 2025–26 the Northern Territory Government allocated an additional \$17m to address deferred maintenance asset deterioration, the backlog of long-term vacant dwellings across the urban housing portfolio. This funding included \$7m specifically targeted at refurbishing long-term vacant properties to support the return to service.

As at 31 March a total of 228 dwellings have been scoped for repairs, with 120 works completed and a further 104 properties undergoing maintenance. The allocation of these refurbished dwellings is expected to impact the proportion of homes occupied within 70 days, reflecting the extended periods many have remained vacant while awaiting necessary repairs.

I will see if the CEO has anything further to add on that.

Mr LEEMING: Partly it is a statistical thing. We realised last year that this number had been creeping up over many years. Thanks to getting some additional funding, we have pretty much finished implementing a plan to clear some of the backlog of those houses, which is the 228 urban public houses that the minister referred to that had formed a backlog of incomplete maintenance for vacant houses.

We have invested \$17m in getting those houses back onstream. As of 31 March, 104 were back in service with tenants off the waitlist in them. The remaining 120 are well underway to be completed by the end of the financial year.

What that does temporarily to the statistics, because we are bringing back into service long-vacant houses which had not been recorded because they had not gone back into service, that then drives the apparent performance down because we are realising the long backlog. In future years you will see that number look much better because we have cleared that backlog.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide the details of the property that was vacant for the longest period during that reporting period?

Mr EDGINGTON: In Katherine, looking at the longest vacancy record was a property—I do not have the dates for this—but the longest was two years and 10 months.

Mr PAECH: I am asking that question for the reporting period.

Mr LEEMING: That is the latest data we have.

Mr PAECH: And that is as of now?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr PAECH: That is fine, thank you. I had a look on your website and it has not been updated since August of 2025, our homes, our futures, our communities. What is the government's commitment to building or will you build new homes on town camps within this financial year? Or, for the purposes of you, Member for Barkly, Aboriginal living areas.

Mr EDGINGTON: Town camps, also known as the community living areas—local people use different names for those living areas. Essentially most of those town camps have mixed tenure I would say. Some of those town camps come under the remote leasing program so when it comes to building new homes in town camps across the board, decisions concerning programming are made through the joint steering committee. I will check on what program we have in place now but my recollection is that ...

Mr LEEMING: Are you referring to this financial year or next financial year?

Mr PAECH: I am asking for next financial year. I am trying to understand. The last person who built a house in the town camp was me, and I am trying to understand what you are going to do this financial year.

Mr EDGINGTON: What are your trade qualifications?

Mr PAECH: Will you build a house on those town camps?

Mr EDGINGTON: You built one, did you? What are your trade qualifications?

Madam CHAIR: Minister.

Can you direct your question, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: I want to know how many houses the department is going to build on town camps this financial year.

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me make this clear. The decisions for the programs are made by the joint steering committee.

Mr PAECH: You are blaming the joint steering committee ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja can you please direct the questions through the Chair.

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me make this clear. Decisions for programs under the \$4bn Remote Housing Agreement are made through the joint steering committee. I will see if we have the information on hand here, but I am not sure why you would point the finger at the government because, as you know, the joint steering committee is made up of the Northern Territory Government, the Commonwealth Government, the four land councils and Aboriginal Housing NT. We have joint decision-making through the joint steering committee. Let me see if we have the data and if we have not, I am happy to take that on notice for you.

Mr PAECH: What I am trying to understand is your website has not been updated since August. People in remote locations and town camps are asking what they are receiving from this package. Can you give us those numbers of town camps and remote communities because people want to know what is being built and when it is being built?

Mr EDGINGTON: We have the list. I will ask the Chief Executive to outline precisely what the program is for remote housing which includes those leased town camps.

Mr LEEMING: It is, as you will appreciate, with the 73 remote communities and 14 town camps in scope of remote housing builds, it is a long list.

I wonder if that might be best be one that we take on notice?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: We can table the list if that helps?

Mr PAECH: I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr EDGINGTON: We will take that on notice to save time. I know the opposition has a few more questions.

Question on Notice No 5.33

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Minister, could you please provide a breakdown of the number of homes scheduled for construction in the bush and town camps and community living areas?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.33.

Mr SMELT: Do you have any plans to redevelop the Litchfield Court complex in Coconut Grove, given its ageing infrastructure and lack of fit-for-purpose housing?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, we do not have any plans to do anything there. Obviously, we will look at all housing across the Territory when it comes to de-densification. All those options are on the table, but we do not have any immediate plans.

Mr SMELT: Will that will be considered as part of that project with CM&C?

Mr EDGINGTON: All housing across the board will be considered across that de-densification project, but there is no immediate plans in place to change Litchfield Court.

Mr SMELT: In terms of the operation of the Litchfield complex at the moment, previously I believe there was some private security service provided on that particular complex. Can you advise if that is still in operation?

Mr EDGINGTON: Whilst we provide tenancy and property management services, I believe security arrangements are through the Department of Children and Families.

Mr SMELT: It is Children and Families, so Housing is not aware of those arrangements.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is a question for the Minister for Children and Families.

Mr SMELT: There is a \$1m grant listed in the budget for relocating Ozanam House. Can you explain what the funding is for and the timing around that?

Madam CHAIR: I do not believe that sits with the minister for Housing. I believe that sits with the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment. That might be a question for this afternoon.

Mr SMELT: I thought it was under Housing and Community Development.

Mr PAECH: In BP 4, page 13.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is currently being considered as the broader strategy around HAFF funding.

Mr SMELT: Does it sit with the department?

Mr EDGINGTON: That funding allocation, yes.

Mr SMELT: The Ozanam House relocation is part of the broader HAFF. Do we have to wait for the outcome of the HAFF decision?

Mr EDGINGTON: I ask the chief executive to give a bit more detail around that for you.

Mr LEEMING: The money that we have in our budget concerning Ozanam House was part of the broader original budget allocation for its relocation. The re-establishment of those facilities—short, medium and long term—is a Department of Children and Families and Department of Lands, Planning and Environment question. The bit of it that we have was originally envisioned to be about redevelopment of the Westralia Street site, but is currently being considered within the broader question, like the questions you were asking earlier—what funding do we have and what strategies do we have around the Housing Australia Future Fund round 3.

Mr SMELT: Is that for the Westralia site, not for the current Coconut Grove and future site?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is right.

Mr SMELT: During Estimates last week the Treasurer and the Minister for Housing Construction said your government would only manage around 455 homes against the 2025–26 and 2026–27 remote housing target of 540. What conversations have you had with the federal government in relation to the failure to meet these agreed targets?

Mr EDGINGTON: There is an aspirational target, I would say, under the 10-year program of up to 2,700 homes.

Mr PAECH: That is not what you said when you were in opposition.

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to the aspirational target of up to 2,700, at the moment we are on target when it comes to the number of bedrooms being delivered.

Mr SMELT: Is that bedrooms as opposed to homes?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will get the CE to expand a bit further on that for you.

Mr LEEMING: The primary objective of the remote housing package—including the federal funding agreement schedule and the partnership agreement with the four land councils and Aboriginal Housing NT, as well as the Commonwealth Government—is halving overcrowding by 2034. There is an indicative and aspirational up to 2,700 output mentioned in the federal funding agreement schedule. The focus remains on halving overcrowding, which is why we allocate, with the joint steering committee, where the houses will be built based on rates of overcrowding.

One of the things that has happened over the course of the agreement, in our desire and commitment to listen to communities and work in partnership, is that through housing reference groups and other channels, communities have asked us to build larger houses. The 2,700 aspirational target was based on an assumption of 3-bedroom houses. On average we are currently building 3.8-bedroom houses. Whilst the number of houses is lower than what we would need to track over 10 years to the aspirational output target of 2,700, we are within 10% of that annual build rate when you think about bedrooms, which is what counts for overcrowding and which is the objective of the agreement.

I am happy to go into detail about numbers.

Mr SMELT: The agreement relates to houses, not bedrooms. Are we rescoping the agreement to count bedrooms as the indicator?

Mr EDGINGTON: The agreement is about overcrowding. We can talk about homes, 3-bedroom homes, bedrooms and the number of bedrooms per house, but the whole program is designed to reduce overcrowding. If it means building bigger homes, then the aspirational target of 2,700 is on the basis of a 3-bedroom home.

We are working with people living in remote areas. If building includes building larger homes with more bedrooms, that is contributing to the reduction in overcrowding in remote areas.

Mr SMELT: Can you confirm that under the terms of the remote housing agreement, land servicing is to be funded by the Northern Territory Government and not to be taken out of funds specifically to build new houses?

Mr EDGINGTON: Legacy funding for land servicing under previous arrangements has now been fully committed. Delivering new homes under the FFA requires a sustained, reliable and cost-effective pipeline of serviced and developed land.

Our understanding of the agreement, particularly through negotiation implementation, includes the costs necessary to deliver the program's intended housing outcomes in remote communities. This includes land servicing and program management.

Mr SMELT: You flagged that in your opening address. Does that mean the NT portion will not go towards homes? It will go towards land servicing.

Mr EDGINGTON: The agreement is a \$4bn joint funding agreement. It is clear to me that you cannot build homes without land. I am not sure why anyone would think that. Land servicing and program management is part of the deal.

I have had ongoing conversations with the federal minister about that, and I am continuing to have those conversations regarding land servicing and development.

It is one of those things that is under discussion. You cannot build a home without serviced land. That is the current issue.

Mr SMELT: It sounds to me like we will build less homes as a result of that. How much funding will you take out and allocate towards land servicing as opposed to home builds?

Mr EDGINGTON: These are the matters under discussion at the moment. It seems to me that quite clearly the agreement was signed in July 2024. There is still some areas that are being discussed under the agreement. It is quite clear to me that Labor signed this agreement in July 2024. It seems it was more focused on headlines rather than the headworks.

This is just one of the problems that we have come across—Labor signing agreements on the eve of an election. It was all about headlines; it was not about dealing with the real issues which is the headworks ...

Mr PAECH: How much land servicing did Bess Price do? Nothing.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, you are questioning.

Mr EDGINGTON: We are working through that with the federal government. Quite clearly, it is the way the program has always worked. Our focus is on continuing to deliver. If that involves land servicing and program management, of course that needs to come out of the \$4bn.

Mr SMELT: Has any funding for remote housing repairs and maintenance been redirected to public housing in regional centres?

Mr EDGINGTON: No. It depends. As I said before, some of the town camps, for example, come under that remote program, so there are some detail about what comes under that remote program. There has been no funding directed to anything outside of that program.

Mr SMELT: In homeland funding, why have homeland service provider contracts been cut from three years to one year?

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me get the detail on that for you.

The issue with that is that the federal funding agreement runs out on 30 June 2027. When it comes to funding for homelands, with that federal funding agreement expiring in June 2027, at the moment there is no commitment from the federal government to contribute towards homelands beyond that date.

While we are committing our part of the agreement, there is nothing being committed by the Commonwealth. This is important when it comes to establishing agreements with service providers. We need certainty; the Commonwealth has not given us that certainty, therefore we cannot give that certainty to service providers.

I urge the Commonwealth to come to the table and make some decisions when it comes to ongoing funding for homelands. As it stands at the moment, there is no commitment beyond June 2027.

J DAVIS: On behalf of the Member for Mulka in relation to homelands. Written question 197 from 17 February 2026 has not yet been answered. Could you advise what funding has been provided to homelands by the NTG, excluding Commonwealth funding, for the financial years 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25 and what is budgeted for this coming financial year?

Madam CHAIR: I note that questions are for this reporting period. I am not sure the department will be able to answer with all of that data.

Mr EDGINGTON: In answer to the Member for Mulka's question, on average the Northern Territory Government commits \$40m per year to that program.

J DAVIS: What is budgeted for this coming year?

Mr EDGINGTON: The current budget is \$44.860m.

J DAVIS: Second question from the Member for Mulka in relation to homelands funding. Given the enormous increasing cost that homeland communities have experienced in the past five years, particularly in relation to rising fuel and construction costs, will CPI be applied to the 2026–27 homeland funding to ensure the real value of the funding is maintained?

Mr EDGINGTON: This is an ongoing issue we need to continue to look at, but the reality at the moment is that we have increased the revised budget for 2025–26 was \$38.381m. We have now increased that to \$44.86m. There has been about a \$6m increase to take into effect the increasing costs.

J DAVIS: I have a couple more questions from the Member for Mulka.

In the Mulka region, please advise who sits on the housing reference groups for Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwinku, Yirrkala and Gunyangara?

Mr EDGINGTON: We would have to take that on notice. I do not have the lists of membership of the housing reference groups for every community.

Question on Notice No 5.34

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

J DAVIS: In the Mulka region, please advise who sits on the housing reference groups for Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwinku, Yirrkala and Gunyangara?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.34.

J DAVIS: On behalf of the Member Mulka, is the department aware that the current rollout of new subdivisions in remote communities often mixes clans together, rather than previous arrangements that grouped family clans together in one area. This creates ongoing tensions within communities. What is being done to address these concerns?

Mr EDGINGTON: The short answer is that this is why we have housing reference groups to work through the establishment of subdivisions. Regarding the allocation of housing in communities, our tenancy staff visit the communities and meet with the housing reference group to talk through these very issues. Tenancy allocation and planning is a shared decision-making arrangement. We are working directly with the housing reference groups to work through those issues, as they are best-placed to understand the issues you raised because they are in the community. We are listening and working with the housing reference groups to ensure we do our best to get that right.

J DAVIS: What standard does NT Housing use to determine whether a public housing dwelling is safe and habitable in extreme heat conditions?

Mr EDGINGTON: All new housing meets the National Construction Code requirements, which is a minimum five-star energy rating. In 2025–26 new builds averaged 6.9-star, with some exceeding 8.8-star in tropical regions. The department is improving thermal comfort through targeted air conditioner upgrades, replacements and ongoing maintenance. All new housing builds meet the National Construction Code requirements with a minimum five-star energy rating.

J DAVIS: Is the department conducting any audits on existing housing in relation to heat resilience?

Mr EDGINGTON: At the moment there is a significant number of ageing stock across the Northern Territory, both urban and remote. Some things that we are targeting are air conditioner upgrades, replacements and

ongoing maintenance. For example, in Central Australia and the Barkly we have allocated \$6.2m for 2026–27 for air conditioning upgrades. This funding will support installation of new and replacement units alongside ongoing servicing through maintenance programs.

J DAVIS: What proportion of the public housing portfolio is considered vulnerable to future climate risk, including heat—we have heard a lot about what has happened over that period of time—extreme heat, flooding, cyclones and sea level rises.

Mr EDGINGTON: We have not done that assessment.

J DAVIS: How is the department ensuring that housing built today remains fit for purpose over the next 30 years.

Mr EDGINGTON: As I said before, all new housing is built to the national construction code requirements. All new builds being delivered under the housing programs are under the national construction code requirements, which is a minimum five-star rating. Without going into detail again, 2025–26 there were new builds that averaged 6.9 stars, for some exceeding 8.8 stars in tropical areas. Some of the future initiatives expected will include improved insulation, thermal coating to ruse and walls and also broader energy efficiency upgrades.

J DAVIS: One clarification—I might have missed it, in terms of the Member for Mulka's question about homelands funding, I think you said 44 into the next ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, that is right.

J DAVIS: What was it for this most recent year?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think it was \$38m, but I can get that detail. I think I said that the increase was from \$38m to \$44m, roughly.

Mr SMELT: For Indigenous Essential Services, what is it currently costing to run diesel-dependent power to remote communities?

Mr EDGINGTON: We do not have that information. It is more a question for the Power and Water Corporation that maintains those fuel levels in the ...

Mr PAECH: In the GOCs.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is a lot of fluctuation in diesel cost. Power and Water may be able to put a figure on how much it has cost to 31 March, but through general government we want to make sure that fuel stocks are up as high as they possibly can be in remote areas. Costs will range quite broadly.

Mr SMELT: Do you have a number?

Mr EDGINGTON: We do not have an actual cost. That would be a matter for Power and Water.

Mr SMELT: In terms of local government, can you point to funding in the budget to meet your election commitment around de-amalgamating councils?

Mr EDGINGTON: Regarding de-amalgamation, I said in my opening statement, we are having substantial conversations. I quoted in my opening statement that as of 24 April 2026 we have engaged with roughly 210 traditional owners, residents and community members along with the Barkly Aboriginal...

Mr SMELT: Chair, on relevance, I am asking about funding not consultation.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is particularly relevant to your question because what I am getting at is that we are at the consultation stage, and if you are looking for money in the budget you are totally on the wrong track, because what I said is that we are consulting with people. When it comes to the crunch time if the people in those areas want to make changes—because we are working together with people, it is not being forced upon people, it is not the same as 1 July 2008 when the Labor government scrapped every local community government council. This is a different process. We do not do what Labor did. We are out there talking to people about what it looks like when it comes to real local decision-making in communities. We are having those conversations with communities about the best pathway forward for local people living in those

communities. Over the last 18 years they have become disenfranchised by a Labor decision on 1 July 2008 to scrap those local community councils.

Mr PAECH: That you mob kept when you were in government ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja!

Mr EDGINGTON: We are getting out and talking to people, working through the issues that Labor left behind. When we get to the stage of making change, I will be the first one to let you know what the budget is.

Mr KERLE: This is on the de-amalgamation of councils, a question from the Member for Fong Lim. Can you update the residents of Northcrest on where we are at with the incorporation of Northcrest into a local government area?

Mr EDGINGTON: The answer to Northcrest is that we have written to three councils, being the City of Darwin, the City of Palmerston and the Litchfield Council. The department has received submissions from all three. That information is currently being collated by the department. Once that information comes to my office, I will be making a final decision on whether Northcrest should be incorporated into a council area.

Mr SMELT: In terms of those consultations that you were outlining before, can you give us any outcomes or feedback from those consultations you have had to date?

Mr EDGINGTON: The feedback is that people want stronger representation and better service delivery, and they are considering what de-amalgamation options will be best suited for their community. The feedback that I receive every time I go there, including feedback given to the department, is that there are people who are still furious with the Labor decision on 1 July 2008 to scrap community government councils in the communities. People feel that they can no longer participate in decisions in their communities. They feel that services have been taken away from their communities. They no longer feel that they can participate in decision-making at the community level in their communities. Services have disappeared, jobs have disappeared and local decision-making has disappeared. As I always say, what really happened on 1 July 2008 was that you scrapped—your team, your Labor team ...

Mr SMELT: It was not me ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Chair!

Madam CHAIR: Everybody, relax.

Mr EDGINGTON: Every option for local leadership in those communities ...

Mr PAECH: Bess Price did not do any better.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja!

Mr EDGINGTON: What disappeared on 1 July 2008 was that leadership structure in every community. The Labor government took that away. These are the things that people in the bush are talking about, and they have been talking about it for the last 18 years. That is why we are taking action.

Mr SMELT: What is the action you are going to take out of that consultation?

Mr EDGINGTON: We are consulting with people. I do not know how many times I must remind you. We are working with the people to look at a pathway forward.

Mr SMELT: Have you costed the impact of the removal of power subsidies on local councils?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is a question for Treasury or Jacana.

Mr SMELT: Have you received feedback from the local government sector and councils about the impact of that change?

Mr EDGINGTON: There has been some feedback provided. I was recently at a LGANT meeting and I believe Treasury addressed the LGANT meeting on that day.

Mr SMELT: Are you aware that some councils might have that subsidy reinstated or continued and some will not?

Mr EDGINGTON: Sorry; what subsidy reinstatement?

Mr SMELT: That power subsidy. I believe some councils will retain the power subsidy and some will not.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am aware that the Treasurer has written to some councils to assist in providing or has offered to provide some grants to assist in managing those power increases.

Mr SMELT: Can you outline what criteria were used to evaluate which council would get that and which ones would not?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is a matter for Treasury.

Mr SMELT: Can you explain what the biggest power price rise is out of all the councils?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is a matter for Treasury.

Mr SMELT: Can you explain what the biggest power price rise is out of all the councils?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not have that information. That is a question you should have asked Treasury.

Mr SMELT: As Local Government minister, you have not received that feedback or information from the Treasurer?

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me check.

Treasury has provided information. It recently wrote to those councils affected, offering grants to assist to manage those increases. I do not have that information in front of me.

Mr PAECH: You are talking about de-amalgamation, and you have talked about empowering the bush. Are they the same thing, or are they two separate things? If so, how much of the budget has been allocated to your project empowering the bush?

Mr EDGINGTON: I have answered that question.

Mr PAECH: Well, you have not. Do you want to answer it again?

Mr EDGINGTON: I have answered the question. I have told you ...

Mr PAECH: Clarification—can you confirm ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, let him talk.

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me ...

Mr PAECH: ... is empowering the bush ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Let me read this once more.

Mr PAECH: ... de-amalgamating?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, if you keep talking over people in here, I will put you on a warning.

Mr PAECH: Well, I was not; the room was quiet.

Madam CHAIR: You were.

Mr PAECH: Who was talking?

Madam CHAIR: If I recall—and I can see clearly—your sign does not say ‘Chair’, mine does. Please stop talking directly to the minister and come through the Chair.

Mr PAECH: I did not hear you talking.

Madam CHAIR: I think you have good hearing, so you heard me speaking.

Mr PAECH: Let me talk then.

Madam CHAIR: Please direct your questions. You have already asked a question; let the minister answer.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Chair!

Madam CHAIR: At least let the minister answer the question.

Mr PAECH: He is looking at me, so I am assuming he is ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, let the minister answer.

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to empowering the bush, I said in my opening statement this is about shifting from top-down decision-making to a stronger local voice. Stronger local governments are more place-based developments. I suppose there are a number of aspects to empowering the bush.

Through our Community Development role and through Local Government, the main focus at the moment is getting out there and talking to people. I have made that point a number of times. We are not forcing anything on anybody. That is what Labor does. It did that on the 1 July 2008 and scrapped every community government council. It forced people into shire councils then ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Chair! I have a particular question. I want to know how many people in the department are in the empowering the bush division to do this work the minister is talking about.

Mr EDGINGTON: This is a new question.

Mr PAECH: I am being interrupted.

Mr EDGINGTON: Thank you for the new question.

Mr PAECH: I am being interrupted again.

Madam CHAIR: This is a new line of questioning. That was not the question you ...

Mr PAECH: It is empowering the bush. I wanted to know how many people are in the division.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, that was a new line of questioning. He was answering the previous one. You raised a point of order about something you had not asked. Please ...

Mr PAECH: I am making a point of order because I am not interested in what happened in 2008. We were all here; we all know what happened.

Madam CHAIR: It does not matter; he is answering the question. Member for Gwoja, let the minister finish your first initial question please.

Mr EDGINGTON: Empowering the bush, as I said, goes hand-in-hand with community development. Overall, in the department, I think there is roughly about 100 people working on community development.

When it comes to empowering the bush, it could involve de-amalgamation. There are some people who want to see new local government councils established in their communities.

We also have 20 existing LDMs—local decision-making. This is something that, for some reason, the opposition has been telling people we scrapped these 20 local decision-making agreements. I put on the record that we have not scrapped anything. There are 20 local decision-making agreements. Despite what Labor says, they have not been scrapped. We are working through the local decision-making agreements. This is part of empowering the bush.

Whether it is de-amalgamation, working through LDMs, working through the NTRAI money of \$842m over six years, there is a range of remote money that is we are waiting for from the federal government. Empowering the bush is a big agenda. There are roughly about 100 people working on it. We will continue to engage with people because there are some communities that want to see their local government council return. There are communities that have never had a local government council such as Canteen Creek in my electorate.

They want to improve the level of services, increase community development in their region and services to come back to their community that were taken away some time ago. That might involve tenancy, housing repairs and maintenance or sports and recreational programs; there is a whole range of services that communities want to deliver locally, rather than having a drive-in, drive-out service which has become the result of scrapping community government councils in July 2008. It is a broad program, and we will continue to engage with people living in the bush.

Mr PAECH: It is disappointing you could not empower the bush when you were the mayor. Can you confirm if the LDMs will have the opportunity to be renewed or, upon their contract agreement expiry, is that it? Are they just then completed?

Mr EDGINGTON: Firstly, when I was the mayor, I empowered the bush.

Mr PAECH: That is not what they have said.

Mr EDGINGTON: When I was the mayor we established a Barkly Regional Deal. I know you...

Mr PAECH: The one you criticised?

Mr EDGINGTON: ...have got a very short memory, but there are things that you conveniently forget.

Mr PAECH: Same with you.

Mr EDGINGTON: Empowering the bush in the Barkly was an extremely big process. It is an agreement which is signed by three tiers of government: the local government; NT Government; and the Commonwealth Government. So yes, I disagree with you on that; we empowered the bush through the Barkly Regional Deal, which is a social, economic and cultural place-based community agreement—something that Labor never did. In fact, we had to drag Labor kicking and screaming to the table ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Chair! Standing Order 110; this was about if LDMs can be renewed or, once they expire ...

Mr EDGINGTON: You asked the question about the ...

Mr PAECH: I am just clarifying because you have not answered that part of the question.

Mr EDGINGTON: You told me that I did not empower the bush.

Mr PAECH: Well, I am just asking you ...

Madam CHAIR: I will ask everybody to take a step back for a minute. Member for Gwoja, you are jumping from question to question.

Mr PAECH: No, it is the same question.

Madam CHAIR: You ask a question and then you come back with a standing order about another question.

Mr PAECH: Yes, but I am just getting a relevance point on this ...

Madam CHAIR: Can you be quiet for a second? You are jumping from one to another; keep your line of questioning. Allow the minister to answer, then come back and ask another question. Do not jump in with points of order, and direct your questions through the Chair.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Chair! That was the actual part; there were two parts. The first part was about the mayor and then the second part was actually about if the government will enable the renewal for local decision-making agreements, or if they will simply expire. I am asking for the question ...

Madam CHAIR: I do not know about anyone else, but I did not hear that second part.

Mr PAECH: Well then you need to check the *Hansard*.

Madam CHAIR: Minster, the floor is yours for the next two minutes.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am answering the question about the allegation that I did not empower the bush. I have just made it clear that I did my bit when I was there. Sadly, as I said, Labor was dragged to the table kicking and screaming. Yes, Labor eventually put some money on the table.

In regard to the local decision-making agreements, Groote has already transitioned to a regional council—the Groote Archipelago Regional Council. We have delivered that; our government delivered the new regional council. That local decision-making agreement is being worked on, and I must say that there is probably a number of other local decision making—I think seven of those communities have already told us that their preference would be to see a de-amalgamation of councils. Through consultation, we are working through all of those.

Conversations about those local decision-making agreements are ongoing. We are delivering them.

Mr PAECH: Through the Chair ...

Madam CHAIR: It is 3 pm, so we will take a break now for 30 minutes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: At 3 pm we finish.

Madam CHAIR: Oh—it is the end of Housing. Yes, sorry.

Mr SMELT: We only have 30 minutes left, Chair.

Madam CHAIR: It is 3 pm. We are out of time.

Mr KERLE: In relation to an earlier line of questioning, can I have them take a question on notice?

Mr PAECH: You can just put it on notice.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, you can just put it on notice. You do not need to do it through this process.

I will wind up. That concludes our hearing today for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Local Development. On behalf of the committee, I thank you and the agency officers who attended to provide advice to the minster.

We will take a short break and resume at 3.30 pm with questions for the Minister of Lands, Planning and Environment.

Minister, would you like to say anything from your department's perspective?

Mr EDGINGTON: Gee, time flies when you are having fun, doesn't it? In closing, I really want to put on the record a thanks to the team from Housing, Local Government and Community Development. The work that has gone underway to prepare for today's Estimates has been extraordinary. All of the staff working on the front line have contributed to where we are today, so thank you to every staff member who has contributed. Keep up the good work out there.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER BURGOYNE'S PORTFOLIOS
LANDS, PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

Madam CHAIR: I welcome the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment and Minister for Water Resources to today's hearings and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mr BURGOYNE: I am here today to talk about the important work of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment and inform you of some of the important activities the department has undertaken over the past year in support. I am joined by Joanne Townsend, Chief Executive Officer; Ms Leah Clifford, Deputy Chief Executive Officer; Ms Desiree Ng, Chief Financial Officer; and members of the executive leadership team.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 20 minutes. I will then call for questions relating to the statement.

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

Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. If you reach 15 minutes, I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Mr BURGOYNE: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment plays a critical role in supporting this government's priority to rebuild the Territory economy and ensure the Territory is positioned as the best place to do business. This is through ensuring that the regulatory frameworks in place support fast and streamlined approval processes.

The department has undertaken a significant level of reform across all its regulatory responsibilities, and has been tasked with implementing 31 of the 70 recommendations of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce's Saying 'Yes' to Business final report. As at today 22 of the recommendations have been completed, with a further eight to be completed over the next month and one which was a tranche 2 recommendation to be completed by June next year.

Some of the key reforms undertaken by the department over the past 12 months include improvements to the planning system to speed up approval timeframes such as:

- simplifying regulatory processes and removing unnecessary public notification and consultation for low-risk activities
- exempting some planning and subdivision activities from disproportionate regulatory processes
- increasing the use of delegations, allowing more flexibility in how regulations are applied, especially in relation to housing supply
- reduced approval requirements for low-risk developments, including for residential, commercial, industrial and community uses
- a review of an existing planning requirements to identify opportunities to enable infill development in low-density zones.

In the building space we have:

- increased the term of registration for building practitioners from two to four years
- reduced regulatory barriers for change of use developments to help facilitate repurposing existing buildings for developments such as student accommodation
- increased oversight of the Fidelity Fund NT
- increased the minimum construction value triggering a Fidelity Fund certificate from \$12,000 to \$25,000.

Recently I made the decision to defer adoption of the National Construction Code (NCC 2025) in the Northern Territory. Instead, the NT continues to apply the NCC 2022, including existing variations for energy efficiency requirements. I made this decision after listening to concerns that builders are already facing challenges in their industry such as rising fuel, tight project margins and supply chain disruptions. Whilst the minimum standard in the NT is the NCC 2022, landowners and developers can apply the provisions of the NCC 2025 for their building projects where they want to.

Under the *Water Act 1992*, efficiencies have been delivered through streamlined water renewal processes, improved water trading provisions to provide greater flexibility and modernised public consultation practices. We have reduced the minimum extraction requirement under the recovery of unused water entitlement policy from 90% to 70%, simplified the water licencing regime into two tiers from three and reviewed the guidance and application processes.

In October 2025 we revised risk criteria and standard conditions for mining exploration activities, and extractive operations took effect. The amendments address feedback received on the operation of the risk criteria and standing conditions within the environmental mining licensing scheme.

The department's onshore gas unit has been progressing in new environmental code of practice to replace the current code of practice for onshore petroleum activities in the NT, which will be supported by new regulations. This remove duplication, improve clarity, create administrative efficiencies and deliver an outcome focus risk framework that is fit for purpose as the onshore gas industry moves into production phase.

More recently, amendments to the *Heritage Act* were made to improve clarity, procedural fairness, governance arrangements and confidence in the Northern Territory's heritage system. Together these reforms ensure that the Territory is the most attractive place to do business.

The department has delivered a number of significant projects throughout the year. Of note, there is the finalisation of the Farrar West land release. On 19 December 2025 the Northern Territory Government entered into the Farrar West development agreement with the Larrakia Development Corporation, completing a key element of the Kenbi land claim into title zone compensation package. The corporation is proposing to develop the land for residential purposes comprising 222 single dwelling lots, five commercial lots, six group housing lots and one community purpose lot, with development planned to be delivered in stages over about eight years.

Including the Larrakia Development Corporation development agreement Crown land estate is currently managing 12 development agreements with developers for the subdivision release of residential and industrial land across the Territory. These include residential developments for Zuccoli stages 2, 3, 4 and 5; Northcrest; Bayview; Muirhead; Holtze, recently named Asche; Farrar West; Kilgariff stage 2; Katherine East; and industrial developments in Humpty Doo and Berrimah.

Significant work has been progressed on the development of the St Mary's site in Alice Springs to address housing supply and deliver social housing in the region. This includes site survey of sacred trees and preliminary environmental site investigations as well as undertaking an assessment under the *Heritage Act*, resulting in a permanent declaration of part of the St Mary's site in May this year. This enables the delivery of social and affordable housing while ensuring the site's significant heritage values are recognised and protected. The department will continue to work with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, Housing, Local Government and Community Development and with Children and Families to deliver the St Mary's project.

The NT is well placed to meet the demand for residential land now and into the future with sufficient development regarding land in the hands of developers to respond to market conditions and to maintain a continued supply of titled lots. The Northern Territory Government continues to invest in enabling infrastructure, including \$72m through the land development program to support Crown land releases and unlock development across the Territory. Total land in the hands of developers in the Northern Territory has the potential to deliver more than 4,000 lots. As at 31 March 2026 there were 305 titled lots ready for the construction of new homes and a further 300 untitled lots that are selling off the plan.

The department is firmly focused on keeping pace with demand and ensuring it supports the Territory's growth agenda. We are committed to continuing this momentum, ensuring that more Territorians can access land sooner, build homes faster and contribute to a stronger Territory growing economy. This is already being demonstrated in performance, with a record number of 133 titles issued in a single day in March, highlighting the system's capacity to respond at scale.

It is recognised that we need to do more than work faster. The department, recognising the likely increased demand for titling, has been working closely with industry to identify barriers and streamline the pathway to bringing serviced land to market, particularly titling.

With respect to industrial land availability the greater Darwin area has significant supply of industrial land across Crown land developments, private developments as well as through the Land Development Corporation, with lots currently available for purchase or lease. New industrial land supply in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs is currently limited, with the department actively planning future releases to support regional growth and long-term demand. In Budget 2026–27 the department secured funding for \$4m over the next two years to progress new industrial and residential land supply in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek and continues to work with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure to support funding for the Katherine Logistics and Agribusiness Hub—otherwise known as the KLAH—through the \$440m Commonwealth Regional Logistics Hub program.

After the controversy of the construction of the Crowley Australia fuel tanks at East Arm, without a building permit under the former Labor government, in September 2025, I provided an exemption under the *Building Act* for the structure of the tanks. This exemption was supported following the provision of a compliance statement, signed by a registered structural engineer that the tanks had been designed and constructed in accordance with the NCC and relevant standards. These tanks have been built to withstand category 4 cyclones which meets the standards set by the NCC.

The building exemption determines that an occupancy certificate is not required for building works on the site which effectively resolves the matter of the building permit for the construction. Once again, it is an historical issue that we have had to fix. The project is also subject to regulation under an environment approval under the *Environment Protection Act 2019* and approvals under the work health and safety legislation for operation of a major hazard facility. To date, seven of the 11 tanks have been filled.

Early this year, I approved the first ever statutory weed management plan for buffel grass which came into effect on 1 May 2026. The plan's focus is on managing buffel in areas of high cultural and biodiversity significance and protecting our priority assets from its impacts, including our national parks and reserves and Indigenous protected areas.

It focuses on reducing further spread of buffel grass and managing its impacts on significant cultural and environmental values, through meaningful actions whilst allowing for the continued use of buffel grass by the pastoral industry.

Gamba grass remains a highly invasive species. It creates high fuel loads and poses a significant risk to Top End communities. The government continues to invest in community-based programs, partnerships with local government and research to support long-term landscape-scale control options.

Of particular note is the Gamba Action Program supporting landholders to manage gamba grass during the control season—this is classed as from December to May—while providing technical advice, free herbicide and spray equipment, loans in the Darwin and Katherine regions, with 3,160 people participating in the program this year.

The Gamba Litchfield Neighbours Project is implementing a coordinated gamba grass management program in the Coomalie region complementing management activities occurring within Litchfield National Park. The government is committing \$150,000 per annum for three years to this project. Support is also being provided for CSIRO research into biological control agents for gamba grass aimed at developing effective landscape-scale biocontrol solutions.

Last year in estimates, I committed to developing a climate-resilience plan which I am pleased to announce is being released in the next couple of weeks. The plan sets out the NT Government's priorities and actions that it will take to promote the Territory's role in the energy transition, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen community resilience. The five key priorities are delivering a secure and reliable energy transition for the Territory and Australia.

I confirm for the committee, the climate resilience plan has been released as of today. It focuses on delivering a secure and reliable energy transition for the Territory and Australia, supporting new and existing investment in emissions reduction and promoting emissions abatement and offset opportunities, managing climate risk to Territory infrastructure and services and building capacity for climate-resilience across the Territory. It outlines actions government agencies will take to manage emissions, address key climate-related risks and

build climate adaptation-related capacity. The plan ensures a pragmatic and coherent approach that aligns with the Territory's development perspective and unique emissions profile.

The Northern Territory has and will continue to experience the impacts of a changing climate. We need to build community and industry resilience by addressing key risks to infrastructure and essential services, undertaking long-term planning and supporting the community to prepare for and respond to climate change.

Building resilience and undertaking targeted climate adaptation are essential for growing the economy and maintaining the Territory lifestyle. The NT Government is focused on rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle while working with the Australian Government on the national target of net zero by 2050. This plan presents a practical and proportionate response to climate change that reflects the Northern Territory's circumstances.

On 3 October 2025 the NT Government passed legislation to expand and simplify the container deposit scheme (CDS) to include more beverage containers from 1 July 2026. From next month Territorians will be able to return a broader range of containers, including plain milk containers and wine and spirit bottles. This will help to increase container redemptions and recycling, particularly in regional and remote areas, and drive the transition to a circular economy. Collection options continue to increase in 2025–26 with the commencement of a mobile depot on Tiwi Islands and depots on Groote Eylandt. The container deposit scheme continues to be a highly successful program with the redemption rate for 2024–25 at 89%, up from 83% the previous year.

A project very dear to my heart is Operation: Don't be a dumper, which is running in Alice Springs and has been highly successful with its focus on behaviour change for improved environmental outcomes. This year the program targeted its efforts on the prevention and deterrence of illegal dumping, via the implementation of a covert camera surveillance campaign which resulted in 35 cases of illegal dumping detected. These were addressed through various regulatory responses, ranging from educational letters to directions and penalty infringement notices being issued, with nine cases still under investigation. We were out on the ground recently with the department, cleaning up an area that unfortunately had illegal dumping. We continue to work in this space.

Having undertaken the reforms to cut red tape and improve approval timeframes, the department has got on with doing business. For the nine months to March 2026, the planning team processed about 460 applications under the *Planning Act 1999* and is on track to process over 600 applications for the year, about 15% up on last year.

As of 31 March 2026 a total of 6,272 building approvals have been issued, which is a 17% increase on the same time last year. This includes issuing a building and occupancy and planning only permits.

The mining division granted 38 new licences and a further 10 variations under the new mining regime, with 92% completed within statutory timeframes. The division also completed 50 inspections across 43 mining sites.

Over the same time the water resources division processed 84 water extraction licences, and 90 licence inspections have been undertaken, with the division on track to meet its target of 128 for the year.

The NT EPA considered six new referrals for environmental assessment, including development proposals for various industries, including agriculture, oil and gas, renewable energy, utilities and services, mining and marine dredging, taking the number of projects under various stages of assessment by the environmental assessment team to 16.

Over the nine-month reporting period the environmental regulation team responded to 510 pollution reports received. The most common of those were noise, and illegal dumping made up 15% and water 13%.

The government's Release of Crown Land Policy provides for eligible community groups, including sporting, cultural and religious groups, to apply for a lease over Crown land at nil or reduced costs. We continue to work with those groups to ensure that we are progressing all that work.

The department's flora and fauna division has undertaken a range of activities throughout the year, supporting the Territory's unique biodiversity. The division is currently undertaking a review of the classification of wildlife to update the conservation status of the NT's plant and animal species.

The flora and fauna division also led the Commonwealth-funded \$4.2m MacDonnell Ranges Priority Places Project during 2024–25 and 2025–26 which is delivering improvements in habitat conditions for a range of threatened species through feral cat and herbivore control, strategic fire management and targeted buffel grass removal.

It is also undertaking research and development for new detection methods and improved surveillance monitoring for crocodiles in collaboration with the Department of Tourism and Hospitality to support the government's restoring the Territory lifestyle commitment.

We have also dealt with feral camels over the previous year.

Through the National Water Grid Fund we are continuing to secure funding for projects. In the past we had \$38.4m which includes funding to upgrade water networks in Galiwinku and Gove. The NT Government has been highly successful in the past with the National Water Grid funding, but I can talk a little more about that later on, I am sure.

Madam CHAIR: You have about 30 seconds, minister.

Mr BURGOYNE: To finalise, I am proud of the work the department has done in delivering on the government's commitment of ensuring the Territory is the best place to do business and acknowledge the role of the department plays in rebuilding the Territory's economy.

I take this opportunity to thank the department for its work over the past year and look forward to working with it further. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these highlights in more detail with the Estimates Committee today.

Madam CHAIR: I issue a quick reminder for all of our committee members that we will be respectful during our line of questioning, make sure we direct all questions through the Chair to the minister, allow the minister time to respond, do not jump in, do not intervene and be respectful.

Are there any questions relating to the opening statement?

Mr SMELT: There is just \$2m of new funding in the budget to support new industrial and residential land releases in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. Can you say where this land will be released and will affordable housing options be part of that?

Mr BURGOYNE: As part of the \$2m announced, there will be further land studies, especially on that industrial land in Alice Springs. The biggest issue we have seen over a long period of time is the suitability of land. Whenever you put down an industrial complex, you want to make sure that anything that could leach from that industrial complex such as oils or other particulates, do not end up in the underground water we rely on in Central Australia.

There has been a lot of land studies done over a long period of time. There are a number of different sites that have been identified. I do not want to go into the particulars—I can if I want, there you go! Thank you, Chief Executive.

In regard to Tennant Creek, there are 12 existing Crown land residential lots which includes Peko Road. This is already an industrial area that has been developed and we are looking at expanding that.

The next stage of Peko Road is subject to an ILUA, so a lot of the time when we are working with Lands and Planning and Environment department, we are also working with local traditional owners to be able to make sure there are land agreements in place to unlock that land. A lot of that is about extinguishing native title.

There are two undeveloped Crown land lots with native title extinguished, 50 lots at McDonald Road and Irvine Street could support more release as well. Is there anything further to that question, Member for Nightcliff, that I have not touched on?

Mr SMELT: To clarify, it is all industrial land, not residential?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes. In Tennant Creek we are looking at how we can unlock residential land as well. There are currently a subdivision in Tennant Creek called Chittock Crescent—I always pronounce that wrong when I say it; you have to be careful. Half of that has been developed and the other half is still subject to a native title agreement. There is another block of land nearby that does not have native title restraints. We are looking

at how we can enable that for residential development, acknowledging that there is a large mine about to get under way in Tennant Creek and there is demand for residential land in that area.

Mr SMELT: Indeed. As you would know, in Alice Springs demand for housing is extreme as well. It is just industrial land for Alice Springs and a small residential development for Tennant Creek?

Mr BURGOYNE: In Alice Springs, the Kilgariff Estate will continue to be developed. That has a provision for many more lots in future. I cannot remember whether it is Stage 2B or Stage 3 that has just been completed and the lots titled. I believe that was another 36 lots. We continue to supply residential land to the market while always having one eye on the future as the need for additional land.

Mr SMELT: With that \$2m of new funding, can you tell us how many additional houses will be released as part of that ?

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to exact numbers, what we are looking to do is ensure that any land that needs to be made accessible—whether it be through native title discussions, land surveys as to the suitability of land that can occur—can progress to developing that land, whether it be for residential or industrial.

No, I cannot take exactly how many houses will be build on each individual block. It will all depend on the size of the lots, what is deemed to be most fit for purpose and what the market is demanding at the time. We are looking to ensure that we continue the supply of land into the future, as well as industrial land which is so important in those regional areas where it has been lacking for quite a number of years.

Mr SMELT: Do you believe that this level of investment is adequate at \$2m, considering the scale of the housing need we currently have?

Mr BURGOYNE: I think we are discussing two different things.

The requirement of additional land for housing is always important. In Tennant Creek we acknowledge that, and we are now looking at additional options as well as the existing developments, some of which have an added amount of time already over them. We know that there is an area of land in Tennant Creek we can continue to develop once that native title is resolved. We appreciate that sometimes it takes longer than what we would like to resolve those issues around extinguishing native title.

In the meantime what our government and I have done through the department is to ensure that there is a block of land that is non-restricted as far as native title is concerned that can be developed. We are looking at the land options for that now, which is exciting because I cannot remember the last time Tennant Creek would have had 20 or 30 lots available to be developed. That is what we are looking at with one of those blocks in Tennant Creek.

In Alice Springs there is a huge area of land at Kilgariff Estate that can continue to be developed over stages as land is required. We always have one eye to the future. Katherine is the same, with Katherine East. In Darwin we have myriad subdivisions that are either being supported by government or are private and which continue to see land developed for residential use.

It is important that the land is not just available but also we support people to build homes. Through our first home grants we are seeing a strong uptake, especially in Darwin. We are trying other things to ensure that there is further uptake in some of the regions where the uptake has been slow.

Mr SMELT: In terms of the development for Tennant Creek, I understand that the native title process can take time and can be unpredictable, but what is your aspirational timeline for getting those lots to market?

Mr BURGOYNE: Once again, Chittock Street is where the second stage is restricted through unresolved native title. The other block we are looking at developing in Tennant Creek is unrestricted by native title. That will purely be—I would like to see it happen in the next 18 months, but it will all be about how quickly we can get the services into the block because it is an unserviced block of land. This what really takes the time—servicing the lots and starting to actually work on a plan for that area to be developed. It is not just as simple as clicking our fingers; there will need to be work that is done. We are looking at what we can do, acknowledging the need for residential land, especially in Tennant Creek where there is limited supply.

I believe there are six vacant lots in Tennant Creek. The department does modelling on how many years that six lots will enable. I always say to the department that if we had someone come in to tomorrow, a miner or a large investor wanting to buy up all those lots, I want to have more ready to go. I would rather have vacant

land sitting there ready to go than someone coming to town and not being able to develop as many houses as they would like.

Mr SMELT: Thanks, minister; that is where I was going to go next. Can you tell us about any modelling that you have done about the number of housing lots required for key workers in Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Darwin, given the number of new major projects coming online with onshore gas, SunCable, Newmont, Arafura Rare Earths and the like? Can you talk to that?

Mr BURGOYNE: In Tennant Creek, as I said, I believe there are about six lots available. At the uptake of about three a year, they deem that to be ...

Mr SMELT: Two years' worth.

Mr BURGOYNE: I will just check those numbers I have provided. I am glad I remembered that. Tennant Creek has six low-density residential lots available for sale. The current land supply supports three years of growth under the baseline scenario. Obviously there are different baseline scenarios. I have used three as an example, which is probably more the median uptake, but we always want additional land brought to market.

There are 36 residential lots that have been titled in Alice Springs. There are currently 65 titled lots available in Kilgariff. That has been delivered by the Land Development Corporation. I stress that I believe a number of those have been taken up, but there are 36 residential lots that have been titled which are all vacant and all ready to be taken up. The current land supply in Alice Springs supports over five years of growth under the baseline scenario and just two years under the high-growth scenario.

This is what the Department does; they model different growth scenarios, how long the land we are bringing to market will last and—as someone who was formerly an electrician and building those homes—I want to see a higher growth scenario. This is why, when it takes a couple years to bring land to market, we always need to have an eye on the future. That is why our government is investing that additional funding and looking at further developments and stages across the Territory.

Mr SMELT: And for Darwin?

Mr BURGOYNE: At the end of March 2026, Greater Darwin had 181 title residential lots on the market with 137 under contract. Approximately 300 untitled residential lots were available—off the plan—for sale. I know this to be true, especially out at Holtze—or the more recent suburb of Asche—where people are buying those lots off the plan before they have actually been developed and titled. It is really good to see people taking that up.

In 2025–2026, 298 urban lots have been titled. There is land with the potential for more than 3,900 lots in the hands of developers, which is 13.5 years of supply at baseline growth, with an average of 292 single dwelling lots per year. You could support just under five years of land supply at peak production in a high-growth scenario; that is an average of 835 single dwelling lots per year. That gives you an idea of the modelling that the department has done and how we are working to ensure that we are always keeping up with that demand.

Mr SMELT: If a new project rocked up in Tennant Creek tomorrow, that would obviously be wiped out—the available land there—but even with our current population and massive issues we have around rental and housing affordability, how do those scenarios play into the fact that we are already a long way behind in terms of access for affordable housing?

Mr BURGOYNE: I think what those numbers show is that the land is there and available. What we need to be able to support people doing is to build those new homes. Land availability is one issue as it relates to housing prices and availability of rentals, but we really need to ensure those homes are being built. I cannot stress enough that when we look at the figures over the period of time as it related to actual new home approval; our government continues to deliver better year on year results than previously. That is something that we are really proud of.

The \$50,000 first home building grant is there and is encouraging more people to build more housing, which is then freeing up older stock for other people to either get into the market or for people to rent out. We need to increase the supply of housing across the Territory. Land release is a part of that, and actually getting people to build those homes is another part.

Mr SMELT: I completely agree in having the land availability—but in terms of the grant, I think the Treasurer said that there was only one HomeGrown Grant awarded for Alice Springs. What other strategies or levers are you going to pull if that is not working to get the land release under control as you are suggesting?

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to Alice Springs specifically, because you mentioned the one new home that had been delivered, there has been a decision made by Land Development Corporation—which they can speak to later when they come on—where they actually are working with builders in Alice Springs to deliver new homes.

One of the biggest things that builders always raise as an issue is that when you have one house that you are building, you are making 10%, 15% or 20% on that one house. There is a lot of backwards and forwards with customers relating to the build of that house and unfortunately, as humans tend to do, they occasionally change their mind about tiles or other things. That has been a big issue for builders; essentially making sure that they can keep their profit margins building one house at a time.

What Land Development Corporation has sought to do is to actually engage with builders directly and build a number of homes which will then be sold under the first home building scheme because they are new homes. That will really kickstart that property market in that area. There are also a lot of options we can look to in the Top End—in Darwin—and that infill development is something that groups have raised with us; that it is one way to increase the availability of homes utilising existing lands.

I am sure you are very much aware—in your beautiful leafy-green suburb of Nightcliff—some people have chosen to retain those very large blocks. If there is the availability for some people to choose to build another home on those large 1,500 square metre blocks it means more people get to enjoy that beautiful area in Darwin, whilst also unlocking further development, because a lot of people like to live in the northern suburbs and it is about managing the increase in development in that urban infill whilst also ensuring that the areas retain the very reason why people love to live in them.

Mr SMELT: Can you talk a bit about what work you are doing with developers in terms of the community housing sector around specific land releases for affordable housing?

Mr BURGOYNE: In Alice Springs at St Mary's this was a lot that was essentially earmarked—the previous government bought it, and I am not sure what the plan was, it was used as a movie set for a period of time. Since coming into government, I have made it a focus to unlock further development for social and affordable housing. You are right, that end of the market sometimes gets forgotten but definitely needs to be worked on. Now through a range of different funds, whether that be working with the federal government as well as looking to have funding, we have now essentially worked with—and it has been a huge process—St Mary's site—for those who are not aware is a site where a lot of people who were involved in the Stolen Generation were housed so it has a lot of historical significance for a lot of people, and I commend the department and the work that they have done to work with those members.

Just recently there has been a heritage declaration over a portion of that site to acknowledge the significant area that St Mary's proposes whilst also enabling social and affordable housing. I do not like to raise this figure too often but there would be close to \$26m available through federal and Northern Territory Government's to develop the St Mary's site. We are working with community housing providers about how that funding can best be spent, and I know you will ask how many homes that will unlock. Initially it was around a hundred homes, but working with community housing providers they have asked government if they could reduce that amount because they want to ensure that as we continue to develop these areas for social and affordable housing that we do not over supply or build too restrictively in that area, because there are a number of sacred trees, there is a number of significant areas and there is now a heritage site on that area.

For me it is about ensuring that we can get a lot of vulnerable women and children into homes because that has also been a missing piece in Alice Springs for a long time. Those who require affordable and social housing—and speaking to the community housing providers they are also looking at what options are available for young people, because that is a missing piece. About 40 to 60 homes is what they have said they are looking to build there, and we are still going through a process as to who at the end of the day will be chosen to develop that site. What is exciting is that we are about to start the preparatory works, the enabling infrastructure, which is my favourite word as the Lands, Planning and Environment minister—a lot of it never gets seen, it is the electrical sewerage and water that enables the site to start to be developed.

Mr SMELT: That is one site for St Mary's, can you point to any other land releases that are targeted for affordable housing?

Mr BURGOYNE: My Chief Executive has rightly informed me, as I spoke about the Farrar West development, which will have an additional six lots, even the development of Holtze, all have project development agreements. This is because they were originally Crown land which stipulates they must deliver a certain number of social and affordable housing. I believe it is a percentage, and it varies from area to area.

Mr SMELT: Generally—around roughly?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a negotiation between the developer and the Northern Territory Government. What it unlocks is that with each development that is occurring through the development of Crown land there is additional social affordable housing that is being delivered, and the way in which that occurs is up for consultation with the developer, and that has happened especially in Darwin with a number of the developments, including Holtze and Farrar West. Whenever those developments are being developed there will be a portion set aside for social and affordable housing.

Mr SMELT: What conversations have you had with the Minister for Housing Construction, the minister for Housing or the minister for Population and Workforce Development about future housing needs?

Mr BURGOYNE: Lots. The minister for Housing has been integral in the development of St Marys. We would not be able to, as the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment—we are ensuring the land is ready to be developed and then the department of Housing will ensure that into the future that is managed appropriately once those houses are built and handed to a community housing provider. It has been integral, and there have even been conversations with Children and Families about the number of—I always like to focus on women and children because we know that there is a lot of domestic violence, unfortunately, across the Northern Territory and what we can do to ensure that there are safe places for those women and children.

It is about ensuring that the community housing provider we get into that space—I have been making it my work to get out and see some of these existing properties across the Northern Territory to see how they operate and how we can support future developments in a similar way. They will not always look identical, especially with that HAFF—federal government—funding; it has to tick quite a number of specific boxes, but we are working with community housing providers as to how we can get the best bang for buck so there is social and affordable housing as well as catering for some of those specific user groups that sometimes get overlooked.

Mr SMELT: In this respect for looking at future housing needs, particularly regarding the major projects, how will we avoid a scenario where we have large fly-in, fly-out worker camps or people not being based in the Territory and not being able to retain that growth?

Mr BURGOYNE: This was a conversation I had the other day with the CEO of Arafura Resources when we met onsite to sign the historic agreement. After final investment decision has been made—obviously there is a lot of excitement about Arafura Resources specifically, and that is one of the big projects which will be developed over the next couple of years. They are keen—this is very early on—to base as much of their local staff as they can in Alice Springs. There will always, with many of these developments—especially in the build phase—be a fly-in, fly-out portion, but I know that there have been conversations already had between the Land Development Corporation and Arafura Resources about the availability of land and what they can seek to do to ensure there are homes built for possibly staff they will have living in Alice Springs and working at their project.

J DAVIS: Minister, what do you understand to be the major driver of climate change?

Mr BURGOYNE: One of the major drivers of climate change is obviously fossil fuel production through industrialisation through humans. Often, when we talk about this subject, we talk about human-induced climate change—emissions—and wanting to ensure that we are reducing that over the longer term to bring about changes and reduce the impacts on our environment.

J DAVIS: What are the NT's emissions in the reporting period?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Northern Territory as the whole of Australia represents about 6% of Australia's emissions, and I will tell you what it represents. The NT's greenhouse gas emissions are 27.7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, which is 6% of Australia's emissions. Reporting on those emissions comes from the Australian Government greenhouse gas emissions inventory annual report. The last report was in 2024.

J DAVIS: Obviously the Northern Territory is a small place. Can you tell me what our emissions are proportionally, as in—I am trying to think of the right language to use here—not the overall figure, but what it would be proportionately in the NT compared with the rest of Australia?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important when we speak about this that we are 6% of Australia's emissions. The information that has been provided to me is a large proportion of our emissions in the Northern Territory are land based. We see that through fire—45%, thank you, chief executive, of those emissions are through land use, mostly fire. It is why the ...

J DAVIS: Sorry, minister, I think I was not clear in my question. What our emissions per capita?

Mr BURGOYNE: Okay. We do not have the breakdown per capita, Member for Johnston, but I can take that on notice if you like.

Question on Notice No 6.1

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

J DAVIS: What are the NT emissions in the reporting period per capita?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.1.

Dr RAHMAN: Thank you for your neat summary of anthropogenic climate change. Could you articulate for us a bit more about the climate resilience plan that has been announced today?

Mr BURGOYNE: Certainly. The climate resilience plan that was delivered today is an important bit of work. Last year at Estimates there was a lot of conversation about the first-pass climate risk assessment. What that essentially goes to is the government looking at all the things we conduct across the Northern Territory and how we can ensure that we are making our Northern Territory more resilient to those climate changes. We have seen over the summer period, with large rainfall events across the Territory, whether it be in the Top End or down in Alice Springs, it impacts on communities differently. Essentially, that climate resilience plan is acknowledging that and that we need to build back stronger and that the Territory is strategically placed. This is something that is not often spoken about.

We can assist large emitters in the Northern Territory to reduce their emissions overall through availability of land, which the Northern Territory has, and ensuring that we have the right regulations in place—carbon capture and storage is one example of that. I believe the Mining minister last year had to change legislation so that you can pass carbon through a pipeline in such a manner. The Northern Territory Government is an enabler. We are doing what we can to assist large emitters to reduce their overall emissions profile. There are things like solar farms, carbon capture and storage and SunCable, which I love to talk about. It is one of those large projects—which I have probably met with more than any other large project in the Territory to see what we can do as a government to assist them to get to where they need to be so that they can start delivering that clean green energy which will then drive down our emissions profile across the NT.

Dr RAHMAN: That is helpful and encouraging. Can you provide more specific definition around the key strategic priorities that might underpin that plan?

Mr SMELT: Chair, this is all in the media release.

Dr RAHMAN: Is it? I am not across it.

Mr YOUNG: It is in the media; just google it.

Madam CHAIR: I agree. We will stick to the follow-up questions in relation to climate change.

J DAVIS: I am also interested in the new announcement. I have some specific questions on that, but I will continue with my line of questioning.

Your department's website still commits the government to net zero emissions by 2050. Is that correct?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is correct.

J DAVIS: You have now scrapped the interim renewable energy target of 50% by 2030 and are explicitly pivoting to gas as a primary energy source. Can you explain what your plan is for us to get to net zero by 2050, with no visible interim targets, no renewable trajectory and a deliberate expansion of gas generation?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important for the committee to understand that in the Northern Territory we will be increasing our emissions over the shorter term before we start to reduce. That is because the Northern Territory is so under-developed. We are still an emerging economy throughout Australia.

When I talk about unlocking the Beetaloo and assisting other jurisdictions across Australia to reduce their emissions, it is important to understand what makes up those emissions. In Victoria, 55% of its energy is still coal-fired production. This is something that a lot of people overlook. When you see Victoria reducing its emissions by large swathes, it is because they are coming off coal-fired power.

In the Northern Territory, as we continue to unlock our gas reserves—and whilst a lot of people may not like hearing it—they are lower-carbon gas reserves compared with others around the world. It concerns me when I see the east coast states building in-port terminals for gas because that means they will be shipping gas here from other countries that will not have the regulatory protections in place that we do in Australia and in the Northern Territory. Who knows how many emissions just bringing that gas here will produce?

Our goal in the Northern Territory is to develop our gas reserves and reduce the overall emissions of the country because that is the end goal. I have said time and again that we can sit here and say, 'Oh, our individual emissions might increase over the next few years while we develop the Territory', but we will be able to assist numerous other jurisdictions to reduce their overall emissions as they come off that dirty coal and other forms of energy production, whilst also ensuring that we have that firm baseload so that we can continue to manufacture things in this country.

It is an important part of the puzzle when we look at all these things. We might look at other countries and buy all our things from them, but they are burning a lot of energy and are having to produce a lot of energy to do that. We would like to see this country and support other jurisdictions to reduce their overall carbon emissions whilst ensuring that we have our own energy in the Territory as well.

Mr YOUNG: Can you outline what funding is in the budget towards achieving that goal of zero emissions by 2050?

Mr BURGOYNE: You could look at every department that has a role, whether it be in development—Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment or other. We are ensuring that we are enabling development like SunCable and working with INPEX and Vopak on enabling reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through these schemes, whether it be carbon capture and storage, additional solar farms—there is a number of other things that I cannot talk about because they would be commercial in confidence.

It is important to acknowledge that there are plenty of things we are doing to ensure that we are reducing the overall emissions, not just for ourselves but also for large emitters in the Northern Territory. We will continue to support those proponents to achieve their goals.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.1

Mr BURGOYNE: Member for Johnston, per capita emissions in the Northern Territory are 63 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per person. That figure was in 2023. That is the latest that we have.

J DAVIS: Just to clarify for the Member for Daly, is there any specific budget line item in relation to reducing emissions? You talked about how it is across different portfolios.

Mr BURGOYNE: If you want an exact figure, there are many departments that deal with this through their own means. The climate resilience plan is a whole-of-government responsibility, with coordination reporting

responsibilities in my department. Specifically in my department there is \$3.29m which covers four FTEs to continue that important work to assist all agencies to reduce their emissions and work on that climate resilience plan, and obviously people are assigned to that. There is so much more; it is not just that \$3.29m.

There will be so much work across departments that is enabling whether it be the land that we provide for other people at Middle Arm with specific emissions-reduction goals in mind. They are things like carbon capture and storage; there has been an agreement in place regarding a block of land for Vopak, I believe. There is also land that we are speaking to INPEX about regarding how they can reduce their overall emissions. There are so many discussions that have been had; I just cannot go into the specifics because of the commerciality of them.

J DAVIS: Can I just clarify if the 63 tonnes you mentioned from 2023 is the latest data you have on per-capita emissions?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is the latest I have been provided.

J DAVIS: Is it possible to get on notice more recent data?

Mr BURGOYNE: The advice I have is that it would only be 2024, so if you want further ...

J DAVIS: I am happy for the most recent I can get.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a simple question of mathematics, where we will get the latest emissions reported through the federal government and divided by the population data. We want to make sure we have the most up-to-date data regarding those two things.

Question on Notice No 6.2

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

Ms DAVIS: Could you provide the most recent available Northern Territory emissions per capita?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.2.

J DAVIS: Your climate resilience plan focuses on adapting to climate impacts, but it appears to contain little or no clear emissions-reduction measures. How can the Territory achieve genuine climate resilience without addressing climate mitigation? If this is your core plan, why is mitigation absent from the plan?

Mr BURGOYNE: The climate resilience plan does not include specific targets, but there will be annual reporting of its outcomes, and this is an important part in this. I sat exactly where you sat, Member for Johnston, for many years and continued to ask the previous government about its targets. It essentially was not working towards them; it was not actually seeing any significant increase, so having targets is one thing, but not achieving them is another.

We have a climate resilience plan with reportables on how our government is working towards ensuring we are building a more resilient Territory whilst also supporting producers to reduce their overall emissions. That is the best way we can do it in the Northern Territory, whilst also ensuring we have cheap and affordable energy for everyone. That is a key part of this as well, which I know Minister Maley has touched on. There will be reporting, and I believe we will review in three years. We will continue to work with the department and all departments about how we can best achieve climate resilience across the Northern Territory through the plan.

Mr SMELT: A couple of projects specific questions. Does your government support the proposed Bayview Boulevard project or not?

Madam CHAIR: Can I just interrupt for a second?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, this is a good question.

Madam CHAIR: It is not a follow-up? The Member for Johnston was still going.

J DAVIS: Can I just finish this line of questioning?

Madam CHAIR: We will give Member for Johnston this line of questioning, then we will come over.

Mr BURGOYNE: I am keen to answer Member for Nightcliff's questions.

J DAVIS: You will get there, I promise. You said there are targets but there are not targets, is that right?

Mr BURGOYNE: Very clear. We are supporting the federal government. There is a target of net zero by 2050. We are working towards that like everyone else. All the large emitters are all working towards that. As far as the—thank you very much Chief Executive, there is a safeguard mechanism under the federal government's legislation.

Those not meeting or starting to reduce emissions towards 2050 will have to pay. As in the Northern Territory, we are supporting those large emitters get to their goal or net zero by 2050. Without the Northern Territory Government support, they simply will not get there. They will not have the land availability and will not be able to achieve it.

It is a key goal here, as we continue to build our roads back stronger, deal with flood mitigation and all the other things we do across Northern Territory that relate to climate resilience. We are also supporting industry to decarbonise. If we were just to say to those large emitters, you are on your own, we are not interested in helping you, they would never get there.

You talk about targets, and the net zero by 2050 is there. It is something the federal government put in place. We are supporting those producers to get there, because if they do not meet certain targets themselves, that safeguard mechanism will come in and they will have to pay penalties in regard to that. It is not our policy, it is federal government.

J DAVIS: To be clear, the measurable target we have at the moment is the 2050 target. Is there no other measurable targets between now and then for the Northern Territory Government?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is right; that was stated last year. I know some people might not like that fact, but it is really important that in the Northern Territory we need to understand, we are such and emerging economy. Less than 1% of the entire Territory is cleared. Whilst other states are trying to reclaim back farm land for conservation and all the rest of it, we have large lots of land that are still completely untouched. Which, as the environment minister, I am very proud of.

As we develop we will see land cleared, but it is really important we do that with all the safeguards and regulation we have to protect the environment. There are so many things looked upon whenever any development is done throughout the Northern Territory.

Yes, we have the net zero by 2050. We are supporting other producers to achieve that, and that work will be ongoing.

Madam CHAIR: Sorry Member for Johnston, we have to move over to the Member for Nightcliff.

J DAVIS: Why?

Madam CHAIR: Are you finished your line of questioning?

J DAVIS: No.

Madam CHAIR: Sorry, it sounded like, before, you only had one question left on that line of questioning. But it seems there is more, is there more?

J DAVIS: There is a bit more.

Madam CHAIR: We are still doing this opening statement, Member for Johnston.

J DAVIS: I just have a couple more questions.

Can you briefly explain what consultation research informed the development of this plan?

Mr BURGOYNE: Sorry, Member for Johnston, I was just getting an answer to your previous question. Could you please restate that?

J DAVIS: Can you briefly outline what consultation research informed the development of this plan?

Mr BURGOYNE: The first-pass climate assessment, and there is a document I will be releasing in the next week or two in regard to that. I knew this question would come. It was a first-pass assessment of the Northern Territory government and its departments, which essentially ranked risk criteria in regard to different areas of the Northern Territory. That was the basis for the climate resilience plan. That is where it came out of.

J DAVIS: Just to finalise the question about reporting and measurements, I heard you say clearly that the target is 2050. I think you said that there will be a three-year report. Will there be public reporting against something? I am not exactly sure what it is.

Mr BURGOYNE: The climate resilience plan will require annual reporting of its outcomes. There will be a review in three years over the effectiveness or otherwise.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.2

Mr BURGOYNE: The 2024 figures are the most up to date. That relates to the 27.7 million tonnes of CO₂, divided by our population is 106 tonnes per capita.

Mr YOUNG: I pick up on the \$100m for flood recovery you mentioned earlier, which allows for some infrastructure upgrades. What planning is underway for climate adaptation needs, so communities across the Territory are more resilient to impacts of climate change?

Mr BURGOYNE: Member for Daly, you would probably know better than anyone that in the community of Nguiu, my department has been working just about around the clock. My CEs told me that Ken Davies has been calling my chief executive, and it has all been around looking at how we can support communities across the Northern Territory. Obviously, Nguiu is front of mind to move that community to higher ground. As you are well aware, a number of stakeholders are engaged around land; it is one thing that we are looking at.

Was there another part to your question, sorry, Member for Daly?

Mr YOUNG: What other planning is underway for the climate adaptation needs right across the Territory so that communities are more resilient to the impacts of climate change? It is a bit more broad.

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, more broadly. Flood mitigation is one that I always get hammered with and speak about. There was a report in 2016 in Alice Springs that was commissioned regarding flood mitigation. Not a lot had been done over the previous eight years. There was money put aside in the last 18 months to two years. A lot of work has been done by the department, working again with Aboriginal traditional owners, getting the necessary AAPA clearances in place so that we can go through a lot of these trunk drains which, unfortunately, when we receive large volumes of rain can cause localised flooding.

There is the flooding that obviously occurs, as many people know, when a major river floods, but what we were seeing around our community was localised flooding relating to drains not being able to disperse the water quickly enough. There is work, that has started literally in the last week, relating to those trunk drains. I heard you mention \$100m. We were very fortunate to be able to access some of that money. Whilst I would love to say that the original \$10m that the previous Labour government put towards that was enough; it simply was not going to be to deal with all the trunk drains. There has been money spent on that, as well additional money out of the \$100m climate flood resilience package to address more drains around Alice Springs, as well as obviously a number of roads and other factors across the Territory.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: The residents of the electorate of Karama are excited about the container deposit scheme. I believe you said in your opening statement that it will commence 1 July 2026. What the electorate of Karama want to know is if there is an education campaign or communication campaign that will come out

to tell the community, 'This is what you can dispose of and get some money back. This is how you do it, where you do it and how you get your money back'? That is what people need to know. They are very excited, and they know it is going to go from this restrictive thing to a much wider thing, including wine bottles. There are plenty of those in Karama, may I say. A lot are dumped in the parks, so maybe this will reduce that. That is one of the reasons I am asking. Can you inform us what communication education campaign there is for the community about this new scheme?

Mr BURGOYNE: Like you, in my home town of Alice Springs, one of the biggest things that upsets me is during Clean Up Australia Day I always get out and clean up the river, but we have noticed over a period of time what is being left behind are the containers like Jim Beam and rum bottles which cannot taken as part of the container deposit scheme. Unfortunately, in some cases they are being used as weapons or they are being smashed on the ground. It is the same for wine bottles.

This is an important piece of work. Some people do not think it is that important, but in towns where you see a lot of litter, a lot of containers lying around on the ground, it will now be worth something. There has been a lot of work with the Envirobanks, with different people that take the containers, and that is why I often get a bit of criticism, 'How come it has taken so long to come in?' They are making sure that all their procedures are ready to take the additional containers. Anyone who has been there knows it is a huge operation. They must split everything—glass, metal and plastics—and they have now taken the time, doing an education piece. I know people who have been saving up their containers ever since they heard about this. There will be further work, as we will be promoting the new options for the community, but now we are working with the operators to make sure they are ready to go. That is why there has been a bit of lag time.

I am looking forward to 1 July when, hopefully, there will be less of these containers being left around our communities right across the NT.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – LANDS AND PLANNING Output 1.1 – Land Development

Madam CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Lands and Planning, Output Group 1.1, Land Development.

Are there any questions? Member for Nightcliff.

Mr SMELT: Does your government support the proposed Bayview Boulevard project or not?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important that everyone understands the history behind Bayview. Bayview was a development that was ready to go. It was after the 2016 election that the then Labor government stopped it and paid—we cannot say the amount—an unresolved amount to the developer at the time. It is important to understand that the government owns the land now. To say that someone does or does not support a development on a block of land that they do not own—let us be clear that the developer was ready to develop the land in 2016, the Labor government stopped it, paid him an undisclosed amount of money and now, by all accounts, the developer is wanting to come back and develop that land. There would need to be a process if that land was to be developed—an expression of interest and all the rest of it.

There is currently already an approval for a development at Bayview. Our government has supported that to occur. Anything else relating to any development across the Northern Territory—this is important for everyone to understand—you need to either own the land or apply to be granted or to pay for the land, and that has not occurred.

Mr SMELT: Has the developer not approached you to secure control of that land?

Mr BURGOYNE: The developer wrote a letter to me. I do not believe it asked to secure control of the land; I believe it requested to be invited, which again, it is a strange request. I do not know of too many processes that have involved the government inviting people. Generally, it is the expression of interest process once a parcel of land has been identified to be developed. That is the process it usually goes through.

Mr SMELT: Can you table that letter for us?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not think it would be proper process to table a letter that someone has sent to a minister. Would you table a letter that a constituent has sent you? Probably not. I am being very open with the committee that a letter was sent, and I will leave it at that.

Mr SMELT: Will you proceed with any sort of EOI or any other process where the developer could pitch their proposal?

Mr BURGOYNE: I did not know the Member for Nightcliff was a fan of development, Madam Chair. I thought they were against land development. Right now, it is not something that is on our government books to be developed. That is just a fact. There is a range of blocks of land that we are supporting, whether it be Asche or Durack Heights. There are processes underway to identify land and then release it.

It would be questionable whether or not—after what has happened with the previous government essentially paying an undisclosed amount to a developer not to develop the land—that would even be seen as a good use of taxpayer dollars to then, all of a sudden, develop that land again.

Dr RAHMAN: Minister, thank you for all of those clarifying statements. I think it is important for everybody to be across the history of the situation. For the record, as the local member that represents that area, I am glad to hear that the government is supportive of a proposal in development of that area. There is a signed-off proposal to continue with an 18-lot development.

Can you clarify for everybody, if the developer were to approach you again, would there be any prima facie reason why you would not consider an application?

Mr BURGOYNE: The parcel of land is not currently marked for development. There has been an agreement in the past; an undisclosed amount of money that has been provided to a developer not to develop that land. There are so many things to unpick in regard to the Bayview development.

We work with—and as the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment I work with—many developers that want to come into my office and sit down to speak about development. That is what I do. What any developer in the Territory should do if they have a goal of developing land is come in and speak with the minister responsible for it. The process that has unfolded in regard to Bayview has simply been the wrong way to go about it, in my point of view. It is important that any developer wanting to develop land across the Northern Territory comes in, sits down and has a conversation. There is an appropriate process that then needs to follow from there. Right now, that has not occurred.

Mr SMELT: Another project that we raised earlier was the Ozanam House redevelopment. Can you update us on the timeline for announcing the location of that site? We believe it was announced toward the end of last year that a location would be announced early in the new year, which is now well since passed.

Mr BURGOYNE: This is one of those things that we have been handballed by the previous Labor government, which moved Ozanam House to where it now sits with no real plan for the future. As a government, since coming in, there have been a lot of conversations with St Vincent de Paul about how we progress so that they can have a service—and I have witnessed it myself, Member for Nightcliff—that is well patronised.

I have also spoken to residents in the Member for Fannie Bay's electorate and in your electorate who attended a park meet and are upset about some of the antisocial behaviour that has arisen since that location started to be utilised. I received many letters, and I want to let people know who might be listening today that I read those letters. I read about how parks, in their view, are now not places they wish to visit as they used to.

It is important that we acknowledge the need for this service and the fact that the current location probably is not meeting community expectations. We are doing a huge amount of work to locate a new site. Again, I will not be mentioning where the new site is. We have been advocating on behalf of St Vinnies. I guess my biggest frustration has been that when we have gone to the federal government to seek additional funding to enable these blocks of land, it has not been forthcoming.

Whenever we talk about that enabling infrastructure for blocks of land, it is costly. We have sites that we believe would work for St Vinnies in the future. We are working with them, as well as other NGOs and organisations, about how best to enable them, and we will continue to advocate on behalf of St Vinnies to ensure that we get a better outcome than what we have now, acknowledging the very important service they provide.

Mr SMELT: I agree that it is a very important service. What is the actual blocker from announcing that new location?

Mr BURGOYNE: Money. If you could get \$50m from your federal counterparts, we could enable it and start developing it tomorrow.

Mr SMELT: Another major project is Lee Point. Have you engaged with the community around calls for an updated area plan for Lee Point?

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding Lee Point, the Defence Housing Australia development, there has been several processes taking place. There was the NTCAT referral, there have also been many submissions, and more recently, discussions regarding several other things. Going forward, the land is there to be developed. They have all the necessary approvals required. I am just checking with my chief executive as to exactly where that is at.

There have been several processes that have taken place that have allowed the community to put forward their views on the development. It is now up to Defence Housing Australia to continue with the development.

Mr SMELT: Has your colleague, the Member for Casuarina, spoken to you on behalf of his constituents around having an updated area plan for Lee Point and Casuarina Coastal Reserve? Has he passed on feedback from his constituents?

Mr BURGOYNE: I consult with all my parliamentary colleagues regularly on the matters that are important to them. Can I gauge what you are trying to get at, with regard to the area plan?

Mr SMELT: The key call that we have heard from the community is that they want to see a moratorium and a new area plan developed for the Lee Point Defence Housing project. Are you not hearing that feedback from the community?

Mr BURGOYNE: I think there is a level of misunderstanding from many in the community. When we look at the Lee Point development, a lot of people would not know that there is land along Buffalo Creek Road that has been set aside as a result of the development agreement between Defence Housing Australia and the Northern Territory Government.

This was initiated by the Labor government. I find it interesting, and I note your opposition to the development. A majority of where the development is going to occur is previously cleared land. We are now working with the developer to ensure that we can enable as much community infrastructure as possible in these areas because everyone can agree, and you have noted time and time again, that we need more housing and to enable supply so that there are more affordable rentals. Increasing supply will achieve that. It is really in the developer's hands now—they have their approvals—whether and when they see fit to continue the development.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Just confirming, regarding the Lee Point development—and you mentioned Defence Housing Australia, but there is nothing on your desk that is stopping the project going ahead now?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is correct, Member for Karama. There is nothing on my desk.

Mr SMELT: In terms of the area plan that is currently in existence, and it is being worked towards with DHA, what NT Government infrastructure is planned as part of the Lee Point development—for instance, a new school? Is that funded?

Mr BURGOYNE: I believe there is a school and also community space. That is to be determined between Northern Territory Government and the developer as to how that looks into the future. There is no budget yet aligned to a school—the land has not been developed.

Mr SMELT: You are saying that there are no brakes on this development; it is all ticked off ready to go, but there is no plan or budget for the government-required infrastructure?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, I think it is a misunderstanding of how the development works. With any new development there might be land earmarked for the NTG to build schools or other supporting infrastructure into the future.

An example of this is Holtze. There is a portion of land that is set aside for the government that is now going to be utilised for aged care. Sometimes the changing needs of government require that land to be used for something other than what it was initially earmarked for, but that area by Palmerston Regional Hospital is now going to be worked with the federal government, so we can deliver those much-needed aged care beds.

In the same manner, the school earmarked for that area, once it is fully developed, can then support the community should the need arise for an additional school, depending on the other schools around it, whether they are at full capacity and how many children are in the area.

As part of any planning space, you look at what the future requirements of that area will be.

There was an area plan developed in 2015, and there are blocks of land earmarked for government which were originally set aside for a school.

Mr SMELT: This is a project that is nominally under construction which is why I am surprised there is not an allocation.

Do you have any costings or estimates for the government-owned infrastructure that will go into Lee Point?

Mr BURGOYNE: No; it all depends on what ends up being.

Mr SMELT: In terms of the overall Lee Point project, you are not heeding the concerns of the community and you have no intention to do a new area plan or a moratorium on Lee Point.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important that the key issues you raised through your first line of questioning in regard to housing availability are met across the Territory. This is a development that has gone through all its approvals and has all its approvals. It is up to the developers now as to whether they proceed. That happened under the previous Labor government. It is continuing to happen now. Obviously, there were processes that were allowed to occur that allowed those who believed they did not want the project to occur to have their grievances heard. I think that, again, shows the level of process throughout this development.

Madam CHAIR: I will interrupt. The time is five o'clock. We will have a quick comfort break and return at 5.10 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Crown Land Estate

No questions.

Output 1.3 – Planning

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Planning.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: You received a report in March 2026 from the Planning Commission into infill development and subdividing in low-density residential areas. Have you considered that report?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes. There has been a report handed to me by the Planning Commission. I thank them for its important work on consulting with the community about the opportunity for infill development throughout the Northern Territory.

There are a number of recommendations from that report. I will get some advice.

It is always confusing when you know what is happening and what you can say is happening. In regard to the urban infill development, the paper was the first step in understanding how infill development and subdivision might work in the Northern Territory, and suggested ideas for change such as allowing more than one house per block—as I mentioned earlier in response to the Member for Nightcliff—a minimum new lot

size of 450 square metres across the Northern Territory, and allowing what a lot of people refer to as a battleaxe lot—essentially having a driveway down the side of someone’s house with a lot at the back.

In March, as you rightly said, the commission reported to government with its recommendations. The key concerns identified through consultation included infrastructure capacity. It is important that we acknowledge that. The commission also emphasised that any change to the planning rules to enable infill would need to be carefully balanced, increasing density whilst maintaining residential amenity. That is something we all want to ensure.

Based on this report, the next steps are that the DLPE will now prepare a planning scheme amendment proposal to make necessary changes to the Northern Territory Planning Scheme to facilitate infill development and subdivision. Any changes to these planning rules will be communicated to the public and undergo the necessary statutory exhibition under the *Planning Act 1999* prior to a decision on the amendment by me.

Mr YOUNG: You mentioned 450 square metre lots or even smaller lots to be established in suburbs, as well as allowing existing blocks to be subdivided. Are you progressing with those recommendations?

Mr BURGOYNE: In the proposal that the Planning Commission put out and consulted on, a number of those recommendations have been accepted. It is now about preparing the Planning Scheme amendment and, essentially, deciding to initiate it or not.

Mr YOUNG: You were not clear whether you support that recommendation or not.

Mr BURGOYNE: The next step—I want to be clear—is to consult on those proposed changes. Yes, the 450 square metres will go out for consultation under the necessary statutory exhibition period—which I will get confirmation on—it is 28 days. For that 28 days people will be able to write in and have their say on whether they agree or otherwise with the proposed planning amendment scheme.

Mr YOUNG: That consultation will be open to the public that will impact communities such as Parap, Ludmilla, with those larger blocks that may be subdivided?

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely.

Mr YOUNG: Can we be confident they will be aware of that, considering ...

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, like any planning amendment scheme ...

Mr YOUNG: What is your communication plan for that to ensure that they are aware of the impact it may have on their community?

Mr BURGOYNE: A lot of people have been readily engaged throughout this process. Obviously, there were a lot of submissions to the Planning Commission when this all happened, both positive and negative. Likewise with any large-scale change, there will be lots of people who will want to have their say. I am sure there will be those who are for it and those who are against it. We will listen to all those community concerns, as well as support, and move forward from there.

Mr YOUNG: How will you be able to triage through some of those submissions, given that there will be industry interest in wanting to subdivide those blocks versus community interest? I am assuming that some may want to keep some of those blocks the size they are, considering it is a lifestyle choice. Dividing those blocks up in the suburbs I mentioned earlier and more broadly in the northern suburbs impacts on amenity and services within those communities.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a good question. No-one will be forced to subdivide their block and make it smaller. It is an opportunity for those who wish to do so, to be able to. We are looking at the process for this to occur. I made it clear to the department that I do not want this to be open-ended. There will be a process by which people can apply to subdivide their lots to that minimum 450 size, and we will look at each one based on its merits.

We also need to ensure that we are dealing with the very thing that has been raised throughout today’s committee hearing, which is housing affordability and availability. This is just one other way in which we can increase availability. Not everyone will want to take this up. There will be lots of people who love their large blocks and will not want to subdivide, but I believe there will be some people.

Importantly, this can already be done through another process called an exceptional development permit, so there is already a way in which people can avail themselves. It is quite a costly process. We are wanting to make it available for more people who may wish to do this—maybe a family who want to subdivide their block so that their kids can live out the back. There are lots of different living arrangements people have.

What seems to be appetising to people now, for whatever reason, is they do not necessarily want to live in a big high rise; they want to have their own titled lot and build a house on it. In some of the suburbs and areas you mentioned, there is lots of wonderful scenery and beaches. People like to live in those areas. It is about enabling that to occur, whilst also ensuring that we keep the amenity of those areas.

Mr YOUNG: You mentioned that you want to ensure that people can develop, so have you already made a decision on that recommendation?

Mr BURGOYNE: No. There is a process.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any point to a consultation period if you have already made your mind up?

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely. We want to support development across the Northern Territory. We are doing that in lots of different ways. This is another planning scheme amendment that is being proposed, and we are consulting on. We will get the feedback and decide once all that feedback has been considered.

Mr YOUNG: How are your department and the Planning Commission using existing area plans when considering zoning and land use decisions?

Mr BURGOYNE: We use those area plans all the time to inform our decision-making.

Mr YOUNG: Do you want to expand on those area plans?

Mr BURGOYNE: Perhaps you have an area plan in mind that you would like to discuss?

Mr YOUNG: It is all right.

Does your government have plans to review existing area plans to ensure they are contemporary and meet the needs of the community?

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely. Throughout the Northern Territory, it is often referred to me by planners that as soon as an area plan is finally agreed upon, there are always changes in use that people will try to avail themselves, because the area plan may enable more development in certain areas, whilst trying to ensure that rural lifestyle in other areas is kept.

We are always working with the community to ensure that the blocks of land for the area plans in place are fit for purpose. That is always an evolving situation where people one day will have one point of view, and a year later might believe that a certain block of land should be used for another purpose because there is a community need. We are always going to work with the community to enable those things to occur.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Building Advisory Services

No questions.

Output 1.5 – Land Information and Spatial Analytics

Madam CHAIR: We will now consider Output 1.5, Land Information and Spatial Analytics.

Are there any questions? Member for Blain.

Mr KERLE: Does the NAFI website that does fire monitoring—I am getting a ‘no’. That was it; never mind.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.5.

Output 1.6 – Northern Territory Planning Commission

No questions.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – ENVIRONMENT Output 2.1 – Environment Assessment and Policy

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 2.0, Environment, Output 2.1, Environment Assessment and Policy.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: Would you consider the recent flood events a climate disaster?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, are you asking for an opinion? Is there a specific question that is not an opinion of the minister?

Mr YOUNG: Would you consider the recent widespread flooding across the Northern Territory a fairly big sign of a climate risk?

Madam CHAIR: Again, you are asking, 'Would you consider that', inferring that you are asking for an opinion. Is there a question attached to that?

Mr YOUNG: I suppose it goes back to noting the lack of investment in climate risk mitigation and adaption. I am trying to get an understanding of the government's position on whether it sees the recent flooding events as climate risk that would lead to that.

Mr BURGOYNE: Across the Northern Territory, from my hometown of Alice Springs, it saw the most severe flooding since 1988—37 years. It was up to Tennant Creek, Katherine, the Daly, and I believe that members in Darwin received flooding in some instances.

Mr YOUNG: Rural—Darwin River.

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely.

Throughout the Northern Territory—I mentioned this regarding the climate resilience plan—it is about acknowledging we live in an environment changing climate and how we build back better. We have the existing infrastructure, and as we continue to development into the future we need to acknowledge the fact that roads, rail and other things will need to be able to withstand the changing climate, especially in regard to flooding, as we need to be able to get our groceries and all our goods from the south to the north.

That is always something our government is considering when we are building back, looking towards the future.

Mr YOUNG: Going back to the question, has the flooding been identified by your government or yourself as minister as a climate risk?

Mr BURGOYNE: This goes more to the first-pass assessment. When we look at the risks associated with a changing climate we are, essentially, rating the risk of flood, fire, drought—all these things—in different areas. The risk of flood, in many cases, is high because of the amount of people it impacts when it happens in, especially, built-up areas. We have seen that happen more recently, especially in Katherine and out Daly where we have had communities that have essentially been displaced for long periods.

As a government, we are looking at how we ensure, going forward, those communities are more resilient. We have spoken about moving some of those communities to higher ground. We are looking at flood mitigation in my hometown of Alice Springs. In Katherine they are looking at flood levies and what can be done to ensure the town is more resilient to flooding in the future. That is an important project the government is working through and why that \$100m put aside through our Northern Territory Government is so important. We acknowledge the risk and are doing something about it.

Mr YOUNG: Are you able to list those climate risks you have identified and the priority order for mitigation and adaptation?

Mr BURGOYNE: It was not necessarily done in a priority. It looked at—I am trying to remember from the exact document—a number of climate risks, rated them like you would in a risk category, if you have ever done a jobsite risk category—high, medium and low—and then related actions that can happen as a result of that.

Mr YOUNG: Last you mentioned that there was no money in the budget for the climate mitigation measures because the department was undertaking the climate risk assessment. Is that the assessment you were speaking to? Or where is that assessment?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will try to be as clear as I can. There was a Northern Territory climate risk assessment that went through a number of risks. I have some tier 1 risks that I can read out, including damage to telecommunication data infrastructure, transport and logistics and waste collection and storage, which happened with the most recent floods. It states biosecurity relating to enabling invasive species to come in and mining and manufacturing. It ranks risks that can occur with our changing climate.

You asked about the amount of money that has been put to that. After the last Wet Season, \$100m was put into a flood resilience package to deal with the immediate issues. As we continue to develop infrastructure, whether it be roads or bridges throughout the Northern Territory, our government will have one eye to the changing climate on how we develop those things into the future so that we are more climate resilient.

Mr YOUNG: Back to my previous question regarding the climate risk you identified, you said that there was no priority order for the mitigation and adaptation. Can you table that?

Mr BURGOYNE: It will be going live in the next couple of weeks, so I am not able to table it. I make the undertaking that it will be publicly available.

Mr YOUNG: Is there a date when it will become available?

Mr BURGOYNE: It will be publicly available in the next two weeks. That is my undertaking to this committee.

J DAVIS: I wondered under which output we ask about air quality. I have some other questions, but I do not want to miss air quality.

Mr BURGOYNE: Any time, Member for Johnston.

J DAVIS: I will start off with some other questions first. I refer to the Pepper inquiry recommendation that the Beetaloo development be subject to strategic planning, including assessment of cumulative environmental, social infrastructure and intergenerational impacts before largescale development proceeds. Has a strategic development plan for the Beetaloo basin commenced?

Mr BURGOYNE: There has been a lot of work done regarding the Beetaloo basin. The SREBA (Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessment) is often spoken about, which is a set of studies used to gather baseline data and fill information gaps in that region which is important to the development of the Beetaloo.

Regarding your specific question, the Beetaloo is not yet at such a scale that the work has yet been done.

J DAVIS: I am familiar with the baseline assessment. I am interested in the strategic plan. What Pepper inquiry recommendation is the government relying on to justify progressing approvals in the absence of a completed strategic plan?

Mr BURGOYNE: We are assessing each development in isolation. When Beetaloo reaches a certain scale, the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority will make that call and will assess the overall impact of the Beetaloo; that is important to understand. It is still developing; it is not at scale yet, but that assessment—is that what you are calling it?

J DAVIS: I am calling it a strategic plan, as per the Pepper inquiry.

Mr BURGOYNE: That assessment and strategic plan about cumulative impact will be looked at as the Beetaloo develops.

J DAVIS: My understanding is that you have just said that you are currently approving individual projects; is that correct? How can you be confident that individually acceptable projects will not become collectively unsustainable, cumulatively over decades?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is because that is being looked at. This is important. The amount of information that is provided by each proponent to ensure that they have all their necessary approvals in place is immense. As the minister responsible for the environmental regulation side of it, they look at everything. Most recently, I remember reading about a certain species of bird that had to make sure it was not in an area that was going to be worked upon. There are flora and fauna studies. There are so many different bits of information that are compiled. I have full faith in the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority that when the Beetaloo gets to such a scale that assessment of cumulative—that work has to be undertaken. I have every confidence that the NT EPA will undertake that work.

J DAVIS: One of the things that I am trying to understand is that if you are approving individual projects, which may go ahead without knowing and without doing the work of what the cumulative impact might be, that impact might happen because you have approved various individual projects.

Mr BURGOYNE: What I am trying to make clear for the committee here today is that the NT EPA are aware of what is being approved and are looking at the cumulative impact. At such time they believe the cumulative impact is at such a stage that it needs to be—the NT EPA, when they believe it has reached such a stage, will conduct that work.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: On that point, would it be fair to say that individual projects supply a heap of information as part of their own environmental impact statements et cetera, and as that information comes together you can then combine that information to get a better understanding of the whole and make a judgement of the whole as you are going forward?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to acknowledge that the department does not work in isolation; they regularly brief the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority on what is being approved so that the NT EPA can make a judgement call as the independent statutory authority about when to do those assessments.

J DAVIS: The Georgina Wiso Water Allocation Plan allocates groundwater for agriculture and the petroleum industry. What assessment has been undertaken of the combined long-term impacts of those allocations on groundwater-dependent ecosystems?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a Water Resources question in Output 4.2.

J DAVIS: I will go to 4.2. I am presuming questions about Lake Woods and surface water refugia may also be under 4.2?

Mr BURGOYNE: What were the questions?

J DAVIS: SREBA identified more than 100 surface water refugia and groundwater dependent ecosystems. There are two parts of the question: how many have formal protection against long-term impacts; and have risks to Lake Woods and its catchment from cumulative groundwater extraction has been assessed?

Mr BURGOYNE: We will do that in 4.2 so we have the necessary departmental people at the table.

J DAVIS: The rest of my questions would come under 4.2. I have a broader question: is there any single integrated assessment that can be tabled that considers cumulative impacts over decades across water biodiversity, climate emissions and future generations in relation to the Beetaloo?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have answered about the cumulative impacts and the work that the NT EPA will have to do into the future as the Beetaloo develops.

Mr YOUNG: Your department undertook a review of licence conditions for hydrocarbon facilities in the Darwin area to ensure human health risks from air emissions were adequately addressed. That review was due to be completed this month. Has it been completed, and will you be making it public?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: That review is being undertaken by the department on behalf of the NT EPA. The NT EPA expects to finalise the report by August, which is a slightly revised date, and it will be made public once it is finalised.

Mr YOUNG: Will it be put up online?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: Will it be in August when it is released, or will it need to go through the minister to be approved or straight through from the department?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: It is an NT EPA review.

Mr YOUNG: In February this year the NT Chief Health Officer and NT EPA released a joint statement saying that levels of hydrocarbons, like benzene and toluene, from INPEX emissions were low risk for human health. Can you table the reviews and data risk assessments that were undertaken to come to that conclusion?

Mr BURGOYNE: Those reports are public.

Mr YOUNG: From those reports and investigation, did they find any issues regarding the levels of hydrocarbons, and what informed your policy position on the legislation for the air quality monitoring?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a good question regarding the assessments that were undertaken by the CHO—an independent Chief Health Officer. From those assessments there was found to be no risk to human health. Our government is unashamed in saying that we want to develop not only Middle Arm but around Darwin—Middle Arm and East Arm. We want to give certainly to the community that what we are doing in this space does not harm the quality of the air and does not harm residents who live nearby.

That is why we have undertaken to ensure, for the first time in the Northern Territory, that there is air quality monitoring that will look at those VOCs which you spoke about—benzene, toluene and other such volatile organic compounds—because we know the assessment done by the health professionals proved there is no risk to humans but want to give certainty to the community that on any given day they can look up the air quality monitoring stations, see the levels live and be able to make their own assumptions in regard to that. It is about providing certainty and saying to people that we can continue to develop areas around Darwin Harbour and Darwin whilst ensuring that it is safe to do so.

Mr YOUNG: The NT EPA recommended that further assessments were required on the cumulative impact of all emissions sources in the Darwin region. Is that work currently happening?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes. Essentially, that is what the according monitoring will achieve over a long period of time. It is about a cumulative effect on human health. These air quality monitoring stations that will be stationed around Darwin, Palmerston and Middle Arm will measure the particulates in the air and tell us the levels that are floating around. There are known safe levels; there are different levels depending on whether you are in Europe or Australia. The NT EPA will set those guidelines and use the established health guidelines to ensure that people in the community have confidence in what is being reported.

It is important to acknowledge that it will be the emitters that will pay for this. It is estimated to cost about \$2m in infrastructure upgrades. We currently have three air quality monitoring stations around Darwin and Palmerston, but they do not measure for VOCs, so it is about improving the quality of those and then adding in another three. Industry will then also pay about \$400,000 per year to ensure that air quality monitoring can continue to occur and that all the necessary tests on the equipment—to make sure it is up to date and operating as it should—can occur.

Mr YOUNG: Minister, I think you stated that the emitters will have to pay for this. I am assuming that is if you find through the monitoring that it is too high for human health?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, that is a good question. If you are a large hydrocarbon facility—I can use two examples, because they are very well known to people—like INPEX or Santos, you will pay on a cost recovery model. We will work out how much it will cost to put the air quality monitoring in place and then issue the bill to the industry. It is about giving certainty to the community—whilst not burdening the taxpayer—that the large emitters in Darwin Harbour are doing everything they can to ensure that the air we all breathe is safe.

Mr YOUNG: What happens when emissions are too high—or, sorry, if the air quality is not good for humans?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have spoken with the NT EPA about this at length because I wanted to understand myself what would occur. As you start to see levels increase in the airshed, they will then go and speak to those

proponents—because obviously we will not know exactly which one it is—and they will find out what has been happening in regard to their operating procedures and whether all their acid gas incinerators have been online or not. From that they will be able to say, ‘Right, well, you need to make sure you get whatever machinery is not operating online straightaway or rectify the issues that we are seeing’. It will give the NT EPA—the independent statutory authority—the ability to see what is happening in real time and then be able to react. It will not be one day that we see a huge increase; we will be able to see the particulates in the air slowly increasing. The NT EPA will be able to act as a result.

The goal is to make the Northern Territory one of the best places in the world as far as regulation of these production plants. It is to make sure that we are doing everything in the Northern Territory to give confidence to the community that these places are regulated and that we can see in live terms what is occurring in our air.

Mr YOUNG: My next question is about how we ensure those emitters are not under-reporting, considering we have seen that recently with INPEX, for example.

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely. This is how we ensure that there is no under-reporting. We will now have live data showing us exactly what is in our area. It will tell us what the safe levels are and if those large emitters are meeting those.

Mr YOUNG: What regulatory and legislative action has been taken against INPEX for under-reporting the pollutant emissions?

Mr BURGOYNE: My understanding is that is still under investigation by the NT EPA. It will obviously report back on any findings it has.

Mr YOUNG: No problem. Do you have a timeline for when they will report back?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, I do not. It is conducting a thorough investigation to ensure that if any wrongdoing has occurred, it finds that out and reports on it to the community.

J DAVIS: Can you confirm that the health reports you mentioned earlier are based on the Darwin LNG INPEX self-reporting which, as we know, was found to be under-reporting to the scale of 130 times?

Mr BURGOYNE: For that specific information I will pass to Tess Cole-Adams.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: Sorry; could I ask you to clarify which review you are pointing to?

J DAVIS: In terms of under-reporting, or of the ...

Ms COLE-ADAMS: INPEX provided the EPA with modelling work and monitoring data in the wake of it revealing the under-reporting that was based on its revised estimates. Then the NT EPA engaged an independent air quality specialist to review INPEX’s modelling and monitoring data. Those reports were then put online. They basically said the modelling ...

Madam CHAIR: Excuse me, Ms Cole-Adams, can I get you to move your microphone a little closer? You are very quiet.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: Those reports were then put online. They basically assured that the modelling and monitoring data that had been provided by INPEX was sound.

J DAVIS: Did the health reports referenced by the minister rely on the earlier data?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: No.

J DAVIS: I am pleased to hear today that you have listened to the sustained concerns and advocacy from the community about the health risks relating to pollution from LNG plants in Darwin. My view—I put a motion to the Chamber about this—is that the air-quality monitoring should have been put in place a long time ago. Am I correct in understanding—I think you just said this—what we will have now are three fixed air monitors?

Mr BURGOYNE: In total, my information is, there will be six stations, and that will give live readouts of the air quality around the Darwin airshed.

J DAVIS: There is community concerns that as these monitors are fixed there is no way to capture the air levels over residential areas because the pollutants do not stay fixed, with factors like wind impacting their direction. How can the community be confident the monitoring does, in fact, capture accurate measurements across Darwin and the Palmerston region?

Mr BURGOYNE: There is science. I will get a bit of information.

What is important is that we currently have three that monitor the air quality. The new stations will increase the areas that can be picked up by this. They will be placed in such a way that they pick up those population areas, so people can be assured that the station that is nearby is monitoring the air and it will be able to tell us in real time what is in that area—whether there are any levels of VOCs.

Madam CHAIR: From what I understand from your response, the air monitors are strategically placed. Whether the wind changes, will it capture the quality of the air?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes. It is important to acknowledge that the current three are at the edge of residential areas. We completely acknowledge the concerns of the community. This is really about giving everyone certainty going forward. We want to be able to show the community that what is happening with the industrialisation of Middle Arm and other areas around the harbour is safe. Air quality monitoring will give everyone the real-time data to give that confidence, whilst also ensuring those that do emit VOCs continue to better themselves to emit less over time. That is what we are working towards.

J DAVIS: If a company like INPEX, for example, is found to be emitting high levels of benzene and other VOCs, what will happen?

Mr BURGOYNE: This is the whole point we are trying to get to. I spoke to it previously. We will be able to see increasing VOCs captured by these air quality monitors—and it will not just be a huge spike all the sudden. If that occurs the NT EPA will be able to go to the producers and ask, 'What is happening at your plant that means there is an increase in VOCs?' We will be able to ensure that is rectified in real time.

J DAVIS: Has there been any consideration of a mobile monitoring device?

Mr BURGOYNE: I knew you would bring this up because I was listening to ABC Darwin this morning, as you were.

J DAVIS: No, I was here in Estimates, so I did not hear ABC Darwin this morning.

Mr BURGOYNE: I heard you on there.

J DAVIS: That was well before you.

Mr BURGOYNE: A mobile station that is up for however long is not as accurate as ones in place to monitor the change in air quality over a period. That speaks to the cumulative impact we are talking about. There will be a technical review which is identifying the best locations for up to three new stations, and the locations will be guided by population density, industrial activity and prevailing winds.

J DAVIS: I think you said that there would be real-time data available. What is the mechanism for that?

Mr BURGOYNE: The EPA website already reports on the air quality currently. Obviously, it does not pick up those VOCs. It will be in the same manner but including the VOCs.

J DAVIS: Your government commissioned an independent review regarding Ichthys LNG emissions, and they raised significant concerns in that report. Is your department committed to implementing all the recommendations identified in that report?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

J DAVIS: I appreciate your brevity. Is there any further detail on that, as in timeframes?

Mr BURGOYNE: For that level of detail, I will pass to Ms Tess Cole-Adams.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: I might need to quickly get up the recommendations. I can speak to each of them. I will just get them up and then I can respond to them.

Madam CHAIR: In relation to that question, Member for Johnston, are you asking for responses on each individual recommendation, or do you just want a timeframe and some information about when they might be implemented?

J DAVIS: Thank you for your assistance. Broadly, a timeframe for what we can expect. This may be publicly available—I am not sure—and if it is, that would be good to know.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: The first recommendation related to better emissions reporting and ensuring that any future reporting could be trusted. In relation to that, the NT EPA issued an audit notice to INPEX to have their revised methodology independently reviewed. That is due 30 June. That will go on the NT EPA register.

There was a recommendation around further air-quality assessment; that is occurring in two parts. INPEX is doing further modelling work as a hindcast model, so that is to look at the period of the under-reporting and ensure that it includes all cumulative emissions and all whole-of-facility emissions. There will also then be further work to do forecast modelling which, in the context of future development in the harbour, is looking at what might those cumulative emissions look like.

There was a recommendation, depending on what that further modelling showed, to do a further human health risk assessment. It will be subject to what that modelling shows as to whether that is required. Who would then do that further human health risk assessment, if required, would need to be resolved.

Then the last one was in relation to independent monitoring, which goes to the announcements today around improving monitoring for the Darwin airshed.

J DAVIS: What would happen if INPEX, for example, are found to be emitting high levels of benzene and other VOCs? Will there be any sanctions if that happens?

Mr BURGOYNE: That will be at the discretion of the NT EPA, which is important. They are the independent statutory authority, so it will be up to them as to what action they take.

J DAVIS: In the context of historically hindcast—I had not heard that expression before—historically severe under-reporting of emissions by INPEX, has your department considered whether they are a fit and proper person to hold a licence in the Northern Territory?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to note that the investigations that are currently being undertaken by the NT EPA are looking at a range of factors. I look forward to seeing the decision based on their investigations.

Mr YOUNG: What funding is in the budget to progress the Circular Economy Strategy?

Mr BURGOYNE: When we talk about the circular economy what our government is focused on primarily is what I spoke about earlier regarding the container deposit scheme. There is a range of other things that can be looked at and factored in that other jurisdictions, whether they be councils or otherwise, are up to and responsible for as it relates to waste management.

Mr YOUNG: The question was about the budget. What funding has been allocated?

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding the circular economy there is a team that works on this from government. There are five FTEs. In regard to the staff costs—who obviously assist in the circular economy—it is about \$840,000.

Mr YOUNG: That is costing in terms of staff, but within the strategy there are three priority areas; am I correct? You mentioned the container deposit laws, but are there any other priorities within that strategy that the government is progressing, and is there budget allocated to that?

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the circular economy, the Northern Territory Government continues to work with stakeholders, including improving education. Clean recycling helps reduce contamination. I guess that again harks back to our CDS.

We are investigating ways to encourage further investment in waste and resource recovery and waste to energy, and develop broader waste action plans. I will give an example. The government is contributing to the City of Darwin scoping study on the NT's waste to energy plan. It is a broader plan—promote expansion of the container deposits scheme, which I have spoken about; promoting greater product stewardship,

especially in relation to problem waste such as end-of-life solar panels and batteries; leveraging opportunities to improve outcomes from existing and emerging product stewardship schemes.

The NT participates in the national solar panel recycling pilot, which aims to establish 100 collection sites nationally, including in regional and remote areas. The scale of solar farms in remote areas of the NT makes us an ideal location for solar panel recycling, possibly through a national pilot.

Those are a few things, Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: I think I heard you say broader waste action plans. Did I hear that correctly?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am just reading what I said to you. I have spoken about the support we are providing in regard to improving education; promoting expansion of the container scheme; investigate ways to encourage further investment; promoting greater product stewardship; and leveraging opportunities to improve outcomes for existing and emerging product stewardship schemes.

Mr YOUNG: You talked about some sort of action plans within there. I was trying to pick up on that.

Mr BURGOYNE: I have just spoken to the other waste management strategies.

Mr YOUNG: But no action plans.

Mr BURGOYNE: I have spoken to a number of actions that are occurring as part of waste management strategies.

Mr YOUNG: Was there definitely no action plans within that?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, I think he has already answered the question. I think we can move on.

Mr YOUNG: I am pretty sure I heard him say action plans. I was trying to figure out how many have been activated.

Madam CHAIR: I think he has responded to that line of questioning a couple of times now.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is all right, Madam Chair.

Mr YOUNG: There was a lot he read.

Mr BURGOYNE: There is a lot that I read.

There is a number of things that are occurring and we are investigating ways to encourage further investment in waste and resource recovery. We work with industry, councils and a range of other people to ensure we are all working together to achieve certain outcomes.

Mr YOUNG: What outcomes would they be?

Mr BURGOYNE: I can think of a number in regard to waste management, ensuring we are expanding the container deposit scheme so that more waste does not end up in landfill. I have spoken about the solar panels and stewardship schemes. It is something that councils are speaking to us about. There is a range of things ending up in landfill currently that, if we work in these spaces—whether it be with private proponents or others—we can reduce the amount of items that end up in our landfill, which can add to that circular economy.

J DAVIS: Which output would PFAS come under?

Mr BURGOYNE: Is that PFAS in land or PFAS in water, Member for Johnston? That is the question I am being asked to ask you.

J DAVIS: Both. It is in relation to broad monitoring.

Mr BURGOYNE: Ask us the question and we will see if we have the necessary experts at the table to answer it.

J DAVIS: The first one is specifically about water, however. In your March response to my question in parliament, which I thank you for, you outlined ongoing PFAS monitoring in Rapid Creek, including monthly Wet Season sampling and annual reporting by Defence. What is the most recent PFAS data available for Rapid Creek and Ludmilla Creek, and when was it published?

Mr BURGOYNE: The actual quantifying of that would be Water Resources, so I will endeavour to get you that answer during 4.2.

J DAVIS: To give you a heads up, I will also ask about what trend analysis has been undertaken of PFAS levels in those two creeks since 2017.

Mr BURGOYNE: We will endeavour to get that answer for you by the time 4.2 comes around.

J DAVIS: My other questions are broader. How many PFAS-affected sites are currently identified in the Northern Territory under EPA oversight? Which ones are subject to ongoing monitoring?

Mr BURGOYNE: To date there have been four section 48 notices issued under the Act in relation to PFAS contamination at Fire and Rescue sites across the NT. They include Alice Springs, Darwin and Batchelor Fire Stations, subject to audit notices. There is a review underway of work undertaken to date to determine whether additional investigations are required.

J DAVIS: Are they the only PFAS-affected sites to your knowledge that are being investigated or that the department is aware of?

Mr BURGOYNE: Just in relation to ours. Obviously, Defence and the Commonwealth are managing contaminated sites linked to Defence facilities under the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. The Northern Territory Government provides representation on the Commonwealth-led PFAS national coordinating body, which oversees and coordinates PFAS management activities linked to Defence estates. This includes RAAF Base Tindal near Katherine. That is exposure from Defence sites. PFAS has impacted the groundwater use for drinking water supply in the Katherine area, and to address this, Defence works with the Power and Water Corporation to treat the PFAS-impacted water before it enters the town water supply. That is all the information that I believe is commonly available.

J DAVIS: Given the scale of PFAS litigation now, nationally and internationally, has the department considered any financial liability risk modelling in relation to potential Territory exposure arising from ongoing PFAS contamination?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, we have not done any financial litigation modelling.

J DAVIS: Have you considered that in any of your planning?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is more a question for Treasury. I note the recent announcement by the federal government who are undertaking legal action in that space.

J DAVIS: To be clear, from your department's perspective, it is something that will be dealt with by the Commonwealth or by Treasury, if that was the case?

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding financial modelling, the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment would not be modelling the financial impact through this.

J DAVIS: Is there any cost, in terms of Northern Territory specifically affected PFAS sites? Not Commonwealth ones. Is there any cost associated with monitoring, regulatory oversight, public health response for whatever the NT Government is responsible for?

Mr BURGOYNE: The work the department is doing is that review, which is underway, to determine whether additional investment is required regarding those sites I spoke about—Alice Springs, Darwin and Batchelor fire stations. That is the work that is being undertaken. I imagine that will inform further actions that need to be undertaken.

J DAVIS: You may have said this, but in terms of that review, is there a timeframe?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not have a timeframe in front of me. I will pass to Ms Tess Cole-Adams.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: The NT EPA is requiring audits on those sites. Those audit notices are publicly available online and have the dates that the audit reports are due. I understand a number of them are overdue, so we work with NT Police and Fire Emergency Services who are the ones subject to the notice on meeting those obligations and reviewing what further work is required to be done.

J DAVIS: You would need to have that audit information to be able to look at any ongoing plan. Is that right? I am interested in timeframes for when we might know what might need to happen.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: Generally speaking, for contaminated land, the trigger for work would be some sort of change of land use or some evidence that there were impacts offsite.

J DAVIS: Can I ask one question which was given to me by a constituent, which you may or may not be able to answer? I was informed that the Shiers Street site was PFAS contaminated and that was the reason development did not go ahead.

Mr BURGOYNE: No, it is not contaminated with PFAS.

J DAVIS: Is it contaminated with anything else?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes. There is an old chemical, called dieldrin, that was used in the extermination of termites in the old days. That is the issue with that site.

J DAVIS: I used to live next door, so that is good to know.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is not harmful if you live next door; just do not grow any vegetables out of it. Just to confirm, from the department, it is all gone now. It has been rectified.

That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Environment Regulation

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider questions on Output 2.2, Environment Regulation.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: Why did you cut funding for environmental regulation last financial year?

Mr BURGOYNE: Can we just confirm, Member for Daly, so we get you the right information, which budgetary figures are you looking at?

Mr YOUNG: It was in regard to environmental regulation.

Mr BURGOYNE: The original and revised figures?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

Mr BURGOYNE: The reduction in figure that you are seeing relates to a transfer between years to support the removal of tyres from a contaminated site.

The other figure relates to internal realignment transfer between divisions, environmental assessment and policy to environmental regulation; a reduction relating to contribution toward the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment centralised leadership program; and an increase relating to non-cash depreciation.

That is the change in figure that you are seeing. It is not a reduction; it is moving money.

Mr YOUNG: Is it shifting it across?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, and a realignment of that funding from environmental assessment to environmental regulation and from environmental regulation to environmental assessment. They used to be one; they are now two.

Mr YOUNG: Last year you removed the requirement for the NT EPA to provide advice on all onshore gas environment management plans. Previous to that, the NT EPA had assessed and provided advice on

43 EMPs. Can you outline the process for monitoring environmental impacts of onshore gas if the environmental regulator is not doing it?

Mr BURGOYNE: I can tell you why I did it, Member for Daly; it was because the Chair of the NT EPA wrote to me and said that it was no longer required. I think that answers that question fairly well.

Mr YOUNG: Why was it not required? Do you remember what was put in that letter that he wrote to you?

Mr BURGOYNE: The NT EPA's advice in relation to every EMP not being required by Territory law—it is not a requirement in any other jurisdiction. Essentially, the NT EPA was doing work that was not required anywhere else across Australia and is not required for other industries across the Northern Territory.

The petroleum regulation team in the department—I note this—are highly experienced and skilled in environmental impact assessment and can determine when independent advice from the NT EPA is required for more strategic and environmental matters or when there is a potential for significant impact under the *Environment Protection Act*. It is also really important to note that should the NT EPA deem it necessary, they can assess and pull in any EMP they wish and have further assessment in regard to it.

Over the last seven years the team gained sufficient experience and expertise in assessing EMPs that has grown to mature, and be that trusted regulator. This is affirmed by the NT EPA's confidence in the environmental regulator and regulatory framework for onshore petroleum in the NT.

Further to that, the NT EPA retain visibility over all EMPs (environment management plans) and would require an environmental impact assessment (EIS) for any with potential for significant impact.

Mr YOUNG: How many breaches of environment management plans by onshore gas companies have there been in the reporting period?

Mr BURGOYNE: There is an annual compliance report in which the number of breaches is made public. Many of those, the department is advised, is by the proponents. I will pass to Ms Cole-Adams for further information.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: There are two key reporting mechanisms. The interest holders are required to report, and they do that quarterly for any recordable incidents and then they have an annual report. On top of that the department does an annual compliance summary where we provide a report on all compliance work undertaken by the department, which includes inspections and enforcement action taken.

Mr YOUNG: Do you not have the number of breaches—the list?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: That is contained in the reports that the companies provide because they are self-reporting on their non-compliances and their incidents.

Mr YOUNG: The companies are self-reporting.

Ms COLE-ADAMS: Yes, but then we as the regulator are doing checks, audits and inspections of those.

Mr YOUNG: How many proponents have breached?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: In the reporting period there were two warning letters issued and seven fines or penalty infringement notices, which were for a mix of ongoing misreporting and breaches of chemical storage requirements.

Mr YOUNG: Were there any prosecutions?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: Not in the reporting period.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up from the Member for Mulka, with a similar line of questions, who also asked in addition to what you just asked, during the reporting period were there any investigations of non-compliance?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: Yes, that is what led to ...

Madam CHAIR: That is the same question.

J DAVIS: Okay, thank you. You may have already answered this—this is also on behalf of the Member for Mulka—who were infringement notices and environmental audit notices served to and for what reason?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: The ones for under-reporting were issued to—I am having a complete blank—there was one or two to Tamboran and the remainder were to Peak Helium.

J DAVIS: Did you say there were seven fines and two warning letters?

Ms COLE-ADAMS: There were two warning letters and seven fines, and the warning letters were also in relation to Tamboran.

J DAVIS: Before approving Santos' proposal to drill up to 12 appraisal wells at Tanumbirini Station, what environmental assessment processes did the project undergo? What specific risks to groundwater, surface water, threatened species and greenhouse gas emissions were assessed?

Mr BURGOYNE: As part of the assessments, the proponent had to undergo a very detailed environment management plan. I am just getting a bit more information in regard to that.

I can assure you that there are volumes and pages of assessment.

The environment management plan met the approval criteria under the regulations by including all information required that was appropriate for the nature and scale of the activity. The plan demonstrated environmental impacts and risks are reduced to an acceptable level. The assessment considered risks of groundwater and surface water interactions for Hot Valley Springs. It also assessed climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions and the occurrence of the Carpentarian grasswren in the project area.

J DAVIS: Are you able to table those assessment reports?

Mr BURGOYNE: The EMP is the document that is assessed, and that is public.

J DAVIS: Is that available on your website? Where would we find that?

Mr BURGOYNE: On the department website.

J DAVIS: Has the NT Government sought or received any advice on whether approval of these 12 wells could be inconsistent with, or ultimately be overridden by, a future EPBC assessment as by a decision by the Commonwealth?

Mr BURGOYNE: At the end of the day any decisions relating to the EPBC Act would obviously be a matter for the federal government.

J DAVIS: Have you sought any advice on that?

Mr BURGOYNE: No.

Just for the committee's confirmation, I have a bit of information. The warning letters—it is important that we get it right so that we are not upsetting anyone—referred to earlier were not Tamboran; they were Central Petroleum. Just for the clarity of the committee, it is the information I have just been provided.

Madam CHAIR: We will break for dinner and come back at 7 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. We are still on Output 2.2.

We will just get some clarification from the minister.

Mr BURGOYNE: I have had the department working overtime.

In relation to petroleum enforcement, which was mentioned previously, there have been six penalty infringement notices for Peak Helium for under-reporting; one penalty infringement notice to Tamboran for chemical storage; one warning letter to Central Petroleum; and one warning letter to Liberty Energy.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you for that clarity.

That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 2.3, Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: The NT EPA Act requires the NT EPA to provide strategic advice to you at your request or on its own initiative. This includes reports on the NT's system of environmental management. In the last financial year you did not seek any strategic advice from the NT EPA and they did not provide you with any advice on their own initiative. How is it that you have not sought a single piece of strategic advice from the Territory's environmental regulator on environmental management, particularly given onshore gas and other major developments are coming online?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to acknowledge the incredible work of the department regarding environmental regulation and assessment. It has been spoken about a number of times throughout this committee hearing this afternoon. I had the exact same thing to say about the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority; everyone is doing their job, and I commend them for that. Whilst they continue to do their job, ensuring that they are keeping proponents accountable through regulation through the Act, I see no need to intervene in that process that is occurring.

Mr YOUNG: The question was not about intervening. As part of the Act you can request advice on environmental management. Considering there is a number of onshore gas developments that have come on in the Northern Territory, why have you not sought any advice?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have not deemed it necessary. It operates as an option in the law; it is not a requirement that I do that.

Mr YOUNG: Even though we have seen a number of onshore gas developments come online, you do not think you would seek any advice from the NT EPA, as it states in the Act?

Mr BURGOYNE: As I said, there are environment plans that are put in place. There is a range of assessments done. I have not deemed it necessary to seek that further information.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know why the NT EPA have not given you any information regarding that?

Mr BURGOYNE: The NT EPA (the NT Environment Protection Authority) provide advice on a range of matters via channels, including reform through approvals. I meet with the Chair regularly. That particular mechanism—provision—that you are referring to is in the Act. I am not required to utilise it.

Mr YOUNG: You stated you meet with the Chair of the NT EPA. Given that you are not requesting any information about environmental management, what are you meeting about in terms of the strategic direction of environmental management in the Northern Territory?

Mr BURGOYNE: Things like air-quality monitoring, which has been announced today, which is a positive for everyone living within cooeee of the Darwin airshed. These are all important strategic policy initiatives, for which I seek a range of advice. People provide that advice.

J DAVIS: Does the government consider it appropriate for the Chair of the NT EPA to hold paid advisory or consulting roles with organisations that may have interests in industries regulated by, or subject to, decisions by the EPA?

Mr BURGOYNE: I want to be clear that I have the utmost confidence in Dr Vogel and the advice the NT EPA provides to me. I understand that Dr Vogel has never directly worked for INPEX. Some time ago he provided

consultancy services to a company, Purple, that provided services to INPEX. I know this is what you are getting at, Member for Johnston. He no longer has any commercial relationship with that company.

J DAVIS: That is good to hear. Has the government reviewed whether all actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest relating to the NT EPA Chair have been appropriately declared and managed?

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the perceived conflict of interest at that time and in accordance with the relevant provisions in the *Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority Act*, in 2012, and with an abundance of caution, Dr Vogel took no part in discussions or decisions relating to INPEX for a fixed period of time. That is what occurred in relation to what you are referring to, Member for Johnston.

J DAVIS: When concerns are raised about undisclosed interests or external appointments, held in this case by the EPA Chair, or anyone in your department, what process does the government follow to determine whether those interests are compatible with the role?

Mr BURGOYNE: The NT EPA, along with the department, manage conflicts under their enabling legislation and policy.

J DAVIS: Sorry, minister, on behalf of their enabling legislation—was that? Could you specify what the process is for managing conflicts of interest, or is that publicly available?

Mr BURGOYNE: Member for Johnston, just to confirm your question, are you asking more broadly how the department and the NT EPA deal with conflicts of interest?

J DAVIS: I am asking explicitly what the process is for dealing with conflicts of interest and whether that process is publicly available for people in decision-making roles?

Mr BURGOYNE: The NT EPA manages conflicts into the *Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority Act 2012*. Regarding meeting procedures and conflicts of interest policy, members must disclose relevant personal interests, and the NT EPA assesses whether the act is engaged. Where it is, the member is excluded from papers, deliberation, decision-making and quorum for that matter.

J DAVIS: Is that self-regulated, like the member chooses whether they disclose?

Mr BURGOYNE: Everyone has a conflict-of-interest register and is required to disclose that when and if a conflict arises.

J DAVIS: Is that conflict-of-interest register publicly available?

Mr BURGOYNE: No.

J DAVIS: Can you confirm that the Chair no longer has a strategic adviser role with VBX Limited—a miner seeking exploration licences on Melville Island?

Mr BURGOYNE: More broadly, if anyone has a conflict of interest they raise it when and if it arises and deals with it appropriately, as I have just said, through the Act.

J DAVIS: Are you able to answer the question in relation to VBX?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, because I am not the Chair of the NT EPA.

J DAVIS: You are the minister.

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely. That issue has not been raised with me, and I do not have that information directly in front of me.

J DAVIS: Are you happy to take it on notice?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Johnston, I believe that one of the previous questions you asked as to whether or not those conflicts of interest are made publicly available—this then refutes your question because they cannot make that public. Any conflict of interest that is actually lodged is not a publicly available document, so it cannot be shared with the public. Is that correct, minister?

Mr BURGOYNE: What is important to acknowledge—because this is what we are really getting down to—is that members must disclose relevant personal interests and the NT EPA assesses whether the Act is engaged. Everyone has a responsibility.

I have confidence in Dr Vogel that, where he is required to, he has excused himself from decision-making in regard to what has been reported and the information I have in front of me. He took time to step aside because of a perception, not an actual conflict—a perception. I think if you want to ask—or get to the point of what you are trying to get to—I would be more than happy to answer your question. I just cannot speak on behalf of someone.

J DAVIS: My question is about actual or perceived conflict of interest of people who hold significant decision-making power in the Territory and how Territorians can feel confident. I have heard you say that there is a conflict-of-interest register, but it is not public; it is up to the individual to declare that conflict. My understanding is that initially the Chair did not declare his conflict with Purple, so it is a question about how people can feel confident that potential conflicts or perceived conflicts will be managed.

Mr BURGOYNE: As I have stated, the NT EPA has meeting procedures and a conflict-of-interest policy, and it complies with that. Members must disclose relevant personal interests. The NT EPA assesses whether the Act is engaged and whether a member is excluded from papers.

J DAVIS: To confirm, did the Chair disclose the initial role with Purple, or was it disclosed publicly?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not have that information in front of me.

J DAVIS: I will move on.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – HERITAGE

Output 3.1 – Heritage

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 3.0, Heritage, Output 3.1, Heritage.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: During the debate on the Heritage Amendment Bill, you undertook to consult with the department regarding the possible inclusion of the opposition's amendment 8 in the future omnibus Bill. What progress has been made on that commitment?

Mr BURGOYNE: You are not going to like the answer for this. I spoke to the CEO of AAPA who said that it was not something that was necessary currently. There is a member of AAPA on the Heritage Advisory Committee. I am not going to change that. As long as one day, if Labor ever gets into government, you do not change that, there will always be someone from the Heritage Council on there.

Certainly, when the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority come on, you can ask the CEO his views on that. I do not want to speak for him. I have sought advice in regard to that. The response I got was that they are more there to protect sacred sites. Heritage is a different set of skills, and that is not saying that people from AAPA do not have necessary skills to ensure that heritage is also protected.

Mr YOUNG: No problem, but it currently is not legislated at this point, is it?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, it is not legislated. I gave that undertaking that I would go and ask, and that is exactly what I did. The information I have is that it will go to the AAPA board as well in July. That will inform the decision going forward. If the AAPA board feel that they want to continue it and include it—when is that legislation, the omnibus? Between now and October a decision will be made.

I am quite happy to consider it; I thought it was a reasonable thing. Whenever I am looking at amendments to legislation, I try not to do it on the fly because I do not know how that will impact other parts of the Act. I have given that undertaking, I met with the CEO, he gave me his view and the information I have now, which I am appreciative for, is that it will go to the AAPA board to be considered in July.

Mr YOUNG: If it is recommended to put it in the legislation, will you guarantee it will go in?

Mr BURGOYNE: Guarantee is a very strong word, but ...

Mr YOUNG: You stated you would listen to them, so I am just trying to get your point, so you will guarantee?

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely, and it is a good point you raised.

At the end of the day, what we were trying to do with the changes to the Heritage Act was make it easier to appoint members in general. If the AAPA board seek to formally have a seat at that table, we can certainly put it in the omnibus Bill, come October. I gave you that undertaking on the night of the legislation.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, minister.

Mr BURGOYNE: You are welcome. It was a good bit of bipartisanship, I thought at the time. It is one of those funny things. When I spoke, it was like, 'Well, actually it does not necessarily fit the role, but I completely understand'. It is about ensuring that we have Aboriginal people represented on the heritage board, and the AAPA board have a very broad range of skills that they can bring to that board.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES **Output 4.1 – Flora and Fauna**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 4.0, Natural Resources, Output 4.1, Flora and Fauna.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: Last year your government locked in waterfowl bag limits of seven magpie geese and 10 ducks for the first five years. This decision has been based on an aerial survey undertaken in July 2025 by your department. Has your department done any investigation into the impact of the widespread flooding over the Wet Season on waterfowl populations?

Mr BURGOYNE: I can confirm firsthand I took part in the waterfowl aerial survey with Tony and Mike from the department who do an incredible job. It was good to see it firsthand. We went up early in the morning and flew over Adelaide River floodplains. I never thought in a million years that flying from a plane we would be able to accurately count the amount of birds, and it has been a big point of conjecture, but you can see—and I kid you not—baby geese and eggs under their mother from the height for which they fly. It was eye opening for me to see the work that they do. They fly backwards and forwards in a grid formation. They only count the birds that they can see to a certain point, so it gives them a good reference to a couple of hundred metres out, and they are logging all the time with the number of birds that they can see. I thought there would be just thousands of birds, and you would never be able to count them all, but because they do it during the Wet Season whilst the floodplain is full the birds are quite evenly dispersed, and you can get a real good sense of how many there are.

The 2026 survey was completed in April this year. Preliminary analysis indicates that the population has increased from 2025 levels, above average rainfall, to go to your point, over the 2026 Wet Season should contribute to an increase in the goose population due to an expansion of the area for which they can breed during those floodplain episodes.

Mr YOUNG: Given what you have said, there has been an increase and there has definitely been no reduction with the huge flooding events over the Wet Season and the impact that the floods may have in inundating nest—that is a guarantee; there has been no impact from year to year?

Mr BURGOYNE: No. The annual survey showed an increase.

Mr YOUNG: An increase of how much year on year?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is a very good question. I am enjoying talking about the magpie geese. I will pass to the expert on this issue, Mr Alaric Fisher, who can further talk about the count and what the flooding means for the magpie geese and their habitat.

Dr FISHER: The floods were bad for many things, but they are good for magpie geese, partly because the early start to the Wet Season was favourable. That is usually when there is large mortality of magpie geese

at the end of the Dry Season, whereas the early onset of the Wet Season was of benefit to this population. Also, because the floodplains filled there was lots of area and resources available for nesting, so nesting levels were very high, and the population estimate was 1.7 million birds, that is a 27% increase on last year's estimate. That is about the maximum rate of increase possible for the population, so it was a very good year.

Mr YOUNG: Are the aerial surveys only done over the Adelaide River floodplains?

Mr BURGOYNE: They are done over a number of floodplains, and one of the areas which the pilots, or the people in the department, love to go to is Arnhem Land because of its pristine environment and beautiful scenery. They do Adelaide River, Arnhem Land, over the Finniss and to Wadeye, so they know the nesting regions of the magpie geese, and they essentially travel in a grid over the known locations and count the birds in the major nesting areas.

Mr YOUNG: Just the Wadeye region, like Thamarrurr region, or was it more around the Daly River region?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will pass to Dr Alaric Fisher.

Dr FISHER: We have mapped all the coastal lowland floodplains of the Northern Territory, and the aerial surveys cover virtually all of them. All way around from Blue Mud Bay through Arnhem Land, Kakadu, Mary River, Adelaide River, Finniss River floodplains, Daly River floodplains down to the Moil and down to Wadeye.

Mr YOUNG: You have not seen a decrease, narrowing in on, say, Daly River where there were quite significant flooding events?

Dr FISHER: No. That area in recent years has been a real stronghold for magpie geese. Some of the largest numbers often come from that area, which is probably because the floodplains there are in particularly good condition and there is less impact from things like buffalo and pigs and weeds in those western floodplains. The higher water levels in the floodplain are beneficial to geese.

Mr KERLE: Does your area look after flora? Does your area research different stratas of bushlands? Do you still maintain an IT system that was originally called Salvage? I think it is a Java Oracle thing. I only ask because the first job I had out of uni was implementing that for the NT Government, so I am curious if it is still floating around.

Dr FISHER: I vaguely recall Salvage. It is not a system that we still use, but we have other current systems for keeping that data.

Mr KERLE: Good news; it should be retired by now.

Madam CHAIR: This concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Water Resources

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 4.2, Water Resources.

Are there any questions? I know the Member for Johnston did have some that were related to this. We will go to Member for Daly first.

Mr YOUNG: Water Resources has been cut by more than \$5m at the same time as the Territory Water Plan is coming to an end, with nothing to replace it. Meanwhile, the Productivity Commission found that the NT is failing to meet commitments on best practice for water management and planning. What exactly is your government's plan to improve water management and meet commitments under the National Water Initiative or the new National Water Agreement, with less funding?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will go through the variation of the budget as it relates. Regarding what makes up that \$5m that you have spoken about, it is the finalisation of funding for the Territory Water Plan and the Office of Water Security. There is a change in own-source revenue generated relating to bore testing and construction. There is a variation in regard to the National Water Grid Authority externally funded programs, and they have reduced. There are one-off contributions from other agencies towards other expenses. There is the non-cash depreciation. The Alice Springs aquifer protection study that was once-off funding. There was a variation regarding the Department of Corporate and Digital Development automation of human resource application. There was a reduction relating to contribution towards resourcing for OCPE.

Then there were a few increases as well that have gone into that, but I guess you are more worried about the overall. The biggest one there was the finalisation funding for the Territory Water Plan.

Mr YOUNG: You mentioned the finalisation of the Territory Water Plan. How many actions under the plan were completed? How many remain outstanding? Which actions were not delivered?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to note that the Territory Water Plan was only funded for three years under the previous government. It set out a three-year approach to strategic water management.

Obviously, without the ongoing funding, all the operations of the Office of Water Security will be rolled into the Water Resources Division which will coordinate with the Northern Territory Government National Water Grid funding proposal. It is dedicated funding. DLPE and NT Government agencies will continue to deliver water security projects in line with core business activities. They do this through applying through that water grid funding.

You asked about key achievements; is that right?

Mr YOUNG: Yes, how many actions were completed under that water plan?

Mr BURGOYNE: I cannot speak to the previous Territory Water Plan, but I can speak to what our government has done over the last financial year, which is to secure a further \$31.1m in National Water Grid funding.

We have delivered nine remote community water forums, with a further five planned before 30 June 2026.

There has been expansion of the Living Water Smart program with the release of the Top End and Central Australia ultimate irrigation user guides and installation of 192 loggers to help detect leaks and save water in regional businesses; delivered the water efficiency training program; released the community education series of products, including Know Your Bore and Know Your Water; delivered water legislation reform to improve water trading opportunities and support economic development; and received two industry recognition awards from the NT Australian Water Association, including an Infrastructure Project Innovation award for the remote community water forums and the Organisational Excellence award for the NTG water demand strategy. Well done, Ms Nerida Beard, Executive Director, Water Resources.

Mr YOUNG: Moving on to the Alice Springs Water Allocation Plan, there has been public consultation on that plan. It closed on 17 March 2026. How many submissions were received? When does the government expect to release its response to the community feedback?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will get the number of submissions. It is important to note there were a number of things that were raised throughout that community consultation period. As well as the community consultation period, I had lots of people coming up to me at the markets, raising the concerns they had with the plan. It is important that we continue the work of the department in educating people about what the plan means.

There will be a plan out for discussion in July, I am being advised. Does that sound—there will be a plan for me to make a decision on in July. There you go.

We will take into consideration all the concerns the community has raised. Was there a specific question, Member for Daly? How many submissions?

Mr YOUNG: How many submissions ...

Mr BURGOYNE: We are trying to find that. It was ...

Mr YOUNG: The other part, minister, was when will that be released—the community feedback report. You might have mentioned it.

Mr BURGOYNE: On the declaration of the plan, it is all there for everyone to see. It allows everyone to have their say, for the consultation piece to be considered by me as minister and then for the plan to be put in place. It is what has happened with all the other water plans. We are working through that process.

Mr YOUNG: You do not have how many people submitted into the public consultation into the plan?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, I am just getting that number.

Mr YOUNG: That is okay. I can ask a couple more questions.

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, we will make sure we get it for you. Keep going, Member for Daly, and we will make sure we come back. I am writing it down—the number of submissions. Keep going.

Mr YOUNG: What were the key themes raised during the consultation on the draft Alice Springs Water Allocation Plan, considering you said that many people brought up issues with the markets as well? Were there any changes made to the draft as a result?

Mr BURGOYNE: The biggest issue people raised with me was the changing of the zone. There originally were five zones, and it has gone down to three. People believed there were areas now no longer being calculated as part of the Alice Springs plan. The reason the department did that was because the areas outside the plan were naturally constrained by how much you could extract. It was mainly for rural areas and low yields. The issue some people had was they thought that by design it was being kept outside of the water allocation plan so then a massive subdivision could be put in, which simply was not the case. You would require rezoning and all these things. There was community concern that for some reason areas were being taken out because there would be all this development or farming, but it was purely because they were restricted by the amount of water they could actually take out of the ground because it was for the large part big rural blocks in those area that did not use much water at all.

Mr YOUNG: What assessments have been undertaken on the environmental impacts of increased in estimated sustainable yield particularly on groundwater-dependent ecosystems and river red gums?

Mr BURGOYNE: For that level of detail, I will pass to Executive Director Nerida who I know is chomping at the bit to answer.

Ms BEARD: In terms of assessments, before any water allocation plan is altered, we have a water resource assessment that is released. That was released in June last year. It is quite a comprehensive report and details the previous five years of data collection since the plan was constructed. It also covers some long-term data about the water resources of the region. That work has also had an updated model, the resources of the region and incorporated some recent data from a drilling program in the immediate years previous.

The assessment told us that the Mereenie aquifer is larger and more connected in the different units than we first anticipated. The plan also uses that information and actually consolidates the different Mereenie aquifers that we understood in previous plans might be separate. We will now be managing those as one unit, and that was another part of the change in the new plan.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have that answer to the amount of people who put in submissions for public consultation?

Ms BEARD: We had 18 submissions via survey, nine written submissions and three submissions that included both. In total that is 30 submissions.

Mr YOUNG: Regarding Singleton, do you support the guidelines to termination that up to 30% of groundwater-dependent trees can be destroyed in the Western Davenport water control district?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to understand the licence which was previously granted under the Labor government regarding Singleton. It is yet to be realised in any way, shape or form. There is a number of reporting requirements as they continue—if they ever get to the point where they can extract any sizeable amount of water out of that aquifer. There is a whole range of—it is a staged approval. The maximum allowable is unlikely to ever be met and there are guidelines that advise protections. There is a number of protections in place relating to the question that you have asked.

Mr YOUNG: Was there any scientific evidence to support the 30% of groundwater-dependent trees in the Western Davenport water control district?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will pass on to the Executive Director of Water Resources, Nerida Beard.

Ms BEARD: Yes, there was some scientific work to map groundwater-dependent ecosystems using spatial science. That science work was released prior to the guideline and directly informed the guideline's release in 2021.

Mr BURGOYNE: Just to add to that, Member for Daly, the guidance that has been provided talks about impacts, not about destruction.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know if the Member for Barkly supports the Singleton groundwater project?

Mr BURGOYNE: You would have to ask the Member for Barkly, Member for Daly.

Mr KERLE: You could have asked him that today.

Mr YOUNG: As you are Cabinet colleagues, I would assume that you would speak about this.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, I do not think the minister is going to speak on any other minister's behalf.

Mr YOUNG: Is that a no?

Madam CHAIR: Please direct questions related to the minister.

Mr YOUNG: I will take that as a no.

Madam CHAIR: Do not infer anything, Member for Daly. Do not infer what they are saying, please.

J DAVIS: I am just following up on my questions to do with PFAS in waterways. The first question, which you suggested I ask in this output, is: what is the most recent data available for Rapid Creek and Ludmilla Creek, and when was that published?

Mr BURGOYNE: Rapid Creek and Ludmilla Creek is monitored by the Commonwealth and the Department of Defence. It has been monitored annually since 2018. The PMAP (PFAS Management Area Plan) was last published in 2023–24. That is publicly available on their website.

J DAVIS: It is done annually, but it has not been published since 2024.

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, Member for Johnston.

J DAVIS: The second question was: what analysis, if any, has been undertaken of PFAS levels over time since 2017?

Mr BURGOYNE: That goes to that report that I have just spoken about. Since 2018 there has been annual monitoring in regard to those areas of Rapid Creek and Ludmilla Creek.

J DAVIS: Does that indicate whether concentrations are increasing, decreasing or remaining stable?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will pass to Nerida Beard, Executive Director of Water Resources, for a more fulsome response.

Ms BEARD: The Department of Defence manage their monitoring program through a PFAS management area plan. They last updated that plan in 2025, and then they published reports that describe over time the change in levels. Their most recent report provided that risk to the community and environment has not changed over the reporting period. Precautionary advice remains in place.

Mr YOUNG: Since the new Aboriginal water reserve legislation commenced, how many Aboriginal organisations, communities or traditional owners have accessed, applied for or benefited from water made available through the Aboriginal water reserve?

Mr BURGOYNE: It was one of my biggest frustrations when coming to the role that the Aboriginal water reserves has not been activated. We made legislative change to enable it to be more easily accessible, and we are currently working and engaging with a range of Aboriginal organisations about a development prospectus that represents the organisation's development interest and markets our aspirations to future partners.

It is about trying to liaise with Aboriginal organisations and people who want to utilise that water and try to get that economic benefit on the ground for Aboriginal people through the Aboriginal water reserve. That is what it is there for. It is there to be utilised and for economic development should people chose to utilise it for that. We want to see it happen.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, but you did not answer the question. I asked how many community organisations, traditional owners and Aboriginal organisations has the Aboriginal water reserve been available to?

Mr BURGOYNE: Oh, available to?

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a figure?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is available to many, as laid out as part of the water allocation plans.

Mr YOUNG: Sorry, let me reword it—applied for.

Mr BURGOYNE: There are none that have actually formally applied. That is the frustration. We continue to try work with those Aboriginal organisations to facilitate that pathway. The inquiries are increasing, I am told, by the Executive Director of Water Resources. It is promising, but we need to get them across the line, because that is what the water is there for. It is there as part of the Aboriginal water reserve for Aboriginal people to use how they see fit and for their own economic benefit.

Mr YOUNG: How have they inquired? Is it more they have come to you, or you have gone to Aboriginal communities or through a formal process?

Mr BURGOYNE: No, through the department. They have not just come to me.

Mr YOUNG: Sorry, I was not inferring to you, minister. I was meaning—how many have inquired? Do you have a list?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will pass to Nerida Beard, Executive Director of Water Resources, to give you a better idea of what has been happening through the department to enable and try to support Aboriginal organisations and landholders to take advantage of the Aboriginal water reserve.

Ms BEARD: We are engaging with Aboriginal organisations, as the minister referred. We are also working with a couple of Aboriginal organisations to create promotional videos on how they have already benefitted from water-related developments. Even though there have not been applications yet to the Aboriginal water reserve, there are water licences in Aboriginal lands through the standard process. We are working with those organisations to promote other benefits they have gained from that in the hope it will encourage others to understand the opportunity that might be available.

I could say we have had more than five inquires and less than 10. Every one of those we follow up and discuss with those potential applicants. We have also made available an application pack on our website and spend a significant amount of time engaging with Aboriginal organisations, including land councils and regional organisations to understand the application process.

Mr YOUNG: If there has been no water allocated or used, what barriers still remain for government, and what are you doing to ensure people get economic benefits as it was promised.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a good question. We are continuing to work with those Aboriginal organisations and landowners, because it is tied to land—that is really important in the Northern Territory—to enable it to occur.

The examples I have been given through the department are there may be a landowner, an Aboriginal organisation, which is entitled to water under the Aboriginal water reserve and a mango farm nearby that can no longer apply for any additional water to grow their farm because, under the water allocation plan, the water is all expended. There is water under the Aboriginal water reserve, and if the local Aboriginal people sought to trade that water, they could gain an economic benefit. It is important they have to be in the same area and accessing the same aquifer, but it relates to land.

These are things that as people become more aware about what is available and what the options are to them, it will make sense. We are trying all the time to remove any barriers. I have made legislative change, and now it is about getting out there, as the Director of Water Resources has stated, and informing people what the opportunities are and then helping them to realise them.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.2.

Output 4.3 – Land Resources

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 4.3, Land Resources.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: My understanding for the 2026–27 budget to implement the buffel grass weed management plan is that there has been \$750,000 allocated to that; is that correct?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is correct; it is \$750,000 per annum.

Mr YOUNG: Have you approved any permits for the use, trade, sale and planting of buffel grass?

Mr BURGOYNE: To confirm, Member for Daly, are you asking about the permits that have been ...

Mr YOUNG: The industry-wide permits.

Mr BURGOYNE: The pastoral estate, as we have stated previously, has an exemption as a permit, and there has been one formal permit to import buffel seed since Declaration 1.

Mr YOUNG: Who would that be to?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will not go into specifics; there has been one in the Alice Springs area.

Mr YOUNG: You have stated that you have approved a permit for the importation of buffel grass seed into the Northern Territory.

Mr BURGOYNE: One.

Mr YOUNG: One, but you will not say who to or who for.

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not think it is fair to single out individuals. We know who it is, the department knows who it is, and there has been one.

Mr YOUNG: Who is we?

Mr BURGOYNE: The department.

Mr YOUNG: Okay, but it will not be made public. Will it be made public in any upcoming reporting period?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is the same regarding any permit, you do not necessarily discuss each individual permit and each individual permit holder. The whole reason for this is that there is a process in place. People were saying that there would be hundreds of applications. That simply has not been the case. There has been one since the implementation of the plan, and that it is. One permit has been issued in regard to importation.

Mr YOUNG: It could open it up for more.

Mr BURGOYNE: That is why the permit system is in place. If that changes next year I will be saying there would be more. Right now, there has been one.

Mr YOUNG: I am trying to understand in terms of the management of buffel grass around Alice Springs and Central Australia. Buffel grass does not just stay within fence lines; it spreads across.

Mr BURGOYNE: This goes to the very point of the weed management plan. This is where I would love to take the time to explain. On pastoral properties buffel grass is managed through grazing of the buffel grass, and that does not happen in towns, in city centres or national parks. Where the greatest impacts are is in towns like Alice Springs, like in the West MacDonnell National Park. We are trying to get out there and engage and do as much as we can with the resources that we have.

I am also going to the federal government to seek further resources to deal with buffel grass. That is important because we have declared it a weed; we are managing it appropriately and are working with landholders to try to reduce its impacts on our communities. That is the important part of this plan.

Mr YOUNG: You just stated you declared buffel grass as a weed. You also stated you are able to import it in for pastoralists to have the ability to still access buffel grass seed with no limitations

Mr BURGOYNE: No, that is not correct. This was the case under the former Labor government. It declared it a weed and you could still import it and spread it. There was no permit system. That is the reality of what was occurring.

Through this department and our government, we have done the heavy lifting and the hard work to ensure that there is a plan in place so we are working with all the necessary landholders to acknowledge their responsibilities under the plan and start to deal with buffel grass. It has not been managed appropriately over a long period of time.'

The buffel grass weed management plan is the first step in starting to deal with this. Just like gamba grass had to be dealt with up here in the Top End, buffel grass will now begin to be managed. I look forward to hopefully receiving additional funding and resourcing from the federal government. Just like they fund gamba grass management in the Top End, in Central Australia we will require additional resources to deal with buffel grass.

Mr YOUNG: You must recognise that buffel grass is causing significant and harmful impacts across huge areas of Central Australia and the Barkly region. Recently we saw the 2024 bushfires in the Barkly region. You would recognise it is having a huge impact on our environment.

Mr BURGOYNE: Not only do I recognise the impacts; they are written in the plan.

Mr YOUNG: Do you concede that buffel grass is having a significant and negative impact on the tourism industry in Central Australia, in the MacDonnell Ranges or Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Watarrka?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will acknowledge that for a long time, under eight years of Labor, nothing was done to address buffel grass. Under our government's stewardship, we have implemented a buffel grass management plan. There is \$750,000 annually, ongoing, to address its impacts. We are now working with the federal government to see what additional resources we can gather so we can further address the impacts that buffel grass has on our communities.

Mr YOUNG: Great speech, but I do not think that will be done through the sale and planting of more buffel grass. We can all recognise that ...

Mr BURGOYNE: Then why did the Labor government not do anything when it was in power?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, do you have a question?

Mr YOUNG: I have a question. Do you also acknowledge that buffel grass is a major threat to the Larapinta Trail?

Mr BURGOYNE: What is important is that the buffel team in Alice Springs—I have met Max, Amber and Tamara. I thank them all for the important work they have in and around Alice Springs. They work closely with Parks to manage buffel along that Larapinta Trail. I have run the West Macs Monster. I hear and see it when I travel to the West Macs. That is why we need the additional resources from the federal government so we can begin to deal with the impacts that it has on some of those strategic and—I am trying to think of the words that are used in the plan.

Ms WAUCHOPE: Priority places.

Mr BURGOYNE: Priority places—thank you very much, Maria.

That is what the plan sets out. We will focus on these priority areas, address the impact it has had and pour our resources into it. Obviously, as with everything in the Northern Territory, we only have a finite amount of resources. Hopefully, through additional assistance from the federal government, we will be able to pour more and more into it and start to reduce the impacts we have seen in areas like the Larapinta Trail.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions for Output 4.3, Land Resources?

J DAVIS: This is on behalf of the Member for Mulka. In 2025 the CLP government ended its support for the Aboriginal ranger program by scrapping \$12m promised funding for grants. Has support been renewed in

this budget for ranger programs? If not, why has the government determined these grants are no longer necessary, and how is the government supporting ranger programs?

Mr BURGOYNE: I completely understand people's frustration. As a government we were frustrated when we came into government and there was no money allocated for ranger grants. That is the reality. When you are in government there is only so much money. There was no money allocated in future budgets by the previous government for ranger grants. That was the reality of the situation. It is important that people understand that positions for rangers in these areas are supported through the federal government. The previous grants the NT Government provided were for specific programs, and every second year for vehicles—cars, boats and the rest of it.

To my knowledge—I keep seeing notices and all the rest of it—Aboriginal rangers continue to operate in areas throughout the Northern Territory. In addition, since 2021 the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment has also managed the INPEX-funded Coastal Management Grants program which provides grants for Aboriginal sea country management. This program will continue until 2043.

J DAVIS: I just note that you said there was no money for that \$12m, but you had a whole budget. You decided that there would not be that \$12m spent on the Aboriginal ranger program.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to highlight what happened when we came into government, because I believe it has not been clearly articulated. There were several cliff funding arrangements in place. That was in place so that the previous government did not look like it would tip over that \$15bn in debt. When you get into government and there is no money allocated for future programs, you cannot just pull money from nowhere; that is the reality of the situation we found ourselves in. There were a lot of hard decisions that had to be made. This was discussed previously and relates to a previous financial year, and the Aboriginal ranger groups positions continue, federally funded. It was purely those grants regarding programs and vehicles that ceased.

Mr YOUNG: That is how election commitments work. They were both commitments as part of the Aboriginal ranger grants from both Labor and the CLP. I was out there on the election booths ...

Madam CHAIR: Excuse me, Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: There will be a question.

Madam CHAIR: No. Can you stop for a second? You did not even get the call; you just started talking without any kind of process or respect through the Chair. I would ask that you try to do that from hereon in.

Mr YOUNG: No problem, Chair.

Madam CHAIR: If you would like a question, notify me and I will give you the call, but you did not do that. You then started to have a crack at the minister, and that is not acceptable. If you have a question, ask a question.

Mr YOUNG: I have a question.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, you have the call. You do not have much leeway, though.

Mr YOUNG: They were both election commitments from ALP and the CLP at the time. I am still trying to understand why that commitment—I was out on those election booths hearing the CLP candidate, Kris Civitarese, tell everyone there would be \$12m in ranger grants. Clearly that would never be the case under your government.

Mr BURGOYNE: The reason there was no money was because your government spent so frivolously that there was no money that could be allocated; that is the reality, Member for Daly. When you do not manage your spending appropriately, there is no money in the kitty. That has been explained many times.

Mr YOUNG: You have plenty of money for jails.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, again—we have been in this position before. I will not hesitate to give you a warning. Please control your responses.

That concludes consideration of Output 4.3 and Output Group 4.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – MINING
Output 5.1 – Mining

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 6.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 6.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs related to the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the agency and the officers who assisted the minister.

Minister, would you like to thank your team?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank the Chief Executive Officer, Joanne Townsend; the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Leah Clifford; and Chief Financial Officer, Desiree Ng for their assistance today. It has been greatly appreciated. I thank everyone who has been sitting out the back and supported them.

Madam CHAIR: Given that we are changing over and it is close to the midway gap, we will have a quick 10-minute recess to get the new teams set up. We will return at 8.17 pm.

The committee suspended.

LAND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes, regarding the Land Development Corporation. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark if you make it that far. The floor is yours.

Mr BURGOYNE: Today with me I have Hannah Barraza, Chief Executive Officer of Land Development Corporation, and Carly Beh, Chief Financial Officer.

The Land Development Corporation plays a critical role in supporting economic growth and development across the Northern Territory. As the government's strategic land developer, the Land Development Corporation ensures land is made available in the right locations at the right time to support industry, investment and population growth.

This budget reflects the government's reset of the Land Development Corporation to ensure it remains fit for purpose in a changing development landscape. The reset sharpens LDC's (Land Development Corporation) focus on areas of greatest value, supporting strategic industries, enabling critical infrastructure and addressing housing and land supply challenges in regional centres.

It also clarifies when government intervention is appropriate, ensuring the Land Development Corporation complements rather than competes with the private sector. The reset Land Development Corporation will step back from non-strategic activity in manure markets, such as Darwin, while increasing its focus on regional development, strategic precincts and priority industries.

Upcoming key priorities include:

- complete construction of 11 service lots and headworks for the marine industry precinct 1, as part of the Northern Marine Complex, supporting the ship lift project
- complete construction of six service lots at the Holtze Industrial Estate to deliver on secured commitments with proponents

- continue to support proponents of strategic industries on Land Development Corporation-serviced, development-ready land at East Arm
- progress housing deliveries at Kilgariff Estate in Alice Springs and deliver 84 new residential lots in final delivery phases 3.10 and 3.11 of Zuccoli Village with development partner Urbex—these lots will provide additional homes for Territorians under the Territory government’s generous grants program
- divest ownership of the residential infill site at Waratah Crescent, Fannie Bay, facilitating the release of the site for development as part of the LDC reset.

For 2026–27 the Land Development Corporation estimated financial position includes total revenue of \$27.33m, including \$22.79m from land sales and other revenue of \$4.54m from leases, interest and other sources, with a strong inventory position of \$150.32m, payments of \$1.3m in tax income and \$1.52m in dividends for the 2025–26 year.

These dividends reflects the Land Development Corporation’s commercial obligations and competitive neutrality adherence. A net operating deficit, before tax, of \$2.57m is forecasted for 2026–27; however, this is expected to improve as a result of commercial transactions not previously forecast.

I welcome any questions from the committee.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions on the minister’s statement? Member for Nightcliff.

Mr SMELT: I know we still have a couple of organisations to come, so I will try to get through this quickly.

How many lots have been sold as part of stage 2A at Kilgariff Estate?

Mr BURGOYNE: In relation to Kilgariff, there have been 24 lots settled, two lots are under contract and 26 titled lots remain available.

Mr SMELT: Can you give the same stats for stage 2B at Kilgariff?

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to stage 2B, which comprises 36 residential lots, they have been titled, but none have yet sold.

Mr SMELT: Can you tell us how many were sold during the reporting period?

Mr BURGOYNE: In the 2025–26 reporting period, two have settled and two are currently under contract.

Mr SMELT: Given that low number of sales in the reporting period, why was stage 2B released?

Mr BURGOYNE: As previously stated, we want to make sure that there is a good flow of land release into the market. We spoke about this earlier in regard to ensuring that there is land available; the allocated timeframes it takes to bring land to market; and ensuring there is that constant supply. Through the Land Development Corporation, they enable that to happen so that there is a constant supply of land ready to be built on.

Mr SMELT: Based on those numbers, there would be about six years’ worth in stage 1A alone. What would you say are the biggest blockers to getting more houses built at Kilgariff?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is probably picky builders, to be honest, but I will not say that because many of them are good people I know in Alice Springs.

The reality is that there is a lot of bush work available around Alice Springs. As I stated earlier, builders at the moment are prioritising government bush work over local home builds. I have spoken to many residents who have raised their frustrations with me about their inability to get a builder to build them a home, which is why the Land Development Corporation is working with local builders to ensure that they can build homes and deliver them for local residents.

That is a positive thing that the Land Development Corporation has sought to do. It means that there will be homes available so that rather than individuals having to seek out a builder, get a quote, then get the home delivered, a builder is able to liaise directly with the Land Development Corporation, build the desired number

of homes that are contracted through the Land Development Corporation and then sell them on the open market as spec homes, which are still eligible for the \$50,000 first home owners grant.

Mr SMELT: Have you done any assessment of land for residential and industrial development? You touched on this earlier for Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek. I think we covered off Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, but particularly Katherine assessments for residential and industry development that LDC could take up?

Mr BURGOYNE: Through Crown lands, there is commercial land available at Katherine East.

Mr SMELT: Has that been identified for LDC to play a role?

Mr BURGOYNE: There is a local developer undertaking those works. The role of the Land Development Corporation is where a private proponent can come in and do the work and make money. That is obviously our preference.

In Alice Springs and in other remote locations like Tennant Creek, to service the land would be commercially unviable. Where there is a failure in the marketplace, the Land Development Corporation comes in and services that need.

Mr SMELT: In terms of the blockers, you mentioned potentially picky builders who want to do the remote work, but is it nothing to do with the builds being too expensive?

Mr BURGOYNE: I always discuss this with builders. Any builder will naturally do a job that will earn them more money. It is important when dealing with mums and dads who have a limited amount of resources available to them—it will be difficult for them with the increases in housing supplies and in building supplies to enable themselves to get that home built. I have seen this when I have been dealing with residents in Alice Springs.

If you are building one house at a time, as a builder you have to make your profit margin on that individual house. If you can build homes through the Land Development Corporation, through a builder, what we are seeking to achieve is that through building multiple homes you can bring down the overall cost because you can pour multiple slabs, multiple sets of wall frames and then drop on multiple sets of roof trusses. It reduces the overall cost, which means the builder can make the same amount of profit but deliver a product for a lesser price, which then enables the mums and dads to be able to afford to get in the market using the HomeGrown grant.

It has been a difficult space. I have been speaking to everyone about this. It does not matter whether you are talking to conveyancers, mortgage brokers, builders or mums and dads, we are doing everything we can to enable first homebuyers to get into the market so that they can have their own slice of the Territory.

Mr SMELT: Why are you persisting with selling off these individual lots at Kilgariff if it is not working?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is not that it is not working. This was my other frustration that came out of some comments recently in the media. There are organisations that are building homes at Kilgariff. The fact that the number that the Treasurer gave to the committee of one HomeGrown grant being provided in Central Australia highlights the difficulties that some new people have of cracking into that market, but there are homes being built for organisations in Alice Springs—there are homes being built now—and this is visible to everyone who drives past.

What the Land Development Corporation is enabling through their work with local builders is to bring down the overall cost, bring those homes to market and, therefore, deliver a product that people will want, and that is the test case for the Land Development Corporation.

Mr SMELT: Looking at the Waratah Crescent site that you mentioned briefly, why did the government choose not to proceed with the proposed development at Sports House?

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding the Waratah Crescent project, as part of the strategic reset for the Land Development Corporation I asked a simple question of Chief Executive Officer Hannah: could private enterprise deliver this project? The answer was yes, they probably could. Where we can get out of the way and enable a private builder to build that project, they can do that, and the Land Development Corporation is focusing now on those strategic priorities of government to ensure that they are delivering in those areas

where there has been market failure but also are delivering strategic priorities for government. There was an understanding there obviously was a change of government, a change of priorities, and that led to that.

Mr SMELT: What will happen with that land now? Will it be sold on the open market?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes, the plan is to sell that on the open market.

Mr SMELT: How will the public benefit be delivered, noting under its previous owner it was for public use?

Mr BURGOYNE: It has been rezoned for residential use. There will be an expression of interest to garner the appetite for that development.

Mr SMELT: Will that include any caveats to try to produce some sort of social outcome or affordable housing or anything in that realm?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to note that is not really the space. The Land Development Corporation are getting out of this space. They are opening up to the market to see what they want to do with that block of land. It will be up to them to put that forward and go through all the relevant processes, as any other developer would have to. It is just about putting that land on the market and for a developer to decide what they want to do with it.

Mr KERLE: I am asking a question for my constituents in Palmerston. We talked about land releases in Kilgariff. I do not want to stray into future policy announcements, but do we have plans for land releases around Palmerston? Are we in the process of planning for land release around Palmerston in addition to the new suburb of Asche? How much land? How many lots are we looking at? How long until people can start buying them?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will pass to Chief Executive Officer Hannah Barraza to answer that question.

Ms BARRAZA: As part of the LDC reset we have taken on strategic priorities. One of those priorities will see us focus that attention on residential regional development. That will see us step back from residential development in Darwin, and that is based on a really mature market. A number of developments are currently underway. I think the minister touched on them earlier, but Holtze Parks is one of them. At this point we will deliver the final stages of Zuccoli Village, and that will see the Land Development Corporation exit the Darwin residential market.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of the Land Development Corporation business line.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers involved who provided advice to the minister today.

Minister, do you have any closing words before we let them go?

Mr BURGOYNE: Thank you very much to Hannah and to Carly for coming in today and taking part in this committee process, and to the entire Land Development Corporation team.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY

Madam CHAIR: We now have the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mr BURGOYNE: Madam Chair, I have here today Robert Pocock, the Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority; Andrew Harvey, Director of Corporate Services, Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority; and Darren Johnson, Director, Policy and Governance, Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Being a statutory authority, I will hand over to Chief Executive Officer Robert Pocock to make an opening statement.

Mr POCOCK: Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. With me today are Andrew Harvey and Darren Johnson. I thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement this evening.

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority is an independent statutory authority established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*. The Act seeks to strike an appropriate balance between the protection of sacred sites and development in the Northern Territory, supporting the preservation and enhancement of Aboriginal tradition alongside the economic, cultural and social advancement of the Territory.

Through its administration of the Act, the authority works at the early planning stage of land use and development, facilitating consultation with Aboriginal custodians and providing clear conditions to guide development while protecting sacred sites.

In the Northern Territory any person proposing to use or work on land may apply for an authority certificate. Authority certificates serve two key purposes: to ensure the protection of sites in accordance with the wishes of custodians; and to provide indemnity to certificate holders from prosecution for damage or interference with sacred sites, provided the work or use covered is undertaken in accordance with their certificate. This process provides certainty for both custodians and proponents, supporting responsible and sustainable development in the Territory. Importantly, authority certificates are the primary mechanism under the Act for protecting sacred sites.

During the reporting period, the authority issued authority certificates across a range of sectors, including infrastructure, tourism, mining, and oil and gas projects. This included certificates for the INPEX offshore pipeline and onshore carbon capture and storage interconnecting pipeline; the Alice Springs Golf Club water bore project; works at Ross Park school in Alice Springs; the Nolans rare earth project; and, more recently, the McArthur River Mine northern overburden emplacement facility. We also issued 28 certificates to Northern Territory Government agencies and instrumentalities to guide public works and projects.

The authority delivered strong operational outcomes during the reporting period. A total of 93 certificates were issued, representing a 33% increase on the previous year. Annual certificate output is forecast to surpass the previous financial year's total of 94 by 24 certificates.

The authority also achieved record revenue during the reporting period. In December 2025 the authority recorded its highest monthly revenue of \$1.176m, exceeding the previous record by \$371,000. For the reporting period total revenue reached \$5.255m, not only setting a new record for the reporting period but also exceeding the previous annual revenue record of \$4.482m by \$770,000. Annual revenue is forecast to exceed the previous annual record by \$1.73m.

During the reporting period the authority finalised one prosecution, resulting in the first term of imprisonment imposed for an offence against the Sacred Sites Act.

This performance reflects sustained demand for authority certificates and engagement with our processes, driven by significant development activity across the Territory. You will see from BP3 that total expenditure was forecast at \$8.376m for 2025–26 and revised through the midyear budget review process to \$10.309m. This variance reflects increased operational expenditure related to sacred site clearance requests funded by self-generated revenue.

To support delivery of large and complex projects involving high volumes of authority certificate applications across multiple subject land areas, the authority implemented a project-based delivery model, with 2025–26 being the first full financial year of its operation. Project-specific funding arrangements for the Telstra intercity fibre link, Territory Energy Link and Kakadu infrastructure projects provided targeted funding to expand operational capacity. This included additional capability across anthropology, project management and corporate services. This approach ensured that authority certificates could be issued within project timeframes while maintaining the integrity of statutory processes and continuing to service business-as-usual applications.

The model has delivered strong outcomes in response to time-limited demand and demonstrates the capacity of the Act to support effective protection of sacred sites and significant development activity. Of the 93 certificates issued during the reporting period, 26—almost 30%—were delivered under this model.

While effective, the authorities considering how it's core structure may need to adapt to support scaling in response to project demand. This is necessary to avoid maintaining a workforce beyond what baseline appropriation and revenue can sustainably support, once major projects conclude. This will ensure the authority remains responsive to demand while continuing to meet its statute of responsibilities in a consistent, efficient and sustainable manner.

While I have spoken a lot about output and revenue I emphasise that authority certificates, ultimately what we are talking about, are fundamentally about the protection of sacred sites. Under the Sacred Sites Act a person aggrieved by certain decisions of the authority may apply to the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment for a review of those decisions. There were no ministerial review applications during the reporting period.

Looking forward, in 2026–27 the authority will continue to focus on improving efficiency while maintaining strong protection of sacred sites and supporting broader economic development. This includes commencing a review and refresh of the authority's strategic and business plans, identified as a priority by our board. The authority also expects procurement to replace legacy systems used in the management of sacred site information to be finalised in the third quarter of 2026.

In closing, I reaffirm the importance of the authority's role in protecting sacred sites, while enabling sustainable development for all Territorians. I thank the board members for their work over the past year, and acknowledge the leadership of Chairman Mr Bobby Nunggumajbarr and Deputy Chair Ms Lorraine Jones, both of whom were recently reappointed for a further three-year term. Finally, I thank the authority staff for their professionalism, commitment and continued work in upholding the principles of the Sacred Sites Act.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Pocock. Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, Chair and to the AAPA staff, and Mr Pocock for your opening statement.

Minister, your government has said you are streamlining development processes. Why have you cut funding to AAPA?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not believe funding has been cut to AAPA, as Mr Pocock—

Mr YOUNG: I think, by \$3m. You are on \$10m previously 2025-26 ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, you have asked a question, wait for the answer please.

Mr YOUNG: It is \$7m for 2026-27.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Daly, you have asked a question, wait for the answer. He did not ask for any clarifying information, he does not need it, he is getting his answer.

Mr YOUNG: I was just giving him some guidance, so it is actual.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to understand that the government appropriation that goes towards AAPA, for this financial year and the next three financial years, is forecast to be \$3.323m. That is how much money the Northern Territory government provides the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. The revenue, which is generated from AAPA certificates, goes up and down depending on the number of authority certificates they believe they are forecasting. Like I said, that can go up and down as well.

Mr YOUNG: What exactly have you cut or reduced?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have not cut or reduced anything. The government appropriation that goes to AAPA remains steady and the revenue and revised budget forecast that you will see, will be about the services that are provided. I will pass to Mr Pocock who can speak about how the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority works with its appropriation and the generation of revenue.

Mr POCOCK: I am not entirely sure what the question relates to, but it might be the fact that the PP3 figure indicates that the budget in outer years is smaller. We have a certain amount that we receive in appropriation and we generate funds through the sale of authority certificates and request for information.

In this last financial year we have had substantial funding through those major projects time-limited funding arrangements, that I had spoken to. At this stage we are expecting that funding will not be available because the Telstra project, for example, has finalised. DLI is entering a different phase, as is Kakadu, so there is a substantial amount of funding reflected in the current budget that will not be in the next financial year. That might be what you are getting to there, or if there is a specific figure.

Mr YOUNG: What I can see from the 2025–26 was \$10m allocated and now it is down to \$7.4m. I am trying to understand those two figures for the total expenses.

Mr BURGOYNE: The variations as stated in the budget papers for 2025–26 reflect increased operational expenditure related to sacred site clearances funded by additional self-generated revenue. The decreases in the 2026–27 are mostly due to self-generated revenues returning to baseline, some of what the Chief Executive Officer Robert Pocock spoke about regarding Telstra and really large projects that they have had. Those fundings were returning to baseline and finalisation of time-limited funding for increased sacred site clearance request from Northern Territory Government agencies.

It has been positive to see from the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Robert Pocock, that when large proponents like Telstra come on board, they actually request almost an additional team of people to handle the number of AAPA certificates they will require, especially when putting a fibreoptic cable all the way from the south of the Territory to the north. We will quite literally need a team of people just working on those authority certificates. As that project comes to an end, there will be a reduction in not only the total expenses, which I think is the figure you are quoted, which go from \$10.039m to \$7.435m.

Mr YOUNG: Under the new *Sacred Sites Legislation Amendment Act*, how many authority certificates have been transferred for continuing projects and, if any, which projects?

Mr BURGOYNE: Eleven transfers and two recorded parties. I will check with the CEO. I am trying to assist you and be open and transparent to the committee, which is what we are here to do.

The advice I have received is that generally you apply online and pay a fee to access authority certificates. Regarding the transfers, variation of authority certificates to construction of core breeding centre and maturation centre will be an NT Caution, 3192 Bynoe. Transfer of authority certificate, project Sea Dragon installation of telecommunications tower, transfer of authority certificate, Commercial Prawn Hatchery, on 3820 Gunn Road, Koolpinyah. Transfer, project Sea Dragon on the Legune Station with NT portion 798 and 3222. Transfer Napperby Exploration works. Transfer Molihill Jinka Pastoral Lease. Transfer and reissue of authority certificate for Union Reefs mine site. Transfer of authority certificate and reissue for Katherine area. Transfer of authority certificate and reissue for Cosmo mine site. Transfer and reissue of authority certificate Princess Louise and North Point mine site and exploration area. Transfer of authority certificate establishment camp on northern tip of Bremmer Island, North East Arnhem Land. It is important to note that the first six that I read out are awaiting board approval in July.

Mr YOUNG: Of those transfers of the authority certificates, were the traditional owners consulted and were there any disputes throughout that consultation?

Mr POCOCK: In answer to your question, there is no consultation requirement in respect of transfers under the Act, so custodians were not consulted. It is an administrative process. You pay a nominal fee, you fill out a form, as long as the person who holds the certificate applies and approves the transfer to the new party, that is how the application is processed.

I think, at least in relation to the Bremmer Island certificate application, that was a transfer from a corporation owned by the TO group to another entity purchasing that operation.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you. Were they notified?

Mr POCOCK: They were the ones that requested the transfer.

Mr YOUNG: The traditional owners, were they notified of the transfers? There is a difference between consultation and notification, so were the traditional owners notified when those transfers occurred?

Mr POCOCK: No.

Mr YOUNG: They were not.

Mr POCOCK: No.

J DAVIS: Follow up on behalf of the Member for Mulka. In relation to the transfers that you have just talked about, are you able to say what date the original certificate was issued?

Mr BURGOYNE: To confirm, Member for Johnston, you would like to know the date that the original certificates were issued?

J DAVIS: I think you said that 11 were transferred?

Mr BURGOYNE: I can read out from one to 11, the year in which they were issued. Going in order, which I read out originally, 2019, 2020, 2018, 2017, 2024, 2012, 2009, 2009, 2009, 2009 and 2006. It is really important speaking to the transfers in order for someone to receive an authority certificate—traditional owners are consulted when the original certificate is issued. The purpose of the transfer is to enable the new holder of the authority certificate to see where the sacred sites are so that they can be protected.

J DAVIS: On behalf of the Member for Mulka, are there any criteria used by AAPA to determine whether an existing certificate remains fit-for-purpose for a new development when that certificate is transferred?

Mr POCOCK: In short, no. It is an application from the original holder of the certificate saying that they would like to transfer the certificate to a new party. Those parties have to make that assessment and whether they think they can rely on the certificate as originally issued for either the same project or use. If it is a new project or use, or related project or use, whether it is covered—I think if we receive that application, the staff would flag that it is an older certificate. That is something that people should consider when making the application—whether it be fit-for-purpose. It is an assessment by the applicant.

J DAVIS: For me to understand, the process is that if I did have a certificate I could choose to pass it on to someone else. If the certificate was silent about something that the new developer wanted to embark on, would AAPA have to do some kind of assessment process?

Mr POCOCK: If there was an aspect of the project that was not captured by the certificate, as originally issued, it would be a matter for the party transferring and the incoming party to determine whether or not the certificate is fit-for-purpose. The risk is that if it is not, and they undertake a work or use that is not covered by the original certificate, they risk action by the authorities, enforcement compliance action.

J DAVIS: That will be after action had been taken or before? In terms of the role of AAPA, at what point would you step in? For example in the situation you described, it was something outside the original certificate, will it go ahead and AAPA would step in; or would AAPA assess that beforehand? Is that clear?

Mr POCOCK: I think I know where you are going. AAPA, if, for example, the certificate was transferred and works were undertaken and a custodian, traditional owner or somebody else complained to the authority, that they thought works were happening that are not in compliance with the certificate, we would undertake an investigation and determine whether or not the proponent was complying. If they are not, we would take further compliance steps. If they are compliant, there is no further action for us to take at that stage. I hope that answers your question.

J DAVIS: This is the final question from the Member for Mulka. Is there currently an investor or developer looking at the Darwin waterfront site, opposite the Stokes Hill sacred site, or have all parties, including the government, listened to the TOs, who have advised that developing beyond a certain height will desecrate a known Larrakia sacred site?

Mr BURGOYNE: AAPA and me as the minister who looks after the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority—that is not something that comes within our remit in regard to someone looking at that development.

Mr YOUNG: Who currently holds the AAPA certificate for the Darwin Waterfront site where there was a 10-storey hotel proposed to be built? Do you want to take that on notice?

Mr BURGOYNE: We can get the information for you; we just do not have it in front of us.

Madam CHAIR: We will come back to it before we finish up. If not, we can take it on notice.

Mr YOUNG: That is fine.

What is now proposed for that site?

Mr BURGOYNE: Again, what is being proposed for that site does not sit under me or AAPA.

Darwin Waterfront Corp, Northern Territory department of Treasury and SH hotel group are registered on that certificate.

Mr YOUNG: Mr Pocock, I think you said in your opening statement there had been a number of prosecutions. Did I hear that correctly or not?

Mr BURGOYNE: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: There has been in the last reporting period. Which projects were they and what was the level of damage?

Mr POCOCK: There was one finalised prosecution during the reporting period. That was the matter of the authority and the Department of Mining and Energy against Scott Smith and Kimberley Smith. That matter finalised in January 2026. On 28 January 2026 Ms Kimberley Smith was convicted, sentenced and fined in the Northern Territory Local Court for offences against the Sacred Sites Act and the *Mineral Titles Act*. The charges against her husband, Mr Scott Smith, were withdrawn due to serious health issues.

The facts of the matter are as follows. In June and August 2022 Ms Smith hired a 25-tonne excavator and arranged for a team to enter the historical Tosca mine on Ammaroo Station and remove significant quantities of turquoise without appropriate mining permits or an authority certificate. Those illegal works resulted in substantial damage to a registered sacred site, Putyenge. Ms Smith then offered the turquoise for sale in Australia, the United States and China.

Following a joint prosecution by the authority and the Department of Mining and Energy, Ms Smith pleaded guilty to one count of working on a sacred site contrary to section 34 of the Act and two counts of breaching an exploration licence contrary to section 147 of the *Mineral Titles Act*.

For the breach of section 34 of the Sacred Sites Act, Ms Smith was convicted and sentenced to four months' imprisonment suspended for 18 months. This is the first time a person has been sentenced to imprisonment for a conviction under the Sacred Sites Act. For the breaches of section 147 of the *Mineral Titles Act*, Ms Smith was fined a total of \$28,000. She was also banned from entering the Territory for 18 months.

Mr YOUNG: What is the damage threshold for deciding whether a matter can be dealt with via an enforceable undertaking or a prosecution?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will pass to Chief Executive Officer Robert Pocock who will talk through the policy that they are developing about that very matter.

Mr POCOCK: With the introduction of the enforceable undertaking provisions, the board requested that we prepare a policy on how the board considers those matters. That policy is nearing finalisation; we are just getting final legal advice on that policy. Essentially, in determining whether to prosecute a matter the authority has regard to the Director of Public Prosecutions guidelines; the nature of the offending in terms of the seriousness, use or entry; the impact it has had on the sacred site; the distress or concern to custodians; and a variety of other matters.

I think the important thing to note about enforceable undertakings is that they must be requested. The authority cannot request them from someone who is alleged to have committed an offence. They must request that of the authority. That is the starting point for discussion about enforceable undertakings. Otherwise, we follow our standard investigation and compliance procedures. We undertake an investigation, consider the matters I just outlined, receive legal advice about the prospects of success of a prosecution and seek board endorsement of whether to proceed or not.

Mr YOUNG: Going back to the case of the criminal prosecution that you outlined a couple of questions ago for me—was that under the old Act or the current Act?

Mr POCOCK: I am not quite sure what you mean by 'under the old Act'. I assume you mean since the amendments took effect in the middle of last year. There was no change to the offence provision, so they remain as they always have been.

Mr YOUNG: Okay, thank you.

Mr SMELT: I would like to pick up a line of questioning that we had with the minister earlier about the *Heritage Act* and the changes that occurred in the last sittings that removed the designated role for AAPA on the

Heritage Council. You might have seen that we had a rare outbreak of bipartisanship in the minister supporting the Labor amendment to reinstate that *ex officio* role on the Heritage Council. The minister did not want to speak for you earlier—which is absolutely fair enough—but I am keen to understand why AAPA would not want to have a designated spot on the council.

Mr POCOCK: The authority did not oppose the removal of a designated authority representative from the council, and that is for a number of reasons. I will talk you through them now.

The Heritage branch within the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment is well aware of the authority's statutory role and engages with us regularly where sacred sites are relevant to a matter before the Heritage Council. This is typically identified early at the officer level, and the authority's advice is sought and provided in a structured way. This is also embedded into the legislative framework around decision-making for works approvals. In addition, the authority routinely engages through the public consultation processes under the *Heritage Act*, including when places or objects are nominated for assessment. In practice we provide advice on the existence of sacred sites and the extent of coverage by authority certificates where relevant.

Whilst there is some intersection between our two regimes, it is important to note that the *Heritage Act* recognises and deals with a much broader range of heritage values than those addressed under the Sacred Sites Act. A place may be both a heritage place and a sacred site, and a heritage object may be located within a sacred site. However, the presence of archaeological material of past Aboriginal use or modification does not of itself give rise to a sacred site under our Act.

The Heritage Council's functions extend well beyond sacred site considerations, including matters such as archaeology, rock art, historic heritage memorialisation—such as in relation to the Stolen Generations—and places of broader significance to Aboriginal people.

The authority's expertise is necessarily focused on the identification, protection and management of sacred sites under our statutory framework and does not extend across the broader heritage spectrum. In that context, the view is that the council is likely better served through representation that can inform engagement and decision-making across the full range of Aboriginal heritage values, rather than a narrowly defined statutory representation tied to AAPA's specific role.

Having said that, that was the agency's view. We have an upcoming board meeting. We understand that the minister is committed to reintroducing that representation if that is desired. We are going to brief the board on that in the next meeting at the end of July and then come back to the agency—DLPE—with the board's views on that.

Mr KERLE: First of all, I welcome Robert Pocock as CEO of AAPA. I know you have fronted Estimates quite a number of times before, so congratulations on becoming CEO.

I have a quick question which is more to get an idea on the record of how much these certificates cost. Can you indicate, in the reporting period, the number of certificates issued and the total cost of them, or, if you are happy to, indicate a range of what a certificate would cost?

Mr BURGOYNE: As outlined in the CEO's opening statement, 93 authority certificates were issued. It really depends on the amount of work that the authority has to put into each certificate as to the end cost. I will pass to the chief executive officer if he has any further information on the cost of authority certificates. In very few cases, say, the organisation was a not-for-profit like a sporting club and was really struggling to pay that, they can apply to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority to waive some of those fees.

Mr POCOCK: It is a bit of a 'how long is a piece of string' answer, but, essentially, it depends on the amount of work that is required to be put into the certificate by the authority. We operate on a full cost-recovery model. They can range from \$30,000 to \$200,000, depending on complexity and location. The costs we seek to recover are accommodation costs, the costs of travel getting to the location—which is usually remote—with multiple custodians, so traditional owners and native title holders, to be able to clear an area of subject land. The number of custodians that may be required will depend on how large the subject land is, how many sites our database indicates are there that we know about and whether there are more. It is complex; it depends on a number of factors and there are specific costs that we are required to cover under the sacred sites regulations.

My director of corporate services has just handed me a note indicating that in the reporting period, the average cost was \$60,000.

Mr KERLE: Awesome; thank you. It is good to hear that if there is a sporting club or not-for-profit they can apply to have reduced fees or fees waived.

Mr POCOCK: That is correct. We have a policy on that and it depends on the financial position of the authority at the time the request is made. This year has been a very good year. There has been more scope to provide fee waivers. We provide fee waivers to Aboriginal organisations, businesses that might be small operators that are struggling financially—they can request that we waive all or part of the fees, but that is a request that we consider after we have done the work and issued an invoice.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of all output groups relating to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the agency officers who provided advice today.

Minister, would you like to make your closing statement?

Mr BURGOYNE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much to the representatives from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority for coming today to inform the committee.

CORPORATE AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

Madam CHAIR: Welcome to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. Apologies it is so late.

I invite you as the Minister for Corporate and Digital Development to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark. The floor is yours.

Mr SMELT: A point of order, Madam Chair! I seek leave from the committee to ask that we table the opening statement—I only have six questions and we have about 10 minutes—on indulgence of the minister.

Mr BURGOYNE: I think the process is that I can give an opening statement, and I would like to, if that is all right with you, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: Sorry, Member for Nightcliff, that is overturned.

Mr YOUNG: He does not want to answer the questions.

Mr BURGOYNE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Joining me at the table today I have Ms Catherine Weber PSM, Chief Executive of the Department of Corporate and Digital Development; Ms Lisa Watson, Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate Services; Mr Greg Connors, Deputy Chief Executive, Digital Services; and Ms Vicki Highland, Chief Operating Officer. Other officials may join us this evening as we work through the outputs.

The Department of Corporate and Digital Development (DCDD) plays a critical role in supporting agencies with specialised corporate and digital services. It has offices in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine. From essential transactions to expert advice and tools, DCDD keeps government running smoothly and efficiently.

Through digitalisation, automation and responsible use of emerging technology, DCDD supports agencies to deliver frontline services and improve outcomes for Territorians. The work of DCDD directly supports the government's three key strategic pillars to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our unique Territory lifestyle.

By strengthening the systems, workforce and technical infrastructure that underpin service delivery, the scale and scope of DCDD's work is significant. Over the reporting period to 31 March 2026, DCDD has:

- processed more than 1.2 million payroll transactions, supporting more than 26,000 employees and ensuring timely and accurate payment of \$2.9bn in salaries and entitlements
- managed the Northern Territory Government fleet of more than 3,600 vehicles and assets, including 140 electric vehicles, as part of a gradual transition to more efficient and lower-emissions vehicles

- facilitated a significant number of public tenders and quotations, with 295 tenders resulting in 1,568 responses and award value of \$1.54bn, with 72% of those contracts awarded to Territory enterprises
- administered 31 across-government contracts, with 277 contractors, 90% of which are Territory businesses, backing our locals
- managed 39 ICT service contracts valued at almost \$115m, supporting digital service delivery across government
- handled more than 1,700 freedom of information applications with agencies, maintaining a high rate of compliance with statutory timeframes
- managed 40 million business records in the Territory Records Management system
- supported early career pathways across government, assessing 2,100 applications resulting in 385 participants engaged across eight programs in 2026, including the graduate traineeship, vocation employment and Aboriginal employment programs to build the future public sector workforce
- provided more than 750 online and face-to-face courses
- coordinated more than 30,000 training completions across the public sector
- processed and paid 389,000 invoices to industry on behalf of agencies
- managed 166 property leases, totalling approximately 237,000 square metres across the Territory
- blocked 53 million spam emails over the past 12 months, protecting government systems, and that is really important
- supported 104 whole-of-government corporate systems that underpin operations across agencies, maintaining availability at around 99%
- increased online services available through the Territory Services portal to 140 services
- maintained 137 government websites, including 4,550 webpages, and resolved more than 17,000 web service requests, ensuring Territorians have reliable access to government information.

These services form the backbone of government operations and enable agencies to deliver essential services to the community.

DCDD also plays a key role in supporting government integrity and compliance through the Fines Recovery Unit (FRU). The Territory has achieved an 86% clearance rate of fines and penalties, exceeding the annual target, and recovering \$17.6m to date this financial year.

In addition to this, DCDD continues to take important steps to modernise and streamline the FRU function. Following our legislative changes in 2024 to recommence and streamline enforcement, the FRU has upgraded its systems to email notices where a valid address is available, with postal delivery as a fallback.

The digital systems also support community safety and reducing crime, such as the Banned Drinker Register which has recorded more than 54 million scans, with more than 140,000 refused alcohol sales, supporting alcohol harm reduction across the Territory. Work is underway to integrate this system with a digital driver's licence.

Beyond core services, DCDD leads key whole-of-government digital and connectivity initiatives through co-investment programs with industry and the Commonwealth.

New and improved telecommunications services have been delivered through the \$28m remote telecommunications co-investment program with Telstra across remote communities, including Avon Downs, Yuendumu, Willora and Wurrumiyanga. The \$5.8m Remote Small Cells Program has seen connectivity extended to 12 additional remote communities and homelands, including Emu Point and Waruwi. Thanks to these co-investment programs between our government and Telstra, these 12 remote communities and homelands now have access to mobile phone coverage for the first time ever. We have delivered a new

mobile service at Canteen Creek, also in partnership with Telstra, fulfilling an election commitment of our government.

DCDD continues to advocate strongly for improved telecommunications outcomes, including through national forums such as the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting, which I have attended and where the Territory has successfully progressed national attention on digital inclusion and access to free-to-air television services for those living in some of our most remote communities. I continue my strong advocacy for the Northern Territory at these important meetings.

Connectivity improvements are also being delivered for schools through the Schools Connectivity Uplift Program. Our government is also investing \$4m ongoing into the Schools Connectivity Uplift Program to deliver high-speed internet to schools, including those in some of the NT's smallest and most remote communities.

Our government is also supporting digital inclusion through community wi-fi, with \$11.6m in Commonwealth funding secured and our government contributing \$216,000 to support services in 37 remote communities. These initiatives support digital inclusion and help ensure Territorians remain connected regardless of where they live.

DCDD is also supporting the safe and responsible use of emerging technologies across government through targeted training and guidance. More than 2,000 public sector staff are now using secure artificial intelligence tools to improve productivity while maintaining appropriate oversight and judgement.

The government's broader digital vision is progressing through the Digital Futures strategy 2026–28. This strategy sets a clear direction to build digital skills, strengthen the local digital industry, ensure safety and security of data, improve connectivity and expand online services for Territorians. This work contributes directly to supporting local jobs and continues to deliver our government's commitment to rebuilding the economy.

Major transformation programs are underway across government. The Acacia system is now in place in all Territory hospitals and renal clinics, and is progressing to its next phase to digitise clinical documentation.

The Education Management Transformation Program is progressing procurement of a modern system to replace legacy platforms and centre information on the student, contributing to better learning outcomes.

Across government DCDD supports a portfolio of 10 major ICT projects under formal government oversight, ensuring risks are actively managed and projects are delivered in line with government priorities.

Significant progress is being made to improve how Territorians access to government services. The Territory Services platform now provides access to more than 140 online services, with further expansion underway. The key next step is the delivery of the Territory Services mobile application which will enable the rollout of a secure modern digital driver's licence. A pilot of the digital driver's licence is expected to commence later this year, providing Territorians with a more convenient and secure way to prove their identity, including in regional and remote areas where connectivity is limited. This work will make it easier for Territorians to interact with government, and supports restoring our Territory lifestyle by reducing red tape and improving access to services.

DCDD also supports improved access to government services through physical infrastructure. In Alice Springs we will see a consolidation of services from five into a single modern service hub.

Turning to the 2026–27 budget, DCDD has a total budget of \$449.8m. This is an increase. The increase is primarily driven by investment in digital and corporate priorities, including \$2.8m to expand electronic rostering to the Youth Justice and Community Corrections workforce within the Department of Corrections; building on existing development with Fire and Emergency Services and Police; and eventually expanding the solution to other frontline agencies that operate rosters with shiftwork. This will improve workforce management for our frontline services that contribute directly to reducing crime. It will also establish functionality of a whole-of-government rostering system integrated into the payroll system, ensuring consistency and greater transparency across government rostering and reducing duplication and inefficiencies and duplication of financial risk. We have also committed \$5m each year ongoing to enhance and modernise the central payroll system and automate processes.

DCDD's work program also includes initiatives that strengthen the Territory economy and support local businesses.

Madam CHAIR: Excuse me, minister. I am sorry; we are out of time for today. It is 9.30.

This concludes consideration of the Department of Corporate and Digital Development.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and agency staff for appearing before our committee today and any officers who provided assistance, coordinating the briefs.

This concludes Estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence at 9 am Tuesday 16 June 2026 with questions for the Minister for Education and Training.

Minister, would you like to close?

Mr BURGOYNE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the department staff who have been waiting outside for a long time today. I appreciate them being here this afternoon. Thank you to the committee and the supporting agency, DLA, for making today happen.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. Goodnight.

The committee suspended.
