

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

**MINISTER VATSKALIS' PORTFOLIOS
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good morning, would you like to make an opening statement, and would you like to introduce the witnesses with you?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I would like to introduce the Department of Health officials joining me today: Mr Jeff Moffet, Chief Executive Officer of the department; Ian Pollock, Acting Chief Financial Officer; Jill Macandrew, Acting Senior Director People and Services; Penny Fielding, Acting Executive Director Health Reform; Liz Stackhouse, Acting Executive Director Top End Hospital Network; Mike Melino from Alice Springs, Acting Executive Director Central Australian Hospital Network; Jenny Cleary, Executive Director Health Services; Dr Barbara Paterson, Chief Health Officer and Executive Director Health Protection; Xavier Schobben, Director Environmental Health; and Anthony Sievers, Director Alcohol and Other Drugs.

Mr Chairman, this government is committed to improving the health of all Territorians. We have dedicated more resources to frontline health services, more doctors, more nurses and health professionals. We are providing health services closer to where people live so getting regular and specialist healthcare is much easier and more affordable for every Territory family. This investment is working and we are seeing real gains in health outcomes. There is no denying this is a long process and requires inter-generational change to reverse the decades of neglect in healthcare under the previous CLP government.

However, the latest report on *Mortality in the Northern Territory 1967-2006* shows since 2000, there has been a four-and-a-half year improvement in life expectancy for Aboriginal women - from 65.2 years in 2000 to 69.8 years in 2006, and the Aboriginal infant mortality rate has fallen by 37%, from 25 deaths per 1000 births in 2000 to 15.7 deaths per 1000 in 2006. There is still much to do because we have one of the sickest populations and we have to work harder. We are employing strategies and policies to improve child health, maternal health, chronic disease prevention and specialist care.

The Department of Health's final output budget allocation for 2010-11 was \$1.09bn, given the establishment of the new agency, the Department of Children and Families with a transfer out of approximately \$135m. Additional funding was received throughout the course of the year from the Australian government for Cabinet-approved initiatives such as the Medical Officers NTPS Enterprise Agreement 2011-13, and the Emergency Road Ambulance and Medical Transportation Services contract.

The Department of Health is on track to meet its budget targets for 2010-11. For the year ahead, the department's budget is \$1.115bn. This represents an additional \$49.8m, or a 7.25% increase in Northern Territory funding. As happens every year, this is partially offset by a decrease of 15% of Australian government funding. A range of national agreements are currently being negotiated, including those relating to the national health reforms for hospitals and primary healthcare. As these agreements are finalised in the coming months, these variations will be incorporated in the department's budget in 2011-12.

Before I highlight some of the key areas of the budget for 2011-12, I would like to thank the large team of people, medical professionals, nurses, primary healthcare staff and other support staff who passionately care about the patients and clients they help every day. There has been a range of significant achievements in 2010-11 and I would like to highlight some of them:

- with the first full year of operation of the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre, providing vital radiation and oncology to Northern Territory residents, together with the Barbara James House, we can provide specialist care in the Territory with a supportive home-like environment;
- successful negotiation of the 2011-13 Medical Officers NTPS Enterprise Agreement to assist in the recruitment and retention of medical officers and subsequently improve service delivery within the Northern Territory, at an estimated additional cost of \$24.8m across the department;
- the new 10-year contract with St John Ambulance for continued highly recognised work of the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre;
- the Territory's first full medical school in partnership with Flinders and Charles Darwin University and the Australian government to grow our own Territory doctors;

- the Palmerston GP Super Clinic officially commenced operation. The facility is now co-located with the urgent care after hours service, providing access to medical care throughout the night seven days a week for residents of the Palmerston and rural region;
- the commencement of construction of the Royal Darwin Hospital short-term patient accommodation facility;
- completion of the Alice Springs and Darwin haemodialysis self-care drop-in centres;
- a new mobile respite unit;
- a new sobering-up shelter in Katherine; and
- new transitional aftercare facility in Tennant Creek plus construction progressing well for their new shelter.

I move to the key highlights of Budget 2011-12, with \$1.115bn as a record for NT health services and the largest allocation of all NT government departments. The Acute Services Output budget for 2011-12 is \$721m, an increase of \$32.2m from last year. This provides funding for the Royal Darwin Hospital, up 181% since 2001; Alice Springs Hospital up 165% since 2001; Katherine Hospital up 123% since 2001; Gove Hospital nearly doubling the budget since 2001; Tennant Creek Hospital 118% since 2001.

There is an additional \$2.5m to continue implementation of a coordinated approach to patients treated for chronic diseases, including ear, nose and throat conditions; and \$20.5m additional funding for St John Ambulance services.

Renal services continue to be a priority for our government, as demonstrated by our leadership in Central Australia, the expanded Tennant Creek renal facility soon to be operational and construction of a new renal facility in Katherine due to commence in 2011.

The Health and Wellbeing Services Output budget for 2011-12 is \$323.9m, a decrease of \$8m from the final estimate for 2010-11. The decrease is largely attributed to remote primary health care agreements from the office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander yet to be finalised for 2011-12. Funding for health and wellbeing services for 2011-12 includes a funding increase of \$3.6m for an enhanced secure care facility for people with complex care needs; an additional \$2m towards a new health centre in Umbakumba; \$1.2m under the Pensioner Concession Scheme; an additional \$1.6m to fund enhanced children adolescent mental health and implement suicide prevention programs in the Northern Territory; \$1.5m to manage existing exceptional and complex needs clients in the community; and \$840 000 for improving disability services.

Public health services receive an additional \$5.2m to support the government's serious approach to target problem drinkers and reduce harm to the community. The funding is part of a five-year package of \$34.2m for increased treatment options. In 2011-12, existing referral and treatment services will be enhanced with \$3.5m, including the establishment of 29 new funded rehabilitation beds and \$1.7m to establish new services in case management, outreach, and brief interventions by the primary health sector.

I am happy to take questions from the committee relating to my current ministerial responsibilities.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions to the opening statement?

Mr WOOD: A clarification before you do that. I want to know which department things fit into. Hospitals in general, is it?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before we throw to you, Gerry, the opposition has the first chance to ask for clarification?

Mr WOOD: You did not ask for clarification; you asked for comment on that statement.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is the same thing. You ask the same question at the same areas.

Mr WOOD: I do not mind. I did not know if you were going to miss that clarification section.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Questions to the opening statement are if you have any questions to anything contained in the opening statement, or if you want to ask where something might fall. They are both in that same area.

Mr WOOD: I was asking where something might fall.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The opposition gets the first call. Do you have a clarification question, member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: No, I do not.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you mind if Gerry has a clarification first?

Mr CONLAN: Certainly.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chair. In relation to hospitals in general, what category does that fit into? Any categories? For instance, the new Palmerston hospital, does that have a category?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Which output?

Mr WOOD: It has an output?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a proposed hospital so it does not fit in the budget questions, but it is Output 1.0, Acute Care. I can answer a question, or if you have general questions I am happy to answer.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output Group 1.0.

Mr WOOD: Does the issue of dementia come under Output 2.3?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, community support services for frail aged people and people with a disability.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is it? Member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the obvious thing is four out of your big guns sitting there, including yourself, are acting. The question has to be: what has happened to all your staff? Everyone is acting.

Mr VATSKALIS: We are currently undergoing health reform which has not been finalised. We cannot finalise positions until the reform is finalised. We have an Acting Executive Director Central Australian Hospital Network and, of course, Network North, who are part of the health reform. They have not been finalised yet but they will be. The Chief Executive Officer is not acting; he is performing very well in his position and is filling other positions as well. Things have to be done that way because health reform has not been finalised. We are in the middle of health reform.

Mr CONLAN: That is right. Essentially, we have lost an enormous amount of our corporate experience, our corporate history - everyone is acting.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not think so. We gain executive experience because Mike Melino has come from South Australia with extensive experience in the hospital sector. Penny Fielding; I have known Penny for many years. We used to work together in the Health department so if you want corporate knowledge, Penny remembers the days when the budget in the Health department was \$400m only, or 200 nurses were cut from the department; she was part of that review. If you want corporate knowledge, we have much knowledge because we have been here for a long time.

Mr CONLAN: The reason you have these acting positions is as a result of the health reform, is that right? The health reform has not been signed off; there is not even a single piece of legislation on health reform. There is not an apostrophe, a semicolon; there is nothing written about health reform at all in legislation, yet you have moved positions around to accommodate this so called health reform?

Mr VATSKALIS: Health reform is happening as we speak, member for Greatorex. Even Western Australia and Victoria have come to the party and signed off significant elements of the health reform. It is a national issue not a Territory issue; we are part cosignatory of this health reform and we are progressing

very well. The lead is from the Commonwealth, but with the other states we are working to finalise it for better outcomes for all Australians.

Mr CONLAN: The number of acting positions we have in the Health department is extraordinary. Minister, the Palmerston hospital, because it is not a budget output group, we can speak about in general questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is Output Group 1.0, Acute Services. That was the clarification question Gerry asked.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the Ombudsman has been quite critical of record keeping by the Department of Health. Could you alleviate concerns the opposition and the general public have about the sloppy record keeping by the Department of Health and the failure to provide timely access of documentation and information to the Ombudsman?

Mr VATSKALIS: You must remember we are talking about the biggest hospital in the Northern Territory, and also a number of reviews have been undertaken - raised by the Ombudsman in her concerns about the record keeping. Part of these reviews would be improving record keeping. Things could have been done better, information could be provided more efficiently, more quickly; however, we are working to improve the record keeping facilities and provide, in a timely manner, all the information required by the Ombudsman. Sometimes records are not kept very well because people are extremely busy - you have seen the emergency department. However, there is no excuse why records should not be kept appropriately. I have seen the software used in the department to maintain records which, ultimately, will lead to better record keeping. It is my intention to review the policy around the way we store records. One of the best ways to do that is through e-Health, and we are doing that currently. Again, information has to be provided when required by the Ombudsman. I have no problem with that, and am glad she raised it because these issues can be identified and resolved within the department.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you mentioned a busy hospital and people being too busy. I am sure you would not accept that as an excuse for poor record keeping. Can you explain what has broken down?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not accept that as an excuse, and that is why a review is currently under way in the department to improve the record keeping and provide the information as required.

Mr CONLAN: Can you offer any reason why things have fallen through the cracks, or why the record keeping has sustained an attack from the Ombudsman?

Mr VATSKALIS: Pressure on the hospital, turnover of staff, which has slowed down significantly. It is not as it was before. You have to remember some of these records requested can go back 10 or 12 years. It is not a very good excuse when you have state-of-the-art software and electronic information but cannot keep proper documentation. Something which has been done really well is the e-records - electronic records - we are progressing and it will be a solution to the record keeping problem and provide records on time.

Mr CONLAN: You said there was a review under way?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, currently the Health department is reviewing the way it keeps records and how it provides the records requested. I wait to see the outcome of that review. We can say we are going to change the whole system, but at what cost? Is it better to change the electronic way of keeping records or spend money to improve health? We have to find the fine balance. People have to keep records, especially qualified doctors and nurses. I cannot find an excuse as to why they cannot keep proper records.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, how much of the department's record keeping is outsourced?

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice is we do not outsource any of the record keeping information.

Mr CONLAN: You do not?

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice is we do not outsource any record information.

Mr CONLAN: How many summonses have been received by the Department of Health from the Ombudsman in the last 12 month period?

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember the Department of Health and this area were combined before. Are you referring to the Department of Health, or are you referring to the Department of Health and Families, separate?

Mr CONLAN: Department of Health.

Mr VATSKALIS: We will have to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.1

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question one more time, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: How many summons has the Department of Health received ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Specifically for the Department of Health?

Mr CONLAN: ... specifically for the Department of Health received from the Ombudsman in the last 12 months?

Mr CHAIRMAN: June to June. That is question No 6.1.

Mr CONLAN: I am quite happy to move to Acute Services.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions to that area, Gerry? All right. That concludes questions to the statement.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, the campaign run on the Stop the Hurting, Start the Healing policy, can you tell me how many calls the Victorian MensLine number has received as a result of this?

Mr VATSKALIS: That comes under the Department of Children and Families, not under Health.

Mr ELFERINK: It is so hard to get an answer out of you guys, you have no idea. You are the fourth minister I have asked about this.

Mr VATSKALIS: Ask the right question at the right time.

Mr ELFERINK: We will wait until then.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 - ACUTE SERVICES
Output Group 1.1 - Admitted Patient Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: Moving on to Output Group 1.0, Acute Services, and before we move to Output 1.1, this is where the minister indicated he would take Palmerston hospital questions.

Mr CONLAN: We may as well go straight to the Palmerston hospital, minister. I have a couple of questions.

As this is such a broad portfolio with a number of output groups and we only have two-and-a-half hours, I am going to focus on several specific areas. I want to ask about the proposed Palmerston hospital.

I understand \$110m has been allocated to the overall cost; \$40m from the Northern Territory government and \$70m from the Commonwealth. The Treasurer mentioned something about modelling around the Palmerston hospital. Do you have that modelling? Are you able to provide that modelling, take it on notice, or outline some of the modelling around the Palmerston hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: The announcement was made a few days ago; you do not expect to have a complete model for the Palmerston hospital within three or four days. What we are doing now is finding out ...

Mr CONLAN: The announcement for the hospital was made a few days ago?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, it was made a few weeks ago. To have a complete model ...

Mr CONLAN: A few days, a few weeks?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. You do not expect to have a complete model within two or three weeks or a month. That will take time. At the same time, we have a report commissioned through Ernst & Young to provide significant guidance on how and where to put the hospital. Currently, we are talking to all the stakeholders to refine the scope of the Palmerston community hospital, consider the location, the size, and if we are going to stage it, models of how to manage it and, of course, developing it as part of the greater Darwin clinical service framework.

That is complex work currently being undertaken by the department and a solution will come before the end of year. It is very easy for you ask if we have a model. I remember during the last election you had a Bathurst hospital model. That was the model you choose for your new Palmerston hospital. Unfortunately, that hospital was closed down three weeks after it opened because it had significant problems. Some of the doors were not wide enough to take some of the beds to wheel patients in. If you talk about modelling; let us talk about modelling and modelling. Our modelling is going to take place after we talk with the stakeholders, the doctors, and the community in order to see how the hospital will develop, rather than picking up one from somewhere else in Australia and saying: 'This is what we are going to put in'.

In addition, we have \$110m, not the \$5m you promised for a hospital in 15 years. You are going to see a hospital in Palmerston which is likely to include an emergency department, up to 60 beds, ambulatory care services, day theatre and maternity services.

We are doing our work properly now in order to develop a really good community hospital, rather than pick up a model from somewhere else and say: 'Here is the model we are going to implement in Palmerston'.

Mr CONLAN: I am unsure what part of my question you did not understand, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: You asked about the model.

Mr CONLAN: I asked about the hospital modelling because the Treasurer addressed the modelling issue in estimates last week. She said modelling had been done. I was simply asking are you able to provide us with that modelling.

Mr VATSKALIS: She said the modelling was done?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: A model has not been developed. As I explained to you, we are working to model the hospital by talking to stakeholders, find out what the community wants, what is necessary for the community looking at the statistics. Are we going to put a geriatric hospital in Palmerston? It is a stupid idea, but Palmerston is a growing town. You have to have something that is going to address the needs of the community, the needs of a young population, the needs of a large population of children, rather than putting a hospital somewhere because it is a good position and a good idea.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the time frame for that? Is this part of your strategic plan of 2025?

Mr VATSKALIS: A part of Territory 2030?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, the 2030 plan.

Mr VATSKALIS: This hospital is going to be up and running much earlier than 2025. In fact, I expect the work to start next year.

Mr CONLAN: Is that like the Alice Springs emergency department work that was to start in 2009, and the completion of the oncology unit that was to be completed in 2006, then 2007, then 2008, and has only been up and running for 12 months, a great facility that it is.

My point is, minister, how can the people of the Palmerston and the Territory have any confidence in anything you say or any promises you make, when every time you make a large commitment like this you seem to fail, your time lines completely blowout and you fail to deliver on those promises?

Mr VATSKALIS: It took you more than a year to find out where the Alan Walker Cancer Centre was, but the Alan Walker Cancer Centre was delivered by this government and the federal government, in spite the fact your ex-member for Solomon tried and tried but did not managed to persuade Tony Abbott, then minister for Health, to provide the right amount of money. This government provided the money and delivered the Alan Walker Cancer Centre. As for the Alice Springs emergency department, the \$20m and the tender has been out, and I believe construction will start very quickly. We have to be very careful talking about Alice Springs Hospital because the CLP government awarded the contract to a particular company to design and construct, and we are still in court with this company for the failure to provide what we asked; for the failure to construct, to do the job properly. It took quite a few trips to discover what went wrong and how much it would cost to rectify some of the problems. You are very aware of the problems with the fire system at Alice Springs Hospital, mismanaged and constructed with a complete lack of proper understanding and proper delivery.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I draw your attention to the *Hansard* from the Treasurer. She says: 'We have already done some modelling around hospital needs in Palmerston so we were well advanced in that'. Some modelling has already been done. She said there has already been some modelling done around a hospital in Palmerston. Minister, I come back to the question: are you able to advise the Territory community, particularly those in Palmerston who will be receiving the service, about that modelling?

Mr VATSKALIS: At the beginning I said a report from Ernst & Young has provided significant guidance in relation to the huge demand for hospital services. That modelling was done for hospital services in Palmerston; however, there is more work to be done by targeting the stakeholders. I am very happy for the CE of the department to provide more information to the output you are discussing.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister is in the middle of answering the question and has referred it to his CE, Mr Moffet. It is Mr Moffet's call.

Mr MOFFET: There are two issues at play here. One is the service modelling that is currently under way in relation to the types of services that will be provided in detail at Palmerston. The other issue is the matter the minister is referring to, the underpinning modelling that was part of the Ernst & Young report. In modelling hospital beds and hospital and service demand, an exercise was undertaken called HARDS modelling, a national benchmark for modelling for hospital services, early last year. That modelling takes the previous seven years data, applies it at specific clinical levels, looks at population changes over time and, in a sophisticated modelling environment, also looks at health reform and service change issues, and predicts the number of beds and the types of demands we will see into the future. That modelling was utilised to develop the EY report, and we are currently updating that modelling with new population figures and new demand to inform our definitive service planning over the next six months.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you very much, Mr Moffet. Minister, I am unsure what part of my question, or Mr Moffet's, your own Chief Executive, answer you do not understand. Modelling has been done; it is not a scoping study, it is not a review, it is not a report, it is modelling. Your own Treasurer has said modelling has been done. Are you able to table that modelling for the Estimates Committee?

Mr VATSKALIS: You asked about modelling for the Palmerston hospital. The Ernst & Young report was not specifically for the Palmerston hospital; it was about the needs of hospitals in the Territory, specifically, the greater Darwin area. Modelling specifically for the Palmerston hospital is being done as we speak - has not been completed - and that modelling will be finalised after we speak to the stakeholders, after we speak to doctors, after we speak to nurses and after we consult with the general community to find out what kind of hospital we are going to build in Palmerston.

You can play with words. The reality is modelling has not been completed. Modelling for hospital needs in the greater Darwin area has been done, but not for the Palmerston hospital. Which part do you not understand?

Mr CONLAN: Again, I refer to your Treasurer: 'Scope and design is under way as we speak'. This is in estimates.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is exactly what I told you.

Mr CONLAN: And has been from the moment of the announcement: 'We have already done some modelling around hospital needs in Palmerston'.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have done some modelling, as part of the Ernst & Young report, for the greater Darwin area which happens to include ...

Mr CONLAN: Are you able to table that for the Estimates Committee?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... include Palmerston.

Mr CONLAN: Will you table that modelling for the Estimates Committee?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I will not table it. The report is currently part of the modelling for the Palmerston hospital and I have no intention of tabling it.

Mr CONLAN: So much for an open and accountable government, minister. You are unable to answer the question.

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot table work ...

Mr CONLAN: It is all right.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex and all members present, when the Chair or the acting Chair speaks they have the call and everyone needs to take a breath and listen. The member for Greatorex has made a comment and the minister has an opportunity to respond.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. No, I do not refuse to answer the question. The member for Greatorex refused to listen to the answer. As I said before, what I have is a work in progress. I cannot table a document in this committee that has not been finalised. When it is finalised the department will provide all the information.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I interpret that as ...

Mr VATSKALIS: If you do not like the answer do not make comments like: 'You refuse to answer the question'. I do not. You refuse to listen to the answer.

Mr CONLAN: No, I listened quite intently and I put it to you three times. I have not received an answer from the Chief Executive. Either the Treasurer has misled this committee by her comments earlier in the week or you are unable to answer the question or provide open and accountable government as you promised. It is probably all three.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, Mr Moffet can make it really simple so the member for Greatorex can understand.

Mr CONLAN: It is okay, it is okay ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex ...

Mr CONLAN: ... honestly I do not

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex ...

Mr CONLAN: ... need to hear Mr Moffet's explanation.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, when I say your name three times, that is an issue. Member for Greatorex, the minister is allowed to refer to Mr Moffet, and Mr Moffet has the call.

Mr MOFFET: In relation to hospitals and modelling, the HARDS modelling I was referring to has been conducted at one level - the greater Darwin region and whole-of-Territory level. In detailed planning, modelling then needs to take the next step. There will be specific population and greater Darwin region modelling for Palmerston hospital. There are several layers to the modelling and the minister is correct in that we have done the initial layer which demonstrates demand into the future. We now need to get into detailed modelling to specifically decide what services should be provided in Palmerston. There are layers of modelling happening, and it is quite normal to move to a much more detailed phase once you have an active capital project.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any more questions for Palmerston hospital?

Mr CONLAN: Do you envisage Palmerston hospital having an intensive care unit?

Mr VATSKALIS: Palmerston hospital will be in stages, that is our intention. In the beginning, it will have 60 inpatient beds with an emergency department, a hospital outpatient services, and ambulatory care services, day theatre and attendant services. Bearing in mind Darwin now grows to the south, we are going to have a significant population growth in the south, in the rural area and in Palmerston. I will not be surprised if the Palmerston hospital, not in the immediate future, but in five, 10 or 15 years, has an intensive care unit because it has to grow to meet demand. On the other hand, the Royal Darwin Hospital cares for the Darwin population - the 90 000 living here – but we have a hospital that has to care for another 40 000 to 50 000 people living in Palmerston and the rural area. With Weddell, that population will grow to 80 000, 90 000 or 100 000 people. In the future, yes, there would have to be an intensive care unit. However, I have made it clear that I do not want to see something for now - I want to see a construction that would support further growth of the hospital in the future.

Mr CONLAN: You understand, do you not, minister, intensive care unit is critical to birthing services in any hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have an intensive care unit in Royal Darwin Hospital now; to duplicate that in a small hospital in Palmerston would not be economical and would be unwise.

Mr CONLAN: Why is that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Because there is no demand. You do not want something that is not going to be ...

Mr CONLAN: A 50 000 projection for Palmerston. There would be quite a demand for women having babies.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, you said 'projected'. 'Projected' means in the future, not now.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the message to the people of Palmerston is: do not hold your breath. If you want a hospital in Palmerston change the government.

Mr VATSKALIS: The message there is ...

Mr CONLAN: That is the message to the people of Palmerston and the Northern Territory. Do not hold your breath. It has taken 10 years to deliver an oncology unit, and we still do not have an emergency department in Alice Springs five years on.

Mr VATKALIS: Now we have finished the advertisement spot ...

Mr CONLAN: It is a projected promise, minister; it is not in stages at all.

Mr VATSKALIS: Now you have finished the promotional spot, this government is going to deliver a hospital in Palmerston the same way it delivered the Alan Walker Cancer Centre and the same way it delivered the renal dialysis units in Alice Springs and Katherine. We are going to see this hospital in the next few years rather than the next 15 years, which was the CLP policy in the last election.

Mr CONLAN: Great. Good on you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Have you finished with Palmerston hospital, member for Greatorex, because the member for Nelson has some questions?

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mr WOOD: Minister, what concerned me is the proposed hospital for Palmerston may not be part of an aged care-type process. This hospital, if I understand where they are looking at siting it, would not be far from Terrace Gardens. Why wouldn't you use this hospital for looking after aged care patients and piggy backing off Terrace Gardens?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, this hospital will grow in stages. The first stage will be a 60-bed in-patients with ambulatory care and there will be emergency care as the population grows. As the demand for certain services grows the hospital will respond to these demands. It has to have not only intensive care, but an aged-care facility in the future. Not in the next two, three or five years, but in the next five to 10 years. That is why I insisted the design has to be such that the hospital can grow. I have seen examples in Alice Springs where everything is flat; one storey facilities taking the whole campus of Alice Springs, which is struggling to find more facilities. I cannot understand why we do not have two, three storeys or four storeys. There are lifts; it can be done and will happen with Palmerston hospital. It will be designed to grow to meet the demands and the needs of the community.

Mr WOOD: You can put a hospital in Palmerston or thereabouts. What discussion has been had with the Darwin Hospital Board, or others, as to the offset that will occur with the Royal Darwin Hospital? My understanding is level 7 in Royal Darwin Hospital is where many aged-care people reside. I understand this is not a very suitable place for them; it is very open, people have very little privacy, yet we have an aged-care facility in Palmerston. What overall discussions are occurring, not only about how you want to model the Palmerston hospital, but what is going to happen to Royal Darwin Hospital at the same time?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask the CEO of the department to respond to that question.

Mr MOFFET: To clarify the formal program responsibility, the Commonwealth is responsible for aged care and the national health reforms will further consolidate that come 1 July this year. Notwithstanding that, Territory Health Services work very closely with aged care providers. We have a level of aged care sometimes awaiting placement inside our hospitals. We also provide sub-acute care, which is restorative around rehabilitation in order to get people back home or into an appropriate facility where they can get supported care.

For Palmerston, the planning process we are going through for the next six months will engage a range of stakeholders, particularly including our existing clinicians and management board members of Royal Darwin Hospital to ensure the hospital is complementary. We will need to have complementary and supported services across the two sites. Part of the determination will be to what extent we can provide sub-acute care in Palmerston. Clearly, we will need to have relationships with Terrace Gardens, community-based aged care and, in the future, any other aged-care providers in the Palmerston region. Aged care is a major consideration and it will be integrated with the Palmerston hospital approach.

Mr WOOD: Minister, where does the public get involved in this decision-making process? I am a rural resident. Weddell is going to be looked at as a possible expansion of population. Regarding the siting, people have said why not put it at Coolalinga on the Stuart Highway. Is there an opportunity for the public to be involved in the planning and decision-making processes around this hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, there is going to be extensive community consultation. We are currently having discussions with the Palmerston City Council. There are going to be community forums. We would like to talk to the Litchfield Shire Council and people in the rural community. No decision has been made on where it is going to be. You have to remember it has to be somewhere close to transport. It has to have areas close to services so we do not spend money to provide services to the land. Also, does the Crown own the land or us - we do not want to buy land. The potential of the land to be very close to complementary facilities - clinics, medical centres and aged-care centres so we can work together as a health precinct rather than putting a hospital there, a clinic 20 km further out, and an aged-care facility 5 km out. The consultation will start on 27 June with key stakeholders and with Litchfield Shire Council.

Mr WOOD: Can I presume the public - not just the councils - will have an opportunity?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we are going to engage the public rather than a few people.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, Output 1.1.

Mr CONLAN: That is Acute Services?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes. Acute Services, Admitted Patient Services.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, what is the projected overrun for the Royal Darwin Hospital at this stage? It is the question I asked last year. We finally got to it. A simple answer will be fine.

Mr VATSKALIS: There is no overrun at the Royal Darwin Hospital because the budget for Northern Territory hospitals, as with most health services, is under pressure. They also run in activities rather than one hospital having so much money over the budget. My advice is we do not have an overrun on the budget.

Mr CONLAN: You are going to come in on 30 June right on budget? Right on the \$200m-odd you put into it last year? You have not put an extra cent it?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will refer to the CEO to give you a more detailed answer.

Mr CONLAN: Just a simple answer please, Mr Moffet, if you can?

Mr VATSKALIS: We try to give you simple answers.

Mr CONLAN: A very simple answer of how much it is going to be? We are going to find out anyway.

Mr MOFFET: End-of-year landing positions are subject to many changes - accounting changes as well at the end of the year. Taking those into account, the department will be within 1% of its budget. It will be very close to balanced at the end of the financial year, including the hospitals program.

Regarding the broader question about budget overruns, the reality is we run the whole hospital output group as one output group in order to move our funds to activity, and to adjust for exceptional activity and other issues during the year. The reporting occurs at output level and, at that output level, we will land within 1% of budget.

Mr CONLAN: Can you remind me how much you put into the Royal Darwin Hospital budget last year? I am sure you have that figure there.

Mr MOFFET: If it is possible, I will refer to our Chief Finance Officer to provide some detail around the actual numbers.

Mr CONLAN: It would be in the speech. Do you know the figure I am talking about, Mr Pollock?

Mr POLLOCK: The opening budget of the Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr CONLAN: Yes. It is \$200m and something.

Mr POLLOCK: For 2009-10 or 2010-11?

Mr CONLAN: For 2009-10.

Mr POLLOCK: I do not have that ...

Mr CONLAN: You do not have that figure with you?

Mr POLLOCK: ... because we are in budget estimates for this year.

Mr CONLAN: I understand, but I thought you would have a figure from last year. Can you give me this year's figure - 200-odd? Mr Pollock, I will refer to the minister, because this would be a figure you probably would know off your head. How much have you put into the hospital for ...

Mr VATSKALIS: As the CE explained before, it is on an output level not on each hospital. All the five hospitals are managed at an output level. It is the same bucket of money then it is allocated out. Money is not allocated to each hospital. I can give you the expenditure if you like, but ...

Mr CONLAN: I do not accept that, because the Treasurer crows about how much she puts into each hospital every budget speech: \$265m into Royal Darwin Hospital; \$142m into Alice Springs Hospital; \$30m into Tennant Creek hospital. What are these figures?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, and together it is money allocated in and out ...

Mr CONLAN: Yes, but it is allocated to a particular hospital.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... then allocated to the hospital as the hospital spends money. We do not say: 'Here is your money' ...

Mr CONLAN: The Chief Executive said you are coming within 1% of your hospital budget for Royal Darwin Hospital, is that right?

Mr POLLOCK: For the output group.

Mr CONLAN: For the output group. The \$250m allocated to Royal Darwin Hospital, what is that? You cannot answer that question, minister? You are not sure?

Mr VATSKALIS: I refer to the Chief Financial Officer.

Mr CONLAN: It is extraordinary the minister cannot answer a question about such a huge amount of money in health.

Mr VATSKALIS: I refer you to the Chief Financial Officer.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can we pause to explain the process to anyone listening. The minister is allowed to answer the question by referring to one of the witnesses present.

Mr CONLAN: I understand that, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There seems to be some misunderstanding so I am explaining the process. The minister, upon receipt of a question, is allowed to answer the question by referring it to a witness. That is the point of having the witnesses present.

Mr CONLAN: There is no confusion about that. I understand he is perfectly within his rights to do that. I thought a very simple question as to how much money has been allocated to the biggest hospital in the Northern Territory would be a top-of-mind issue for the minister.

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Mr Chairman! Mr Chairman, you have just explained the process. We are all very clear about the fact the minister is able to answer this question. We do not need the repetition of comment from the member. It is questions and answers.

Mr CONLAN: I am sorry you do not like it.

Members interjecting.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, member for Nhulunbuy and member for Arafura! Thank you, member for Nhulunbuy. A question has been asked. We are waiting on an answer and the call is with Mr Pollock.

Mr POLLOCK: Can you please repeat the question?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, can we please have the question one more time for Mr Pollock?

Mr CONLAN: How much money has been put into the Royal Darwin Hospital for Budget 2010-11?

Mr POLLOCK: The acute care output group budget ...

Mr CONLAN: No, the hospital, Mr Pollock.

Mr POLLOCK: I will start with the output group - \$688m for 2010-11. The projected variant on that for end-of-year expenditures, as the CE pointed out, is within 1%. We move budgets around the hospitals depending on where the activity lands, and we have to adjust the budgets depending on where the activities are in those hospitals; however, as an output group the expenditure will be within 1% of that acute care budget output.

Mr VATSKALIS: The output includes not only the hospitals, but ambulance, patient transport and emergency retrievals. The reason we have a packet instead of tied up in a budget per hospital - we have a budget per output - is if Royal Darwin Hospital, for example, needs more money than what we normally allocate, we can transfer there. Some hospitals would spend more because of various reasons, others would spend less. As I said, these are allocated per output. If you want to know what the nominal allocation is for Royal Darwin Hospital in 2011-12, that will be \$315m, and for Alice Springs, \$143m.

Mr CONLAN: What was that figure?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a nominal allocation. The hospital can come to \$312m or it can come to \$320m and, because we allocate as an output, the department gives it the freedom to move money to fill that gap. You got it, did you?

Mr CONLAN: Sorry, I missed the figure. What was it, 300 and what?

Mr VATSKALIS: The nominal allocation for 2011-12 for Royal Darwin Hospital is \$315m.

Mr CONLAN: Fifty or 15?

Mr VATSKALIS: Three hundred and fifteen.

Mr CONLAN: And Alice Springs was?

Mr VATSKALIS: One hundred and forty three.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: That does not mean this is the money that the hospital has and that is it; if they spend it they do not get any more money. You only need something like the swine ...

Mr CONLAN: No, and there is where you would get an overrun, and that was the question I was asking ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, you do not get an overrun ...

Mr CONLAN: ... in the previous one.

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on, you do not get an overrun. You have a nominal allocation and you respond to the output if there is an emergency, like the swine flu at Alice Springs Hospital, if you remember.

Mr CONLAN: No swine flu in the last 12 months.

Mr VATSKALIS: When we had swine flu in Alice Springs previously, we had an extremely busy hospital with extreme use of the intensive care unit which exceeded the money normally allocated. We had to move money from the output. There is no budget overrun. The output has the money and allocates the money when necessary.

Mr CONLAN: Do you accept last year there was a budget overrun?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will say it again slowly ...

Mr CONLAN: Do you accept that?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... there is no budget overrun.

Mr CONLAN: We have several executives who were not here last year.

Mr VATSKALIS: I was here last year. Mr Pollock was here last year ...

Mr CONLAN: You were here. Yes, Mr Pollock was here. That is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... Ms Fielding was here last year. Ms Stackhouse was here last year. There is no budget overrun.

Mr CONLAN: I do not accept that, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will give you my accountant's number. You can ring him and he will explain what we are talking about.

Mr CONLAN: That would be great. Minister, why are elective surgery waiting times at Royal Darwin Hospital in such an appalling state? Why are elective surgery waiting times at Royal Darwin Hospital some of the worst in the country, if not the worst in the country? I would have thought that flies in the face of a core government service, the strategic plan, and the mission statement of the Northern Territory government.

Mr VATSKALIS: Elective surgery is not emergency surgery; it is something you plan. The problem is, if you have an emergency case the planned operations have to be delayed to address the emergency surgery. One reason we have a waiting list is because of that. We have some of the sickest population of the country needing much attention. Some of these people have multiple conditions. We have a high demand for emergency surgical procedures - twice the emergency procedures in other jurisdictions. We do not have an alternative. You cannot go to a private hospital. There is only one private hospital in Darwin, and that is rather small. There is no private hospital in Alice Springs or elsewhere in the Territory. The workforce issues - we are too far away and have a lack of suitably qualified personnel. We have to fly in and out in order to meet the demand for elective surgery. That happens at certain times over the year. However, whenever we have block elective surgery done; not only do we achieve our target, we exceed the targets put by the Commonwealth government.

I agree it is not acceptable but we are restricted by the tyranny of distance, the tyranny of having some of the sickest population. We want to bring down the elective surgery waiting list. We have invested to attract better personnel. We have invested in medical equipment allocated in different hospitals so people can fly in and perform the operation, say in Tennant Creek or Katherine, but it is not going to happen tomorrow. The waiting lists are not going to be reduced tomorrow. They are going to be reduced slowly and steadily. Again, there are a number of factors that contribute to the growth of the elective surgery list. If you had a case for an emergency operation would you accept someone telling you: 'I am sorry, I cannot do that to you because I have planned operations'. I do not think so. There are things we have to do now, and others things that can wait.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, it is all about maximising our resources, isn't it? We have Darwin Private Hospital; it might be small but it is still a resource. What measures are in place to maximise those resources to ease the elective surgery waiting list so you can concentrate on emergency surgeries, for example, to free up staff?

Mr VATSKALIS: One of the problems we have in the Northern Territory is the number of people with private medical insurance is extremely low. That means everyone expects to go to the public hospital for surgery.

Mr CONLAN: What is the figure for private health insurance in the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have it in front of me, but I ...

Mr CONLAN: You are not sure? You say it is low.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: How low?

Mr VATSKALIS: Nearly 30%, but I can give you an accurate figure ...

Mr CONLAN: I thought it was up to about 40%.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can give you an accurate figure. One of the problems we have is lack of facilities. While we have seven operating theatres now, an increase from five by putting in two new theatres, the number of operating theatres at the private hospital is very small. There is no private hospital in Alice Springs, so everyone expects to go to the Alice Springs Hospital to have surgery.

Mr CONLAN: Alice Springs does not have the acute problems with elective surgery waiting lists as Royal Darwin Hospital. This is focused on Royal Darwin Hospital. You have a facility in Darwin, the Darwin Private Hospital. I am asking what is in place. I will put it in simpler terms for you, minister: how much activity have you purchased from Darwin Private Hospital in the last 12 months for elective surgery?

Mr VATSKALIS: We always buy beds from the private hospital; currently we have 17 beds. To come back to your comments about Alice Springs, I have looked at the figures in front of me. Alice Springs has about 28 000 people ...

Mr CONLAN: Why are we talking about Alice Springs again?

Mr VATSKALIS: You brought it up. You said it does not have the need for elective surgery.

Mr CONLAN: No, I did not. I am talking about how much activity you have purchased from Darwin Private Hospital.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Estimates is conversational in nature and naturally there will be back and forth. The minister has the call and is responding to about three different questions/statements. Minister, the call is yours.

Mr VATSKALIS: You prefaced your question with Alice Springs not having the need for emergency services or elective surgery when it is totally the opposite.

Mr CONLAN: I did not ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Alice Springs has enormous pressure on emergency services and, yes, it has pressure on elective surgery which is much bigger than Darwin if you take into account the population. With regard to buying activity from Darwin Private Hospital – yes, we do. We buy their time and we buy beds; currently we have 17 beds purchased from the Darwin Private Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: What does that equate to in surgeries per year? You have 70 beds, but how much activity have you purchased over the past 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the figure in front of me.

Mr CONLAN: Does anyone have that figure?

Mr VATSKALIS: I can provide it to you at a later date.

Mr CONLAN: Will you take that on notice? Is that a question you cannot answer?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.2

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat that question one more time, member for Greateorex.

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember the Darwin Private Hospital relies on visiting specialists as well, and it does not have an ICU. What it can offer is limited.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I want to get that question on notice before we move on. Member for Greateorex, if you could repeat the question.

Mr CONLAN: How much activity have you purchased from the Darwin Private Hospital in the past 12 months, minister?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.2.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, while there may not be an ICU, it is located right next door. By virtue of being next door to the Royal Darwin Hospital it is unique in that sense. Darwin Private Hospital is more than capable of taking on extra surgery, particularly in the field of orthopaedic, ENT or facial trauma. It will be interesting to see how much you have purchased from Darwin Private Hospital.

Could you also provide the cost? I assume you would not be able to answer that either, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the figure in front of me now; it can be part of the question we have on notice.

Mr CONLAN: As minister, do you not have a few figures up your sleeve to be able to - even in conversation ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want to phrase that as a question on notice?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.3

Mr CONLAN: What is the cost of the activity purchased from Darwin Private Hospital in the past 12 months?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.3

Mr CONLAN: What are the occupancy rates at Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: When?

Mr CONLAN: For the past 12 months.

Mr VATSKALIS: The occupancy rates for Royal Darwin Hospital 2009-10 ...

Mr CONLAN: Could you provide me with the current occupancy rates?

Mr VATSKALIS: Royal Darwin Hospital was 88.33%; Alice Springs Hospital 82.66%; Katherine Hospital was 51.66%; Gove District Hospital was 70.49%; and Tennant Creek Hospital was 49.37%. On average, the occupancy rate for all the hospitals for 2009-10 was 85.64%.

Mr CONLAN: You have done some hard work, minister, haven't you? That is a pretty good improvement, 85%.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Grotorex, I know you love the sound of your own voice. The reality is hospitals in the Territory do not operate like other hospitals for the simple reason they are ...

Mr CONLAN: You have gone from 100%-plus to 85%.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, hold on, I am trying to explain. This is the average throughout the year. There are times when we exceed 100% because of the enormous pressures in the hospital service, and there are times when the hospital is relatively empty. I am giving you the average occupancy rates. That does not only happen in the Territory, it happens in other states as well.

Mr CONLAN: That was for 2009-10, was it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Do you have the current occupancy rate of Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, 2010-11 has not finished yet, but I will be very happy, at the end of the year, to provide this information.

Mr CONLAN: We will take that on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: It will be difficult to take it on notice because, if you go on the financial year, the financial year will finish on ...

Mr CONLAN: I thought you might be able to tell us. Is it full at the moment?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will place the question on notice before we move on.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, I need that question on notice.

Mr CONLAN: Can the minister please provide the current occupancy rate for Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.4.

Mr CHAIRMAN: A reminder, if you provide an answer to a question on notice within the same hearing, could you quote the question number when providing the answer, thank you.

Mr CONLAN: I want to talk about the cross-border agreement with Western Australia for the provision of oncology services for patients in the Pilbara and the Kimberley. What negotiations, if any, have you entered into with the Western Australia government, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have a number of agreements with Western Australia. One is the access to renal dialysis units for people living east of Warburton in Western Australia. Also, the Western Australian government has purchased six beds based in Royal Darwin Hospital in case people from Western Australia north need them. We are currently negotiating an agreement for the provision of oncology units for the people of Western Australia from the Kimberleys and the top of the Pilbara.

Mr CONLAN: The negotiations are under way?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: They are?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Do you foresee that happening any time soon? This is good news for the people of the Top End.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. I have had personal contact with minister Kim Hames in Western Australia a number of times. They are very keen to have people transferred to Darwin rather than another state simply because of distance factor. Trying to get someone from Derby to Perth, which is 2500 km, whereas Darwin is only about 1000 km away. Kununurra is only 700 km from Darwin while Perth is about 3000 km. It makes sense to have people being treated in Darwin.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I am happy to hand over to the member for Nelson ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions for the minister?

Mr CONLAN: Hold on.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry.

Mr CONLAN: ... in a second. Minister, I wanted to back up a bit with regard to Royal Darwin and Darwin Private Hospital. How many surgeries have been performed – this is probably a question you need on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can put part of the question on notice. You asked about how much activity was purchased from Darwin Private Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is how much you purchased. I want as much information as possible.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we can incorporate it in that question.

Mr CONLAN: Can I put it on notice to ensure ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay.

Mr CONLAN: ... because to be frank, minister, I do not trust you will give me the information.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I suggest we ask the question then work out from there if they have the answer or not.

Mr CONLAN: How many surgeries has Darwin Private Hospital performed on behalf of Royal Darwin Hospital in the past 12 months, and a breakdown - Mr Chairman, am I still on a question on notice here?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I think so.

Mr CONLAN: ... and a breakdown of those.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will list that as question No 6 ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The CEO can answer that question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mr MOFFET: We purchase medical beds to manage demand and free up our surgical capability. The program is designed to free up theatre capacity and surgical bed capacity within RDH, so we partner with Darwin Private Hospital to increase capacity by pushing more predictable medical work its way and managing the surgical demand inside our theatres because of the reasons the minister referred to. We have an ICU, and we have a large number of theatres and capability.

Mr CONLAN: Sorry, Mr Moffet, I did not quite understand the answer. I need a figure on how many surgeries have been performed at DPH on behalf of Royal Darwin Hospital. Do I need to put that on notice? I understand what you are saying; however, I am looking for an actual figure. You talk about 70 beds, but does that equate to 1000 surgeries, or 500 procedures - activity, to put it in more of an industry term?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, would you like the question to be ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We can answer the question.

Mr MOFFET: In order to fully answer the question about how much additional surgical throughput we achieve by partnering with Royal Darwin Hospital, we will need to provide that on notice, because it will require some calculation. That is the strategy.

Question on Notice No 6.5

Mr CHAIRMAN: On notice is fine. Could I have that question one more time?

Mr CONLAN: That is why I attempted to put it on notice the first time. How many surgeries have been performed at Darwin Private Hospital on behalf of the Royal Darwin Hospital - a breakdown of those surgeries for the last 12 months?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.5.

Mr CONLAN: I am going to stay on Admitted Patient Services. .

Mr CHAIRMAN: Your call, we are on Output 1.1.

Mr CONLAN: Hang on, I will double check because I do not want to lose this. I want to move to interstate patient travel.

Minister, how many, people from Central Australia undertook interstate patient travel for the past 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: How many people?

Mr CONLAN: How many in Central Australia. Can you break that down?

Mr VATSKALIS: Interstate travel?

Mr CONLAN: Interstate travel to, say, Adelaide or Brisbane.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have the total number for the Territory, but I have to analyse it for regions. We will take it on notice. For interstate in the Territory for 2010-11 it was 1367 people for the whole of the Territory. I will come back to you with a figure about Central Australia and the regions. I do not have the regions in front of me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If we could get that question again, member for Greatorex? Do you want to put these questions by the regions?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I will do it by the regions.

Question on Notice No 6.6

Mr CONLAN: What are the numbers, per region, for interstate travel undertaken in the last 12 months?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.6.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is only for the PATS service, member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: Just those who have flown.

Mr VATSKALIS: The ones that have been provided assistance by the health system.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, obviously it would have that. We can now move to intrastate travel, and this brings me to the aeromedical. Minister, you will understand quite a significant announcement was made the other day, quite an enormous expenditure too; \$256m, of which, at least in the first 12 months, will be through a Treasurer's Advance. You have announced the contract to CareFlight. What service do you expect from the CareFlight contract and, overall, what do you think of the service? What do you think they are going to be able to deliver to the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: The services we expect from CareFlight would be a service which is much better than we had, for a number of reasons. We are going to have relatively new aeroplanes that are specifically modified to address the needs of the client. We are going to have four planes; three of them will be in the air and one will be on the ground for scheduled maintenance. We are going to have an aeroplane based in Katherine for low acuity people; people who do not have an emergency condition and can fly during the day so we do not take up the service of a plane that can be used in an emergency. We are going to have a helicopter that can operate day and night out of Katherine and any other place.

We are going to have a full 24/7 logistical clinical coordination. One of the biggest shortcoming previously was there was not a single point of referral. People were trying to coordinate from different areas, different cities. This is going to be done by one group only and that will be CareFlight. That means if someone needs to be evacuated they will ring one number and talk to one person and that person will coordinate the whole approach rather than having EMOs talking to hospitals, talking to ambulances, talking to nurses. This is going to be one point of referral if there is a situation.

CareFlight will provide 24/7 medical and nursing staff, accredited clinical training and full maintenance and engineering. You get a fully integrated service, not only the equipment, but also the staff and the person behind the phone line can coordinate from A to Z what has to happen, when it is going to happen,

and how it is going to happen. The biggest problem we had in the past was the aeroplanes were not new. When many aeroplanes have to be maintained it means pulling them out of the service. We did not have this point of referral where you pick up the phone and talk to one person. I have spoken to cattlemen many times and that was one of the biggest problems they had. Trying to talk to someone in Katherine, that person in Katherine will refer you to someone in Timber Creek, and that person in Timber Creek will refer you to someone at the Royal Darwin Hospital. This is going to be one point of referral; it does not matter where you ring from one person coordinates the evacuation.

Mr CONLAN: You are talking about aircraft. The problem last time was the aircrafts were not new. These are not new either. You say they are near-new; what constitutes near-new?

Mr VATSKALIS: Aircraft that have very few flying hours.

Mr CONLAN: How many?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not an expert, but I believe an aeroplane that has less than 4000 to 5000 hours is considered to be relatively new.

Mr CONLAN: Is that stipulated in the contract?

Mr VATSKALIS: The contract will stipulate low flying hours aircraft.

Mr CONLAN: Was that figure specified?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have not seen the contract. The minister was at arm's length for probity reasons, but the contract specifies an aircraft with fewer than 4000 flying hours.

Mr CONLAN: Less than 4000.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: All four aircraft have less than 4000 flying hours?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is specified in the contract.

Mr CONLAN: Including the aircraft based in Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a different aircraft. All the aircraft providing the medical evacuations have to be less than 4000 hours.

Mr CONLAN: What about the one in Katherine? It is a different aircraft?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are currently using a normal aircraft. It does not need to be new for several reasons. It has to be able to fly any time an emergency happens. That airplane can be scheduled and can be replaced at any time. It is a simple reason. When you have an emergency, you need an aeroplane to fly immediately. You cannot say: 'Sorry, you cannot fly now because of maintenance'. If you have an aeroplane that transports people with no emergency situation, if something goes wrong with the aeroplane you can charter another. You cannot do that with the medical evacuation aircraft.

Mr CONLAN: What sort of aircraft is based in Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a twin. Same model but it is not an emergency aircraft. Twin propeller.

Mr CONLAN: Like a King Air?

Mr VATSKALIS: Like a King Air?

Mr CONLAN: Is it a King Air?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not know; I am not familiar with aeroplanes. I believe the aeroplanes will be King Air's because they tend to be the most suitable ones.

Mr CONLAN: It is not in a medical configuration, is that right?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is configured for clinical retrievals not emergency ones.

Mr CONLAN: Why have you accepted an operator that would only provide a 12/7 low priority service out of Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is what we specified. We wanted a low priority service out of Katherine because it will not take out of service an emergency aircraft if we have to evacuate someone who does not need to be medivaced quickly or immediately.

Mr CONLAN: Can you repeat that answer?

Mr VATSKALIS: To use an analogy, we have ambulances we use if there is an accident or emergency. In the past, if someone was to be transported from home to the hospital, a person who did not have an emergency or an accident, that would take an ambulance out of service transporting that person to hospital. That is wrong. St John has provided a car to transport people to the hospital. We want an emergency aircraft to be used for emergencies only. The aircraft in Katherine during the day is to evacuate people who do not have an emergency or do not have to be evacuated immediately - it is transporting people of lower acuity to Royal Darwin Hospital or somewhere else.

Mr CONLAN: What about those people in Katherine who require an emergency?

Mr VATSKALIS: There is a helicopter that can operate 24/7.

Mr CONLAN: From?

Mr VATSKALIS: From Darwin.

Mr CONLAN: What is the turnaround time on that?

Mr VATSKALIS: It will be less having something staying in Katherine flying to Darwin to pick up a ...

Mr CONLAN: Less time or less money?

Mr VATSKALIS: Less time. Time is the greatest factor here not the money.

Mr CONLAN: Are you saying it is less time to fly a helicopter from Darwin to Katherine to retrieve someone...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I am saying medical personal and the specialist doctors needed for medivac are based in Darwin. You could have an aircraft in Katherine, but in order to evacuate someone from Katherine in an emergency that plane has to fly to Darwin, pick up the medical staff and then fly back to Katherine.

Mr CONLAN: Only because there are not medical evacuation staff based in Katherine.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mr CONLAN: Why aren't there medical evacuation staff based in Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: Because Katherine is small; it does not warrant the presence of specialist personnel. Also, if I have an aircraft in Tindal that cannot fly during the night because of a problem with wallabies, that means I am losing a medical evacuation aircraft for 12 hours a day. That means you have an emergency airplane that cannot fly at night. It is better to fly a helicopter.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Are you still blaming the wallabies?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The call is with the member for Greatorex.

Mr VATSKALIS: The information we receive from the air force is the wallabies are still a problem. At the end of the day, the decision to fly in or out of Katherine at night time is not made by the minister or the department, it is the pilot. If the pilot cannot guarantee the safety of him, the airplane and his passengers, he will not fly, which is what happened before. A Hornet flying out of Katherine that hits a wallaby - nothing will happen. However, if you have a twin or a single flying out of Katherine that hits a wallaby, you have a disaster on your hands. It is a duty of care to the medical personnel, to the pilot, and to the people in the

aeroplane that they are going to fly in and out of Katherine safely. If we cannot do it at night we will use the helicopter. There is no reduction of services in Katherine; we simply use a different method of retrieving people in and out of Katherine.

Mr CONLAN: That is rubbish, minister. It is a compromised service you are providing the people of Katherine. You are still clinging to the furphy that wallabies are an issue at Tindal Air Force Base or Katherine airport. Were you aware a notice to airmen, a NOTAM, has since been removed regarding the wallaby issues at Tindal?

Mr VATSKALIS: I was not aware. I would like you to table that NOTAM.

Mr CONLAN: I cannot table this. This is a personal e-mail and it could compromise someone's ...

Mr VATSKALIS: How can I believe a NOTAM has been issued?

Mr CONLAN: A NOTAM is a public document, minister. You can look at the Air Services Australia website. You have all these people sitting here; get someone to look at it. They could probably be here in five minutes with the documentation. I am not going to table this to this Estimates Committee.

Mr VATSKALIS: This is a personal e-mail to you that alleges a NOTAM has been issued. If a NOTAM has been issued ...

Mr CONLAN: That alleges what?

Mr VATSKALIS: Alleges that a NOTAM has been issued.

Mr CONLAN: A NOTAM has been issued and was in place but has since been removed. The only information about wildlife hazards is in the ERSA, the en route supplement, which every single pilot carries about hazards, just like there are bird hazards around Sydney airport.

Minister, to suggest the wallaby issue is still a problem is wrong. You have been peddling this line for a long time. I believe a more sinister angle is involved around cost; it is not about providing the best service. This is not a comprehensive service by any stretch. The CareFlight aeromedical contract is a compromised service. You are treating the people of Katherine and the Northern Territory as second-rate citizens by continuing down this path about wallabies. We know it is not true. The NOTAM has been removed; wallabies are not an issue at Tindal.

I put to you: why is it okay to land in the middle of the night at Gunbalanya or Ramingining, or wherever you might be, on a pretty rough old strip that is lit up by lanterns, but you cannot land at a Category 5 airstrip such as Tindal?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, you and I, and the member for Katherine: remember we had an issue with wallabies that led us to withdraw the service for Katherine. Talking about the reduction of cost, this new contract is going to cost \$11m a year more than the previous contract. Telling us we are trying to cut down costs is absolute rubbish ...

Mr CONLAN: You are still getting a compromised service; that is what is so extraordinary. For \$25m you still cannot base an aircraft in Katherine ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, the minister has call!

Mr VATSKALIS: In addition to that, we have enhanced the service to Katherine, not only by having a helicopter to respond 24/7, but also providing an aircraft that can move people out of Katherine in a non-emergency situation during the day. Telling me that we cut the cost to Katherine is absolute rubbish. One of the reasons elective service is not in Katherine 24/7 is the medical staff and the medical personnel will be based in Darwin. It makes no sense having an airplane from Katherine flying to Darwin to pick up the staff, to go back to Katherine to pick up someone to medivac them. Time is the critical factor, not the money. To have ...

Mr CONLAN: For \$25m a year you cannot base 24/7 staff in Katherine? That is extraordinary mismanagement.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to ask the CEO to talk to you because ...

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I know you have not ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... you refuse to listen to what I am saying. You want to make a political point.

Mr CONLAN: You are not making any sense, minister. You have not been across this brief from the beginning.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, the minister is answering and has handed to Mr Moffet. Mr Moffet has the call.

Mr MOFFET: Thank you. It is important to recap that the specifications for the tender were based on a whole new integrated level of service, one which was driven by clinical priorities and priority response times for the most unwell. The service in the past did not always differentiate between Category 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 patients in the way the new system will. Over the course of the tender evaluation, the selection panel, which was made up of an aviation expert, management experts, remote senior doctor expertise, etcetera - we had a very experienced panel - part of their role was to work with proponents around getting the best service profile to ensure the best clinical response times for all people across the Top End.

What ultimately transpired is we are moving to a national standard, which is integration of the full logistics as the minister was saying - logistics, medical, nursing, aviation, coordination of transport, with one provider in one place at one time. That is the national best practice approach. We are also ensuring we consolidate skills and resources to provide the best response times. For example, there will be eight doctors with the new service - specialist aeromedical retrieval doctors rather than generalist practitioners as in the past. They will work in partnership with our specialist doctors in Darwin. That will provide the best response time to acute Priority 1 and Priority 2 patients anywhere in the Top End, including Katherine.

In the past, a high priority patient in Katherine who required a doctor escort on the plane - a plane was required to come from Katherine to Darwin on occasion to pick up a doctor and go back. Clearly, the best tasking to minimise response time is to have that medical crew on that aircraft coming direct out of Darwin. What we have done for the lower acuity retrieval, in order to maintain volumes, is to put a low acuity aircraft as a separate arrangement in Katherine, which picks up around 30% of the old business. It is picking up traffic and delivering people in a very timely way - non-urgent people - to Darwin. As the minister has said, we also have a helicopter for urgent night time retrievals.

Mr CONLAN: Are you able to provide me with the turnaround time for that? What does it take to mobilise a helicopter from Darwin, send it to Katherine, refuel, pick up the patient and fly back?

Mr MOFFET: For a night time retrieval?

Mr CONLAN: Any retrieval.

Mr MOFFET: I will have to provide the exact time for a helicopter retrieval. During day time it would be a different response time for a fixed-wing aircraft as well.

Question on Notice No 6.7

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you mind repeating that question?

Mr CONLAN: What is the turnaround time for a night time and day time retrieval, for a helicopter to be mobilised from Darwin, flown to Katherine, refuel, and pick up a patient and transport back to Darwin?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.7.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Moffet, do you agree having a fully operational medically-configured aircraft in Katherine, with medivac staff and pilots based in Katherine, would be a quicker and more efficient service than mobilising a helicopter or a fixed-wing aircraft from Darwin?

Mr MOFFET: On the basis that the service is not sustainable - this is what we heard from all our proponents through our tender evaluation period. It was not sustainable, from a workforce perspective or a volume perspective around safety, to have separate dispersed doctors and nursing staff. Their advice was specialist expertise is very hard to get, to maintain, to train, and eight doctors is not a large number

dispersed across three, four, five sites. You really need to have consolidated resources. The best response times for the Top End were around a service designed around eight specialist practitioners based in Darwin with the aircraft to be tasked immediately.

Mr CONLAN: Is that the same for Gove?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, it is.

Mr CONLAN: Any retrievals from the Gove/Nhulunbuy area are all sourced out of Darwin?

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: There is an aircraft based in Gove, isn't there?

Mr MOFFET: There is an aircraft based in Gove; that is nurse only. What we will be doing for P1s and P2s is ordinarily tasking our specialists out of Darwin. It is very dynamic, obviously. At the end of the day, decisions are made on an hour-by-hour basis by aeromedical providers because of the number of circumstances and factors that arise during a 24/7 retrieval operation. We will be providing capacity at some point for our DMOs in Gove to be trained up and provide some evacuations back into Gove Hospital. It is the same model for our P1s and P2s coming out of Darwin; the same for Katherine and the same for Nhulunbuy.

Mr CONLAN: Are you saying everyone that tendered for this contract offered the same level? No one was prepared to offer a full-time aeroplane and crew in Katherine and Nhulunbuy? It was all to be out of this integrated model out of Darwin? Essentially, all medical evacuations originate from Darwin?

Mr MOFFET: Yes. The tender panel worked with proponents first to shortlist - it was a pretty ordinary tender evaluation process - and then with a shortlisted number of proponents around specifying and developing the service model. Documentation received by me was all the final proponents agreed that, in order to achieve the response times and a sustainable service, the basing out of Darwin for the specialist medical officer was the appropriate model.

Mr CONLAN: What are the response times? What are you looking for? The previous contractor was about 78% of dispatch reliability, which is pretty extraordinary and pretty frightening if you are on the back end of that 78%. So, 78 out of 100 times you might get someone flown in; the other 22 times there is no one home. That was a pretty poor performance. What safeguards are in place at the moment for dispatch reliability? Considering we have this model, and in my view it is a compromised service for the money not a comprehensive service, what safeguards are in place?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, 78%. Where does this figure come from?

Mr CONLAN: The Cornish report.

Mr VATSKALIS: That was for the old service.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is what I am saying.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. However, ...

Mr CONLAN: If you read the report, it says – I am doubtful you have read the report, minister; you have been so lacklustre across this whole aeromedical tender. It says the manager did not even realise they were operating at only 78% dispatch reliability. Pearl has been punished for that. The contract was torn up, and they have not been successful in winning a new contract, but it does beg the question: what safeguards are in place to ensure this does not happen again? Are there any penalties in the contract if an operator does fall below a certain dispatch reliability or percentage?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, the member for Greatorex is well-known for selective reading and quoting. The Cornish report took place because of the problems we had with the previous service, and 78% is the figure the member for Greatorex quotes. Following the new service provided by CareFlight, the interim service, P1 is retrieval within 30 minutes and P2 within two hours. From August 2010 to March 2011, the P1 was above 92%, P2 was 91% and P3 retrieval within 24 hours was 95%. We are nearly at the top of the range. The reason they are between 100% and 90% is because you can have a situation where aeroplanes are needed for a particular time and they are not going to be available because they are already

in the air. However, 92% for P1 and 91% for P2 is a significant improvement on the 78% that Cornish identified in his report.

Mr CONLAN: What is so selective about that? I just stated a fact.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, it was true, and the reason why we did the review. That is why we needed an improved service, and why we have a better service now with total coordination by one provider in order to have a better response for P1, P2, and P3.

Mr CONLAN: What safeguards are in place to ensure we do not get down to such a dismal dispatch reliability percentage? Are there any penalties in the contract? Anyone worth their salt knows a contract often comes with penalties if you do not live up to it. What is in place to hold CareFlight to account so it maintains 90% to 91% dispatch reliability? Who is keeping an eye on it?

Mr MOFFET: Part of the new arrangements will include much tighter governance, and a much more fulsome contract around management of the standards in relation to the service. In answer to your question regarding if penalties will apply, if they fail to achieve performance targets, yes, they will. There will be penalties capable of being invoked inside the contract, and there are specific performance criteria by prioritisation that will be measured and reported monthly. All the final proponents had opportunity to view the contract being proposed. All accepted that. We are obviously yet to finalise our contract negotiations, but they will form a major feature in terms of the governance, the management, and performance of the contract going forward.

Mr CONLAN: What is the performance indicator for this dispatch reliability? It is important to assure Territorians and those who are relying on this service, minister - which is incumbent on you as the Health minister who has signed off on this contract - particularly in Katherine, who feel aggrieved they have a second-rate service - they do not have a full-time aircraft based out of Katherine. What assurances can you give them that when they pick up the phone someone will answer it, the aircraft will be dispatched in a timely manner, and they will be evacuated to the appropriate facility in an appropriate time without compromising their health?

Mr VATSKALIS: People can be sure when they pick up the phone they will talk to one person only, and that person in that group would coordinate the evacuation, rather than be given the runaround. I would like Mr Moffet to expand more.

Mr MOFFET: This is subject to finalisation of the contract, but the intention is there will be a 95% performance provision reducing only to 90% where there are significantly increased volumes. It will be an enhancement on the past. We also have several layers of governance. A group will meet monthly at a clinical level, around clinical tasking in relation to any issue where there is an unidentified problem with response time or management clinically. We will have a higher level department governance framework that looks at quarterly and annual performance, including demand management around services. The regime being put in place is far more robust, with many more layers of reporting capacity for flexibility inside its reporting than has been the case in the past.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will take a break and return to Output 1.1 and the member for Greatorex.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will continue. The member for Greatorex has the call.

Mr CONLAN: The KPI for the dispatch reliability is 95%, in some cases 90% due to workload. I was wondering what type of workload environment - what is your benchmark for busy?

Mr VATSKALIS: Aeroplanes in the air. You have a retrieval P1 but you cannot do it because all three aeroplanes are in the air; you have to wait until they come back in order to retrieve someone. It happened before, and I have no doubt it will happen again because of the nature of the beast.

Mr CONLAN: With regard to the helicopter there are some concerns, due to the particular type of helicopter, that it will have issues flying during the Wet Season. Are you aware of these issues and is that a legitimate concern?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are not aware of any issues. The helicopter has been used to fly during the Wet Season and we did not have any problems.

Mr CONLAN: No issues at all there? You can dismiss those?

Mr VATSKALIS: The helicopter was flying during this Wet Season, which was one of the worst Wet Seasons we have had, with no problems.

Mr CONLAN: Usually this has to do with visibility, holding diversions and that type of thing, much like an aeroplane, but a helicopter.

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is the helicopter is fully equipped with full instrumentation, and also the ability to have extra tanks of fuel if required. That was one of the questions I asked: can it fly to Katherine, what fuel capacity it has, and can it come back? I was advised there is the capacity for extra fuel onboard.

Mr CONLAN: Who did you ask those questions of?

Mr VATSKALIS: The pilot; the person who knows everything.

Mr CONLAN: The pilot?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: I was wondering about your involvement in this. I was curious ...

Mr VATSKALIS: During the launch of the contract the helicopter and pilot were present. We were shown the helicopter, and I asked the pilot at the time how far it could fly and how long it could fly, and he answered these questions. The minister did not have any involvement in the contract for probity issues. The contract was assessed by a panel, with an auditor in place. Before it was referred to the PRB it was referred by the CEO to Frank McGuinness, the Auditor-General, to look at the tender and the contract. Mr McGuinness was happy with that and advised the CEO, and the CEO referred it to the PRB.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, are you able to advise estimates how often in the past 12 months CareFlight, the interim contractor, had fewer than three fixed-wing aircraft online?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department conducted an audit about the availability of all three aircraft by CareFlight in March 2011 to May 2011. The average was 90% of the time all three planes, plus the helicopter, were available.

Mr CONLAN: With regard to the aircraft type for the contract, what is the reason tenderers could not submit a conforming bid for a single engine turbine aircraft?

Mr VATSKALIS: A tenderer submitted a non-conforming tender with a single engine aircraft.

Mr CONLAN: What is the reason they could not submit a conforming tender?

Mr VATSKALIS: They were allowed to, and they did. One of the tenders considered was someone who provided single engine aircraft. The reason CareFlight twin engine was chosen was because of safety issues, especially flying over water, and electrical storms during the Wet Season in the Top End - because this is a Top End contract - and the fact we want to provide the most secure aircraft for the pilot, our staff, medical staff, and also the patients.

Mr CONLAN. Electrical storms – what has that to do with single or twin engine aircraft?

Mr VATSKALIS: If one engine fails, the aeroplane will not go down; there is another engine to fly the aeroplane.

Mr CONLAN: What does that have to do with electrical storms?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the advice we received from the experts. I am not an expert.

Mr CONLAN: You did not bother to investigate that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we did.

Mr CONLAN: What is the answer?

Mr VATSKALIS: We found most other services have moved away from single engine aeroplanes to twin engine aeroplanes, especially aeroplanes that fly in the north of Australia or over water – Queensland and Western Australia. Only recently, we had an accident with one of the Pilates single engine aircraft flown by the RAAF and, as a result, all the single engine aeroplanes have been grounded by the RAAF, including the Roulettes.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you are not quite right there. More than half the aeromedical fleet in the country is equipped with single-engine turbine aircraft and they are moving towards single-engine aircraft. Contrary to the advice, but I am sure the advice is skewed a particular way. I have great issue with the self-styled, so-called expert, and the advice provided by the Northern Territory government. I am not only appalled at the unprofessionalism of this report and how slavishly the government has embraced it, but also that the self-styled so-called expert has managed to get himself on the tender board. If there is not a conflict of interest there, what is?

Minister, are you aware of the significant cost savings when it comes to single-engine aircraft and turbine aircraft?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, one of the reasons we went to a particular model of aircraft was not the cost. It was the safety; it was a safety issue. It is not only our government that is moving to the twin-engine aircraft, the Queensland government is moving to contract twin-engine aircraft for the top of Queensland, and the Western Australian government is moving away from the single-engine aircraft in the Kimberley and the Pilbara to twin-engine aircraft. It is not a matter of cost saving; it is a matter of safety. You can save \$10m, and that plane goes down and you lose six people. You have to justify to the public and the relatives of these people that you tried to cut costs and that is not why you use a single-engine aeroplane.

Mr CONLAN: What is so safe about a twin-engine aircraft, as opposed to a single-engine aircraft? I want to see the credibility of your argument, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: In a single-engine aircraft, the engine goes out, you go down. In a twin-engine aircraft, one of the engines go out, you can still fly.

Mr CONLAN: Do you realise, minister, just because you lose one engine in a twin-engine aircraft does not mean that you are automatically going to survive, or the aircraft is going to continue to fly.

Mr VATSKALIS: Nothing is set in life and, as a personal experience, when I was taking off in a jet and one of the engines exploded, the pilot landed perfectly all right because the other engine was working. In Western Australia, we had an incident - I think Mr Moffet was, at the time, the Director of Regional Services, Western Australia - when in Derby, a single-engine aeroplane engine cut off during a takeoff. Fortunately, the pilot managed to bring it down because it was not very high; it was takeoff stage. It could be disastrous if it was in any other situation. For me, the important thing is safety of the people rather than the cost of the airplane.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, do you know the circumstances surrounding that situation in Western Australia.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will let Mr Moffet explain more.

Mr CONLAN: I do; I want to know that you do not. You are quite happy to quote it whenever this comes up, but you seem to be not across the facts.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question was asked though, member for Greatorex, and ...

Mr CONLAN: I just need a yes or no. To be honest, Mr Chairman, I do not need an explanation.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Estimates is of a conversational nature. The question has been asked, and the minister can choose how to answer it. The minister has chosen to refer to Mr Moffet, so Mr Moffet has the call.

Mr MOFFET: Thank you. In relation to the selection of aircraft for the new tender, the tender specified twins but with provision for alternate bids in relation to innovation, including aircraft supply. The panel did a

comprehensive evaluation of a range of issues: risks, costs, suitability, etcetera. The panel, in negotiation with the final proponents, settled on the recommendation for the twins as originally contemplated in the tender specification. It is important to clarify twins logically have better nighttime safety capability in relation to engine failures at night, particularly in remote areas with strips few and far between, and where lighting is variable. There is no doubt there is some conjecture nationally about the single- versus twin- argument.

I contract-managed the aeromedical service in Western Australia and there was quite a degree of debate around the incident that occurred over Derby about 18 months ago. The balance of conclusions nationally is a balanced fleet is appropriate and twins are safer for nighttime operations in remote areas.

Mr CONLAN: According to this particular report, hence why Queensland is moving there; they have taken the same advice from the same author or so-called self-styled expert.

This incident in Derby, the engine was sourced from outside Australia. No one knew where it came from and there was a lack of trend monitoring. You may not know what trend monitoring is; it might be worth finding out, minister, before you start quoting these things and offering up excuses as to why you so enthusiastically take on the advice from the so-called self-styled expert.

Has the department received any advice from civil aviation regulators from Australia, or elsewhere in the world, that single engine turbine aircraft are less safe to operate than the equivalent multiengine competitor? Has the department received any advice at all, except for the biased, flawed and skewed advice from the so-called self-styled expert, from the civil aviation regulators in Australia, or other civil aviation regulators around the world, that single engine turbine aircraft are less safe to operate than the equivalent multiengine competitor?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, no one said the single engine turbine aircraft is unsafe.

Mr CONLAN: You have said it a couple of times in the last five minutes.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have said at certain periods of time, and for certain operations, a twin aircraft is much better. Mr Moffet made it very clear that for night operations in remote areas, where there are few airstrips with variable conditions of lighting, a twin-engine gives you a better opportunity, if something goes wrong, to survive. A single one will not.

I find it interesting the member for Greatorex said 'self-appointed expert', while he is now a self-appointed expert on twins versus single. I would like to point out although the engine may have been sourced outside Australia the reality is an engine that is maintained properly and is looked after properly operates effectively. In Derby, the engine cut off. Someone who looks after their aeroplanes better than anyone else is the Royal Australian Air Force. The Royal Australian Air Force had an incident where a single engine turbo prop aeroplane in a training mission lost part of the engine, crashed and, fortunately, both pilots escaped without injury. As a result, the Royal Australian Air Force grounded a whole fleet of single engine turbine aircrafts until they were assured the aeroplane was safe to fly again. If you need information about turbine safety and what happens if something goes wrong, the fact that the Royal Australian Air Force has grounded all the aircrafts until ...

Mr CONLAN: That is an absurd example. That is completely ridiculous, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call, member for Greatorex. He is still talking.

Mr CONLAN: An unrelated example ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, you will have an opportunity to respond once the minister has finished.

Mr VATSKALIS: It might be a good idea for me to give them your telephone number so you can give them advice on their single turbine aeroplanes since you seem to know so much about them.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I know a little about these aeroplanes. The frightening thing is you seem to know nothing about them. You are the minister; you are presiding over a \$256m contract - \$256m of taxpayers' money. You have signed it off willy-nilly. You have been nowhere when questions have been asked about this contract. You have wheeled out your public servants, you have slavishly and

enthusiastically handed this thing like it is holy writ to this so-called self-styled expert - this guy who has been discredited across the country although you seem to think that his advice is holy writ. You are, minister, the issue. It is not whether I know so much about single or twin-engine aircraft. It is about whether you know something about single or twin-engine aircraft, and, unfortunately, you do not. You have been nowhere. You have been missing. You have been asleep at the wheel when it comes to this contract and this tender process.

This tender process first went out three years ago. What has happened? These releases: 'Tenders Invited for a new Aeromedical Contract'. It is 12 months past its date. The whole thing is in tatters and now you have awarded the contract to a second-rate operator. I have no qualms about saying that here, Mr Chairman. I am very concerned about CareFlight's ability to deliver this service. You have taken everything on board this self-styled expert has said except the fact he said a five to seven year contract. You have awarded it for 10 years. You have locked us in to this second-rate service for 10 years.

Minister, this is not about my credibility; this is about your credibility. You are the minister; I am not the minister. I am here, charged to ask questions on behalf of stakeholders, the people of the regions who rely on this service, people in my constituency, and the opposition. Your credibility is diminishing by the minute. You do not know the answers to these questions; you have not been across this brief. I ask you again: have you received - a simple yes or no - any advice from civil aviation regulators from Australia, or elsewhere, that single engine turbine aircraft are less safe to operate than its equivalent multiengine competitor? Please, a yes or no. Have you received any advice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I said before that the member for Greatorex refused to listen to answers. He tries to discredit people who are well-known in Australia. He calls him a 'self-appointed expert' when he tried to give us lessons on what is safe or not. I wonder, with this sales pitch about the single-engine turbine airplane, why he is so fervent about it? Every advice we received is twin aircraft, for certain operations, are safer than single engine.

Mr CONLAN: Not every advice.

Mr VATSKALIS: Four states are moving to twin aircraft, member for Greatorex. I challenge you to leave this parliament, go out on the stairs and call Mr Cornish 'a self-appointed, discredited expert'. Find how quickly his lawyer will contact you, and I hope you have a good superannuation.

Mr CONLAN: There is nothing wrong and there is nothing illegal about calling someone a self-styled expert, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: You said discredited and you made a number of comments. You are quite right; I know nothing about aeroplanes. I take advice from the people who know. However, you seem to know much. I do not know where you studied or what you studied. I am amazed the only thing you say - a single engine turbine plane - and we know it is the Pilatus you push so hard. I have no idea why you do the sales pitch for the Pilatus. Have you an interest? Has the company lobbied you so hard? I make decisions based upon advice I receive from experts, not the advice I receive from a particular company. My decision is based on the safety of the aircraft and the safety of the people in the aircraft at different times when it is required to operate.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, there is certainly no lobbying going on. I have no interest in pushing the barrow of Pilatus. All I want to see is the most efficient and comprehensive service delivered to the Northern Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are not going to get it if you use a single engine aircraft.

Mr CONLAN: We are not getting the most efficient and comprehensive service. We are getting an inefficient and compromised service based on flawed advice. You talk about conflict of interest and about someone who, perhaps, is being lobbied by or has a particular interest in a particular aircraft. How about you look at your own report, your own advice? This, from the self-styled expert. Not once is there any mention of any other aircraft. It is always one particular type of aircraft. You can have this particular type brand new, or you can have the same type second-hand or near new - nothing to do with any other aircraft.

The reason it is so concerning to the opposition is because it is a cost issue. You have allocated \$256m to CareFlight - \$256m over 10 years! You have locked us in - there is nothing we can do - without any of the cost considerations or the safety record! You talk about safety record, and this isolated incident in

Western Australia - this ridiculous encounter trying to draw a parallel with something to do with Royal Australian Air Force and Roulettes, for crying out loud!

Mr VATSKALIS: Same type of aeroplane. The same incident happened.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, and I talked to you about trend monitoring. You clearly do not understand what trend monitoring is all about. How many in-flight incidents has the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Central Australia - just off the top of your head - had with their four aircraft over the last 10 years? How many engine incidents? How many engine failures have they had with their single engine turbine aircraft? Yes, they are Pilatus PC12s. How many have they had in the last 10 years?

Mr VATSKALIS: The difference between the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the medical service is that aeromedical service has to fly when required. The Royal Flying Doctor Service can fly when they have to and where they are scheduled. The aeroplane is used for different purposes and different reasons. I cannot have an aeroplane that cannot fly when I want it, and that is the reason we selected that one.

Mr CONLAN: Can you please explain why the Royal Flying Doctor Service cannot fly when it wants to?

Mr VATSKALIS: If there are weather situations, or remote areas ...

Mr CONLAN: What has the weather got to do with anything?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... a twin engine aeroplane can fly over water, for safety reasons ...

Mr CONLAN: There is nowhere over water in the Northern Territory that a single engine aircraft cannot fly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am going to take a moment here, member for Greatorex, to remind members estimates is conversational in nature, which requires some back and forth; however, two members talking at exactly the same time is confusing for many parties, particularly Hansard, which has to transcribe this. While we have spent the last two hours with quite a fair degree of back and forth, it is very helpful if, when one member is speaking, another member is listening. The call is currently with the minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. The argument by the member for Greatorex that the Royal Flying Doctor Service does not fly over the Top End, does not fly in the tropical conditions - I am not an expert on aeroplanes, I receive advice from the experts, but this is a ridiculous discussion. The decision was made based on safety issues and a number of other issues, not only the type of aeroplane. Yes, it might have been cheaper to use single engine aeroplanes. Is it more suitable to fly in the Top End, the committee and the experts said no. Is it cheaper? It may not be cheaper, but it is safer, and that is the result of the decision of the committee. When you have other states moving to twins from singles, I find it ridiculous for the member for Greatorex to tell us we made the wrong decision, we should have a single engine aeroplane. It is not an issue of cost; it is an issue of safety. The advice received from the experts says twins are the safest aeroplane for the conditions of the Top End, and that is the end of the story. The member for Greatorex can tell the Pilatus company he bravely defended them, and if they want to support you in an election campaign, they can.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, I ask you to warn the minister for misleading the House. The rest of Australia and the aeromedical fleet are not moving away from single engine aircraft. In fact, they are moving towards single engine aircraft, and more than half the aeromedical fleet in Australia is utilising single engine aircraft.

As this is a matter of cost - \$256m of it - I feel compelled to ask you about the safety issues you talked about. You have admitted you are not an expert, but I would have thought, as you have been the minister for Health for a couple of years, you may have at least tried to get across this brief and expose yourself to the differences between the two aircraft and get to the bottom of it so when you come in here, or when you front the media, you have some credibility.

What safety issues so concern you? You talked about over water. There is nowhere in the Territory that you need to fly for extended periods over water, even the member for Arafura. With the formula for a single engine aircraft to maintain a sea level cabin - if you lose an engine at 13 000 feet you can glide into the Tiwis. There are plenty of areas, look at the map. You talked about over water - perhaps that is your amateur approach to it. I would like to get to the bottom of why weather conditions are a problem for single engine aircraft, but somehow, miraculously, not a problem for twin engine aircraft. Why is that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, this contract was not decided by the minister, and thank God it was not decided by politicians; it was decided by an expert panel. The decision of the expert panel, after reviewing both tenders with single and twin aircraft, was to award it to twin-engine aircraft. The contract was then reviewed by the Auditor-General, who did a risk analysis and said the tenderer it was awarded to was the least risky. Then it was reviewed by the PRB and a probity auditor. I cannot believe all these people got it wrong and the member for Greatorex got it right. He is wrong talking about flying over water in the Territory for a long periods of time. Try to fly from Nhulunbuy to Groote Eylandt, most of your flight will be over water, and I would not like to be on an aeroplane that tries to glide into the Tiwis.

Mr CONLAN: It is about the distance, minister, not about the water component.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Sorry Mr Chair. Have you finished?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: You have not answered the question about the weather. As this is \$256m you have handed over to an operator, which I am certain is going to deliver a second-rate service to the Northern Territory, what is the situation with weather? Can someone please tell me why weather has such an adverse effect on a single engine aircraft, but somehow, miraculously, seems to have no effect on a twin-engine aircraft?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I said the Royal Flying Doctor Service was using the single engine turbo prop in Central Australia. None of these turbo props has flown in the Top End. It is well-known in the Top End - the member for Greatorex lives in Alice Springs, so he is not familiar with the situation here - many lightning strikes on aeroplanes and the reliability of engines. Things happen, things can go wrong. I would rather be in a plane with twin-engines than one.

See how ill-informed he is talking about a 10-year contract. If you had a better look at the contract you would find it has a five-year review. The company has to prove it can operate effectively in order to be awarded the next five-year stage. Also, there is a review every 12 months. It is not a 10-year contract like the CLP silver circle. This is a 10-year contract with a 12-month review, followed by a five-year review. The company has to prove it performs according to the KPIs before it is awarded the next five-year contract. It is not a handover contract - 10 years for \$256m - there are provisions the company has to meet before it is able to go from the first five years to the second five years. I hope you understand this is not a carte blanche 10-year contract; it has provisions.

Mr CONLAN: I was taking your word for it, silly me, where it says: 'Health minister Kon Vatskalis said the 10-year \$25m a year deal'. I should have known better than to believe anything you said.

Mr VATSKALIS: You have been going on about it. If you were really interested, rather than playing politics, and were alarmed about the length, you could have asked for a brief. Obviously it went in one ear and came out of the other and nothing stayed in between.

Mr CONLAN: I had several briefs. We have established over water flights have nothing to do with it; you cannot answer the question. You cannot give any real reason why a single engine aircraft suffers adverse weather conditions more than a twin-engine aircraft. Talk about lightning strikes; for crying out loud! Aeroplanes are struck by lightning all the time; it has nothing to do with it. It is because this is a flawed report; it is full of holes and is skewed towards a particular type of aircraft. You say I am enthusiastically defending Pilatus - I do not think I am. However, if it is perceived that way perhaps someone needs to defend the interests of the Northern Territory. This report is skewed and favourable towards Beech aircraft, the King Air.

The author - the so-called, self-styled expert - was a former marketing manager for a company that distributed King Air's. I have had conversations with him on a couple of occasions over the telephone. It is obvious the author of this report - and reading through the report shows how little he mentions other options, whether it be Pilatus or anything else - the options mentioned are all skewed towards a King Air. It sets alarm bells off, and the fact he was also on the tender board and was driving this whole process is pretty appalling. There are really no differences. The PC12 outperforms the King Air in most areas apart from speed - two-engines - but you talk about range, payload, runway distance, and takeoff roll and all those things that are pretty important to aeromedical service delivery, and the King Air is out-muscled pretty much at every time. Nevertheless, if you could give us some good reason why the government has

awarded the contract to an operator utilising these twin-engine aircraft that would be fine; however, you cannot. You cannot give any reasonable excuse or plausible reason at all. All you can say is 'I am not an expert; I took my advice from this report'.

Mr WOOD: A point of order, Mr Chairman. I am interested in the debate; however, the questions need to be a little more contracted, especially since one question has taken two hours and 15 minutes.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, fair enough. Member for Nelson, I am happy to hand over. I know we are out of time.

Mr WOOD: You said one second last time you mentioned it.

Mr CONLAN: At the end of the day there is an enormous lack of factual evidence in this. Territory taxpayers have been completely duped. The government is peddling information to suit itself and the position put forward in this report. I hope, minister, you are right; the \$256bn you have spent on this - taxpayers of the Territory get value for money. It is a case of watch this space. I would not like to be stuck in Katherine relying on a second-rate operator flying near new aircraft. We have been down this path before. In five years those aircraft will be five years older. Minister, how do you feel about all this money going interstate? Does that strike you as regrettable?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, CareFlight will be based at Darwin airport. CareFlight will employ 55 people based in Darwin. CareFlight will maintain its aeroplanes in Darwin. How could you say that money would go interstate? The Royal Flying Doctor Service is based in South Australia and services Central Australia. The member for Greatorex does not seem to have a problem with that contractor but has with CareFlight. The member for Greatorex said he has been briefed. I have been advised by my department he did not seek a brief; no one from my department has briefed him about the aeromedical contract. I am happy to be proven wrong if you can tell me when you were briefed and by whom.

Mr CONLAN: I am unsure if I can single out particular people. I have been briefed and have had a couple of phone conversations, through your office, with Mr Cornish. Can I ask the member to correct the record, Mr Chairman?

Mr VATSKALIS: Your issue is the 10-year contract. Why didn't you ring me and ask for a briefing on the 10-year contract. You told me you had been briefed. Were you briefed about the 10-year contract after we announced ...

Mr CONLAN: You can split hairs all you like, minister. You just said I was not briefed; I was.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not splitting hairs. It is a valid ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am taking the call back for a second. Member for Greatorex, rather than a semantic argument about who was briefed when, we should be asking questions about the budget. We have moved on now, member for Greatorex.

Mr WOOD: We are all PAC here. It is not opposition versus government; we are all part of the Public Accounts Committee, we need a fair share of questions.

Mr CONLAN: I would like to clarify where the staff are coming from. You talk about the staff and jobs in the Northern Territory. You mentioned RFDS. RFDS has made a substantial investment in Central Australia and are just about to pour \$3m into the visitor centre in Central Australia. The commitment the RFDS makes into Central Australia is a little different in infrastructure, employment and commitment to the region than we have seen from CareFlight thus far. Are they building a hanger? Are they going to put substantial investment into the Darwin airport to the tune the RFDS does in Central Australia? I do not think so.

It is all well and good to play one off against the other. The RFDS deserves more respect, minister, than you are giving it at the moment. It would be appalled at what the minister for Health in the Northern Territory has to say about its service in Central Australia.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Minister for Health had nothing to say about the service. The service provided in South Australia is excellent. The point I made is it is based in South Australia, because you tried to tell us that CareFlight is going to be money going interstate. Fifty-five people would be employed in Darwin. There will be medical staff, clinical staff, and engineers. The aeroplanes will be based in Darwin, flying in

and out of Darwin, serviced in Darwin and refuelled in Darwin. I do not know how you say the money will be going out of Darwin. Also, it was not only a twin or single engine that decided the tender. There were 10 assessment criteria, and the tender that satisfied the criteria won the contract. It was not only on the aircraft.

I know you do not like it; you have your own personal views and expertise. I am not an expert on aeroplanes. We sought advice from a person who is recognised nationally and internationally as an expert on planes.

Yesterday, on radio you tried to involve CareFlight with Australasian Jet to make an assertion this is not a good contract for Australasian Jet; that when they were in Darwin three or four years ago they left many debts, which we know; we have been there before ...

Mr CONLAN: Which they did.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... at the same time you failed to say from July 2010 to May 2011, CareFlight purchased engineers from the Alice Springs arm of Australasian Jet. CareFlight is currently leasing a plane from Australasian Jet in Melbourne for the life of the patient transport service. You cannot complain about Australasian Jet four or five years ago leaving many debts - which I do not doubt - when you failed to mention they buy services from Alice Springs from Australasian Jet. If you do not like the contract that is fine, but do not try to talk it down. This is a good contract that will provide good transport services for Territorians for 10 years. It is a fully integrated contract which will avoid the flaws of the past and will provide good service to all Territorians.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.7

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I have an answer to question on notice No 6.7: turnaround time, both night and day, for a helicopter to and from Darwin to Katherine. The answer is the CareFlight helicopter can depart within 15 minutes of tasking. The flight time to Katherine and back to Darwin is one-and-a-half flying hours, and the refuelling time is 15 minutes. Essentially, a Priority 1 retrieval can have a passenger retrieved back to RDH approximately two to two-and-a-half hours, depending on the condition of the patient. I am pleased to table this.

Mr CONLAN: In a nutshell, minister, you have signed off on a second-rate aeromedical service with a cost to Northern Territory taxpayer of \$256m. Territorians have the right to expect a first-class service, considering the enormous amounts of money that involves. We have already seen one operator fall by the wayside under this Labor government's stewardship. You have not really left this PAC, this estimates, or the opposition with any confidence you are not about to repeat your mistakes, minister. Remember it is those who forget the past who are bound to relive it ...

Mr WOOD: Mr Chairman, can I ask a few questions please?

Mr CHAIRMAN: You may have the call, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I have quite a few questions in other categories, especially environmental health. I have, according to the agreement, three-quarters of an hour of questions available to this side.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, we are in output 1.1. We are going to environmental health, but we are not ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, I go to output 1.1. I had no chance to butt in.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will get to environmental health; we are not there yet.

Mr WOOD: On Acute Services, minister, I have a question from the member for Macdonnell in relation to renal dialysis. Her concern was in regard to whether there any guidelines in relation to consumption of alcohol for those patients using renal dialysis. Are there any education programs? Is there any requirement for people having that treatment who abuse alcohol to receive treatment for their alcohol addiction?

Mr VATSKALIS: I ask Ms Fielding to respond to that, please.

Ms FIELDING: Penny Fielding, Acting Executive Director Health Reform. Through the renal services a range of health promotion activities are done generally but, also, specifically for individual people to support them through a range of lifestyle issues. There is no requirement that people need to comply with no drinking. Renal services, for most people, is an essential lifesaving service.

Mr WOOD: Is the issue of whether a person has a severe alcohol problem a factor in making renal dialysis more difficult or a program that is going to be less effective?

Ms FIELDING: That is a clinical decision-making process the clinicians involved would need to make on a case-by-case basis.

Mr WOOD: I am trying to get short questions and short answers, minister, because there are many questions. The Royal Darwin Hospital board raised a number of issues in its annual report and I will summarise those and ask what comments you have. It said recruitment and retention of specialists is seen as a key risk for the hospital in the quality of patient care and significant costs due to locum costs. What movement have you had on that issue?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, there is a problem with recruitment and retention of specialists because, as you are aware, we are suffering the consequences of cutting down the number of doctors by previous governments - Tony Abbott has much to answer for. However, we have continuous recruitment campaigns, not only through the media, but also through the colleges to attract and retain specialists in Darwin. The federal government has many initiatives, monetary and other, to bring GPs and other doctors to the Territory. We are working with the federal government to make it more attractive for people to move to the Territory. We have a contract with specialists from down south who visit to provide services to Royal Darwin Hospital, and will continue to do so. We identified this as one of the key issues, and we will continue to work to employ these people and keep them here. The Acting Executive Director of Top End Hospital Network can provide some more information on that.

Ms STACKHOUSE: Liz Stackhouse, Acting Executive Director Top End Hospital Network. We have been successful, since the last report, in being able to recruit four anaesthetists, as well as another general surgeon, an orthopaedic surgeon, and another maxillofacial surgeon. Our success has been good in retaining staff, specialist staff, and recruiting staff. Like all hospitals, there is a turnover of staff, but ours is improving in retention.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. The second question in relation to the hospital board's issues is it was established one of the clinical services, angioplasty and stents - according to this report, stenting was recommended for cardiac review three years ago. Why has that recommendation not been done, or has it been done?

Mr MOFFETT: We have a broader cardiac services plan that has moved into a second phase around highly specialised services. Part of that is considering the volume and nature of this service across the Territory. Yesterday I received the report. The next step is for us to convene an expert reference group to look at the timing, phasing and scope the cardiac specialist services will provide. It is in process in accordance with the plan that has been agreed and I understand funds have been committed from government.

Mr WOOD: Another recommendation from the hospital board was that members should be remunerated. Has there been any decision made on that?

Mr VATSKALIS: They are remunerated, but that will change under the new arrangements for the networks.

Mr WOOD: I read the Katherine Hospital Board report, which is very skinny, then I released they did not have a board at that time. Has a new hospital board been appointed for Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have a hospital board in all hospitals in the Territory.

Mr WOOD: I will speed the questions around the Territory. Maternity services have been resumed at Gove Hospital. We had a period there where they ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, they have.

Mr WOOD: How can we ensure that service is not closed down again? Are there processes in place to reduce the risk of that happening?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have two leadership positions. An obstetrician and midwife have been established. They are working in partnership to provide strategic leadership and expertise. Ms Rachael Lockey has commenced in the midwife position. Professor Jeremy Oates commenced in the obstetric position in September 2010. The birthing hospital at Gove has successfully retained the full range of antenatal, birthing and postnatal services, and currently has four GPs, obstetricians and staff.

Mr WOOD: This is more a statistical question about separations. When I looked up the differences between Alice Springs and Darwin Hospital in the report, it said there were 39 975 separations - this is page 11 of the report - and in Darwin there was 51 793. Considering the big variation in population between Darwin and Alice Springs, about 120 000 to about 28 000, why is there relatively more separations in Alice Springs than Darwin.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask the CEO to respond.

Mr MOFFET: Thank you. The morbidity profile for Central Australia is generally greater than that of the Top End. We have more disease and more illness suffered in that region.

Mr WOOD: That is the simple reason.

Mr MOFFET: Yes, a greater level of admission. There is a higher rate of admission from the emergency department as well, which reflects the underlying disease profile.

Mr WOOD: One other question in this area goes back to the report. It said: 'removal of onerous and complex approval process for funded position clinical leaders and assist them to effectively manage the resources they require in their division'. Obviously they are saying some of the approval processes are far too onerous and complex. Has there been any move to simplify those processes?

Mr MOFFET: Was that in relation to Alice Springs or in relation to the Royal ...

Mr WOOD: It was in relation to the Royal Darwin Hospital board's issues it put forward. It is saying it sees one of the issues being the removal of complex and onerous approval processes for funded positions which would empower clinical leaders and assist them to effectively manage the resources they require in their divisions.

Mr MOFFET: I am advised one of the issues that has emerged operationally is, as we manage our resources, we have delegated approval levels for staffing, for example, within the department. There are business processes that need to be in place in order to manage resources over the year, particularly in tougher economic times; that is one example. There is a policy and a regulatory framework inside the department that means we manage resources in a certain way. I might pass to Liz Stackhouse to see if there are any other examples we could respond to and any changes we have made in order to reduce the decision-taking burden.

Ms STACKHOUSE: In respect of the delegations, the new Top End Hospital Network, as well as Central Australian hospital network, has made it easier for the delegations to be fulfilled within the hospital environment and we are looking at other efficiencies and business savings.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. That is all questions I have on that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Katherine had local member questions to Output 1.1.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Returning to air-med, minister, I will try to be reasonably brief. Can you tell me when the full-time nighttime aeromedical retrieval service out of Katherine was stopped?

Mr VATSKALIS: I think it was 2007 or 2008, but to give you an accurate date I will have to take it on notice.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That gives me an indicator. The answer is August 2008.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want it on ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: No, that is fine; I do not need to put that on notice, Mr Chairman. Prior to the nighttime retrievals ceasing through fixed-wing, were there trained aeromedical staff at Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: There were only nurses, not a doctor.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Have we ever had a trained aeromedical doctor in Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot recall since I was a minister, but I can definitely find out if there was one in the past.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I will put that on notice, please.

Question on Notice No 6.8

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you repeat the question.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Can the minister please advise whether there has ever been a trained aeromedical doctor based in Katherine?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.8.

Mr VATSKALIS: While we are on the aeromedical service, Mr Chairman, I would like to point something out. I have in front of me a document titled *En Route Supplement Australia*, which is issued by Airservices Australia, a government owned corporation that reports to the federal minister for Infrastructure and Air Transport. This refers to Tindal airport. The member for Greatorex said the Northern Territory has been removed; however, in the document in front of me issued 2 June 2011 page 5 says:

Additional information: Animal and bird hazard exists. Notify all sightings to Tindal ATC when active. At all other times notify Tindal Base Fire on 119.7.

I would like to table that document.

Despite what the member for Greatorex said, animal and bird danger still exists. This shows once again the member for Greatorex intentionally, or unintentionally, did not provide the right information.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Could I make a point on that, minister, as you have raised it. The member for Greatorex alluded to a NOTAM, which is a notice to airmen. He referred to that and said an ERSA was still in place which related to birds and animals. This is no different to what you find at Sydney airport, where they would have one for birds. However, the NOTAM is a notice to airmen and an advice to RAAF pilots, and others, as to whether there is a significant risk they need to take note of. For the record, that NOTAM has been withdrawn.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, there is a difference here. When you are flying an F18 which weighs 20 tonnes and you hit a wallaby, the damage you suffer is much less than flying a light aeroplane taking off from Katherine and hitting one with the wheel. One of the reasons Pearl Aviation withdrew from Katherine was because of the perceived danger to the aircraft during take-off and landing by hitting an animal.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you for adding that, minister. You said it before, but perhaps you will be aware there are significant issues with heavier aircraft, like F18, and wallabies. Are you aware of an incident in 2009 where an RAAF jet struck a wallaby at rotation - at rotation means as the wheels are leaving the ground - and it had to abort the landing. There are issues for the heavier aircraft at Tindal, as well as for light aircraft ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly, but not as serious as a light plane.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I make that point so it is quite clear.

Mr VATSKALIS: Not as much as for a light plane. The structure of the wheels of the undercarriage in a military aircraft is much sturdier than a light aircraft. I do not believe anyone has any doubt about that.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, staff at Katherine hospital who were air-med trained, where are they now?

Mr VATSKALIS: Under the new contract staff would be provided by CareFlight - that is part of the contract. Doctors and medically trained nurses will be provided by CareFlight from a central point, which will be Darwin.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I understand that, but the staff employed by the Department of Health who were air-med trained previously, where are they now? Are they still in Katherine or are they elsewhere?

Mr VATSKALIS: Some of them decided to retire; some of them decided to be employed with the department in other remote health and hostel services.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, this contract goes for 10 years, is that correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: This contract goes for 10 years; however, there are milestones to the contract. Every 12 months there will be a review. On the first five years there will be a total review of the contract to see if the company delivers what we expect it to deliver, and only if it satisfies the department it has delivered the contract will it be extended to the full 10 years.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: They have to meet the KPIs?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Are there any provisions to allow for changes to the contract should contingencies change, or any of the parameters change, upon which this contract was based?

Mr VATSKALIS: The contract is flexible; the purpose of the contract is to meet the needs of the community, not the needs of the department. If there are changes, if something happens, then the contract has to be changed accordingly.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: When it was mentioned before to this committee - I believe Mr Moffet said it - there were some negotiations between the department and the preferred tenderers in discussions about the parameters of the contract, and that during those negotiations it was determined from those short-listed contractors that the most efficient service would be one where Katherine had a 12 hour aircraft for low priority evacuations. Is that correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: Katherine has 12 hour low priority evacuation by an aircraft, and 24/7 medical evacuations for Priorities 1, 2 and 3 by helicopter. There is a difference. The airplane based in Katherine is not an airplane used in emergency evacuations. It can be used to evacuate people who are sick, but it is not a fully-equipped medivac aircraft. The helicopter is.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, I understand that. The fact there are not any trained air-med trained doctors and nurses in Katherine - was that the reason why the short-listed contractor decided it would be more efficient to run the high priority cases out of Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, that was not the reason. The reason is we want an integrated and fully coordinated service which means someone has to be in one place. All the tenders provided very similar arrangements to CareFlight, which has clinical and medical staff based in Darwin and fly to Katherine. None of them offer a base in Darwin.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, this contract is for 10 years with KPIs the contractor has to meet. Does that mean Katherine will be stuck with this contract where we will not have a permanent 24-hour fixed-wing emergency high priority aircraft to take patients from Katherine to Darwin? Are we stuck with it for 10 years?

Mr VATSKALIS: You asked me before if this contract is cast in stone; I said no. If there is a need, if change is required, change can be made. If things in Katherine change tomorrow, for whatever reason, the contract can be modified to accommodate the needs of Katherine, Tennant Creek or anywhere else. The contract is not rigid; it is flexible. That is what I want in the conditions of the contract.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: What would have to change in Katherine for that to take effect in the contract?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Mr Moffet to talk about it because it has become hypothetical.

Mr MOFFET: Going back to the process that occurred for the service model, each of the proponents were asked to respond to a fixed level of demand with a certain growth rate over a period of time against certain performance criteria prioritised for clinical need. What has driven the service model that eventually unfolded and was negotiated with the final three proponents was their ability to respond clinically in a timely fashion for retrievals back to the district hospitals but, also, particularly to Royal Darwin Hospital.

For the Katherine base, each of the final three proponents negotiated with the tender panel. All had a view they could provide a more sustainable and more effective emergency response service with their resources consolidated in Darwin. That is consistent with national trends. There will be eight specialist doctors who are very hard to recruit, to keep, and to keep upskilled. They need certain volumes of work in order to work as a team. They need to cover certain rosters and if you have three teams you simply cannot run a consistent roster across the Top End.

Each of the proponents looked at a range of human resourcing and other factors to realise that sustainability of a service which needs to meet the priority times we are asking for needs consolidation of specialist medical services and logistics coordination within the Top End.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: When you say consolidated that, to me, screams money. If there was more money available, or spent in a different way, then there could be the provision of a full-time 24-hour high priority service in Katherine?

Mr MOFFET: Technically we could provide that in every town or community in the Territory. There is an issue around the cost of the service, but the more important issue was one of meeting actual clinical response times and sustaining a service. For example, getting an aeromedical intensivist to the Territory is a tough job, recruitment-wise. To sustain them in a town like Katherine or Gove, with the volumes they would not be exposed to, would be very difficult.

What will happen for the eight specialist based in Darwin is they will do some rotation and upskilling through our ICU, through our emergency department and through our Royal Darwin service programs in general. We cannot offer that experience anywhere else, and it would be very difficult to attract and retain those sorts of specialists in district setting.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We are really talking about staffing. What would have to change in Katherine for the contract to be varied, at review time, in order for Katherine to get a 24-hour service?

Mr VATSKALIS: The issue with recruitment and retention of specialists is very important, not only in Katherine. For example, we do not have a birthing service in Tennant Creek for the same reason. For the very low volume of births in Tennant Creek an obstetrician will not go there. These people want to be trained, they want to be current all the time. Having 10 births a month, or 10 births a year, it does not matter how attractive you make it, they have to be current all the time, so getting a medical specialist on an evacuation, you have to have the volumes to evacuate from that area to maintain their skills, otherwise they feel like they are losing their skills, they are not current and, by heading to Darwin, because we have the volumes to be evacuated, but also we have opportunity to train in other areas, we can attract them. We cannot attract them in Gove, we cannot get them in Tennant Creek and we cannot attract them in Katherine.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So government has thrown its hands in the air and said we cannot attract people to Katherine so we are going to provide a lesser service.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can pay them \$300 000 a year. If these people believe they cannot maintain their currency, they cannot maintain their skills, they will not come. They would rather go where they are paid less but have more opportunity to improve and maintain their skills. It is not the money, it is not the attraction; it is how they keep themselves current. It is like being a pilot but not flying an aeroplane; it does

not matter how much they pay you, you are not going to go there because you have to maintain your currency as a pilot - you have to fly planes. It is people maintaining their currency, maintaining their skills, people being able to do that, because they have sufficient volume to do it. In Darwin we can do it.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Your argument is spurious. In this economy we live in, we have computers, we have Internet access to everything in the world. Surely we could have people maintaining their currency much easier than you are suggesting if they were living in Katherine. You have repeatedly said the wallabies continue to be a problem, and that is one of the reasons why there is no nighttime aeromedical service at fixed-wing for Katherine. In fact, earlier today you said the message from the Air Force was wallabies are still a problem. Can you please table for me the advice you have from the Air Force you base that assertion on?

Mr VATSKALIS: In August 2008, the previous ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That was three years ago, but please go on.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... service provider withdrew its services from Katherine because of the wallabies. We had incidents of aeroplanes hitting the wallabies. The advice, and I tabled it before - a notice to airmen refers to the RAAF, this is a notice to civilian aircraft which clearly says animal and bird risk still exists. You have an official notification from the Airservices Australia which says it still exists.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Which is no different from any other notification you would find on any airstrip around the country. Do they do them for remote airstrips? There is probably one for Oenpelli, probably one for Lajamanu. We will move on, minister.

I seek leave to table a letter from the Department of Defence. It is an open letter to the Katherine aviation ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is leave granted? Leave is granted.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: ... community sent out in December 2010. Minister, I am going to draw your attention to a paragraph and I am going to be quick. Second page, the second paragraph down says:

Wallaby density within the airside area is now thought to be significantly lower than the ambient population outside the security fence; thus, the risk is now lower than if the fence did not exist.

That is, pre-2005.

One other benefit of the security fence is that we can guarantee there are no horses, cattle, buffalo, donkeys, camels or pigs within the airfield enclosure.

Minister, why do you keep clinging - when clearly the Department of Defence in December 2010 - and their wallaby management program continues - to that furphy?

Mr VATSKALIS: I would like to have a copy of that.

Member for Katherine, you have read something that says the risk now is lower, it does not say it does not exist. It does not say it is negligible. It is lower than before the fence was erected. However, it is not the factor only why we do not have a service in Katherine. There is a number of factors as spelt out by Mr Moffet. The fact the aeroplane has to fly from Katherine to Darwin to pick up the specialist then fly back to Katherine to evacuate someone; the fact we do not have medivac specialist staff in Katherine. It is not a single factor, there is a multitude of factors and none of the tenders included establishing a base from Katherine. The tenderers recognised the difficulty in having a service in Katherine for the reasons we highlighted. It is not about the cost; it is the safety of the people and the efficiency of the service.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, do civilian aircraft other than aero-medical evacuations operate out of Tindal day and night?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the number of air movements at Tindal. A civilian aeroplane can divert and land somewhere else if there is significant danger or the pilot thinks it is not ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: How do they know there is significant danger?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... however, a pilot, for a medical evacuation aeroplane that starts to retrieve someone – P1 - does not have this luxury. He has to move in and out quickly. CareFlight operates as any other commercial airline. The final decision to land or not is for the pilot; not the minister, not the government. It is not even on the executive of the company. In some cases he exercises that right not to land and, in other cases, he exercises the right to land.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: A civilian aircraft landing at Tindal at nighttime, the pilot would not know if there was an imminent wallaby threat, nor would any pilot. Have there been any wallaby incidents on the Tindal airstrip with any aircraft in the past 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, I find it amazing you have this document from December 2010 telling us the advice by Defence was the risk of wallabies was lower and the next paragraph down says, and I quote: 'a NOTAM, notice to airmen, remains in place warning of wallaby hazards'.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Correct.

Mr VATSKALIS: Did you read that, or did you miss that?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I have already indicated ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, hold on a minute. You tell us that in December 2010, the Air Force issued a notice saying the risk is lower but, surprisingly, you failed to notice the NOTAM still exists - the wallaby hazard still exists. How can I take you seriously? How can I believe what you say? You have a document telling us there is no problem in December 2010, and when I get the document I find out you misled this committee.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I have not misled the committee at all.

Mr VATSKALIS: You tell me it is low ...

Mr ELFERINK: A point of order, Mr Chairman. The minister well knows if he wishes to make that type of allegation there is only one vehicle open to him, otherwise he should withdraw it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I withdraw the comment that he misled this committee. Very selectively, he reads one thing but refuses to read the other, or chooses not to read the other to counteract his argument because he knows his argument is not valid.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: What is the date on that letter?

Mr VATSKALIS: You told us it was December 2010.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Correct. Minister, I am not going to table this e-mail in its current form, but I will seek leave to table it when I remove reference to the sender. This says: 'Hi Willem, yes, I can confirm that the NOTAM has been withdrawn and is no longer current'. That e-mail is dated today, 21 June 2011. Thank you, minister.

Minister, I am trying to remove from this debate about air-med in Katherine that wallabies are no longer the issue.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am pleased if that is the case, member for Katherine, because the issue is not only wallabies. I explained to you before a number of factors were considered by all tenderers when they put the tender to government. None of these tenders, I am advised, included a base in Katherine.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. I have just heard you say the wallabies are no longer an issue.

Mr VATSKALIS: I said I am very pleased to hear the wallabies do not exist in Katherine.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. No more questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes questions to Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Non-Admitted Patient Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output 1.2 Non-Admitted Patient Services.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I can ask a couple of questions. Sorry, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: No, I have a question, but the time - I will move on.

Mr ELFERINK: You want to move on?

Mr WOOD: No, you can ask.

Mr ELFERINK: If we are moving on I want to go to the section where I can ask my men's health question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, that is Children and Families after lunch. Is there an output in particular you want to ask a question on, member for Nelson, because we can move to that?

Mr WOOD: On the next one, 2.1.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES **Output 2.1 – Community Health Services**

Mr WOOD: In regard to dentists at schools, minister, was the original policy all children in all schools be ...

Mr ELFERINK: A point of order, Mr Chairman! Did we suddenly move to 2.1 without ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I thought he said 1.2.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We were at 1.2, and there were no questions. However, our earlier advice was questions around the men's health line were in Children and Families.

Mr ELFERINK: No, I thought it was under this section.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mr ELFERINK: I want to ensure I get the question up. Are we there now, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am happy for us to be in 1.2.

Mr ELFERINK: No, 2.1.

Mr WOOD: No, 2.1.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, how many telephone calls has MensLine received as a result of your 1300 campaign? I am sorry, Gerry, but I have been chasing this for weeks.

Mr WOOD: No, you are right.

Mr ELFERINK: Surely you have this at your fingertips.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, this is under the Department of Children and Families, not the Department of Health.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is what I said earlier.

Mr ELFERINK: Surely someone in that of mass of people behind you can answer this question.

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on, member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: Get on with it, Gerry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is a different department now.

Mr WOOD: Has the policy in relation to dental visits to schools changed? Was the original policy all children would automatically be seen by a school-based dentist? Has it now changed that if parents arrange for their child to be visited by the dentist that is the only way a child will be seen by a dentist at school? If that is the change, why?

Mr VATSKALIS: Jenny Cleary, Executive Director Health Services, can respond to that question.

Ms CLEARY: Thank you. We have had a reasonably recent policy change associated with the children's dental service whereby a parent or carer is required to be present at the appointment of a child. This is based upon legal advice we had about the duty of care for children.

Mr WOOD: Minister, after all the years of every child being seen by a dentist – never thought of being a danger – we are now reducing the dental care of children by a policy which will be detrimental to the dental health of school children.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, I tend to agree with you. When we receive legal advice that this is the way we should go we cannot argue with the legal advice, we have to accept it.

Mr WOOD: I might ask at another stage if I can see the legal advice, but I will move on because we have plenty of other questions. That is all the questions I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Mental Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 2.2 Mental Health Services.

Mr WOOD: Minister, in the Mental Health Tribunal report the Chair said prohibition of psychotherapy for patients with mental illness could mean it could not be used for patients with Parkinson's disease, where it has had promising results. Has the department looked at this issue and allowed this therapy to be used for people with Parkinson's disease?

Ms HENDRY: Bronwyn Hendry, Mental Health. The only things prescribed in the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* are for mental health patients. The act does not cover procedures that might be performed for other types of illnesses.

Mr WOOD: I am going on what the tribunal said. I am taking ...

Ms HENDRY: They did ask the question, but it is not relevant to the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* so it is not covered.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.8

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I have a response to question on notice No 6.8. The question was whether there has ever been a trained aeromedical doctor in Katherine. The answer is yes, there has. However, there have not been sufficient doctors to run an aeromedical roster out of Katherine since 2002-03. I table this answer.

Output 2.3 – Community Support Services for Frail Aged and People with a Disability

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions for Output 2.3, Community Support Services for Frail, Aged, and People with a Disability?

Mr WOOD: I have been asked to ask this important question, minister. This is in regard to dementia. In the Caring Places planning report from Access Economics for aged care and dementia between 2010 and 2050, it said the NT would have 795 dementia patients in 2010 and this will increase to 4892 by 2050. There is a note to say this does not specifically cover dementia rates for Indigenous people which, they

think, may be higher. What are the government's plans to ensure there are enough caring facilities for what will be an increasing problem of patients with dementia in the Northern Territory into the future?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will refer to Jenny Cleary to answer this question.

Ms CLEARY: At the moment, the aged and disability program is in the process of developing a dementia framework and action plan in recognition of those trends you have referred to.

Mr WOOD: When will we see a finalisation of those action plans?

Ms CLEARY: Late in this calendar year.

Mr WOOD: We might ask the question later in the calendar year. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Environmental Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output Group 3.0, Public Health Services, Output 3.1, Environmental Health Services.

Mr WOOD: Could I ask my questions first?

Mr CHANDLER: No problem; ask your questions first.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chandler. My questions are in relation to the incidents at Mt Bundy, which were fairly serious issues. I hope I have these in the right order. Minister, the *NT News* of 13 June said, in relation to the tragic incident at Mt Bundy, the NT Chief Medical Officer had said there were high arsenic levels in eight long-term residents. I am trying to get information around that. Can you tell us when the urine samples were taken? How long did it take to test the urine? Have the tests been interpreted? Have the eight residents of Mt Bundy been given the results?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, member for Nelson. That was a really tragic incident where a young 17-year-old boy died in hospital in South Australia. Of course, what you read in the media probably was not the truth about the scare at Mt Bundy.

You have to remember, because no death certificate was signed, the Coroner in South Australia and the Coroner in the Territory are investigating the death. The Coroner issued an order to the police, under the *Coroners Act*, to declare the area closed. The police had no alternative but to close it because the autopsy results showed elevated levels of arsenic in the body of the young boy. Also, elevated levels of arsenic were found in urine samples taken from the long-term residents - I believe, his family.

The situation with the arsenic in Mt Bundy is the police acted in accordance with the Coroner's instructions, and advised people to move out of Mt Bundy. Investigation of the area with regard to water and soil samples did not show any elevated levels of arsenic. The department involved a toxicologist from the University of Wollongong to provide advice on the issue. There is a complex issue about the presence of arsenic in the body and the way the body excretes arsenic. It depends on many factors. Some are, believe it or not, what you have eaten and how long before ...

Mr WOOD: Minister, because of time, I need to do this in an orderly fashion. When were the urine samples taken?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will come to that. I am trying to give you ...

Mr WOOD: I will approach some of those other questions ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... the whole issue because it is a complex issue. You have to ...

Mr WOOD: I will go through that whole issue as well.

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to understand the way we acted was not because we decided to do that, but because it was an instruction. Barbara Paterson, the Chief Health Officer, will provide that information because she has a time line of the whole issue.

Dr PATERSON: Barbara Paterson, Executive Director Health Protection and Chief Health Officer. Following the tragic death of the boy at Mt Bundy Station, it is important to put this in context of the overall picture. As we understand it, the cause of the boy's death has not yet been determined and whether arsenic is a contributing factor. There is a query about arsenic in relation to his death. As part of the ...

Mr WOOD: Why was arsenic tested for? Who said the child died from arsenic? Who leaked information into the public arena that arsenic could have been a possible cause if this was at a coronial inquiry in Adelaide? Where did the term arsenic come from in relation to this case?

Mr MOFFET: I can provide a response. Some of our comments are confined by the fact there are still two coronials on foot so we are limited in what we can say. Obviously the postmortem results were the initial indicator that caused the Coroner to seek some advice around arsenic.

Mr WOOD: Was that public advice? How did it get back to the Northern Territory that arsenic was involved at all? Someone must have known to test people for arsenic and the water as well? There must have been some link with the death of this boy, unfortunate as it is, with the department testing urine and water samples for arsenic. There must be a link there and I am unsure how that link came to be.

Mr MOFFET: What we can say is two Coroners are working together, and clearly the Northern Territory Coroner has engaged us as part of his investigation to conduct certain tests and do certain things and provide information.

Mr WOOD: I will go to basic question which is not going to affect anything: when were the urine samples taken?

Dr PATERSON: If I could help clarify some of your questions. The death was reported in the media on 31 May, which sparked the initial concerns.

Mr WOOD: How would they know? I am still trying to get back to the original question: how does the media know how a boy in Adelaide died?

Dr PATERSON: I do not know that.

Mr VATSKALIS: We know the media was inquiring about it and were referred to the Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital. The hospital's media officer was alerted to the fact the media expressed some interest, but we do not know how the media found out about the arsenic.

Mr WOOD: Was it from the media response that the government decided to test the urine samples for arsenic?

Dr PATERSON: No, the Department of Health has been working with the Northern Territory police who are investigating the death of the boy. Our staff contacted the hospital to see whether there was a genuine query about arsenic, whether we should be concerned, whether we needed to consider if there was any risk to public health in the area. We have been working at the request and in collaboration with the Northern Territory Police and the Coroner.

Mr WOOD: The boy died on 31 May. When did the urine samples take place?

Mr VATSKALIS: The boy died on 24 May.

Mr WOOD: What was the 31 May date?

Dr PATERSON: That was when it was in the Northern Territory media.

Mr WOOD: When were the urine samples taken?

Dr PATERSON: We understand they were taken on 1 June.

Mr WOOD: Who interpreted the tests?

Dr PATERSON: The Centre for Disease Control was contacted by the general practitioner on Saturday morning, 11 June.

Mr WOOD: And were residents of Mt Bundy told of the results?

Dr PATERSON: Yes, they were.

Mr WOOD: Do you know what date that would have been?

Dr PATERSON: They were told by the GP, which I understand was on 11 June.

Mr WOOD: Is it fair to say it took 10 days for those results to be referred back to the people from whom the tests were taken?

Dr PATERSON: I understand that to be the case.

Mr WOOD: Is it true two of the results were lost?

Dr PATERSON: Apparently there were a number of tests done. We understand about 10 residents had tests taken.

Mr WOOD: My information is two of those test results were lost, is that correct?

Dr PATERSON: According to the health centre, yes.

Mr WOOD: Do you know why they were lost?

Dr PATERSON: I do not know.

Mr WOOD: Is it true there are only possibly two experts in Australia who can deal with interpreting arsenic levels in urine, and one of those is Professor Alison Jones who has been in Darwin this weekend?

Dr PATERSON: It is. It is a highly specialised area.

Mr WOOD: Would it be true to say those tests were not interpreted correctly?

Dr PATERSON: At the time, we understood the levels were raised and contacted a number of people to get clarity around the clinical implications of those results.

Mr WOOD: Has anyone in the department gone back to the media and said those results were not interpreted correctly because the headlines were about high levels of arsenic. There are two reasons: one is because of the grief these people are going through and, second, because these claims have damaged these people's businesses quite severely. Has anyone from the department made an effort to publicise the fact these tests were incorrect?

Mr MOFFET: If I can clarify that, we received advice over a period of a week from several sources, including poison centres and experts in other jurisdictions, and finally, Professor Jones. What is very clear is the testing for arsenic poisoning is composed of a range of factors; not just the test results. It is also the background, the history, and the clinical picture of any patients presenting, so it is a complex and multi-factorial assessment that needs to occur. Professor Jones has confirmed that. What was the second part of your question?

Mr WOOD: I was wondering if anyone has contacted the media and the family about these results, because not only have they had the tragedy of losing their son, but their business has been damaged quite severely because of these headlines which are based on a misinterpretation of the results.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, we cannot contact the media for privacy reasons. You have to remember the Department of Health was not the leading agency; the Coroner conducted the coronial inquiry and all information has to be fed to the Coroner. We cannot disclose information if we act on behalf of the Coroner and for the Coroner. I agree with you ...

Mr WOOD: The Director of Health contacted or was spoken to by the *NT News* and we have a headline which says: 'High arsenic levels found at NT station', which was not correct in the end. Has someone from

the government, the department, gone back to the family, gone back to the media, and explained that that was incorrect. These people are going through enormous pain and, on top of that, a group of Chinese people booked in this year and have cancelled. These headlines have basically destroyed a family business and a family.

Mr MOFFET: In relation to the family, as soon as we had information available we communicated, with them. Police, as a result of the coronial investigation, brought Professor Jones to the Northern Territory and she met with the family over the weekend to go through the results and explain all the decisions and relevant factors around poisoning.

Mr WOOD: When were water samples taken at Mt Bundy and who took the samples?

Mr VATSKALIS: Xavier Schobben, can respond to that.

Mr SCHOBHEN: Xavier Schobben, Director of Environmental Health. The initial tests were conducted as part of the police investigation on 3 June. We went with NRETAS and NT WorkSafe as a team, and a range of samples from bores were taken.

Mr WOOD: How long did it take to get those samples tested?

Mr SCHOBHEN: The preliminary results came back on Saturday, 11 June, and the endorsed report from the laboratory came back three days later, on the Tuesday.

Mr WOOD: Why so long to get a sample of water tested?

Mr SCHOBHEN: At that stage the issue was not so much arsenic, it was to try to ascertain the whole screen of metals and general parameters in the water. NTEL, which is the preliminary laboratory that undertakes that testing on behalf of private and public entities, requires that time in order to provide and endorse reports on all of the characteristics of the water supply.

Mr WOOD: Minister, was there any consultation between your department and the Coroner before he made the orders to evacuate?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Coroner does not consult with the department. The Coroner makes the decision under the *Coroners Act* and dictates what will happen. The only thing they asked for was support and advice.

Mr WOOD: Where did the Coroner get his advice that there was a need to evacuate Mt Bundy at midnight? Did the department give him any basis for that evacuation?

Mr VATSKALIS: We did not give advice to evacuate the station. We provided him with the test results. The Coroner makes his own decision; he does not rely on the Department of Health advice. We are not the leading agency; we are a supporting agency.

Mr WOOD: I realise that; however, the Coroner has made a decision based on what he thought was a health risk and I ask what the health risk is? Has he based that on the headlines in the paper about high arsenic levels, or has he based it upon the possibility of arsenic in the water. Has he made the decision on what the department said?

Mr VATSKALIS: We cannot comment on that bearing in mind the Coroner's inquiry is still under way.

Mr WOOD: We are now certain the water in Mt Bundy is perfectly safe?

Mr SCHOBHEN: Yes.

Mr WOOD: We are certain those high arsenic levels the newspaper reported were incorrect?

Dr PATERSON: Yes, further advice was sought. Arsenic levels are a very complex issue and depend on many things: the sex of the patient, renal function, a number of matters, which is why we sought further advice from a toxicologist.

This had to be taken in context of balancing what the risk may be and the importance of adopting a precautionary principle. We are uncertain what caused the boy's death. There may have been sources of

arsenic on the station because he had levels of arsenic and the cause of death is yet to be decided. At that stage, there was no information around recent water testing or soil testing to see if there were any environmental or other sources of arsenic that could be a contributing factor. It was really a case of considering if there were any risks to public health. Often in those cases all the information may not be available at the time and you have to act on the side of caution to protect public health. If you do not adopt that precautionary principle there may be a greater risk to public health until you know.

Over that weekend, through very prompt testing of water, soil and follow-up of the individual patients - medical officers went to the health centre to do further investigations and check the clinical status of the patients - we were able to get more advice from experts and over those days it became clear what the situation was, that, in fact, those levels were acceptable. However, on Saturday, with the information we had, there was a concern about levels and there was a concern about a boy's death, and we did not have information regarding water and soil.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the information in the media has harmed this business and harmed those families. Has there been any attempt by yourself, or the department, to hold a media conference to put forward the facts so the damage to this family's business can be limited? Is any effort being made by the department to help this family through this time and get their business up and running because - you can blame the media, blame many people about the information that has gone out, but the poor people at the end of the line are the family. There have been no media releases to say the water is clear. If there have, I have not heard about them. It needs more than a media release. It needs someone like you to put forward a clear indication that the government will do something about what has happened in relation to this incident.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, because there is a coronial inquiry under way I cannot make any statement; I can only advise the Coroner. The Coroner can say - he announced he had lifted the closure. The Coroner can say, according to the Department of Health, the water and soil are safe. I cannot say that because of the coronial inquiry.

Mr WOOD: Mr Schobben said the water is okay. The people are back at Mt Bundy and they are drinking it so, it obviously is safe.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is true but we cannot disclose that ourselves. It has to come through the Coroner's office because he is still in charge of the coronial inquiry.

Mr Elferink: Pick up the phone and ask him.

Mr WOOD: What I am asking is will the government be proactive?

Mr VATSKALIS: This information will be provided to the Coroner.

Mr Conlan: Do not hold your breath, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: This family is really hurting; they have contacted me. Errors have been made and the Coroner will, obviously, look at those as well. The point is they are hurting; their business is stuffed. What can the government do to help this family?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have been working closely with the family advising them there is no problem with arsenic and no problem with the soil. Under parliamentary privilege, we said today there is no problem with the soil and the water. I cannot issue a media release; the Coroner has to say this is what happened.

Mr WOOD: Can you help these people?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department issued a media release saying the water was safe.

Mr WOOD: One last question, because I know there is not much time ...

A member: It was one question, wasn't it, Mr Wood?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a long question.

Mr WOOD: In relation to our agreement, I have over three-quarters of an hour, and you have to realise your colleague had a fairly good time asking important questions.

Minister, do you know whether the boy was treated in the hospital in South Australia with arsenic trioxide as part of his treatment?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not know that.

Mr WOOD: Does the department have any knowledge of that?

Dr PATERSON: That is under investigation by Northern Territory and South Australian coroners.

Mr WOOD: Is that a possible cause in the issue of arsenic that has arisen in this case?

Dr PATERSON: I understand Professor Jones is assisting the Coroner in his investigation, and will be assisting with those things. We are not privy to that information.

Mr WOOD: Could you say whether this chemical is used in rare cases for the treatment of certain disease?

Dr PATERSON: I do not know the details of that. I understand it may be in some medications, but we would not know what medications he had. That would be part of the coronial inquiry.

Mr WOOD: Would you expect the coronial inquiry to find whether the boy died from arsenic - how that information was leaked either, to the police, someone in the department or to the media? Would you expect that to be part of the coronial inquiry?

Mr VATSKALIS: That should be part of the coronial inquiry because whoever leaked it is in breach of the *Coroners Act*.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have on that area.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For clarification, there is a goodwill agreement which sees the member for Nelson get roughly 15 minutes in an hour which, in this morning's session, is around 52½ minutes. The member for Nelson has currently had just over 30 minutes. For your information, you have had about 33 or 34 minutes; you are about 20 minutes short.

Member for Brennan, it is your call to Output 3.1, Environmental Health Services.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I had a number of questions also on Mt Bundy and arsenic. I wonder whether the member for Nelson had a copy of my questions.

Mr VATSKALIS: Someone leaked it.

Mr Wood: Member for Brennan, great minds think alike.

Mr CHANDLER: That may be. The member for Nelson touched on this, appreciating a coronial inquiry is taking place surely, given the damage to this family, a phone call from the minister to the Coroner to ascertain if it would be okay to get back to the media and promote this a little is not too much to ask? It is not going to ruin the coronial inquiry.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have no problem ringing Greg and speaking to him about it. Again, we have to be very careful how we word it. We do not want to be seen to influence the Coroner. I am happy to do it this afternoon.

Mr ELFERINK: Why didn't you already?

Mr VATSKALIS: Because there is a coronial inquiry in place which has not been finalised. We have already issued a statement saying the water was safe. We have said there is no problem with the soil. It is very presumptuous for the minister to tell the Coroner how to do his job. I do not think he would appreciate it.

Mr ELFERINK: For goodness sake ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The call is with the member for Brennan.

Mr Elferink: Yes, I know. This is ridiculous.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, given the latest information regarding imported goods, including cars, from Japan being subjected to radiation testing, could you please advise whether any goods, including cars landed in Darwin from Japan are being tested?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not aware of that; we can take it on notice. My department does not test imported goods. If it is imported into Australia it is the responsibility of the Commonwealth department rather than the state department, under the *Quarantine Act*.

Mr CHANDLER: We have radiation specialists in charge of monitoring mining equipment and process. Do we have that capability in Darwin?

Mr SCHOBEN: Member for Brennan, we do have the capability. But under the *Radiation Protection Act* there is no compunction for health authorities, or any authority for that matter, to test unless we know in advance there are radioactive sources contained in the car. If they were above the exemption level in the *Radiation Protection Act*, which takes its power from the uniform Directory for Radiation Protection, we would have the power to act and to take tests.

Mr CHANDLER: If testing from landed vehicles being conducted down south at the moment showed high levels of radiation, and we have goods being landed in Darwin, it could follow that some time down the track that is a possibility here?

Mr SCHOBEN: That is correct, yes.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, 12 months down the track, are we any closer to finding out why we have high levels of *E. coli* and enterococci in our harbour?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Brennan, we are working together with specialists from CDU, Dr Andrew Campbell and Professor Karen Gibb, to find out the source of the pollution. The Environmental Health branch has undertaken a review of all possible sources. If you look at the pattern of the pollution, it is really concentrated on the Darwin side of the harbour. All the test sites in Mandorah are clear, the middle of the harbour is clear and, as you go further into the water, it is clear. Obviously, it is from storm water drains, which complicates the issue because storm water drains are the responsibility of the council.

I would like to point out at Lake Alexander, which has been closed a few times, 44 samples have been taken in Lake Alexander and 44 samples taken in the ocean where the inlet for Lake Alexander is. Out of the 44 samples taken inside Lake Alexander, 20 have failed. At the same time, out of the 44 samples taken near the inlet in the ocean, only three have failed. That indicates the conditions in Lake Alexander probably contribute to the elevated *E. coli* and enterococci, and not the water from the harbour.

It is a complex situation. The fact that storm water drains run 365 days a year, which they should not, indicates illegal connections. Some of the information I have received is in the 1980s, because the system did not cope with the sewage, some of the sewerage system was connected to storm water drains then later closed. There will be a thorough investigation to find out why we have an outbreak of *E. coli*, and why it is not through the whole Darwin area, only in certain pockets. It could be like Manton Dam.

I recall from my days in environmental health, we had a meningitis scare for *Naegleria fowleri*. We found it was not in the water it was in the mud; when the sediment was stirred it would surface and create a dangerous situation. We are doing a thorough investigation to find out the cause of the *E. coli* and enterococci. One thing we know for sure is the Larrakeyah outfall is not the culprit, because all the tests done by Power and Water in the area found the level of bacteria is not there. The source of the *E. coli* and enterococci is somewhere in the Darwin side of the harbour.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you think the poo shooter does not contribute in any way to the health of the harbour?

Mr VATSKALIS: It should not, because the action of salt water is very quick on the bacteria we find in sewage. Within a certain distance from the outlet and a certain period of time they are destroyed naturally, either from solar radiation or saltwater, through osmosis.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, do you agree regular testing mapped against tidal flows, whether they be neaps, spring, lower tidal flows, Dry Season days versus Wet Season days, would assist in identifying the problem?

Mr VATSKALIS: The tests undertaken by the department are done in accordance with the national guidelines and will indicate if there is a problem. We are finding some of these problems in places like Casuarina Beach, or we find them in Rapid Creek, where you might expect to. Rapid Creek starts as a swamp within the RAAF Base, goes through the airport, goes through the Rapid Creek area, where you have animals in stables, mango plantations, and road runoffs in Rapid Creek finishing all the way down to the open area in Nightcliff. It is not a single factor; it is a combination of factors.

Mr CHANDLER: I want to get to the national guidelines point about normal water testing. When a problem has been identified, would you not agree we would go above the national guidelines when it comes to finding out what the problem is to get that good baseline data?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is what we do. There is not much point taking samples every hour, every day, considering that samples analysed take about seven days to come back - hopefully earlier now because our laboratory in the Territory has been upgraded. Even if you take samples on Monday, on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, the variation, if there is pollution, will be minimal; however, on weekly levels it gives you a better indication of what is happening in that particular spot.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: I should not be answering that, sorry.

Mr CHANDLER: My understanding is testing stopped through the Wet Season and there are probably arguments for that; however, if regular testing is going to help you get better baseline data, why was testing not continued through the Wet Season?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our concern in the Wet Season was ...

Mr CHANDLER: The stingers, I get that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, however, I have now instructed the department to have whole year sampling to establish baseline information. For example, do we get the same level of bacteria during the Wet? Does the flushing of storm water drains by rainwater make the situation better, or the sediment disturbance from the wave action contribute to the *E. coli* and the enterococci in the water? We are going to have a comprehensive study throughout the year.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, it is good to hear the water can be tested locally. Was it about the accreditation of the local lab or did we have to get staff?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not going on the lab; it goes on the person. The microbiologist has to be accredited rather than the lab.

Mr CHANDLER: We have the equipment, we just need staff?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have the equipment, and I will ask Xavier to provide you more information on this issue.

Mr SCHOBEN: Thank you, member for Brennan. We have recently been informed by the Department of Resources that the Darwin water microbiology laboratory has been re-accredited. My understanding is that with the retirement of the laboratory manager in July last year they surrendered accreditation by the National Association of Testing Authorities. That required us to seek endorsed reports from another laboratory and the only one that could do it, with the prescribed tests required for both the *E. coli* and enterococci, was the Australian Water Quality Centre in Adelaide. Now we have re-accreditation, it is not so much NATA has relaxed its rules, it is previously the accreditation was given to the person, hence with the resignation of the person it was difficult to get another person in. Now it is procedural, which is much better. You have the procedures in place; you have standard operating procedures, you have the testing apparatus, etcetera, then NATA now accredits the laboratory based on procedures and that is the basis for the re-accreditation of the Department of Resources laboratory.

That means we are able to receive endorsed reports, which makes the whole procedure much more efficient and effective because we can get results within 48 hours. We are also looking to adopt formally the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines under the new *Public and Environmental Health Act* which is enacted on 1 July - 10 days time - and that will allow the Chief Health Officer to formally adopt those guidelines and set in train these testing procedures with the Department of Resources laboratory.

Mr CHANDLER: Can I make the assumption reporting will be quicker than it has been?

Mr SCHOBEN: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will take a break for lunch and we will be returning to the member for Brennan in Output 3.1 Environmental Health Services. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

The Estimates Committee reconvened at 1 pm.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are at Output 3.1 Environmental Health Services, and the call was with the member for Brennan.

Mr CONLAN: I think he is finished.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions, member for Greatorex, to Output 3.1 Environmental Health.

Mr CONLAN: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson? The member for Nelson has no questions on 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Disease Control Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 3.2 Disease Control Services.

Mr CONLAN: I would like to move straight through, if it is okay, to AOD 3.3.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no other questions at Output 3.2 Disease Control Services, we can move to Output 3.3 Alcohol and Other Drugs Services.

Mr CONLAN: For the record, there are many questions surrounding every output; however, we are a bit behind time, so I wanted to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It just would have been good to have that advice at 12 pm because Environmental Health stayed over the lunch break. We were of the understanding you were continuing with that.

Output 3.3 – Alcohol and Other Drugs Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are now at Output 3.3 Alcohol and Other Drug Services.

Mr Elferink: I am sure it was an oversight, Mr Chairman.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, in a media release dated 1 September 2010 with regard to increased rehabilitation services, the Minister for Alcohol Policy claimed there were, at that time, 300 treatment and sobering-up shelter beds across the Territory. In September 2010, how many rehabilitation beds were there in the system, and how many sobering-up shelter beds were there in the system?

Mr SIEVERS: Anthony Sievers, Director Alcohol and Other Drugs, Department of Health. In 2010, there were 240 residential treatment beds, 40 transitional aftercare beds, and 108 sober-up shelter beds.

Mr CONLAN: The residential treatment bed, what is that?

Mr SIEVERS: The residential treatment bed is a bed in a treatment service. It conducts alcohol and other drug therapy and pharmacotherapies with clients. The length of stay can be up to six weeks to three months depending on the client's need. Basically, they are in-house in a residential centre.

Mr CONLAN: Two hundred and forty residential treatment beds and sobering-up beds?

Mr SIEVERS: Sober-up shelters was 108, and 40 transitional aftercare. Transitional aftercare is a form of treatment as well. It is a transitional reintegration back into the community through a treatment service, or someone on a day program could go there with limited supportive treatment and therapy.

Mr CONLAN: I will put the question this way, you may have answered it; however, I want to put it to you again, Mr Sievers, through the minister: how many rehabilitation beds are currently online and how many sobering up beds are currently online? Is the answer 240 plus 108 plus 40?

Mr SIEVERS: Yes. The beds fluctuate. We co-fund residential treatment beds and transitional aftercare beds with the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth has just gone through a number of reviews of services through the Territory and some of those beds have fluctuated.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, in April 2011, the Treasurer announced \$3.5m in extra funding towards the expansion of treatment services currently provided by non-government organisations which include 25 extra beds in addition to about 400 currently online. That equates to almost an extra 100 beds in six months. Where did those extra beds come from?

Mr SIEVERS: The extra \$3.5m was funding given to current treatment services that were lacking under the reviews we had conducted in Alice Springs in 2008-9. We found there was significant lacking in clinicians, social workers and so forth to run the services at full capacity even though we had bed capacity. Much of that \$3.5m has gone into those services to build their capacity rates in residential treatment services. The other part of that money is to bring the services to a national standard and accreditation across the Territory in alcohol and other drug treatment services, and the majority of that \$3.5m has gone to non-government agencies.

Mr CONLAN: Are you able to provide us with a breakdown, minister, of the residential treatment beds, the transitional, and the sobering-up beds - the whole gamut by region? How many do we have in each jurisdiction?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to do that. In Alice Springs, CAAAPU has 30 beds; DASA has 32 beds which includes 10 VSA beds and 12 transitional aftercare beds; BushMob has five beds, VSA mainly; and Ilpurla has 20 beds, VSA mainly. In Darwin, we have 17 beds in the Salvation Army; 16 beds in FORWAARD; 24 in Banyan House, and four to eight family units in Banyan House. CAAPS has 44 beds, including eight VSA beds; and 10 in St Vincent's. In Tennant Creek, we have 30 beds in BRADAAG. In Katherine, we have 50 beds at Kalano, which includes 28 transitional aftercare beds. In East Arnhem, we have 16 beds. The Department of Health and Families can include VSA clients. That total comes to 292. Do you want the sobering-up shelter beds by region?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, please.

Mr VATSKALIS: In Alice Springs, we have 26 in DASA; in Darwin, 32 in Mission Australia; in Tennant Creek, 16 in BRADAAG; in Katherine, 18 in Mission Australia; and East Arnhem, 16 in Mission Australia; total of 108. That brings all the beds to 400.

You wanted me to give you the 25 extra beds: Salvation Army, 15 new beds, and 10 new beds for extensive rehab and withdrawal service in Alice Springs for Drug and Alcohol Services Association.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, minister. The cost of alcohol to the Territory is \$642m - an incredible impost on the Territory. What commitment does the government have to improving - that is 87 beds in Alice Springs. Is there any move to improve these services or create more rehabilitation beds?

Mr VATSKALIS: The best way to address the alcohol problem is prevention. You can have beds and more beds but, unless you sort out the alcohol problem in the Territory - and no one can deny it is a big problem - things are not going to be fixed. With 60% of assaults and 67% of domestic violence alcohol-related - and no one can deny that - the total cost to the Territory is about \$640m per year. That works out at \$4100 per person compared to the national statistics of \$943.

Unless you sort out the alcohol problem we have in the Territory - you can put in as many as beds as you like, you are not going to provide any relief to the community. The measures we have put in place - banning problem drinkers including the banned drinker register and alcohol core reforms - this is going to work to reduce the problem of alcohol in the community. It is enormous.

That not only refers to Alice Springs. I am talking about Darwin and everywhere else. If you go to Mitchell Street on Friday night you will see some of the problems we have with the young population - young women staggering. I do not know about you, but I do not remember growing up in a culture of going out on a Friday to get blind drunk. The girls we went out with would not get drunk and disorderly. We are seeing it in our society today. You might have, I have not.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, it does not sound like a much of a commitment to rehabilitation. I would have thought rehabilitation was a crucial element to addressing someone's addiction.

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on! You are a master of twisting things. If you do not call a commitment to rehabilitation \$3.5m to expand the services currently provided with 25 extra beds, \$700 000 for community-based outreach case management intervention, \$500 000 for alcohol withdrawal support and \$500 000 for pre-intervention I do not know what you are talking about. The measure for your party was to open liquor stores in Alice Springs earlier. Who has a commitment to rehabilitation and resolving the alcohol problem in the Territory is obvious. We have, you do not.

Mr CONLAN: You can talk about ancient history all you like, minister, we are talking ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not ancient history. You are going on about it ...

Mr CONLAN: You mentioned \$4.5m. It is hardly a commitment to rehabilitation services in the Northern Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have committed \$67m over five years, including \$34.2m on treatment. Budget 2011-12 will deliver an extra \$10.9m for initiatives. The \$5.2m I referred to was for treatment. So, \$67m over five years compared to open the alcohol outlets in Alice Springs earlier. Where is the commitment?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you have just said your focus is not on the end result - rehabilitation, so I take it the government does not have a strong focus on rehabilitating those people who have addictions to alcohol, the most vulnerable of Territorians. Your focus is more on imposing restrictions through our major centres. Soon we will see those implemented in Darwin. We have seen it in Alice Springs. It has not been working there, but is it not compelling that your alcohol restrictions are working? I realise that is a question for the Alcohol Policy minister, but where it falls in your lap is with the rehabilitation.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, you have been spokesman for Health with the opposition for longer than I have been the Minister for Health. I hope by now you know what the health principle is - better prevention than cure. We are not going to solve the alcohol problem by putting in more beds; it has to be a combined effort at both ends. We put in more beds to provide treatment services, but we have to tackle the problem where it starts. That is why I am so angry and upset by your proposal. Opening liquor stores earlier is not going to solve the problem. People will drink and drink and drink; access to alcohol is what drives the domestic violence. You have three policemen in your ranks, and you will find that most of the violence they faced when they were on duty was alcohol-related, and you can see that again and again. Unless we provide preventative measures and treatment at the very end, nothing is going to change.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, opening the bottle shop later and having later trading hours is not going anywhere near addressing the alcohol problem in the Northern Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: Opening the alcohol shops later ...

Mr CONLAN: The evidence is not compelling ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... having to show your card, having a banned drinker register and providing the SMART Courts and compulsory rehabilitation will do something to solve the problems. At least we are trying to provide some solutions; you have not put forward anything as a solution.

Mr Elferink: That is not true.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, to save getting into a back and forth here, the Country Liberals has made a strong commitment to mandatory rehabilitation throughout the Northern Territory. We feel that is a key plank in addressing the issue; however, your focus is on restrictions not rehabilitation. We have clearly established you do not have a focus on rehabilitation, it is just a small part of a broader strategy, and your broader strategy involves restrictions across the Northern Territory, banned drinker registers and photo ID. You have answered the question.

Mr VATSKALIS: We hear your colleague, the member for Port Darwin, many times in the media saying there is a small number of people causing most of the problems and we know who they are. That is exactly what we do. We do know who they are and we will find a way to restrict ...

Mr Elferink: You are penalising the whole community.

Mr VATSKALIS: No. I have not penalised people in Alice Springs buying a bottle of wine at the Todd Tavern by showing a card for five seconds. I have no problem with that, and ...

Mr Elferink: You took out full page ads against the Commonwealth equivalent – full page ads.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Port Darwin!

Mr VATSKALIS: Seven seconds will not change my ability to purchase alcohol; it will do a great deal for the community ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: A point of order, minister! Only three members of the opposition are meant to be on the committee at any one time. I would ask one member to withdraw.

Mr Elferink: We are so enthusiastic about this process, Mr Chairman, we cannot stay away from it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will remind members also of Standing Orders 69 and 51 regarding interruption. Obviously, this is conversational in nature and involves back and forth, but we try to limit interruptions. The minister has the call.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. We have evidence which shows the restricted sale of alcohol has results. Groote Eylandt has had a 74% drop in antisocial behaviour, a 68% drop in property crime, 79% drop in commercial break-ins and a 90% drop in protective custody. Go to Nhulunbuy, since alcohol restrictions there has been a 68% drop in aggravated assaults from 2004-05 compared to 2008-09. Persons in protected custody fell from 90 in 2004-05 to 10 in 2008-09. We have had a 35% drop in DUI infringements, a 53% drop in antisocial behaviour incidents in 2008. Barbara Paterson, Director of Health, can provide more information about what we are really doing with regard to treatment.

Dr PATERSON: First, I will outline the alcohol reforms. As the minister stated, there is an extra \$3.5m to boost the capacity of the non-government services around residential treatment and also around counselling, ambulatory care, and other forms of treatment that do not require inpatient services. With the alcohol reforms, this next financial year there will be \$700 000 for the community-based outreach, also funding for primary health care. It is really important that alcohol is part of a broader issue of health, and that primary health care providers are capable and important parts of that service provision. Much work has happened around alcohol misuse interventions that link with the alcohol reforms.

When people are put on banned drinker registers, or through the courts, training and support to primary health care through Aboriginal medical services, remote health centres, and GPs; we have done training to all those areas around the use of this brief intervention, or better described as alcohol misuse interventions, and there is a number of resources going out there. Our unit has a strong focus on accredited training to assist people in communities around alcohol and other drugs ...

A member interjecting.

Mr CHAIRMAN: A point of order. You made a direct comment around treatment. The minister answered and deferred to Dr Paterson. Dr Paterson is answering. I would ask you to respect the call of the department officer. You have the call, Dr Paterson.

Dr PATERSON: Thank you. I can also provide that between 2004 and 2011 there has been increased recurrent funding through the *Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act*. Nhulunbuy Special Care Unit, which is the residential centre in Nhulunbuy, also supports an outreach service as well. We have also had

some *Closing the Gap* funding for clinical support - the Prison In-reach program, which is very important as there is a high association between incarceration and alcohol misuse, so people that go into that system can access treatment and services during their time and, through the Alice Springs transformation plan \$2m has been put into the Safe and Sober program, which is an ambulatory service to support and do case managements.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, I appreciate your detailed explanation, Dr Paterson. We understand all that, but there is an impost, minister. Seven seconds is not a problem if people are seeing results. We are not seeing results. You have quoted Groote Eylandt; it is a totally different kettle of fish. You could compare apples to apples, not apples to oranges in this Estimates Committee, and we do not see any glowing statistics coming out of Alice Springs or Katherine as a result of government's alcohol policy measures. We need to move on.

The member for Macdonnell has a question on this, and I know that member for Port Darwin has a few things to ask as well.

Mr ELFERINK: I could keep going but I ...

Mr CONLAN: There is plenty to say on it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, on Output 3.3, how do we monitor the NGOs that receive money from the Northern Territory government, and the federal government to do work on behalf of the funding body. We, as opposition and Independents, can scrutinise the government to a degree; however, there is no avenue to scrutinise NGOs which are working on behalf of government. Is there any information you can table about that, minister?

Mr SIEVERS: We do a considerable amount of data recording and input from NGO services. They report to the National Minimum Data Sets. We collate all that data information and report on that every year in our annual report and our briefs. With the new reforms coming on board all the services are going to be working towards national standards and they have a level of care they have to provide, and a level of service they have to provide. We will be working hard with the NGO services to ensure that is achieved over the next year.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, we were talking about the number of beds. Can you break up, especially with DASA and Bushmob, how many beds are there for adults under the influence of alcohol and how many are there for adolescents or children taken to either Bushmob or DASA?

Mr SIEVERS: We fund Bushmob for five treatment beds for alcohol and other drugs and VSA. Bushmob also provide another four or five beds for other treatment services on a fee-for-service basis. I do not have all the figures for the year, but the numbers ...

Ms ANDERSON: Within Bushmob, you have children in the same area as adult drunks.

Mr SIEVERS: Yes, and that is a concern of government as well. We are working hard with Bushmob and DASA to relocate Bushmob. We have looked at a number of sites around Alice Springs and worked with a number of services and with Bushmob to find a suitable site for youth in Alice Springs.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, with the 10 beds or whatever Bushmob has, have you had children mixed up with adults under the influence of alcohol?

Mr SIEVERS: They are very separate on the site; however, I understand what you are saying. They are co-located and the youth go into one side of the residential block and you have the sober-up shelter on the other side.

Ms ANDERSON: I am asking because we promote all this material about educating our young society to be good citizens. If you have a problem child and put them in with a problem adult are we setting a good example for society? I do not think so. We are saying to our young children with problems it is okay to behave like this at this age because we are putting you into a place with alcoholic adults who are also misbehaving in society. I have said this many times in the House, and it is on public record, we have to extend and be honest and truthful with the material and information we put out to society to encourage

society to be well mannered. We have to get children not to see the bad behaviour of adults and this is not encouraging that.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with the member for Macdonnell; we cannot have children with adults; that give a bad example. The department is trying to relocate Bushmob and increase its capacity. If we fund this it will be a condition of funding. I understand there are difficulties around space, but they have to bite the bullet and make decisions otherwise we will make decisions for them.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister. Thank you, Mr Chair.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes questions to output ...

Mr ELFERINK: One quick one. Minister, you say presentation of ID is not an inconvenience. Why then did your government take out full page ads complaining about the requirement to present ID under the federal intervention?

Mr VATSKALIS: Because the difference between our ID and the intervention ...

Mr ELFERINK: It is different?

Mr VATSKALIS: Of course it is different. You know that; you like to play games. Every time you purchased more than \$100 worth it had to be recorded. Someone had to open a folder, record it, finish it, charge you, take the alcohol, put it somewhere and no one checked it. You present the ID, it scans immediately, and the scanner indicates whether you are allowed to buy alcohol or not. This is the big difference. Ours is checked immediately and has an immediate result. The other was a collection of useless information no one ever used.

Mr ELFERINK: For the record, BS.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I might ask you to withdraw that.

Mr ELFERINK: I withdraw BS.

Mr VATSKALIS: I would not have expected anything better from the member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: I would have expected more from you, mate.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 – Health Research

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output 3.4, Health Research.

A member: I am quite happy to go straight through to Output Group 5.0, unless anyone else has anything.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have questions to Output 3.4, Health Research or Output 4.1, Health and Community Complaints Commission, member for Macdonnell?

Ms ANDERSON: Does this come under Health or Justice?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Which one?

Ms ANDERSON: Health and Community Services Complaints Commission.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is up next. Do you have questions to that?

Ms ANDERSON: One very quick one, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will conclude Output 3.4, Health Research.

Output 4.1 – Health and Community Services Complaints Commission

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will move to Output 4.1, Health and Community Complaints Commission. The call is for the member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There is a change of witnesses, member for Macdonnell.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, before we continue, I table the media release the department issued with regard to the Mt Bundy drinking water testing. In addition, I advise the CEO of the department spoke with Mr Greg Cavenagh, the Coroner. Greg has announced he is happy with the information released today, and he will release more information when the investigation is concluded.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to introduce the officials accompanying you from the Health Complaints Commission? Mr Shanahan was before the committee last week.

Mr VATSKALIS: Greg Shanahan, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Justice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Questions, member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: I am hoping, Mr Chairman, for clarification from you or the minister about whether this section includes complaints by Aboriginal Health Workers?

Mr SHANAHAN: Complaints by or against?

Ms ANDERSON: Against Aboriginal Health Workers.

Mr VATSKALIS: Health provider.

Ms ANDERSON: Health provider, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: If it is against the health provider, yes.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, I have written to you on this matter; I am not going to raise it. I want to place on public record - because I have put this complaint in writing to you which is the right thing to do - what the department is doing about bullying in the workplace between professionals. As far as we are concerned - I hope the department is concerned as well - health workers are part of the old health system. An incident has been brought to my attention about nurses bullying a specific Aboriginal Health Worker.

Mr VATSKALIS: In that case it does not come under this. It comes under human resources and industrial relations.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister. That is the clarification I wanted. I do have, minister, this complaint coming to you, or with you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 4.1, Health and Community Services Complaints Commission. Thank you very much, Mr Shanahan.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Mr CHAIRMAN: We welcome the Minister for Children and Families. We ask your witnesses to come forward. Thank you, minister, do you have an opening statement you wish to make?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to make a statement in relation to my portfolios. I introduce the senior officers of the Department of Children and Families who are with me today: Ms Clare Gardiner-Barnes, Chief Executive of the department; Ms Helen Nezeritis, Executive Director of Corporate Services; Cameron Wilson, Acting Chief Financial Officer; and Frances O'Toole, Executive Director Family and Individual Support Services.

As you are aware, the Department of Children and Families is in its infancy as a separate government department. Having said that, since its inception on 1 January this year, the new agency has made great

progress in improving processes and systems in the care, protection and wellbeing of children and young people while managing other busy portfolio responsibilities, including Family and Parent Support Services, Youth Services, Out of Home Care Services, Family and Domestic Violence Prevention and Sexual Assault Services.

I will be taking questions for the general outputs and the whole-of-agency output for the Department of Children and Families for each of these areas, as well as for the Children's Commissioner for which I retain portfolio responsibility until 30 June 2011. My colleague, minister Knight, will take questions on the output group related to the Office of Youth Affairs. Questions related to the Office of Women's Policy are the portfolio responsibility of minister Malarndirri McCarthy.

As represented in this year's budget papers, the Northern Territory government has allocated significant budget increases to support the extensive program of work to be implemented by the Department of Children and Families over the next five years. Most of this work has resulted from the recommendations of the Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory, in their comprehensive *Growing them strong, together* report handed to government in October last year.

In 2011-12, the Northern Territory government will invest \$182m in Children and Families, compared to \$141m in 2010-11 - an increase of \$41m to the department's budget. Significant budget increases are across all five of the department's outputs: \$6.8m for Family and Parent Support Services; \$13.7m for Child Protection Services; \$8.6m for Out of Home Care Services; \$1.4m for Youth Services; \$10.6m for Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services.

In just four years, the budget has increased by \$100m, which is a 30% average year-on-year increase. The department's budget for 2010-11 includes \$24.5m as part of the \$130m announced by the Northern Territory government over five years to progress reforms to child protection services and for the creation of new child protection and family support systems which will improve the safety and wellbeing of children. Since the release of the *Growing them strong, together* report, the Department of Children and Families has released a strategic framework *Safe Children, Bright Futures*, which clearly outlines how the department will implement the Board of Inquiry recommendations.

We released the first progress report on the 34 urgent recommendations, with work commencing on all the urgent recommendations; implementation of a number of strategies to attract, recruit and retain staff in the Northern Territory, including an international recruitment campaign that has led to the offer of employment to 41 professional staff to work in child protection; national recruitment on a continuous basis for professional staff that has led to 33 offers of employment, including the establishment of a hotline for ongoing recruitment; and the establishment of a dedicated Department of Children and Families careers website highlighting jobs available and information about moving to the Territory.

The department has also developed a comprehensive staff incentive package, with six of the seven components of the package under way. It has also commenced the redesign of the implementation of regionalised management and service delivery within the regions of Darwin, Katherine and northern and Central Australia. The department has reviewed a new structured intake service, which includes intake of child protection concerns, an after-hours service and, this year, professional investigation staff. The intake service has been redeveloped to include a 24-hour, seven day a week function, including developing an increased capacity to respond to the needs and concerns of families and children.

The department has also begun recruitment for the first of the five positions for the Community Child Safety and Wellbeing teams. A backlog team was established which successfully reduced the legacy backlog of 870 cases as identified in the Board of Inquiry report to zero. Many cases were closed following investigation which assured the child's safety, with some cases now part of the casework mix in the service centres around the Territory. A workload and staff resource allocation model has been developed. Five new sites have been identified and agreed to with the Australian government for five new integrated child and family centres in the Territory.

National reporting standards have been realigned to allow a national coordinated approach to reporting on child protection throughout Australia. The department is also working in partnership with the Menzies School of Health Research to develop an evidence-based World Health Organisation UNICEF program called the Care for Child Development program that supports the development of strong attachment between parents and children, reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

An amount of \$2m has been provided to non-government organisations to provide youth diversionary programs throughout the Territory. Funding of \$1.1m has also been provided to non-government

organisations to provide three youth rehabilitation or youth camp programs which were evaluated earlier this year. An additional \$2.3m in funding has been provided to non-government organisations to provide youth engagement, wellbeing and recreational activities throughout the Territory.

Our government is committed to reforming Child and Family Services and to ensure the Department of Children and Families is properly resourced.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions to the opening statement?

Mr ELFERINK: Clarification?

Mr CHAIRMAN: About which output it falls in?

Mr ELFERINK: When do I get to ask my MensLine question? Can I ask it now?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output Group 5 or output ...

Mr VATSKALIS: 5.5.

Mr ELFERINK: The chances of getting there are pretty slim.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like clarification of when I could ask about staffing?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is at agency-related whole-of-government questions. That is next.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Adoption?

Members interjecting.

Mrs LAMBLEY: 5.3 Out of Home Care. The flood response at the Daly River?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That would be Output 1.0.

Mrs LAMBLEY: 1.0. And the Ochre card?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Ochre card is under the Police Commissioner.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We were told that previously; however, because it has a direct connection to the protection of children in the Northern Territory, I feel it might be appropriate to ask a few questions relating to children protection and the Ochre card.

Mr VATSKALIS: Output 2.0.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Output 2.0. Thank you. And also clarification ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We administer the legislation; the Police Commissioner does the clearances.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If you cannot answer my questions, I will accept that you are not ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: As a matter of explanation, the following test of relevance is what we use: any questions going to the operations or financial positions of the department. If you have an operational question that falls within the minister's ambit, then yes, but if it is one of those ones that applies ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: At 5.2.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Clarification, Mr Chairman, on how much time we have?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We have until 4.30 pm.

Mrs LAMBLEY: 4.30 pm. Two hours.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we have the Department of Resources as well.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The agenda for estimates is the outputs. It is in your hands how much time you choose to use. This should have started at 1 pm; it is now 1.40 pm. I chair to the agenda, which is the outputs, and how much time you choose to spend on the outputs – if that makes sense.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have another portfolio.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We have other outputs.

Mr VATSKALIS: Department of Resources.

Mrs LAMBLEY: An output question on income management, what section is that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Output 2.0.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Output 2.0, thank you, minister. It is a great honour to be before you today to ask questions on child protection, and children and family services. I thank you for delivering the responses to our written questions from April. A few hours ago we received your responses. Thank you very much for that.

Minister, I am wondering about your commitment to regionalisation of the child protection services in the Northern Territory. In February this year, you advertised several regional manager positions in the *Northern Territory News* and, no doubt, other media outlets. I am wondering who got the jobs and what is happening with your commitment to regionalisation?

Mr VATSKALIS: Clare Gardiner-Barnes, the CE of the department will answer questions about staffing.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Thank you, minister. Clare Gardiner-Barnes, Chief Executive Department of Children and Families. Those positions included an Executive Director Regional Services as the direct line manager and three regional director positions. Yesterday, I was advised that the executive remuneration review panel had met to consider the proposed appointments of those people. Consequently, they have been advised and made offers and we are currently finalising those arrangements for announcements.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was the delay, Ms Gardiner-Barnes?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There were delays in negotiations in relation to remuneration of several applicants. Those have now been finalised and we have been able to make offers to staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What sort of pay packages are these regional managers on?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The three regional directors are at Executive Contract Level 2.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much money?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There is a range offered in the public service. I will ask my colleague, Helen, if she has the starting point for that.

Ms NEZERITIS: I do not have a starting point but I can obtain that for you.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We will get that during the session for you.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay, thank you.

Question on Notice No 6.9

Mr CHAIRMAN: From experience, we should take that on notice and give it a number. If you could ask that question again.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I asked what the salary range was for the regional director positions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.9. For tracking purposes for Hansard, last week we had a few questions where we said the answer would come back later; that becomes complicated. It is better to give it a number.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is fine.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Given it has taken four months for you to almost fill these positions - you have not got there yet by the sound of it - what does that mean to the process of regionalisation in the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, I used to work for public service and I will give you an example of how the public service sometimes works. In my case, the position was advertised in June, I was interviewed in December, and I got the job in February.

Mrs LAMBLEY: With all due respect, minister, we are not talking about you.

Mr VATSKALIS: The reason is we advertised nationally. When advertising nationally we have a time frame for people to apply, then there is a time frame for people to be interviewed by a panel, a decision is made, and then people have to accept the position and put resignations in place. It does not happen in two or three days. It can take four weeks, six weeks, eight weeks. In addition, people at that level will negotiate what they want to be paid with what allowances, etcetera. Our commitment is there, the money is there, but we have to work with the people who apply for the jobs. It is not us saying you are going to get the job. We want the best person for the job, and we are going nationally and internationally to get these people. I refer to CEO of the department to further expand.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There is a very strong commitment to regionalisation across the department. We have recently engaged Mercer, a consultancy company that specialises in HR development. They are providing a service to the department to finalise the structure for the department. That involves consultation with directors and managers around what the new structure for the agency will look like including staff at the regional level. Because we have made a commitment to roll out services and devolve services from central office, it has been important to ensure we engage at the manager level and to ensure we have the right structure in place.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.9

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I have been given the figure for the Executive Contract Level 2 salary package. This is the full package as provided online through the Office of the Public Service Commissioner. It starts at \$189 378 and the highest pay point is \$203 052.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you. What I can glean from the response to my last question about the time it has taken to recruit these positions, you are saying a period of over four months - perhaps five months when things are finalised - is perfectly normal for your department to recruit to any position in the public service?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Following the advertisement of the regional director positions we advertised for a supervisor of that position. That was advertised much more recently. We held interviews a few weeks ago. I am in a position to announce the successful application for that position is Lorraine Williams. Previously, Lorraine was in charge of operations for child protection and youth justice in New Zealand nationally. She was responsible for reforming their child protection system, introducing regionalisation, getting rid of their backlog, and reforming the Out of Home Care sector. She is very experienced. She will be a great gift to the Territory and will provide very strong leadership to the regional directors once they are appointed.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am pleased to hear that.

Mr VATSKALIS: In some cases, member for Araluen, we advertised internationally. If we go internationally we can get really good applicants; however, we have to work with the Immigration department to organise visas, etcetera. Sometimes, this can take time. As I said before, our purpose is to employ capable people with skills such as Lorraine who are going to benefit the Territory. I am prepared to wait to get the right person rather than make a rash decision.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In answer to my question: yes, it is perfectly normal to take four, five, six months to recruit to positions in the Department of Children and Families?

Mr VATSKALIS: I said before we have to work with people who come from other jurisdictions and other countries. It would be ideal to do it in approximately a month, but the harsh reality is it cannot be done in a month; it has to be more than a month.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: May I refer to my colleague, Helen Nezeritis, because there is a brief on the average days it takes to recruit within our department.

Ms NEZERITIS: Helen Nezeritis. That is noted in the written questions you would have received this morning. Average time is ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do I need a response verbally, if they are written?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide a response verbally, if you like.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, it is okay. Thank you. Given the Department of Children and Families - or FACS, or names it has previously been known by - was regionalised when I first came to the Territory in the early 1990s, we are going the full circle. I am wondering why it takes so long to set up a new structure of regionalisation when we go around with these processes? We regionalise, we centralise, we decentralise - why does that take a huge amount of time?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: One of the key benefits from regionalisation, from my perspective, will not just be in relation to the devolution of decision-making down to the local level, and the speediness in which decisions can be made as a result of that. At the moment, the structural arrangements in the department mean there are programmatic lines for directors so that child protection staff report through to Central Office Director in Darwin, the out-of-home care staff do the same, and the family violence program does the same.

What we are trying to create through a regional approach is a much more integrated service delivery at the grassroots level, so there can be local solutions to local issues, and staff working much more collaboratively together across program areas to ensure we have child and family centred responses, staff communicate more effectively with each other and case manage more jointly.

Mrs LAMBLEY: For your information, most of the questions I am delivering today come from members of the community - stakeholders in child protection. I sought responses far and wide. One area brought to me by many people was recruitment and the amount of time it takes for middle management within the department to process the requirements of the bureaucracy. I notice in the information we were given today that 445 out of 812 staff of the Department of Children and Families are employed temporarily. Those contracts have to be renewed, or reviewed, or something has to happen to them every three to six months, from memory; it takes a huge amount of time and takes managers away from the core business of child protection. Would you like to comment on that, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you; I do not like to have people on short-term contracts for the reasons you identified. That is the reason we put significant amounts of money in to recruit more people. The government has put in a significant amount of money to recruit 76 new people. The government, in the last year, put in more money to recruit more people. We had gaps in the system, for various reasons. One was because we could not find people to work here and, when we did, we had to retrain them because the Territory is a different planet when you compare it to South Australia or Victoria. It was identified by the board of inquiry's recommendations, and we immediately moved to put in extra money to recruit people on a permanent basis.

Some people choose to work temporarily, and that is fine with us. There are people who have to be employed temporarily because they are Commonwealth programs. However, our intention is to recruit people who can stay in the Territory permanently - not only with extra money, but also the extra allowances we put into the Territory for the first time. The fact is we are prepared to spend money to provide training for these people to live in the Territory, and we have decided to grow our own, especially with an emphasis on Aboriginal child protection.

I can further add ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, that is fine.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister can choose how to answer the question, and that includes referring to a department officer.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The department is making a big effort at the moment to clean up a number of the HR issues relating to temporary staff. We have recently done a complete audit of the staffing numbers - our full staff equivalent and our establishment - to ensure we can place temporary staff against established positions and we have made a concerted effort to do that and have made huge inroads into that goal.

Mrs LAMBLEY: More than half your staff being employed on temporary employment contracts would suggest it is almost a characteristic of your department; it is almost a policy of the department to employ temporarily. I have never seen statistics like this before in the public service. I find it quite appalling, to be honest.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There are huge issues, no doubt, with our temporary staff arrangements, and that is why we have made the decision to undertake the audit and put strategies in place. With the big increases in workload and the huge increases in staffing over the last couple of years, our priority has been to get staff on the ground as quickly as possible which has resulted, in many cases, of putting people into temporary jobs. We are now going through the process of ensuring they go through the proper merit selection process and are allocated into permanent positions wherever possible.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will move to income management. The department came out this year or earlier last year with an arrangement with Centrelink whereby the Northern Territory child protection authorities could identify families that would benefit from income management.

Mr VATSKALIS: A point of order, Mr Chairman!

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are still at agency-related whole-of-government questions.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is Output 2.0.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I thought you said Output 1.0.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are not even at Output 1.0 yet. We are at agency-related whole-of-government questions.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have not moved to Output 1.0 yet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: During estimates last week the Ombudsman stated she was unable to complete an investigation into the reprisals and harassment of Susan Mansfield. We all remember the *Four Corners* program, *Dangerous Territory*, which graphically illustrated the incompetence of this government in protecting children in their care. During estimates, it was said the Department of Children and Families had engaged an independent investigator. Could you give me some details on that please, minister?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The Department of Health Chief Executive, while we were a combined department last year, undertook to have an independent investigator look into that matter. The Chief Executive of Health would need to respond to that question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What about the minister? This woman was working at the hospital looking after the care and protection of children. She was featured in the *Four Corners* program *Dangerous Territory*. You are dodging a bullet here, minister, if you cannot respond to this question.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, it would be totally inappropriate for a minister to get involved in an independent investigation of a complaint on a human resources issue.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is public.

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot direct one way or another how my department deals with its staff. You are well aware, because you used to work in the public service that the minister does not get involved in

directing his CEO about an issue with a public servant. It would be totally inappropriate. Ministers cannot fire or hire public servants. That is based on the Westminster system. We cannot do it.

An independent investigator was hired, he looked at the issue and my understanding is the investigation is in its final stages and will be delivered to the CEO when it is finalised. The minister will not interfere, and cannot interfere. Even when I was a public servant, the minister did not interfere in firing and hiring public servants.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I was not asking you to interfere; I was asking you to give information. As a minister, you can provide such information.

Mr VATSKALIS: The only information I can give you is an independent investigation was conducted, it is in its final stages and the result will be provided to the CEO of the department. The CEO will formally advise the minister. The moment the minister starts firing and hiring and becoming involved in the public service in the Northern Territory it will be the end of the system as we know it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, you are not just trying to sweep this under the carpet ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely not.

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... which would be in your best interests and totally understandable.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, I cannot get involved in that; however, the CEO will advise me. With regard to personnel working in the Department of Children and Families, Clare Gardiner-Barnes is in charge of the public servants and is the only one who can deal with it - not the minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If I was minister I would be able to get involved in anything I pleased.

Mr VATSKALIS: Then you would have a court case on your hands.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are defining your role according to what you feel comfortable with, minister, and that sounds like absolute rubbish.

Mr VATSKALIS: Is it a new policy of the CLP that a minister will interfere in public service affairs? Yes or no?

Mrs LAMBLEY: You could ask questions that are highly appropriate.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, you just said something: you said if you were the minister you would find a way to interfere.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would get involved by asking questions.

Mr VATSKALIS: So, we have a new policy direction by the CLP.

Mr Elferink: You do not set a hiring and firing policy, minister? Of course you do. That is nonsense.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I might call order at that point and suggest we return to the debate around the budget.

Mr Elferink: Of course you set policy. Otherwise, you are redundant.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Port Darwin! Are there any other questions to agency-related?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, there are. I am wondering what fiscal integrity and propriety is observed by the department to ensure taxpayer-funded programs achieve measurable and dedicated outcomes?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: As a new department, it has been important for me to ensure due processes are put in place which allows the department to be fully accountable for its expenditure or resources and use of government funds. As a result, shortly after the department commenced on 1 January, the department put on board an audit officer. That person is a temporary officer on loan from the Department of Treasury so we could put that in place straightaway. In addition, to ensure there are proper investigative practices throughout the department, I have an officer on board who is project managing the establishment of an investigations unit for the whole of the agency. That unit will undertake practice investigations for staff

and support the work of the audit where it particularly relates to the practice of people in the field, ensuring they comply with legislative responsibilities and policy.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I table the salary rates for executive contracts.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you. My next question is about the flood response at Daly River. You said I could ask that now, is that correct?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is Output 1.0, agency-related whole-of-government questions. Member for Macdonnell had a question at this stage.

Ms ANDERSON: Can I have a clarification, minister, where do I ask questions on Youth Street Outreach Services or YSOS?

Mr VATSKALIS: Output 2.0.

Ms ANDERSON: Where do I ask questions on initiatives on remote Aboriginal communities; how the Commonwealth pays for the positions of Indigenous people to work on remote Aboriginal communities like Maningrida or Papunya. Where does that come in?

Mr VATSKALIS: Output 2.0 and Output 5.0.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I suggest you ask them at 2.0 to see if we can deal with it there. That concludes agency and whole-of-government questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Output 5.1 – Family and Parent Support Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: In which case, we move to Output Group 5.0 Children and Families, Output 5.1 Family and Support Services. Member for Araluen?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can ask about the government's response to the Daly River community. What was the total cost of providing accommodation at Batchelor for the people evacuated from the Daly River community earlier this year during Cyclone Carlos? What was the total cost of providing meals and other sundries for those people?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I formally advise we are changing the Chair. The member for Nhulunbuy will be acting Chair.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Could you repeat the question, please?

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was the total cost of providing accommodation for the Daly River community at Bachelor for those evacuated from the Daly River community during the cyclone earlier this year, and could you provide the total cost of providing meals and other sundries for those people?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We accommodated 340 Daly River residents at the Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Training and Education. At this stage, the cost of that is at \$522 173; this invoice is in the process of being paid. That was including meals, etcetera.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Could you repeat that amount, please?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It is \$522 173.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How long were they accommodated? How many days?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The 340 Daly River residents were accommodated over 12 days in February. There was also supply and delivery of food for the Wooliana School evacuation centre in April, including the care and support of 14 elderly residents from Daly River.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is around \$4500 per person for that 12 days.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That included financial hardship and re-establishment and assessments of affected residents, coordination of welfare services for evacuees, including essential clothing, mattresses,

linen, and personal care packs, provision of chefs and kitchen hands through the Australian Defence Force and St Vincent de Paul Society for food preparation and services, individual counselling services over three days for evacuees and personnel, and the coordination of school and recreation services and child protection services for children. The Department of Children and Families' response was supported by a number of Northern Territory government agencies, 60 volunteers, nine non-government organisations and the Victoria Daly Shire Council.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Who is paying for that?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The invoice comes to the Department of Children and Families and we liaise with Treasury around the transfer of funds.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is a completely government-funded exercise?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: An amount of \$522 173 for 12 days accommodating 340 people.

I refer to the Bath report. Dr Bath, the Chair of the Board of Inquiry into Child Protection - the product of this inquiry was the *Growing them strong, together* report - has described the most critical recommendation of this inquiry was recommendation 6.3 which refers to the sustained new investment in the development and expansion of a suite of secondary prevention, tertiary prevention, therapeutic and unification services for vulnerable and at risk families and communities. I am wondering what the government's commitment has been over the last eight to nine months since the report came out to the establishment of these type of preventive services in the Northern Territory, government and non-government. Wrong group?

Mr VATSKALIS: Just clarifying which output this is.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If you are confused, I am confused too. Both government and non-government services.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: In the 2009-10 year, NT Families and Children provided \$32.8m or 23% of its budget to grants to the non-government sector. Of this, \$11.2m went to not for profit organisations to provide a broad range of family support services including counselling, intensive family support, crisis accommodation, and targeted family support services. The enhanced family support funding has a projected underspend this financial year. That is mostly due to a delay in the implementation of the child safety and wellbeing initiative, where we have had difficulty or delays in recruiting staff. The work is under way to apply this underspend to initiatives and roll-out the child safety and wellbeing teams, including mentoring on the ground of support workers through NAPCAN and delivery of training through national child family and parenting resource organisations, and the conduct of action research by Menzies School of Health Research.

A total of \$124 000 is being directed towards supporting the capacity of the NGO Development Unit to support additional staff to work directly with the non-government sector. We are currently developing a strategic investment framework to guide future investment in the non-government sector, particularly in relation to the child, youth and families services sector. The department has been working with the NGO sector to develop this. It will provide a structured and transparent approach to the future assessment and review of investment in child, youth and family services, and targeted future investment in end-to-end service delivery that strengthens and expands the range of prevention and early intervention services across the Territory. There are two key priorities for this framework; first, to build and strengthen the relationship with the department and the non-government sector, and also to define some shared principles and priorities for future investment between the department and the non-government sector.

We are in the process of developing the roll-out of the child safety and wellbeing teams. At this stage, we are supporting the roll-out at Yirrkala, Wadeye, Elliott, Tiwi Islands, and Galiwinku, where we have been able to arrange temporary housing for staff. Consultation is also under way with organisations and community members in Maningrida, Groote Eylandt, Ngukurr, Gunbalanya, Ntaria, and Papunya with a view to establishing teams in four locations in the 2011-12 financial year. The final allocation of the four teams will be determined by a number of factors, including the capacity to draw on staff accommodation.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you. You said 23% of the \$32m has gone to NGOs to develop these ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: 23% of the Northern Territory Families and Children budget has been allocated to the non-government sector in the past.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In the past?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, in the 2009-10 financial year, \$32.8m.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What percentage is NGO funding up to now?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have \$37m currently allocated to 71 non-government organisations providing 213 services across the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Has there been an increase in percentage of total budget going to NGOs in the last 12 months?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will take that question on notice and, hopefully, we can do the calculations and get that to you before the end of the session. Can I take that question on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 6.10

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Can we get that question on notice, please, so we can record it?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Has there been an increase in the percentage of money from the budget going to fund non-government organisations?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question on notice is No 6.10.

Mrs LAMBLEY: My reason for this questioning is to reiterate Dr Bath's position; without significant funding in this area - I know I am speaking to the converted - none of this will work. I want to know what your commitment is to these preventative community-based services.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The critical thing to remember in looking at the prevention and early intervention investment that needs to occur across the Territory is this is a shared responsibility with a number of agencies. Department of Health provides universal health services including health education services for families. The Department of Education and Training provides a number of early years services including programs such as Families as First Teachers that assist parents.

We also have the Australian government providing funding for parenting programs and parent support. The Department of Children and Families is just one department that provides investment into early intervention and prevention. It is important we continue to cooperate with those other agencies, including the Australian government, and plan strategically across the layers of government for future investment. That is the intent of the to be developed investment framework under way at the moment.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is all I have for this output, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on Output 5.1?

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. Mine is along similar lines as the shadow has just asked, minister. Could you give me data, and if you can table material on this I would prefer that rather than eat into the time of estimates when there are so many important questions to be asked. How many child safety and wellbeing teams are operating in remote locations? In which locations are they operating? You briefly gave that answer, but if you have a document I would really like it tabled. How many local Indigenous people are employed on these teams? Are any of these local Indigenous people qualified?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take that question on notice, member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: Can I read it out, Madam Deputy Chair?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I can clarify for the record. The teams are, in the main, being formed by existing staff across a range of government departments. Their notion is they will include staff from Department of Health, Police, Education, so we will need to consult with other agencies as the teams are

formed, and none are yet on the ground. None are operating at this time. We are planning to roll them out in the next financial year.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, perhaps you can take this question on notice because I have questions within this question that need to be answered. Would any of these local Indigenous employees be able to obtain employment in child protection elsewhere or are they employed in jobs like Aboriginal health workers or Aboriginal teaching assistants which keep them locked in remote Aboriginal communities? Is this serious? Can these people get their qualifications and move to Alice Springs if they choose, or to Darwin, and be employed in these places or are we going down the same path as with Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal health workers?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take that question on notice. We have a big problem with a lack of Indigenous people trained in child protection. There is no way we can make inroads in these communities unless we utilise people in the community. We are working with Queensland for Certificate 3 to train these people so they have the opportunity to go further because they will have some qualifications. That is the way it works with AMSANT, the Aboriginal peak child protection body, because we are looking at exactly the same problem.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, are we training our people on the ground to recognise conflict of interest? This matter was only reported last week from a community - I have had calls - it was reported by one of your workers who visited the community, even though you have an Indigenous person on the community who should have reported it and they did not. That raises great concerns; protection of children can be left, through a conflict of interest, for a certain period of time unless you have non-Indigenous people who are aware of the situation who raise it with your people who go to the communities. That is of huge concern for me, because if there are child protection issues - the minister knows and I will back him in the House on this - children just want love; children do not care whether it is white fellas, Chinese people, Greek people, anyone looking after them - they want to be protected. As an Australian society pushing people living together, we have to go down the path of engaging as a society to put children in the care of loving families rather than black kids with black people. That is just not on. First and foremost, the department's role has to be about the protection of the child.

Mr VATSKALIS: My response in the parliament has always been the safety of the child is paramount; it comes first. I do not care if they are black, white, Greek, or Italian. I had a list of Aboriginal kids in the care of Aboriginal people. The majority are not. The Aboriginal placement principle is not blind. What we consider first is the safety of the child.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister, and can I put that on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You need to read those questions on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.11

Ms ANDERSON: I will read the whole question on notice. How many child safety and wellbeing teams are now operating in remote locations? In which locations are they operating? How many local Indigenous people are employed on these teams? Are any of these local Indigenous people qualified? Are any of these local Indigenous people pursuing qualifications? Would any of these local Indigenous employees be able to obtain employment in child protection elsewhere or are they employed in jobs that only occur in remote Indigenous communities? How are local Indigenous employees advised to deal with conflict of interest, for example, cases involving their own family members?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question on notice 6.11.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Is that it, member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: CEO, you said YSOS comes under 5.2.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, 5.2.

Ms ANDERSON: That is it, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.1.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Can I give clarification of a point in relation to the emergency funds for Daly River. Whilst it is true government does pick up the bill, 50% of that bill is picked up by the Australian government.

Mr VATSKALIS: That cost was \$1500 per person for 12 days. That comes down to less than \$100 per person per day for all these things.

Ms ANDERSON: Madam Deputy Chair, can I have clarification on the Families as First Teachers? Minister, does that come under you or did it come under education last week.

Mr VATSKALIS: Education.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are finished with Output 5.1.

Output 5.2 – Child Protection Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will proceed to 5.2 Child Protection Services. Member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you. I would like to ask a question about income management. In the responses to our written questions we received today, question 16 was: as at 1 January 2010, how many families have been placed on income management plans affecting 70% of their welfare payments? The response we got from you, minister, was: Centrelink would be able to provide this information. I would like to know from you, minister, how many cases you have referred to Centrelink for income management.

Mr VATSKALIS: As of 9 June 2011, the Department of Children and Families has made 51 referrals to Centrelink for child protection income management.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Would you like to explain why that figure is so low? Why is there an apparent reluctance within the Department of Children and Families to refer parents and carers to Centrelink for income management?

Mr VATSKALIS: The CEO of the department will explain why.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The figure as of last Friday was 56 referrals around child protection income management to the department for Centrelink. There are a number of key reasons why there have not been high referral rates. One has been staff turnover; staff who were trained some time ago were no longer in some offices where referrals were required to be made. In other cases, there have been concerns cases would need to be left open because that is part of the negotiation with the Australian government - any of the income-managed clients we will keep open. When we negotiated with the Australian government about introducing the 70% income management in the Northern Territory, one of the things we were successful in getting agreement around is it would contribute to the provision of intensive family support services for those clients who were referred to income management around neglect and child protection.

The Commonwealth government has recently announced its commitment to provide \$24m for intensive family support in some locations to assist. We all know income management on its own will not change behaviour of parents, they need support. Sometimes that means education and training around financial management. The Commonwealth government currently provides that to families on income management. Some families also require additional support specifically to address the issues of neglect and that might mean parenting programs, it may mean referral to programs related to drugs and other alcohol, it may require referral to programs which affect behaviour and management of children, etcetera.

It is important when making a referral to income management we also have other support services around the family to ensure the behavioural changes required to impact on the child's neglect are a long-term outcome we achieve. We are yet to have the roll-out of those Australian government services on the ground. They should be commencing shortly, but once they are on the ground our staff will see there will be real benefits for clients and referrals are likely to increase.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The whole issue of income quarantining is highly contentious, we all know that. You said we all know income management on its own does not change behaviour. I would dispute that. Some people would argue income management alone can change behaviour markedly, but that is another discussion.

What I am hearing from different people within the Department of Children and Families is there is a prejudice within the organisation against using income management with your clients. They do not want to be seen as furthering the intent of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, otherwise known as the intervention. I ask you to consider whether or not there is a prejudice in your organisation for implementing the use of income management because that is the main reason why, over the last 12 months almost, only 51 families have been put on it.

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice from the department is income management would be used as a tool to change of behaviour not only by itself. You have to remember we cannot implement further income management in communities already under income management. We only apply the income management to people where we can because the Aboriginal communities under the intervention already have income management. My advice is, and my instruction is, income management would be used if people cannot behave or do not behave the way they should.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are not getting the message, minister, nor are you, Ms Gardiner-Barnes. Your organisation has failed in selling this concept to your child protection workers as a means of changing behaviour.

The *Care and Protection of Children Act* gives the CEO the ability to establish a team to review the operation of Chapter 2 of the act as quoted. The CEO has the ability to establish review teams to ensure services provided to children and other people as a result of the exercise of a power or performance of a function under Chapter 2 are of a high standard. Review team members are appointed by the CEO with a brief to review services provided to a person who has been or is a protected child or family member of that child or other services connected with the functions under the act.

Minister, have there been any review teams established under the *Care and Protection of Children Act* to ensure services to safeguard the wellbeing of children are being complied with and delivered to a high standard as required by the act.

Mr VATSKALIS: The CE can respond to that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: At this stage we have not commenced any review teams. That section of the act has not yet commenced. As indicated earlier, we are currently establishing the internal investigations unit within the department. That investigations unit will look at how we will review cases at a practice level. I am including that provision within the act and whether or not there are any legislative changes that need to be made through the current review of the act to ensure it accurately reflects the needs of case reviews as identified by the range of reviews and the board of inquiry recommendations held over the last 18 months. We want to ensure the review teams are able to adequately respond to the needs that have been identified.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Why haven't you set up any review teams? What is the reason?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The department previously has not had an investigations unit within its structure. We are in the process of setting that up at the moment.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The act has been in existence since 2008 – four years and no review teams. That is not a very good report card. This confirms my suspicion that things are not really as good as the minister would have us believe.

Going to the backlog of cases. Over the last few months I have heard four different versions, including one today, of what has happened to the backlog of the 870 cases outlined in the *Growing them strong, together* report. Today I believe you said it is down to zero. A couple of weeks ago, I heard Dr Vimpani say one figure; Ms Gardiner-Barnes was quoted in the paper as giving another figure. Where are we up to exactly - honestly?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I stated today and will state again, the backlog at the time of the board of inquiry was identified as 870; today it is zero. That is the original backlog identified at the time of the inquiry. Of course, things are not static, and new information is coming in. They are going through the intake and investigating. The original backlog is zero.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Since that backlog was identified by the board of inquiry and the backlog team established, since October last year there has been a new backlog we continue to monitor on a daily

basis. As at 6 June, that backlog was at 257 cases. We continue to prioritise Category 1 and 2 cases as those which need to be responded to immediately. The backlog is in Category 3 cases.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is definitely zero as of today?

Mr VATSKALIS: Shall I say it slowly, again? The original backlog ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: There have been so many discrepancies in this figure I want to confirm that ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has the call, thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am informing you the original backlog identified during the inquiry as 870 has been eliminated. There is none.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Fantastic.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will explain again: things do not stop. New information is coming in, notifications come in. We have, since then, new notifications of 250, most in Category 3. We have staff working through those to bring it down further.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Mobile assessment teams, minister. During a meeting with the department last year the CEO stated there was one mobile assessment team with eight personnel who spent around 50% of their time in the field and the other half doing administrative-type duties, including report writing. How many mobile assessment teams do we have now? Jenny Macklin made a promise to provide funding for one more. You had difficulty staffing the one you had six months ago. Where are we up to?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We currently have 17 staff allocated to the mobile child protection team, which includes two team leaders, eight advanced practitioners - five from the original funding and five advanced practitioners from funding provided from 1 January this year - three team leader positions and one administrative officer. From July this year, the Australian government is providing funding for an additional number of staff to commence the second team. So, an additional 10 P2 practitioners will be appointed from 1 July.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A total of 27 staff. Are the 17 positions you have at the moment filled?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have four vacancies at the moment.

Mr VATSKALIS: Two have been appointed to start on 1 July 2011. Ten additional have been appointed to the work unit as of 1 July 2011.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is the federal government funding for the extra 10 positions ongoing?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The Australian government funding is due to cease on 30 June 2012. That is in line with the current mobile child protection team funding. We are currently in negotiation at a whole-of-government level about ongoing funding for these matters.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, the case recently thrown out of court against Jodie Hunt – she was charged with failing to notify a case of child abuse on a remote Aboriginal community. This was a groundbreaking case we were all following quite intently as it was the first of its kind. What are the implications of this case for you as Minister for Child Protection? What are you going to do as a result of this case, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is it is not in this output.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is child protection.

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is that the case was thrown out of court because the magistrate was surprised it ever went to court and probably should not have. This department did not bring this case to court; it was referred to the Department of Justice, which made the decision to bring it to court. Obviously, they made the decision not under the best advice and lost. What remains current is people have to report child abuse, and the department is working very closely with staff on the ground to provide information and guidelines on how to report and what to report.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are not going to change the legislation as the prosecutor suggested?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mrs LAMBLEY: 'Clearly, if there are difficulties with the legislation then I need to bring it to the attention of the relevant person in parliament', which I suggest is you, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: The legislation, as it stands, is working well. Unfortunately, it was a decision to bring that case under the wrong part of the legislation.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is not working well, minister. You have the prosecutor saying the legislation is failing. I do not intend to go into the intricacies of this case. You need to read the transcript from the court. It clearly has holes in it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Legislation is voted on and, of course, is always under review. The advice I received at the time was the charge was brought under the wrong part of the legislation and the department believed it was not going to succeed, which proved correct. We had a further discussion with the Director of Public Prosecutions with regard to the act. We will look at how this charge was brought and why, and will ensure in the future that the right legislation is used if we are going to prosecute someone. At the same time, we have to ensure the legislation stands because it is an excellent tool to provide information about abuse of children.

Mrs LAMBLEY: With all due respect, minister, what you have said is incorrect. You need to reflect on this; take the advice of defence counsel and amend the legislation as suggested. It is not about what legislation was used. The charges were failing to meet the requirement of mandatory reporting. Obviously, you do not have any intention of responding to the recommendations, apart from your original statement about educating your staff. For the people of the Northern Territory working with children, you are not allaying too many of their fears around the likelihood they might find themselves in a similar situation as Jodie Hunt.

Does the minister promote a policy of placing children with Indigenous carers?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the minister promotes the policy that the safety of the child is paramount; it comes first. I refuse to separate Indigenous and non-Indigenous children; they are simply children.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Indigenous children.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not care whether they are or not. The safety of the child is paramount; that comes first. Despite that, it is in the next output, although I am prepared to answer it. Of the 407 Indigenous children in care, only 45% are under the care of relatives or other Indigenous carers. I would not promote if it is a black kid, it goes to a black family. What I promote is if a child is safe with a family, it goes with that family.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is the wrong output group so I am happy for you to respond later if you want.

Minister, what legal representation does the department provide to a protected child involved with a legal dispute?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask the CEO of the department to respond to this question.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We will take that question on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.12

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Will you repeat the question please, member for Araluen?

Mrs LAMBLEY: What legal representation does the department provide to a protected child involved in a legal dispute?

Mr VATSKALIS: Any clarification on the legal dispute? Is it a criminal offence, is it a ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Any sort of legal dispute, minister.

Ms VATSKALIS: Okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question on notice No 6.12

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a few questions around the Ochre Card which we discussed earlier. You may or may not be able to answer, minister. I appreciate your attempt to respond. Are labourers and tradesmen required to have an Ochre Card to work on school grounds, hospitals, playgrounds, swimming pools, and parks?

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you repeat the question?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The question relates to an issue raised in the media last week. Are labourers, tradesmen, or any such workers, required to have an Ochre Card to work on school grounds, hospitals, playgrounds, swimming pools, and parks?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Ochre Card is issued to people working with children. If you have a groundsman removing asbestos from a school, that person does not require one because children are not going to be around. If I have people renovating the children's ward at the hospital when children are not going to be around because the ward is closed, that person is not required to have an Ochre Card. However, if it is a person who is actively involved with children in a childcare centre providing care, that person has to have an Ochre Card. We cannot put a blanket on everyone. Some employers require everyone to have an Ochre Card; inquiries come through the business council and the answer is: if someone is working with children, and close to children, yes. If someone works in a place where children are present but does not have contact with children there is no point having an Ochre Card.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Does a bus driver need an Ochre Card.

Mr VATSKALIS: If he is working with children all the time, yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: The same with a taxi driver. If the taxi driver is contracted to transport children with disabilities from high school to a home, yes he has to; however, if someone gets into a taxi with children, he does not.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a question around the need for an Ochre Card for foster carers and people who might be living in the same house as a foster child. Can I ask this question now?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Foster carers are required to have an Ochre Card. In addition, we undertake criminal history checks of foster carers and others in the household to ensure the safety of the children.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Someone visiting a family that fosters children, would they need an Ochre Card?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That would depend on whether it was a long-term arrangement or a one-off.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have to use a commonsense approach. We cannot put a blanket otherwise no one would be able to visit anyone unless they had an Ochre Card in their pocket.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, I agree. The community needs some clarification around this area.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have provided clarification to business groups and have reviewed our webpage about who really needs an Ochre Card.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is all I have for this output group. Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions for 5.2? Member for Macdonnell? I remind witnesses to identify themselves before they speak.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, I have a couple of questions in this area and perhaps I can start with YSOS. You would be getting cracked over the knuckles on child protection all

the time and where there is an avenue for good news you need to know about it. I am parked out at Kings Cross, Kentucky Cross - Kentucky Fried Chicken and ...

A Person Unknown: What are you doing at Kings Cross?

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, headlines: 'Alison at Kings Cross', thank you. At Kentucky Fried Chicken corner and I wanted to compliment you, the CEO, and the department for a program that is fantastic, especially two really important people who work on YSOS, Vicki Hayes and Mitch. They are fantastic with the kids and one of the things I wanted to suggest to you, minister, is how we get beyond YSOS doing a fantastic job - taking these kids home and making sure the streets are clean - to YSOS not becoming a taxi service. What is starting to happen - I see them because I am parked there all the time - the kids will go up to one of the workers and say: 'You are here until one o'clock in the morning; I will see you at one when I want a lift'.

How do we change that focus? It is still good but we have to get these children to have respect for the program. The program is running fantastically, and those two people I mentioned do a fantastic job on the streets of Alice Springs. It is not just driving around in a car, but walking the main streets of Alice Springs. They have a fantastic relationship with these children, but the children are now taking advantage of this program to the extent they will come up to the guys at the window when they are sitting inside the car - because Alice Springs is minus 2°C and 3°C sometimes so we put the heater on and sit inside the car and say to these people: 'I will see you at one o'clock in the morning'. How do we change that attitude and how do we become more engaged so these kids are not in the street?

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you; it is one of the essential services. We have to be out on streets if we are going to solve the problem of the streets. Last time we had parliament in Alice Springs I got in the car with these people and drove around Alice Springs to see what was happening. Yes, some kids will use it as a taxi and we have to avoid that and find strategies to deal with that. However, I reckon the kids now recognise this is a safe car for them to travel in to take them home. What if a kid asks you to take them home and you say no and something happens to the kid. You have to find a fine balance, but at the same time we have to ensure they are not used as taxis. The CEO, Clare, can continue on that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Member for Macdonnell, I would like to thank you for the question and also for praising the frontline staff of the Department of Children and Families. There are many staff in the frontline doing a very hard job every day and it is important to them that their efforts and good work are recognised. So, thank you.

One of the significant things we have done this year to add value to the Youth Street Outreach Worker program is ensure those young people who are picked up on the street are referred to the family support centre. There have been a number of referrals and a number of family responsibility agreements have been put in place directly as a result of young people being picked up on the streets at night. There is now an obligation on staff to do a follow-up with the parents the next day to ensure we try to break the cycle of young people being out on the streets. It is not just about a taxi service; there have been referrals made to the family support centre, also to a number of non-government organisations in the Alice Springs area that provide support to young people and follow-up activities.

As a result of the Youth Hub activities we have many agencies working collaboratively together, sharing information about these young people and ensuring the cycle of risk these people are putting themselves in is reduced and that parents are being put into the loop around their responsibilities and obligations to ensure the safety of those young people.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, CEO. I go to another question about the safe houses. What we see when we are sitting in the street is these kids escaping from their designated safe houses we have in Alice Springs. There are often kids walking around the street who have left the safe house. Can I have an answer, through you, minister, as to what we are doing to close that gap - that we are on to it, and we know it is happening? Maybe there is a strategy you already have in place I can look at.

Mr VATSKALIS: We are looking at safe houses being real safe houses where kids will not abscond and escape. Currently, the safe houses we have are simple houses; kids can come and go as they wish. If a kid is taken off the street and put in this new type of safe house that kid would not be able to get out. They would be suitably supervised, and the houses suitably built so kids will not open the door and walk out in the middle of the night and go somewhere else. I know the bleeding hearts will say: 'Oh, you should not be doing that'. Once again, a child being safe is the most important thing ...

Ms ANDERSON: Exactly.

Mr VATSKALIS: There are many temptations out there and kids do not have the mental capacity to make these kinds of decisions. We are adults and we have to make these decisions for them.

Ms ANDERSON: What is the time frame for that being enacted? Are we looking at ...

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is it will be up and running in the next few months.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have a safe place for youth planned for commencement in Darwin at the end of July. We already have a safe place available and staffed. The outreach team does an assessment after police drop them off at the triage or if they pick them up off the street. They determine, through that assessment, whether it is safe to take them home. In most instances, those young people have a safe place to go.

The second option is to look at the number of emergency accommodation beds provided through non-government agencies in Alice Springs. To date, we have had 60 young people accommodated through the Youth Outreach Program into those emergency beds, and only one young person has been required to be put into the safe place the department has set up that is a more secure environment.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, I asked this question in alcohol and rehab and I would like to put the same question to you. What mechanisms do we have to monitor NGOs with the amount of public money now going through child protection into NGOs? You really need to separate how much the NGOs get. They still come under the child protection legislation. Who monitors them? Do we get a separation of reporting from FACS and the NGOs? It needs to be very different to see your outcomes and their outcomes in order to get a view of how we are moving forward.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Macdonnell, we are currently in the process of changing the way we do business. We will increase the engagement of NGOs, provide funding to the NGOs but, at the same time, there will be performance agreements with specified KPIs, and also with outcomes we want. It is not just providing money to NGOs and go for it; it is going to be: 'Here is the money but you have to fulfil these obligations. You have to do this, this, and this'. It will be clearly specified and they will be evaluated every year.

I want to increase the cycle of funding, not from year to year, but to three years or even more. Something has to be given back to us in order for people to access this money. Clare Gardiner-Barnes can add to that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We are in the process of developing a review for our current service agreements. We are also developing, in collaboration with the Department of Health, a new grants management system that will allow service providers to access their agreements online and do their auditing and reporting online for the first time. The new agreements will include setting milestones and key performance indicators, clearer reporting requirements, and clearly articulating the responsibilities of both the Northern Territory government and the NGO sector in the agreement. We hope to have the new system in place for the start of next year.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, it is my understanding employment contracts for Aboriginal community support workers are not extended beyond 30 June. Is that the case?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There have been a number of Aboriginal community workers who were due to have their contracts end on the 30th of this month. I recently issued a directive to staff to allow those contracts to be extended until February next year so we could undertake permanent recruitment processes and allow those staff to continue in their jobs while that occurred.

Ms ANDERSON: This is more of a statement than a question. We continue to see incentives created all the time for outsiders rather than people inside, the people who matter, the people who can make a difference, so the policy document and what happens in reality are two different things. It is like your right hand is shorter than your left hand, or your right leg is not there and you are hobbling on the left leg. We have to match the policy to reality and give more and more incentives to engage and employ Indigenous people in this area, because the core business of this department is about 85%, perhaps more. If you were running this as a business, you would be absolutely broke; you would not have anyone working there. You have to tap into the resources you have, and that is good qualifications. You have many Aboriginal people unemployed in remote Aboriginal communities just sitting around. There has to be a connection between policy and what happens in reality.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you, and that is why we have a number of allowances provided to professional staff, also the people there in the front line no matter who they are. We have a \$6m package over a two-and-a-half year period from January 2011 to June 2013 which includes a market allowance for frontline professional staff, a relocation allowance for professional staff, a skills retention allowance for targeted frontline administrative staff in Alice Springs, Katherine and remote locations, and allowances for people who are already there and doing the hard yakka. It is not only trying to attract new people, it is rewarding people who have been there doing the hard work.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. That concludes consideration of Output 5.2.

Output 5.3 – Out of Home Care Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will move to Output 5.3 Out of Home Care Services. I am flagging that at around 3 pm we will be taking a very brief break. Member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I would like to commend the staff of the Department of Children and Families too. The questions I ask by no way reflect an attitude of negativity about what they do and how they do it. I know they manage a high level of risk and I respect them immensely.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with the member for Araluen. The department has been under enormous pressure in the past year or two. Everyone reads the media and believes it is the department's fault. No, it is not the department's fault; the department is trying to sort the faults of the community and is working very hard. When you are on the other side of the desk you are copping flack because you have to make decisions that are sometimes very hard and can be perceived as hard by the families. I am pleased to hear your support because this is not about politics; it is about child protection services.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where is the department situated in relation to the eight legislative changes to the *Care and Protection of Children Act* made as recommendations by the Coroner as part of the inquiry into the death of Deborah Melville? The department responded it would make the changes after the release of the national standards for children in care released in December 2010, now called the National Standards for Out of Home Care.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The recommendations from the Coroner that related specifically to the legislation changes are being included as part of the planned legislative amendments under way as part of the board of inquiry legislative changes. The legislative timetable for changes following the amendments to the Children's Commissioner's powers - the next round of amendments planned relate to information sharing provisions. There will also be further changes related to the Community Visitor Scheme and other changes, and a huge review of the whole act which will pick up changes as recommended by both the board of inquiry and the coronial investigations. They are all expected to be undertaken this year so we are ready to introduce legislation by next year.

Mr VATSKALIS: I hate to point it but that was under output 5.1, 5.2 ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was about national standards for out of home care. I thought I could squeeze it in there.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... but that is fine.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A question about adoption, minister. Approximately how many Territory children are adopted each year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Adoption: the department administers the adoption of children and in 2010-11 we had adoption programs with China, South Korea, Ethiopia, Hong Kong, India, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand. On 1 May 2011, 23 approved files for Northern Territory applicants were lodged overseas. So, 23 Territorians applied for adoption overseas. From July 2010 to April 2011, nine children were matched with Territory families; seven from Taiwan, one from Korea, and one from the Philippines. From these nine children, two overseas adoptions have been finalised, and the remaining seven are due to be finalised within the next two months.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I asked how many Territory children are adopted each year.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Locally, we have one known child adoption by a relative which is due to be finalised in the next few months. That is for the 2010-11 financial year.

Mr VATSKALIS: Apparently five applications for local adoptions, but the process will take up to two years.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Roughly, over the last five years how many Territory children per year have been adopted?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: In 2009-10, there were two Territory children; in 2007-08, there was one Territory child, and in 2004-05, there was one Territory child adopted.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is not many. I would be interested to know what your thoughts are, minister, about why those figures are so low.

Mr VATSKALIS: There have never been ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will preface, minister, that seeking an opinion is out of order. However, if you wish to ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, this is not an opinion; I do not have an opinion on that. If you look at the statistics, even in 2000 and the previous government, there were only two adoptions a year. It is not a policy of the government; it is what happened in the Territory. That is the harsh reality.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have been asked by several people about the adoption of Indigenous children by non-Indigenous parents. Does the government have a policy about that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly not. We have children in care; 551 children in out of home care - that means living with other people. Three-quarters of them are Indigenous and, out of the 470 Indigenous children in care, only 180 children were placed with relatives, kin, or other Indigenous carers; the others were with non-Indigenous carers. There is no policy of the government. I repeat: what is paramount is the safety of the child, not the race or the ethnicity of the child.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are going to break for two minutes, and resume with Output 5.3.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If we can resume now, please. We are on Output 5.3 Out of Home Care Services, member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am interested in residential care, minister. How many residential care places are there throughout the Territory for children?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department operates nine residential care facilities across the Northern Territory. There are five facilities in Alice Springs that can accommodate up to 25 young people. There are four facilities in Darwin that can accommodate up to nine young people, and the occupancy rate of these facilities is between 90% and 100%.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What are the plans to extend the non-government sector of residential care services?

Mr VATSKALIS: The CEO will respond to this question.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There are a number of recommendations from the board of inquiry that relate to the out of home care sector, specifically residential care. There will be a comprehensive review undertaken over the next 12 months to totally reform the out of home care sector, including our residential care facilities: how we staff them, what our governance arrangements and regulatory arrangements are for those services, what training is provided, and looking to provide some greater evidence-based approaches that are more culturally appropriate where possible across a range of communities so we can provide local homes for children who are removed rather than having to put them into Darwin or Alice Springs, in most instances, where foster carers are not available.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Earlier, you mentioned capacity building for NGOs. How you are doing that in residential care.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We are currently in partnership with Life without Barriers, which is one of our key providers in out of home care to improve how we provide services to children and families. A part of the review process will be to examine broadening the range of service providers we have in the Territory. We have a number of other providers that provide services. We would like to ensure they comply with the new regulations we will put in place. We will provide support to the peak organisations such as NTCOSS to help with training of staff, and also work with the organisations to ensure they are able to provide improved services beyond training. Also, they face recruitment issues in the non-government sector similar to recruitment issues we have in the government sector. That will be part of the comprehensive review that is undertaken.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In my preparation for estimates, I have visited most non-government agencies involved in child protection in the Northern Territory. The message I am getting is they feel they have the capacity, but the department is moving very slowly on funding them and giving them the opportunity to deliver the goods. What is your response to that?

Mr VATSKALIS: They may have some capacity, but you have to remember because of the nature of the issues we are dealing with, we have to make significant changes in our operations. Also, we might have to make significant changes in our legislation, especially with regard to privacy issues. The other thing, of course, is with intake. If we are going to investigate complaints about children, the idea would be for us to investigate complaints for Category 1, and then to build up the capacity to investigate Category 2 and 3, as happens in other states.

Yes, they may have some capacity, but not the capacity at the level required to meet the challenges of Child and Family Services. Our idea is to build up this capacity; bring in people from down south who are running these programs already to source some of these organisations. I will do it. For example, there is no capacity for Indigenous child protection service at all because there has never been one here. I wish they would build that capacity.

Some of the NGOs have the capacity to deal with families in financial crisis; they do not have the capacity to deal with families with the children in crisis. Yes, some of them believe they have the capacity and might have some level of capacity, but not to the level we want.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I was only referring to out of home care, not child protection services.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not only the out of home care. It will be more than out of home care if we are going to deal with the problem. The problem is so big throughout Australia that governments cannot face it; we have to work together as a community. Out of home care is probably the easiest one, but some of the other issues are more difficult.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I notice you have been giving foster carers some recognition, awards for different things, which is fabulous. I am wondering what else you are doing to support foster carers since the *Growing them strong, together* report was released?

Mr VATSKALIS: The recognition is not going to be a certificate in a frame on the wall, but some real recognition, which is why we are looking at the remuneration of foster carers. For many years they have received the same remuneration and we intend to increase it. That is why we allocated funding in next year's budget for an increase in the allowances foster carers receive for looking after children.

Mrs LAMBLEY: An increase in remuneration?

Mr VATSKALIS: We call it remuneration, but an allowance is not taxable. It is helping them raise children.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is there anything else you are doing to support them?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Clare can report on that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There is a range of activities currently under way to improve the foster care support systems and processes for both foster carers and kinship carers. Initially, we are focusing on learning development of our foster care and kinship care system by improving the flexibility in which training is provided. Part of that is a comprehensive five-year learning and development plan that has been specifically developed to focus on foster and kinship carers. We have purchased 53 self-paced learning modules for carers. We have purchased and delivered a trauma-based therapy program for fostering

kinship carers and conducted a Train the Trainer program that was completed in April of this year. We introduced a carer peer support program that commenced in April this year.

For the latter half of this year we are planning a review of our existing training package. We will have the introduction of the new induction process and orientation kit for carers, and we will have joint training of carer teams that involves carers and case managers. We are also developing strong partnerships with Foster Care NT and the Northern Territory Council of Social Services. We have a 12-month mentoring relationship established between Foster Care NT and Foster Care Queensland through the secondment of a worker from Foster Care Queensland to support the development of that organisation. We have a series of forums that have been established to provide opportunities for carers to raise issues that impact on them and their children in their care. Foster Care NT will meet biannually with me and with representation at the management level.

We are also introducing a review of our assessment of carers' process, including the introduction of the Ochre Card as part of the working with children checks. We have a current carer registration review under way, and a project officer has been engaged to look at the assessment process for foster carers.

From July this year, a carer agreement will be completed for all carers that will identify the knowledge and skills capacity of carers and the categories for approval, including general kinship carers, specialist carers, professional carers and therapeutic carers. We also have new minimum standards being introduced to support carers and supervise them through a peer support program. We are currently undertaking a review to look at the standards of care and development of the regulation of the care system.

In addition, we have the Carer Recognition program, including the Excellence Awards, the Annual Carer Service Awards, and newly-introduced Carer Appreciation Awards. We are introducing a rights of carers document that will outline a statement of rights and responsibilities, developed in partnership with DCF and carers, and we have a new recruitment of carers campaign and one specifically focused on Indigenous carers. In addition, we are doing some work around our foster and kinship carer allowances to improve those and ensure they meet the out-of-pocket expenses of carers across the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you. I am wondering what your budget is for the training and education of foster carers for this year?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will provide the exact figure.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will take that as a question on notice. Would you repeat the question please, member for Araluen?

Question on Notice No 6.13

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Could you repeat the question, member for Araluen?

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the budget for the training and education of foster carers for this financial year?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That question is 6.13.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Does the government support the Aboriginal placement principle at all costs?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the third time I have answered the question. No, the safety of the child comes first.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is all for this Output Group, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Macdonnell?

Ms ANDERSON: Madam Deputy ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arafura first, and then ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I want clarification regarding adult guardianship. Is it in this output? Which output was that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Department of Health.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it was not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any questions on 5.3?

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, I do not know whether this comes in this area; however, I want clarification and, if it does, there was a media release put out this morning by AMSANT advising the name of the appointee to the position of CEO of the new Aboriginal community-controlled peak agency for children, youth, and their families. I am thinking, because we have reiterated over and over again and yourself, just seconds ago - I want clarification as to what this peak body will do. Is it there as a black children's department, or what is its role. What is it being funded for?

Mr VATSKALIS: One of the problems we had, and it has been identified many times in the past, is the department in past years did not have much to do with Indigenous people, either because it did not have the capacity or did not have the ability. The *State of Denial*, a study conducted by SNAICC, refers to the last 10 years of the CLP. That research found child protection in the Northern Territory was not a system at all and was failing to meet its statutory obligations to Indigenous children under the Northern Territory *Community Welfare Act* of 1983. It found little evidence of any serious or sustained attempt from the Northern Territory or Commonwealth governments to address the underlying cause of child abuse or neglect in partnership with Indigenous communities. That report is a slap in the face for the department at the time about the lack of involvement and lack of commitment to Indigenous children. There is no way of making inroads to Indigenous child protection unless we engage the Indigenous people and Indigenous communities.

This is not about black children. This is not about segregating the service. This is about learning about Indigenous communities and having someone guide us when we are dealing with child protection services in Indigenous communities. It is not to have a parallel system; you have a system the same way you have the Indigenous-controlled medical services. They work with the Health department to deliver services to Indigenous people and deliver good service. That is what we want to do. We want someone who can work with the Department of Children and Families, deliver services to the communities - Indigenous control, but working with us, no segregation, no separation.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, what is the funding for this peak body?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have provided the initial funding for AMSANT, and there will be funding allocation from the budget that came out of the board of inquiry for the peak body.

Ms ANDERSON: How many staff members will be employed?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is too early to answer that. We are in the process of establishing the peak body and everything else will be worked out with the department in the future.

Ms ANDERSON: Is this a real voice for engaging Aboriginal people, Aboriginal communities, and the protection of children?

Mr VATSKALIS: If they are not a strong voice they cannot blame anyone but themselves. The Indigenous health service has grown to be a very strong voice for Indigenous people and has made many achievements. I expect the same thing to happen here.

Ms ANDERSON: What is the name of the lady who was appointed, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Josie Guy.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, is she the same woman who worked for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service in Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms ANDERSON: My concern is she has made a statement, and I will quote from what she said about the Northern Territory Emergency Response:

In this case the tsunami came in the Response itself - shocked and demoralised people and a totally unprepared bureaucracy. Submissions to the review of the intervention consistently say it was poorly planned and ill-coordinated. Aboriginal communities were swamped by a bewildering variety of agencies with no idea of how to behave in a way that was culturally sensitive, particularly in the context of unfounded accusations of widespread child sexual abuse.

That paragraph tells me someone has been appointed to the position who really does not believe child abuse or child neglect happens.

Mr VATSKALIS: The reality is most of the things she says in that statement are true. The way the intervention was done was wrong. Aboriginal people feel they have been studied to death regarding child abuse. As an ex-West Australian I can tell you, the level of child abuse found in Western Australia, especially in the north, is far more than it is in the Northern Territory. Yes, there is child abuse in the Northern Territory but not to the level alleged by Brough and his mates. That statement is not entirely wrong. I questioned the statement made at the time about Indigenous communities and child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. If someone looks at the communities where sexual abuse occurred, you will find the same elements.

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, order!

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, can you state people being accused - widespread child sexual abuse was wrong?

Mr VATSKALIS: There has been sexual abuse, and many people have been charged and found guilty, yes. However, what we heard at the time from the federal authorities - I could not believe I was living in a place where child abuse was so widespread and I did not realise that was happening next to my house or next to my community. I believe there was, but not to the extent it was alleged because I believe they made these allegations in order to justify the intervention. Do not get me wrong; I do not accept sexual abuse even for one child; however, I find it wrong to accuse a particular group to justify what you are doing.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, can we have figures through you - and maybe that should have been asked of the Police minister. Is there any documentation you can table - not names, communities and people - of how many people were charged or any prosecutions. As the minister said, it should not happen to one child. If it has happened to 10, 15 or 20 people and you have some evidence and documentation, can you table it, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot table what you have asked for because there are problems. We have established a Child Abuse Task Force specifically to identify allegations of sexual abuse of children. That task force has facilitated levels of communication and coordinated information sharing between agencies regarding the issue of child harm. In the period 1 July 2010 to March 2011, the Child Abuse Task Force has worked with 210 individual children while conducting investigations of child sexual assaults in communities throughout the Northern Territory. The Child Abuse Task Force has been successful today in that there have been 141 arrests and 63 summonses as a result of the investigation, with significant growth in activity. This task force consists of 15 police officers, six Australian Federal Police officers, investigators, one intelligence officer and 12 child protection practitioners from the Department of Children and Families. It is not only Territory police; it is federal police and federal investigators. The task force has same results, but not the results we have seen in some of the Western Australian remote communities.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister. The other question following up on this appointment, I know you cannot have input into the bureaucracy, however, at any stage did the department have any kind of input into selection and checking of the background of people you give money - to employing certain people with a certain background with certain attitudes?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I was on the selection panel for the appointment of that person and we did referee checks and some further background checks. In the interview process it was clear to me that she understood the issues she needed to address through the leadership of the peak organisation.

Mr VATSKALIS: That was not done only by us; it was also done by AMSANT.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, it was not of any concern to your department, or to you, that a person may be appointed to this position with this kind of attitude having made this statement, considering this person has to work with the families who have children in the care of the department?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Macdonnell, it was not only my department on the panel. There were a significant number of Indigenous people from AMSANT. The selection was not done by us; it was done by people belonging to the same community group. We believed she was a good applicant. Nothing was raised to us by AMSANT or other Indigenous participants in the panel. People have views, and she probably had that view at the particular time. I do not know if her views have changed now, and if you ask her they might have. People change their views.

Many people around this table share the same sentiment about child abuse. She did not say there is not any level of child abuse in the Northern Territory. She said she questioned the level of child abuse quoted at the time by the Commonwealth in order to justify the intervention. Everyone has the right to question the motive behind the intervention, which was not to save the Aboriginal community.

Ms ANDERSON: Exactly, minister. You yourself said it is bad for just one child. You quoted numbers of people who have been charged. It was over 100?

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on. The Child Abuse Task Force does not target Indigenous communities. It targets everyone. You cannot say of the 143, 41 arrests were Indigenous people. It could be anyone. I want to make that clear.

Ms ANDERSON: I did not say that, minister. A figure of 100 was quoted by you. You said it should not happen to one child. My concern is a person who thinks along that line should have been questioned through the interview process. I am wondering, through you, minister, if the CEO had seen what she has previously said?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I was not privy to that particular quote through the selection process. The panel, which included the Chief Executive of AMSANT and the Chief Executive of NAAJA, were all convinced, through the selection process, including a face-to-face interview, that she was the right person for the job and demonstrated the principles, objectives, and philosophies required to advocate on behalf of Aboriginal families and children and youth, and their protection through the system.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, CEO. Thank you, minister.

Mr Conlan: The problem is, Alison, you have a government and minister who think exactly the same way so ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. You do not have the call, member for Greatorex.

Mr Conlan: ... what hope do we have?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Output 5.3 is now concluded and ...

Members interjecting.

Mr Conlan: It is true; you do not like the intervention ...

Madam Deputy CHAIR: Excuse me! Order!

Output 5.4 – Youth Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output 5.4, Youth Services. I preface it by saying the Minister for Children and Families will take questions on family responsibility agreements and orders. The Minister for Young Territorians will take questions on youth policy and grants, which will be on Wednesday, 22 June. Are there any questions for Output 5.4?

Ms ANDERSON: I have, Madam Deputy Chair. Thank you again, minister. My question is on an NGO like Bushmob. Is there any requirement, when you fund them, that it is compulsory for any school-aged child who goes through NGOs such as Bushmob to attend school? It is a requirement if these children are under the care of their parents.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The Department of Children and Families does not fund Bushmob itself. However, as a general principle, the requirement for children of compulsory school age to participate in education is something that should be upheld, both by children who are in the care of the Chief Executive and others. When an NGO is providing a care service for those children and acting as their guardian in that role it should be compelled to comply with the legislation that requires participation in an educational program. That may be provided in a flexible way, depending on their needs, but they should have their right to access a program.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, is there a requirement for NGOs that run these services to have these children connect back with their families?

Mr VATSKALIS: Ultimately, our responsibility is to reconnect these kids with their families. It is not to keep the kids away from their families, but we have to consider the circumstances.

Ms ANDERSON: What would trigger a child not being able to have access to their parents?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: If a decision was made by the department that it was unsafe for a child to have access to a parent, normally supervised access would occur. In some cases it is not only unsafe, but it is not helpful to the trauma experienced by a child to continue access for a period, depending on the circumstances related to the removal of a child. It would be taken on a case-by-case basis. When children are of an age where they can make decisions themselves about parental access, then those decisions are taken into account by the department.

Ms ANDERSON: At what age can a child make that decision on their own without ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That age would vary, but generally speaking, in law, a child about the age of 14 would be of an age where they could start to make decisions on their own behalf if they were of sound mind.

Ms ANDERSON: What would happen in a case, through you, minister, where a parent rings an NGO and does not get the response that you would require through the legislation for that NGO to have contact with that child? Can that parent go back to the department, to your frontline workers, to get FACS involved with the NGO if there is a collapse of that interaction between the child and the parent?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It is important to note any parent who feels in any way their rights to access to a child are not being provided has the capacity to make a complaint or an inquiry to the department to ensure those issues are addressed. If they feel those matters are not being addressed effectively by their case worker, then they should escalate those to a manager position to ensure they are addressed effectively.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, can you tell me how many care plans we have for youth in the care of NGOs?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: If a child is in care of the Chief Executive, but that care is currently being provided through a private provider, those children are still required to have a care plan in place. Under the policy, any child brought into care is meant to have a care plan in place within two months of them coming into care, regardless of who is providing the care for that child.

Ms ANDERSON: With the 500 and whatever children you have in your care, do you have 575 care plans?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The expectation is that, within two months of coming into care, every child in care of the Chief Executive would have a care plan in place.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, do you have 575 care plans now?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Much work has been put in place, particularly over the last 12 months, to focus on this issue and improve compliance. Staff have been putting in place measures to ensure care plans are put in place within that required time frame.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister, and thank you, CEO. The reason I am pressing that question is not through nastiness or anything. It is really important through any process that parents have interaction

with their children. I believe the aim of the department would be, at some stage in that child's life, to get it connected with the mum and dad, or extended family, or whatever. That is the reason I am pressing that.

Mr VATSKALIS: The important thing is the safety of the child. I know of occasions where people say: 'The department does not let the kid come to me, come to my house'. I would love to, but if your house is unsafe we will not. We are looking at different examples around Australia. One example I have from Western Australia is a very good one. The Western Australian government has established a hostel in Halls Creek that has children living there and going to school. The parents are allowed to go into the grounds of the hostel, interact with the children, sit there, have lunch, but when night comes, they have to go away. Parents who want to have contact with a child come in from the bush, they can stay at the hostel, but they cannot take their kids with them when they go away. The kids maintain contact with the family in a safe environment. The parents sometimes decide they do not want to continue and leave; that is fine, but at least the kid maintains some form of contact with its parents. It is something we are looking to establish in the Territory for the sake of the children more than anything else.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister. I would like to put on the public record that this is a really hard issue. It is like the issue of alcoholism, rehabilitation and everything else. I have said to you in the House at least you are trying to do something.

Mr VATSKALIS: That example was given to me by the minister for Child Protection in Western Australia. Many people are alcoholics. Sometimes when they are sober they visit their children then go away, but the child stays in a safe environment, looked after, fed and attends school.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes Output 5.4.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.10

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I have an answer to Question on Notice No 6.10. Has there been an increase in the amount of money to NGOs? In 2010-11, the Department of Children and Families' annual budget was \$141m, of which \$37m will be paid to the non-government sector. This represents 26% of this year's budget. Funding allocation for NGO services by year five of the board of inquiry funding will represent 30% of the recurrent board of inquiry funding. This is in addition to our current base funding provided to NGOs and I am happy to table that response.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That amounts to a 3% increase in 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you.

Output 5.5, Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are going to Output 5.5, Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Today marks the fourth anniversary of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, the beginning of the intervention in the Northern Territory. This intervention came about as a result of an independent report into child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. The inquiry produced a report called the *Little Children are Sacred* report. I would like to know from the minister what plans you have around the withdrawal of the Australian Federal Police and various other funding from Aboriginal communities involved in child sexual abuse and the prevention of it?

Mr VATSKALIS: First, let me say this is the fourth anniversary of the intervention which I dispute came as a result of the inquiry which led to the *Little Children are Sacred* report. It had more to do with the political future of the Coalition government at the time rather than the interests of the Indigenous people of the Territory. If there was an interest in the Indigenous people of the Territory, why did they wait 10 years to do it?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Why did you sit on the report?

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I find it hypocritical for the opposition to talk to us about the *Little Children are Sacred* report which highlighted the rivers of grog, and when we try to stop the rivers of

grog, the opposition wants to open liquor stores earlier and earlier every day. The question referring to the withdrawal of federal police from communities should have been directed to the minister for Police rather than the minister for Children's Services

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, in answer to a written question we gave you on 5 April this year around the Northern Territory government full time employee caps you said:

It should be noted that included in this FTE are 83 positions funded by the Commonwealth to assist in the roll-out of Australian government programs?

Is this intervention money? If it is, what plans do you have in relation to the possible withdrawal of those funds?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: If I can use, as an example, the Safe Places in Communities initiative. The total budget estimate for the current financial year is \$6.030m. There is a growth in that funding for the new financial year taking the allocation to \$13.570m. There is a demonstration there is not a stalling of investment but a growth in investment in the 20 safe places in the 15 communities and the two transitional houses in Darwin and Alice Springs. These safe places are staffed, in the main, by local Aboriginal people. There are currently 62 people employed to deliver these safe places. There are eight men's places and 12 remote women's places. To date, the operations have had 722 women clients with an additional 581 accompanying children. As you can see, this is a very positive initiative in the Territory and we will be continuing to advocate with the Australian government for ongoing funding for this initiative.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This funding came about as a result of the intervention - the federal government/Northern Territory response? For the record, Ms Gardiner-Barnes is nodding.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes. Correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In relation to 2012 when that funding could cease, what plans do you have around sustaining or cutting those 83 positions?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We are currently negotiating, as part of a whole of Northern Territory government position, around ongoing programs for the future of particularly the remote communities, and the 20 growth towns. It is the position of the Department of Children and Families that there are a number of positive programs, including the Safe Places initiative, the mobile child protection team and the remote Aboriginal community workers that need to continue to ensure we have effective impact on child abuse and neglect in the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have heard the minister criticise the Northern Territory intervention for all sorts of reasons; however, in all reality once this funding ceases 83 positions could be lost - 83 people employed in the Northern Territory could lose their jobs. I fail to understand how you can sit there as the Minister for Children and Families and be so critical of an intervention that has brought much funding and many good things to the Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not critical of the funding provided by the federal government; I am critical of the timing. The timing was just before a federal election and everyone was trying to rescue a political scheme. If this money was allocated to the Northern Territory five or six years before, then yes, I would admit the Howard government did something good for the Northern Territory. As Alexander Downer said: 'We tried the intervention and polling did not turn around so we tried something else'. It is a clear indication the intervention was not to improve the life of Indigenous people in the Territory or north Western Australia; it was to ensure Howard was re-elected. If your name is Joe Brown and you are Indigenous, what right has the Commonwealth to impound some of your money? If your name is Joe Brown and you are white and living at Kings Cross and use drugs, it does not do that. If you are going to play fair, play fair for everyone.

Mr Elferink: I agree.

Mr VATSKALIS: Do not isolate people for their skin, their ethnicity or their background. If the Howard government had said everyone on welfare has to become part of the intervention, we will impose a restriction on their income, I would applaud it. I have a problem when people are discriminated against because of their colour and we use excuses to put all this in place. Why was this money not allocated 10 years ago by a Liberal government when it was needed? This problem with Indigenous communities is not new. Regarding the state of neglect, the *State of Denial* report was done for the 10 last years of the CLP government and states - I will read from the executive summary:

Rather than address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Northern Territory child protection has in effect withdrawn from service provision abandoning the most impoverished children and families in Australia.

That was in 1999-2000. Where was the Howard government then? Reading the report, the government said: 'You need money. Here is the money to help Indigenous children'. The whole thing is hypocritical, and I am not prepared to accept it. It was not done for Aboriginal kids, it was not done for Aboriginal people, it was done for Howard and his mates.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. There are several other reports that have been written since ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I know. I am glad you mentioned it ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... the *State of Denial* report ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... I am glad you mentioned ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is my turn, minister!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is rather insincere to quote one when there have been many since ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I can quote more if you like.

Mrs LAMBLEY: *The Little Children are Sacred* report came about through the identification of rampant child sexual abuse in remote Aboriginal communities. With the possible withdrawal of federal government assistance in 2012, what are you going to do about child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: It was identified, yes, and we have acted on it. The first thing we tried to do was cut the rivers of grog, because that was one of the most contributing factors. You are the ones who refuse to accept it, are fighting against us, who said the solution to the problem is to open the rivers of grog again. Well, it is not.

There have been many reports about children's services in the Northern Territory and Australia, and I thank you for mentioning that report because I was not aware of it. I looked at it and I could not believe you came here today to tell me about child services in the Northern Territory when this report is a catalogue of the last years ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have had 10 years, minister!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr VATSKALIS: ... the last years ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are hypocritical. Ten years of doing nothing.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr VATSKALIS: The last 10 years of the CLP government completely abandoned Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. We are trying to do something about it. You have the audacity to tell us we are not doing anything for children's services.

What was the budget in the last year of the CLP government for child protection?

Ms Scrymgour: \$8m.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was the population?

Mr VATSKALIS: What is the budget now? How many people did the CLP government employ? Fewer than 100.

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order! Order, honourable members! Minister, you have the call.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I do not want to go on about it; I know who is doing something for child protection. The member was not a member of the then government, but at least let us be fair here; let us be real here. Who is doing something about children's protection?

Am I going to solve this tomorrow? No. In the next two years? No. In the next five years? Yes, we might start making inroads but, unless we start now nothing will happen. If there is a problem with child protection in the Territory it is because we started from a very low base, where nothing was happening, especially in Aboriginal communities; when \$7m was the budget allocated to child protection; when about 100 people were trying to solve the gigantic problem in the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, in response to my question: in 2012 when the federal government possibly ceases all funding which has supported the fight against child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory, you have said: 'I will stop the rivers of grog'. I have no more questions.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, our government has \$145m in the child protection annual budget. We put an additional \$130m in the next five years. The member for Araluen asked: 'What are you going to do if the Commonwealth stops funding?' We are going to do our best to replace that funding, and we are going to do our best to negotiate a better agreement from the Commonwealth for our Indigenous people. They deserve it, they have not been treated very well in the past four years, and I believe they deserve to be treated as any other citizen in Australia.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions?

Mr ELFERINK: Very quickly on this. I will only be a minute because I am very aware of the member for Goyder. If I do not ask this question now I will look like a complete fool. Am I under the right output area for MensLine? Since the introduction of the 1300 number for *Stop the Hurting, Start the Healing* campaign ads - can you advise if the 1300 number is the Victorian-based MensLine number?

Mr VATSKALIS: Northern Territory taxpayers are not funding MensLine; it is funded by the federal government ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes or no, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I say that because I saw your media release that said you want to know what value for money the Territory taxpayer gets. We are not putting any money from the taxpayer ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, but the advertising campaign is in the Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will let Ms Gardiner-Barnes give you the answer about MensLine seeing you are so interested in it.

Mr ELFERINK: The question is: can we confirm that the Victorian-based MensLine number is the 1300 number in the advertising campaign?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That is correct.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, thank you. In that case, how many telephone calls has that 1300 number received from the Northern Territory?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The calendar year number of calls from the Northern Territory at this stage is at 255 calls.

Mr ELFERINK: How many of those in the past two weeks?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I do not have figures for the last two weeks.

Mr ELFERINK: Question on notice, Madam Deputy Chair.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It should be noted any calls made from a mobile phone, and that is about half the calls to the 1800 number, are not able to be recorded for their regional location, so the numbers will be underrepresented for across the board.

Mr ELFERINK: So, 200-and ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Two hundred and fifty-five.

Mr ELFERINK: Two hundred and fifty-five.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: ... and, from April to May this year, the total number of calls is 45.

Mr ELFERINK: April to May this year.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the average number of calls per month.

Mr ELFERINK: Per month.

Question on Notice No 6.14

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Port Darwin, you need to repeat your question on notice, please.

Mr ELFERINK: The on notice question is: of those calls that are able to be traced, how many have been made in the last two weeks?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.14.

Mr ELFERINK: How many of these calls have come from Darwin? The advice I have received from MensLine is they can trace this information.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will have to take that question on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take it on notice.

Mr ELFERINK: A question on notice, Madam Deputy Chair.

Question of Notice No 6.15

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Port Darwin, would you mind repeating that question?

Mr ELFERINK: Madam Deputy Chair, I will rephrase the question. How many of the calls made to MensLine have been from Darwin, how many have been from Alice Springs, and how many have been from other regional areas?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.15.

Question of Notice No 6.16

Mr ELFERINK: How many of those calls have led to further counselling? The call has been made, the counsellor picks up at the other end after four or five minutes on hold listening to music, how many of those calls have led to further counselling?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take that on notice.

Mr ELFERINK: Is that another one on notice?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.16.

Mr ELFERINK: What do you have in place, seeing you are struggling to answer any of these questions, to measure the success of this program when you are unable to tell me even the vaguest details about how this service is operating?

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, he is asking about the number of phone calls over the last two weeks. I am glad he does not ask for the number of phone calls over the last two hours.

Mr ELFERINK: No, because I am ...

Mr VATSKALIS: This is not information given to you every day or every hour. We will provide this information.

Mr ELFERINK: I am curious how many of these phone calls have been since ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has the call, member for Port Darwin.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, I want to point out sometimes the member for Port Darwin is asking questions that are a bit rich.

Mr ELFERINK: You cannot tell me how many of these come from Darwin, Alice Springs or the regional centres.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have taken it on notice and will provide the information to you.

Mr ELFERINK: This cannot have been a surprise. You knew I was interested in this. I have a question on notice, I have issued media releases; I have been hunting this for over a week. I now have the opportunity to ask the questions and you do not have an answer to give me on any of it other than the fact you received 255 calls.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am busy trying to find out what you put in your media release - half the time they are wrong - to respond to this. We have said ...

Mr ELFERINK: You were able to quote from it a second ago.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... we will provide the information.

Mr ELFERINK: No more questions.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The average number of calls per month has been 45.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I have that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have plans to conduct an evaluation of the campaign. Prior to the launch of the campaign we did some baseline evaluation with 100 self-identified perpetrators. In August and September this year we will make 300 calls to the general population, and then further focus groups with 200 self-identified perpetrators to inform the evaluation effectiveness of the program.

Mr ELFERINK: How does that work where you are getting information out of it? You are going to speak to these self-identified perpetrators, you say that you are going to have another – so you have your baseline data, then you are going to have your subsequent data. Is it going to include the same perpetrator, or are these different perpetrators?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will call on my Executive Director, Frances O'Toole, from the Family and Individual Support branch.

Ms O'TOOLE: Fran O'Toole, Director of Family and Individual Support Services. The evaluation will be done by the Grey Group. They have expertise in doing this type of research with people. They go through a structured format of questioning that covers people's understanding of domestic and family violence, their experience of domestic and family violence. They will also, through the focus questioning, talk about their views of the social marketing campaign, specifically the *Stop the Hurting, Start the Healing* campaign.

Mr ELFERINK: It is going to be a focus group basis?

Ms O'TOOLE: The January evaluation was focus groups. The August/September will be a phone survey, but a focus survey with specific questions.

Mr ELFERINK: There is one ad on the television where the fellow throws the plate off the dinner table, the kids go under the table, he rings MensLine and the next scene is she is looking, doubtfully, across at him while he is looking, doubtfully, across at her and they are playing with their kids in the garden. Minister, do you approve that ad? Did you approve that ad?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will approve any ad that highlights how ugly domestic violence is.

Mr ELFERINK: It has been pointed out to me the ad promotes women staying with abusive husbands. Do you wish to comment on that?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not care who is the abused or the abuser. I do not accept domestic violence and I do not accept anyone abusing anyone else, be it a woman or a man. I will approve any advertisement that highlights how ugly domestic violence is.

Mr ELFERINK: I understand the view. I am going to leave it. It is all yours.

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

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.13

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I have a response to question on notice No 6.13. The question was: how much money has the department spent on training foster carers? This year \$116 000 has been spent on training foster carers. In addition, the department provided recurrent funding of \$92 550 to Foster Care NT to develop new structure for their organisation to better position themselves to provide training and education programs for foster carers. Training and education is a component of this grant. I table this.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Can I check with members of the committee: are there any questions around the Children's Commissioner because that involves a change of officers? No? All right then. That concludes consideration of the Department of Children and Families today. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and the officers who have attended and provided evidence at the committee. Thank you very much. If we could make it a swift changeover for Primary Industry, Fisheries, and Resources personnel to come into the room, please.

DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back, and welcome to the officers accompanying you from the agency. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you from Primary Industry, Fisheries, and Resources and if you wish to make an opening statement on behalf of the department.

Mr VATSKALIS: I would love to, Madam Deputy Chair. I have half an hour. I can do it in half an hour.

First, let me introduce the officer next to me, Mr Richard Galton, CEO of the department, and Mr Bernard Ho, the Chief Financial Officer. I also have Mr Rod Gobbey, Executive Director of Primary Industries; Mr Alister Trier, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy; and Mr Ian Curnow, Executive Director of Fisheries.

Madam Deputy Chair, my Department of Resources is responsible for supporting and facilitating development of resource-based industries throughout the Northern Territory. Our three resource sectors - primary industry, fisheries and minerals and energy - are expected to contribute over \$7.2bn to our economy over the next 12 months. Our primary industry sector not only contributes nearly \$0.5bn per year to the Northern Territory economy, but also remains the backbone of so many of our regional and remote communities. In the 2010-11 financial year the value of production is expect to be \$568m, thereby exceeding last year's anticipated value of \$447m. It is likely the value of production will rise again to \$594m in 2011-12.

While cattle production for 2010-11 was expected to reach \$267m, it was predicted to grow to \$284m over the next 12 months. This may vary due to the significant disruption to the live export trade following

suspension of the trade by the Commonwealth minister after the airing of distressing and graphic footage of the mistreatment of Australian cattle in some Indonesian abattoirs. This calendar year to date, 108 000 head of Northern Territory cattle have gone to Indonesia in 2011, and although there is growing optimism that the trade will resume at some level in coming weeks, it is likely there will be a significant reduction in Northern Territory animals going to Indonesia in 2011. The Chief Minister is currently in Canberra working to ensure live export resumes as soon as possible. We know cattlemen want to ban animal cruelty as much as everyone else and have requested we not play politics with this issue. We respect this request. The Northern Territory government is funding a national advertising campaign highlighting the human cost of animal cruelty. Ads appear in newspapers across the country.

In 2010-11, horticulture has continued to grow with an estimated annual value of production of \$138m, forecast to increase to \$142.9m in 2011. Mixed farming has also continued to rise with production for 2010-11 estimated to be \$90m, with a similar outlook for 2011-12.

We recognise the importance of information and data about fisheries, and for that reason the government is currently updating catch and effort data. This includes information on expenditure by recreational fishermen. In 2009-10, the estimated production value from commercial fishing was over \$57m, with an estimated value of aquaculture exceeding \$25m. As well as employment, the commercial fishing industry also supports a wide range of associated sectors including: wholesale, retail, transport, boat builders and repairers.

In relation to value to the economy the mining and energy sector is clearly the most significant, not only in its direct contribution to the economy, but also through all the spin-off benefits to industry and business in the Territory. The value of production is estimated to exceed \$6.4bn per annum. There are 345 authorised mining operations across the Northern Territory. Many of these are exploration sites, including several good prospects for new mining ventures in future years. In 2009-10, the currently producing mines, both metallic and non-metallic minerals, generated production worth \$3.4bn.

Our government has committed to strategic programs to raise the profile of Territory minerals and energy potential and to promote it as a preferred location for exploration investment. These programs are necessary to maintain the growth momentum and expansion of the sector. Programs cover a range of best practice: from attracting local interest and investment in drilling and geo-science initiatives to the continuing highly successful China and Japan investment attraction strategies. As of March 2011, the China strategy alone has seen 15 agreements signed and over \$144.3m in publicly announced deals since the strategy commenced four years ago.

Mineral exploration expenditure in the Northern Territory for the 2010 calendar year was \$166.7m, an increase of 12% on the previous year and continuing the trend in growth in recent years. Exploration was up 22% Australia-wide as most jurisdictions bounced back from the global financial crisis. Given the impact of Wet Season in 2010, including in Central Australia, the result is another strong one for the Northern Territory.

Committed petroleum exploration expenditure in the Territory for the 2010-11 financial year was \$42m, an increase of \$27m from the previous year. For 2011, exploration interest in petroleum and gas has risen remarkably, with 38 new exploration permit applications this year. Again this shows the Northern Territory is an area of interest Australia wide.

With the geothermal energy industry showing interest in certain parts of the Territory we have granted six geothermal exploration permits this year, with a potential of \$660 000 of exploration on the ground.

This year's result from the Fraser Institute survey found the geological database produced by the Northern Territory geological survey ran equal first globally, up from 13th the year before, as ranked by 494 companies. This criterion examines the perceived quality, quantity and ease of obtaining geological and geophysical information supplied by the government.

My department continues to manage the successful renewable remote power generation programs. This year, the Alice Springs Solar Cities program is due to complete with full expenditure of funds. Administration of Commonwealth funding for the solar program at Ti Tree and Kalkarindji, and a solar wind power program at Lake Nash is due to cease upon completion of the contracts.

The economic outlook remains positive and, with expected terms of trade to remain high, our resource-based sector can look forward to a strong year ahead. As I said earlier, I expect the Territory's resource sectors to contribute around \$7.2m to our economy in the coming year.

I would be happy to respond to any questions. I will, at times, be calling on my colleagues from the department to provide information requested. Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, minister. Are there any questions relating to the statement?

Ms PURICK: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Ms PURICK: No.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Output 7.1 – Minerals and Energy

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will move to Output Group 7.0, Resource Industry Development, Output 7.1, Minerals and Energy.

Ms PURICK: Thank you minister, for your statement and for attending the rally and speaking this morning regarding live cattle exports. It is very important bipartisan support continues in regard to having the ban overturned.

In the interest of time, I will not get through all the questions; I will zero in on some key areas. Under mining, from a taxation regulation point of view, has the department done any work you can detail about the impact of the mining tax?

Mr VATSKALIS: That work has been done by Treasury, and the Treasurer would be in a better position to provide you with information.

Ms PURICK: The department has been involved in discussions regarding the impact on our industry?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, but as you know, the taxation regime on minerals and energy is under the Treasurer rather than the department?

Ms PURICK: Does the same apply for carbon tax? Has any modelling been done on the impact the carbon tax might have on projects in the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: That should be Treasury relevant. Our department does not deal with this.

Ms PURICK: Minister, there is legislation before the parliament - the exposure draft in regard to native vegetation. In Queensland, which has similar legislation, they have specifically excluded the legislation applying to exploration of mining leases, but the legislation we have before the House does not. Why did you not lobby to have exploration mining leases excluded from this proposed legislation?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not legislation before parliament; it is an exposure draft for public comment.

Ms PURICK: That is correct.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not before parliament. Okay?

Ms PURICK: All right. Semantics, but ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no, hold on. It is not semantics. Saying something is before parliament indicates it is going to be put before parliament, have the second reading, we debate it and it becomes legislation. We are not there. We have not even introduced it to parliament; we put an exposure draft out for comment ...

Ms PURICK: Okay, I will rephrase it. In the exposure draft, why are exploration mining leases not excluded?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you. It is for public consultation, and my department will have input on that legislation.

Ms PURICK: Do you support exploration mining leases being excluded from the legislation, given we have a rigorous *Mining Management Act*, mine management plans, environmental bonds under mining legislation ...

Mr VATSKALIS: My department will comment on that legislation in the interests of the industry and the Northern Territory economy.

Ms PURICK: In regard to the exposure draft, from my reading, is it correct mining companies will need to get a land clearing permit from NRETAS separate to commitments they will make under a mine management plan?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, it is an exposure draft for consultation and my department will make comments on the particular areas affecting the industry.

Ms PURICK: Perhaps if I read these questions; the department knows the areas of concern. Is it correct that mining companies will be required to place an environmental bond under the native vegetation legislation, as well as under the *Mining Management Act*?

It is my understanding reading the draft legislation that the Planning minister will have the power of veto over a development application including exploration mining applications associated with land clearing. The draft exposure bill contains provisions for an authorised officer to enter a property, which includes the mine site, seize goods and require cooperation from the extractive company. How does this fit with the OHS requirements of the mine site, and do you, and the department, support non-compliance with OHS regulations of mine sites in regard to vegetation?

If you say your department is considering all these items, I hope it is because it is causing great concern to the industry. I know you are aware of that because they have spoken to you about it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, it is an exposure draft. These things are in the public domain for discussion, not only with the department of mines, also with cattlemen and the pastoral industry. The department is aware of all these issues and will have input on the legislation highlighting the potential problems, the potential conflicts, and potential impact on the industry.

Ms PURICK: Has the department had preliminary engagement with NRETAS in regard in this exposure draft?

Mr VATSKALIS: Of course; however, you have to remember that is an NRETAS proposed bill. If we believe in something strongly, we will argue very strongly for or against it.

Ms PURICK: If the exposure draft goes through the parliament in its current form, has the department done any costing as to what it will cost the industry to comply with this legislation, in addition to the *Mining Management Act*?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is very presumptuous to say the exposure will go to parliament in the current form ...

Ms PURICK: I said 'if it did'.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... because it will not be going in the current form, there will quite a few changes.

Ms PURICK: Excellent, good to hear, minister. I hope it has at the start that this legislation applies to everyone in the Northern Territory except for exploration mining extractive leases.

Mr VATSKALIS: My colleague, Karl Hampton, will be here tomorrow. He is the minister for NRETAS, you can ask him personally.

Ms PURICK: Sadly, that is not my area. Minister, the federal government, under a previous Prime Minister, made a commitment to some kind of flow-through share scheme in regard to exploration as an incentive and I have tried to find out exactly where that is at. Through you and your department, have you done any lobbying of the federal government, working through either of the various frameworks between governments to get some kind of flow-through share scheme up, because we know the experience in Canada has been hugely successful?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am a very strong supporter of this scheme. I have discussed it with my colleagues around Australia, and we have continued to lobby the federal minister about this. We are unsuccessful to date, but we are not giving up. We will continue to push, because we believe it will be beneficial for exploration, not only in the Territory, but throughout Australia.

Ms PURICK: That is great. In regard to petroleum, how much did the Northern Territory government receive from the Commonwealth for the regulation of the offshore oil and gas industry in 2010-11?

Mr VATSKALIS: To date, 1 July 2010 to April 2011, \$938 000 had been received in revenue by the Territory for offshore petroleum tenement management fees.

Ms PURICK: Are you able to give details of the cost to government to respond to the Montara incident?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can take that on notice. I do not have it in the breakdown.

Question on Notice No 6.17

Ms PURICK: How much did it cost the Northern Territory government/Resources department to respond to the Montara incident?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.17.

Ms PURICK: Minister, you may not have the information for this either. Can you tell us what the Montara incident cost the Northern Territory in lost economic contributions?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have that in front of me, and I do not know whether - it was an exploration well not a production well, so the economic impact on the Territory economy ...

Ms PURICK: Supply and service, though?

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry?

Ms PURICK: Supply and service – rig vessels, support services?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can take that on notice.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Would you repeat that as a question on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 6.18

Ms PURICK: What did the Montara incident cost the Northern Territory in lost economic contributions?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.18.

Ms PURICK: Minister, I am conscious of the time. I have other questions; perhaps I might put them on notice. In regard to regional development for the exploration and mining industry, the 2030 document says there is a program to attract companies to regional places in the Northern Territory such as Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and the Roper River region. What does that program entail? How are you attracting companies there?

Mr VATSKALIS: By ensuring people know where the mineral resources are; by releasing information on the geological survey highlighting in the regional areas there are many mineral resources; by having 15 exploration areas close to Alice Springs there will be a flow-on effect on the supply and service industry in Alice Springs. Build it and they come, and we have seen that in Alice Springs, we have seen it in Tennant Creek. Not long ago you could buy a house in Tennant Creek for \$12 000. Look at the price of houses today - you probably have to pay \$250 000 because of the economic activity you have with 12 exploration drills operating in the area.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, minister. The program is about the geological survey programs ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Our program is the investment attraction strategy in China and Japan, and other areas we are focusing on, highlighting the opportunities in the Territory and providing all the information we have.

Ms PURICK: Minister, two major exploration companies left town at the end of last year taking with them 30 full-time jobs and probably countless millions of dollars from the Northern Territory economy. Why did you not say anything when Cameco and Paladin shut shop and left town?

Mr VATSKALIS: People make decisions to leave town. My understanding at the time I spoke to Cameco - the reason they left town was because they could not attract personnel in Darwin. Most of their personnel preferred to live in Perth. I had personal discussions with them as to why and the answer was because they could not attract the personnel in Darwin.

Ms PURICK: Minister, they made you aware early last year that they were thinking of relocating their corporate office to Perth. Under previous governments, the minister for mines would have done everything in his power to get an exploration company that employs nearly 20 full-time people to stay in Darwin.

Mr VATSKALIS: I would love to have them stay Darwin, but there is nothing much I can do to attract more geologists and more staff to live in Darwin. That is a choice people make and a choice the company makes.

Ms PURICK: Did you have any discussions with them as to how you could assist them in recruiting; how you could assist them in getting their 457s through quickly?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our government is very supportive of 457s. The company did not come to me suggesting they had some 457 application online so I could support them in writing with the relevant minister. The question I asked was: 'Why are you leaving town?' and the answer I was given was: 'It is because we cannot attract people to live in Darwin; they prefer to live in Perth'.

Ms PURICK: Minister, do you know how many exploration companies have offices in Darwin at the moment?

Mr VATSKALIS: There are a number of exploration companies which have offices in Perth and come to Darwin - exploration drills.

Ms PURICK: How many exploration companies have offices in Darwin at the moment? Do you know how many?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the information at hand; I can get it.

Ms PURICK: It is six. In years gone by it was double that number.

Minister, the department's website has a full description of the Angela Pamela project with questions and answers regarding that project. It says: 'Will exploration adversely impact the environment?' The answer on your website is: 'Exploration has minimal impact on the environment and is strictly monitored by the Northern Territory government'. Why did you government walk away from supporting it while on your website you are still supporting it?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department's website is quite correct in that it refers to exploration activities, not to mining activities. The government said it will not support the development of an open cut uranium mine close to Alice Springs. As you are probably well aware, the decision for the mine to open or not is up to the federal government. However, since you brought up Angela Pamela, you know our position; do we know your position? If you want to talk about ...

Ms PURICK: You know my position, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I refer to your party's position, or two or three positions. I would also like to know your party's position on Koongarra. How many positions do you have there?

Ms PURICK: It is in the paper today; it must be true!

Mr VATSKALIS: I have seen another position from the member for Katherine. It is a pity the member for Araluen is not here; she would probably have her own position about mining in Koongarra.

Ms PURICK: I will leave it at that, Madam Deputy Chair. We need to get to the other output groups. Thank you, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Further questions on Output 7.1? No?

Mr WOOD: Yes, I do, 1.1? Sorry.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: 7.1.

Mr WOOD: That is all right because the old tables show it differently. Minister, is the government still paying for the rehabilitation of the Mt Todd mine and how much is it costing?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not believe you brought that up! Yes, we still pay for the rehabilitation of Mt Todd mine because it was a disaster and we do not want it to be a disaster waiting to happen. We are working very closely with the company that has taken over Mt Todd to prevent the spill of contaminated water to Edith River, to re-allocate some of this water, to modify catchment areas and to minimise the impact on the environment by the disastrous development at Mt Todd. It is not the mine that is the problem; it is what was done. We have to pay for it because there is no funding left and no rehabilitation bond put in place by the previous government that approved the development of the mine.

Mr WOOD: Are the present owners paying any contribution?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, the agreement is for a joint contribution by the current owners - not owners, they do not own it yet. They have a lease agreement with it.

Mr WOOD: Mt Todd is not being mined at the present time?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is not.

Mr WOOD: It is a question that will come up every year till it is fixed.

Minister, comments from the Minerals Council on the drafting regulations the government put out - the second draft - their comments arrived the day before the government put out its second draft and they wanted to know how could its comments, therefore, be included in the second draft.

The Minerals Council website says – I will read the full question:

Is it true that the day after the Minerals Council submitted their comments on the draft Mining Regulations the government put out its second draft? If it is true, how could they take the MCA's comments into consideration if they only had received them one day before?

That is on the Minerals Council website.

Mr VATSKALIS: Alister Trier can respond to that.

Mr TRIER: Alister Trier, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy. I assume we are talking about the Minerals Title Act, is that correct?

Mr WOOD: The regulations they said.

Mr TRIER: The regs, okay. The consultation period closed. As a fair amount work has to go into the development of drafts, a draft was developed with comments that had previously been included. With regard to the Minerals Council, we sat down with them, as a result of their submission to the Northern Territory in relation to the regulations, and went through them one by one. We satisfied their concerns in that their concerns were taken on board and subsequently amended as part of the regulations.

Mr WOOD: Minister, are there any live geothermal explorations occurring at the present time?

Mr VATSKALIS: Exploration licences have been granted and about \$600 000 has currently been spent in exploration for geothermal activities in the Territory.

Mr WOOD: There are people out there doing some ground work?

Mr VATSKALIS: Bear in mind we have just come out of a big Wet. I doubt very much ...

Mr TRIER: There is \$660 000 committed for this year. I cannot give you a guarantee that work has commenced for this year.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions? That concludes Output 7.1.

Output 7-2 – Primary Industry

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will proceed to Output 7.2 Primary Industry.

Ms PURICK: How many Aboriginal trainees has the Primary Industries Division taken on over the last 12 months, how many are currently employed, and in what areas?

Mr GOBBEY: Rod Gobbey, Executive Director, Primary Industries. There is an Indigenous trainee position at the Arid Zone Research Institute. An ex-trainee has been made permanent in the last 12 months at the Research Institute. In relation to the Indigenous Pastoral Program and directly related areas, people have been trained during the past calendar and financial year, but I would not give a precise answer at this point in time. I respectfully suggest I take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.19

Ms PURICK: That is fine. I will repeat the question. How many Aboriginal trainees has the Primary Industries Division taken on over the last 12 months, how many are currently employed, and in what areas?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No. 6.19.

Ms PURICK: What surveillance and monitoring programs have been undertaken for pests and diseases over the last 12 months, and what was the cost for each program and how much human resources was involved?

Mr GOBBEY: With me today I do not have a breakdown of all the activities for the Biosecurity and Product Integrity Division, but that information could be provided.

Question on Notice No 6.20

Ms PURICK: What surveillance and monitoring programs have been undertaken for pests and diseases over the last 12 months, and what was the cost for each program and how much, or how many, human resources were involved?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No. 6.20.

Ms PURICK: What were the financial resources allocated to the Vet Diagnostic Laboratory at Berrimah Farm for 2009-10 and for 2010-11?

Mr GOBBEY: I do not have the precise breakdown of the veterinary laboratory as a proportion of the overall Biosecurity Product Integrity Division. The precise figure can be provided. The number of staff working in the laboratory has had no change, as I recall, in the immediate past.

Ms PURICK: If we could take it on notice. I am keen to find out if there has been a decrease or an increase. Decrease not good; increase would be good.

Question on Notice No 6.21

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Would you repeat the question, please?

Ms PURICK: What were the financial resources allocated to the Vet diagnostic Laboratory at Berrimah Farm for 2009-10 and the 2010-11?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.21.

Ms PURICK: Minister, the 2030 document under this area says the government will undertake certain works. How many hectares of land and seawater have been identified as being suitable for agriculture and aquaculture, respectively?

Mr GOBBEY: With respect, the question needs clarification; it is in two parts. I am charged with leading a process to identify the number of hectares of land suitable for development. My colleague, the Executive Director of Fisheries, is dealing with the number of hectares of sea for future development for primary industries.

Ms PURICK: Work is under way at the moment?

Mr GOBBEY: Work is under way. I am leading a project across government, and we expect to produce maps specific to particular crops and land types for public consultation by the end of July.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have developed the agribusiness industry strategy in cooperation with the sector in order to define the needs of the industry and future potential for expansion.

Ms PURICK: Minister, the Plant Health Bill was introduced in September 2008 and passed in November 2008, but has yet to commence. What is the hold up? Why is it taking so long to finalise?

Mr GOBBEY: I recall this week the bill has been granted assent and will be coming into effect from 1 July.

Ms PURICK: 1 July this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr GOBBEY: Indeed.

Ms PURICK: Perhaps some questions now on the live export trade because it is so relevant and pertinent. Are there currently people from the Department of Resources, or seconded from somewhere to the Department of Resources, who have been sent to Indonesia to help with this issue?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. However, we have seconded a member of the department to work with the Cattlemen's Association in the Territory. My department has volunteered expertise to work with the federal industry to identify issues about animal welfare in Indonesia.

The trip to Indonesia has been undertaken by the federal Minister for Agriculture, Joe Ludwig. I have extended my invitation to the minister, anytime he needs something we are happy to participate in a working forum to assist with the resumption of the live cattle export.

Ms PURICK: Minister, you are obviously not aware that eight people went from the Territory today through Denpasar to Jakarta to work with the industry, including previous stock inspectors. That was not done through your department?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Ms PURICK: Okay. Minister, do you have any details as to how many people have already lost their jobs in the agricultural industry in regard to the live export ban?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I do not. The department of Business would be the most appropriate department to provide this information. The issue has made the Prime Minister aware of the impact of the banning live cattle export will have, not only of the cattle industry per se, but also the associated support industries, including anyone from the person who transports the cattle, from the boats that transport the cattle to Indonesia, even to the fuel depots that change the car tyres, and the people who provide support to the cattle industry.

Ms PURICK: Minister, in regard to the livestock suspension, what risk assessment exercise has your department undertaken in regard to the future of the livestock export industry? Has there been any assessment done internally of the impact the loss of the export industry will have to the Northern Territory? Perhaps I will rephrase that. Has the department done any work in the past in regard to risk assessment if our export industry was ever going to be challenged, which clearly it has been now?

Mr VATSKALIS: Since I became Primary Industry minister, and since my first trip to Indonesia, I have been very alarmed and worried about putting all our eggs in one basket. That is why I looked to the Philippines and Vietnam to open other markets. I was a very strong advocate of establishing an abattoir in the Northern Territory. I am pleased to say that work is very well advanced through AAco to establish an abattoir that will be operate nearly 12 months a year. The Indonesian trade is very, very temperamental. A decision by the Indonesian government can change things; a decision by the Australian government can change things. My department has always been worried about the impact that will have on potential cancellations ...

Ms PURICK: Has any defined work been done in regard to risk assessment?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Mr Gobbey to respond to that one.

Mr GOBBEY: I have been nominated as the Northern Territory representative to a national working group that includes all peak industry bodies, the Commonwealth government, the Western Australian government, the Queensland government and me as a representative of this jurisdiction. The work of that national working group falls into two broad categories. One is the development of technical protocols that will enable resumption of the trade to the satisfaction of the Australian government and, hopefully, the Indonesian government. I understand from a meeting I participated in earlier today that minister Ludwig, the Commonwealth minister, has been in Jakarta and is returning to Canberra today. I further understand that the draft technical documents the working group I am a member of has developed have now been officially provided to the Indonesian government by minister Ludwig for an exchange.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Gobbey. Given it is after 4.30 pm, we need to wind this session up so. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and his officers from Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources for providing evidence today.

MINISTER HAMPTON'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT, THE ARTS AND SPORT

Mr CHAIRMAN: We might start when you are ready, minister?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have an opening statement you would like to make?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I do, thank you, Mr Chairman and members.

I am joined at the table this afternoon by Mr Jim Grant, Chief Executive, and the relevant senior executives of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts.

I am speaking to the committee as the Minister for Natural Resources, Heritage, Environment, Parks and Wildlife and Sport and Recreation portfolios. These portfolios sit in the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sports, a department that is responsible for conserving, enhancing and ensuring the best possible access to, and enjoyment of, the Territory's natural and cultural assets. The Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sports aims to better understand the Territory's biophysical environments, our diverse society, complex social history and artistic capability, and to encourage excellence and participation in sporting pursuits so Territorians have an opportunity to use

these natural and cultural resources as a source of inspiration, innovation, and personal and economic growth.

I will make some brief introductory comments relating to the department's budget for the period as covered by Estimates specifically as it relates to my areas of responsibility. The key highlights in 2010-11 include the government continued its commitment to enhancing and preserving the Territory's parks and reserves by delivering over \$5m in capital works including major essential service upgrades of Nitmiluk National Park and completion of the West MacDonnell's Discovery Centre which includes online elements.

In an effort to promote water-saving activities, the rainwater tank rebate scheme run by the department has successfully granted over \$125 000 in rebates across the Northern Territory. To further enhance the government's commitment to the environment by reducing its carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions, \$1.7m has been dedicated to the installation of solar, PV energy generation systems on the departmental facilities in the Alice Springs region, and \$348 000 has been spent on the installation of a solar hybrid powered generation system at Watarrka National Park Ranger Station.

Another Territory government initiative was to upgrade the Arafura Stadium to continue to provide outstanding facilities for our athletes and to host national and international competitions. The stadium received a \$4.2m upgrade including a new track surface which was recently put to good use in the recent very successful Arafura Games athletics competition. From running tracks to go-karting and great car tracks, the government recently spent \$6.2m for upgrades at Hidden Valley including some \$3m from the Australian government.

The EPA, also known as the Environment Protection Agency, also comes within the Natural Resources Environment and Heritage portfolio and, for the purposes of the *Financial Management Act*, has its budget administered under the Natural Resource Environment and Heritage portfolio. I am happy to take questions on the EPA during this session as appropriate. Jacinta Stanford, Acting Executive Director of the EPA, will be assisting in this regard.

The Territory Wildlife Park forms another part of the portfolio and I am accompanied today by Steve Rossingh, Executive Director of Sport, Venues and Indigenous Development from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport. From NRETAS I am accompanied by Mr Jim Grant, Chief Executive, and Susan Kirkman, Executive Director of Business Services. In the Parks and Reserve area I am accompanied by Mr Graham Phelps, Executive Director; Alaric Fisher, Acting Director of Biodiversity Conversation; and Hugo Leschen, Executive Director of Arts and Culture. In the Natural Resources area I am accompanied by Diana Leeder, Executive Director of Natural Resources. In the Environment and Heritage area I am accompanied by Matt Darcey, Executive Director of Environment and Heritage. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any questions to the opening statement?

Mr CHANDLER: I have a couple, minister, not so much for the opening statement but I am unsure where they sit within the output group. Where would you like waste water discharge licences to ...

Mr HAMPTON: They will come under Environment and Heritage, Output Group 3.0.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is the output group. Which output? 3.1?

Mr HAMPTON: Output 3.1, yes.

Mr CHANDLER: Questions on climate change?

Mr HAMPTON: I understand they are in section ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 7.1 is a whole output. It has its own description. That is something we can clarify through the Chief Minister's Department.

Mr CHANDLER: Before we move on, I have some general questions about ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I was going to go to whole-of-government agency-related questions, if you had any there?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, that is fine.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No whole-of-government agency-related ? Member for Macdonnell, no? Member for Drysdale, do you have any agency-related whole-of-government questions?

Mr BOHLIN: Only the art sector, which comes tomorrow.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mr CHANDLER: I have one to do with the NRETAS budget overall, rather than ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is what this is.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I refer to Budget Paper No 4 where, once again, we see a record revoted works, often used to gloss up budgets. Minister, I cannot blame you here, as it seems to be across all agencies. However, in this case we have a budget for total infrastructure spend of \$65.657m, where a massive \$44.416m has been revoted. That is nearly 70% of the budget; a very high percentage for revoted works. Can you please provide some insight into this?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I am happy to get Ms Susan Kirkman to answer that one.

Ms KIRKMAN: Susan Kirkman, Executive Director Business Services. The revoted works predominately relate to specific major capital works. Did you want to work through every major capital works project?

Mr CHANDLER: I just want further information because it seems a rather large slice of the budget.

Ms KIRKMAN: Yes, the first revoted works is \$4m for the Araluen air-conditioning system. That project was put on the program this year so we could initiate works to go to tender. It was ...

Mr CHANDLER: Can I ask a specific question about that? Was that a solar system that was being installed? When I was down there last year I visited the centre and saw the work being done on a solar cooling system. Is that what we are talking about?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will talk briefly to this. This is the whole-of-government agency-related questions - the entire department. Even though there is a section of the department that appears under a different minister, all agency-related questions should be dealt with at this point and not with the other minister. Does that make sense? This is a question to the whole-of-department revote, and the first item of detail was to the Arts section of the portfolio. However, it can still be answered at this section. The minister will not be aware of the Araluen - he may be; coming from Central Australia. It is a point of clarification for any members who were not aware of ...

Mr GRANT: Jim Grant, Chief Executive. I am happy to answer that question. The Araluen system - we looked at a solar system for the air-conditioning long and hard with DCI and many experts. It came out to be not economical. It got up to \$8m or \$9m in the end. Once that was ruled out, we went back to a more standard air-conditioning system. That was approved quite late in the piece, so we will not been able to do that until next financial year.

Mr HAMPTON: Also, I might add, in Parks there has been some revote due to access issues with the weather. In Finke Gorge, Watarrka, and Nitmiluk, there have been some issues there because of the high rainfall and the floods we had this year, which can relate as to why they have been revoted.

Mr CHANDLER: That is fine. Minister, the budget this year, overall, for the Northern Territory is a record spend again. Can you explain the reduction of \$14.4m in the NRETAS budget this year?

Mr HAMPTON: I will hand over to Ms Susan Kirkman. In my department, we have had significant extra funding coming through this budget in a number of areas across the portfolio. We are continuing to roll out our stimulus package for parks infrastructure. Some of that has been revoted because of the flooding. In the extra need to allocate resources in crocodile management, there has been extra funding that has been put into the budget for the extra positions for the croc management team for the monitoring of the harbour. There is extra funding for the EPA, in giving them more teeth in legislation that I amended last year. Overall, there has been some significant funding in priority areas of the department that is needed. I will hand over to Susan Kirkman.

Ms KIRKMAN: The majority of the variation relates to external funding. We recognise external funding in the year that it is secured. In 2010-11, we secured external funding of \$7.6m. Obviously, we have not recognised that in 2011-12. Additionally, there was a one-off appropriation, a \$4m grant for the squash facility, and there was \$2.2m allocated to deliver the Arafura Games.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Drysdale had a question on the whole-of-government section.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you, minister. Mr Jim Grant just gave an answer in relation to the Araluen Arts Centre air-conditioning. Is it possible he could inform us what the cost was to do that investigation work to find that the solar system was unfeasible?

Mr HAMPTON: Jim?

Mr GRANT: I can find that out; I do not have that with me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will take that on notice. Repeat the question, member for Drysdale. Oh, sorry.

Ms KIRKMAN: The feasibility study is undertaken by DCI, the Construction department, not by NRETAS.

Mr BOHLIN: I understand that could have been the answer but, at the end of the day, you are the client. Their answer to me would be the same. They would say: 'I cannot share that because you are now the client'. You are the ones who have asked for the information. Do you have it available or not?

Ms KIRKMAN: We can take that on notice.

Mr HAMPTON: We can take that on notice but, as the agency has said, DCI are the ones that do the project. We will take that question on notice.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you.

Question on Notice No 7.1

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr BOHLIN: Can we have the cost of the feasibility study for the solar air-conditioning system for Araluen Arts Centre that was later not proceeded with?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes whole-of-government questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PROTECTED AREAS AND CONSERVATION

Output 1.1 – Parks Joint Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move on to Output Group 1.0, Protected Areas and Conservation, Output 1.1, Parks Joint Management Programs.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you please clarify how many joint management plans are in place?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, under the Parks and Wildlife Division, a priority for this government - and particularly through the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act* - is talking to traditional owners and representative bodies about joint management plans for the 27 parks that are subject to the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*.

Plans have been completed and are operational for the following parks: Rainbow Valley, Karlu Karlu or the Devil's Marbles, and Chambers Pillar. Plans have been subject to formal public comment and are ready for tabling in the Legislative Assembly as soon as titles for these parks have been transferred to the Aboriginal traditional owners - we have Watarrka and the West MacDonnells National Park. Also, public comment has been completed in 2010-11 and expected to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly this year for Judbarra or Gregory National Park, Gregory's Tree Historical Reserve, and Flora River Nature Park.

There have been some draft plans completed and they will be ready for release for public comment before the end of this year. There are another 12. I will hand over to Mr Graham Phelps but, as you can see, there have been quite a few at various stages of joint management plans which have been entered into. I hand over to Mr Graham Phelps to go into further detail.

Mr PHELPS: Graham Phelps, Executive Director, Parks and Wildlife. As the minister said, we have three plans which have passed through the House: two which are ready to go out for public comment and then titles transferred; three which have been through public comment which we have been notified today have been sign off by the Northern Land Council, so they will be ready for tabling as soon as we can put them up; and another 11 or 12 which will be ready for release for public comment later this year. Of the 27 parks and reserves which came under the Framework act, that will give us a total of 20 of the 27 at least to the public comment stage by later this calendar year.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, you have budgeted for 22 in the 2010-11 Budget and achieved nine. Is that right? Yes, that is right. This year, you budgeted for 25. If you only achieved nine last year, are you confident that you can reach the 25 this year?

Mr HAMPTON: I will hand over to Mr Graham Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Brennan, yes we are, because we have made significant progress on a number of those and, as I said, there is a number of them sitting right on the edge ready to go. The progress on the title transfer for West MacDonnell and Watarrka has been much slower than we anticipated. It has been quite a complex matter, but we are now very confident those title transfers will occur this calendar year. Again, that opens the way for those plans which are, essentially, ready to go for public comment as soon as the title is transferred there; they are sitting there ready to go. We are very confident.

We did overestimate the progress we would make this year. We have had some difficulties with the capacity of traditional owners and land councils to do the level of consultation that has been required.

This year, some of these are just simply the weight of numbers of plans that we are working on. Some of it has come down to the normal events which can intervene, including weather events that can put an end to a planned consultation meeting, which then blows a program out by three or four months before you can get to the next consultation to do that work, depending on the time in the land councils. The land councils, particularly the Northern Land Council - but also the southern land council - has a very high consultation schedule it is working on.

We have also put into the coming 2011-12 Budget some additional resources into the Central Land Council to assist us with that consultation process. We overestimated last year; we did not achieve our goals. However, we have so many plans that are now really well advanced, and with those extra resources in there we are quite confident we will get to that number. That is a total number shown; it is not a number of plans to be done in that year alone.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, on 12 June 2009, nine Central Australian national parks were handed back to traditional owners, including Trepina Gorge Nature Park, Arltunga Historical Reserve, N'Dhala Gorge Conservation Reserve, Corroboree Rock Conservation Reserve, Native Gap Conservation Park, Chambers Pillar Historical Reserve, Kuyunba Conservation Reserve, Ewaninga Rock Carvings and the Dulcie Range National Park. These parks were then leased to the Territory government for \$3m a year. Can you please describe the payment process? In the first place, who gets the money?

Mr HAMPTON: I will ask Mr Graham Phelps, but I believe this investment, this way forward for the Northern Territory government of joint management is very important. What we have is very good legislation in the Framework for the Future act. It is about sitting down with traditional owners and their representative bodies and negotiating our way around some of these difficult matters. The benefits of sitting and negotiating far outweigh those of litigation and going to court. The benefits are that, sometimes, you can actually pick up extra parcels of land as part of a negotiated agreement. In joint management plans one of the best outcomes is increasing Indigenous employment, and that is certainly the case for those parks. I have had the pleasure of being at some of the signing of those agreements with traditional owners, including Emily and Jessie Gaps, then at Judbarra at Gregory as well.

Regarding your question, I believe the importance of paying a lease to those people is just the same as any other Australian if you are going into some agreement with them and how you manage that land. I will hand over to Mr Graham Phelps to talk more about the process regarding those payments.

Mr PHELPS: Just to correct one thing, member for Brennan, I think you said the rent for the year was \$3m. The rent for all of the joint managed parks for the financial year was \$1.23m.

Payments are owed to the land trusts that own the land which they rent back to the government for operation as a national park. Those payments are made through the respective land councils. In the case of the parks that you listed, they are all in the Central Land Council region. The distribution of those monies to the land trust members is at the discretion of the land council and the land trust members.

I am very pleased to say that the Central Land Council full executive council took a decision on the rent payments that have flowed from these joint management arrangements; that all of those rent monies should go into community development activities for the traditional owners of those areas rather than any payments made directly to individuals. However, that is a decision which the traditional owners and Central Land Council have made. We are delighted with it, but it is a decision they made themselves.

Regarding the payments, they fall due in advance so they are due on 1 July each year. They commenced in this current financial year.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, you just mentioned rents are paid, as with any other person who owns property. Are these payments paid to the land councils taxed in any way?

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, they are landowners recognised by courts across this country. We sit down and negotiate that with traditional owners ...

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, my point is you made reference to any other Australian. If I was a property owner and that property was rented, that rent that comes in is seen as an income ...

Mr HAMPTON: It is the principle, member for Brennan. You are trying to twist it a little here. I believe the important thing is we sit down, negotiate with people over country, and look at the best way forward so everyone can enjoy that wonderful natural asset in the Northern Territory. This government has taken that way of progressing those discussions; sitting down with people and working through a joint management plan and negotiating the best outcome, both financially for traditional owners who own that country and for the people of the Northern Territory to have access to that asset. Unless Mr Graham Phelps wants to talk anything further about that, I believe he has fully explained the process of that lease payment.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I do not have any issue with people who own land to earn money from that land - no issue whatsoever. It was a simple question. Obviously, the answer is no.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I have spoken to a traditional owner from the Dulcie Range area who advises they have never seen any payment as agreed. What can you tell me about that?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I do not know who you are talking about. That would be a matter for the Central Land Council because the Dulcie Range is in their region and their executive. I commend the executive for their efforts in putting that money into community development. That is a fantastic initiative by them and the traditional owners. I do not know anything about the case you are talking about, sorry.

Mr CHANDLER: I could give his name, minister. He advises he has spoken to you and you said it is nothing to do with you and he should take it up with the Central Land Council. I suspect, though, from the answer by Mr Phelps, it is quite reasonable to accept the Central Land Council has made a decision to use that money for community services. I am happy to ...

Mr HAMPTON: I will reply to that. I know the case you are talking about and have undertaken to get back to that person. I seek advice as a minister of the government, as the Minister for Parks and Wildlife, and I am still waiting for that advice in relation to that case. I am happy to get back to that constituent. At the end of the day, the representative body of the land council is the one that negotiates on behalf of traditional owners. I am waiting for that advice to come back from my department.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further question to Output 1.1? Member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, on behalf of my colleague, the member for Nelson, why are parks and reserves being changed to protective areas and conservation?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Macdonnell. I will get Ms Susan Kirkman to answer that one.

Ms KIRKMAN: The output group is being expanded to include the conservation efforts of the department to more clearly reflect in one place the conservation function output.

Ms ANDERSON: The other question: what plans are there to open up Dulcie Range National Park?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I will hand over to Mr Graham Phelps. In relation to the broader government approach, sitting down talking to people and negotiating over joint management of these parks is very important and, through the Framework for the Future act, is something government will continue to do with traditional owners and land councils.

Mr PHELPS: We have not commenced the planning process yet for the Dulcies. It is one of the five or so left to be started, and we will probably not commence that until the year after next. That would be the stage where we would be talking about access and opportunities for development of that park.

Ms ANDERSON: Thanks. I understand it is good policy and process to negotiate rather than litigate. Parks has done a tremendous job, as has this government, to bring the two parties together to talk about ways to work the parks of the Northern Territory. However, there are also questions I need to ask. The Central Land Council just used the rangers as moving employment out of the CLC into parks, rather than parks employing their own rangers to look after the parks. That is a statement I am making; I will ask you the direct question on that. How many Indigenous rangers are employed by the Northern Territory government on Central Australian parks?

Mr HAMPTON: There are 18 Indigenous ranger groups throughout the Northern Territory. They provide very important employment pathways for people living on country. One of the things I was proud to announce in this budget was extra funding for Indigenous employment.

I would like to see the figures for Indigenous employment up around 30% in Parks and Wildlife to truly reflect the population of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. I also see many opportunities for these 18 Indigenous ranger groups to take on some contract work with government and other non-government organisations on country. You only have to look at the partnership between those people in Arnhem Land with ConocoPhillips to see the unique opportunities they offer. The carbon economy is coming, and there are many opportunities in land management.

In Parks and Wildlife, I am very keen to see what we can do to lift Indigenous employment numbers. The budget was able to announce some further funding to do that. I will hand over to Mr Phelps to talk a bit more about Parks and Wildlife rangers and the numbers.

Mr PHELPS: As the minister said, there is a combination of employment within Parks and Wildlife. At the time of preparation of our figures - which was in May, just couple of weeks ago - we had on joint managed parks across the Territory 25 Indigenous rangers, including trainees, and five full-time equivalents of flexible employment program-type employment ...

Ms ANDERSON: Is that for training?

Mr PHELPS: No, flexible employment is more along the line of short-term contract work. Seven of those positions were training positions, but they are on the joint managed parks. We had 13 Indigenous staff across our non-joint managed parks. That made up 26.2% of our Parks and Wildlife staff. We are getting towards the figure that reflects the demographic of the Northern Territory within Parks and Wildlife. We also recognise, whilst there are opportunities for employment within Parks and Wildlife, we had 164 staff on the books at that time.

There are approximately 600 rangers employed in Indigenous ranger groups across the Northern Territory. We see that as a tremendous asset and contribution to conservation management in the Northern Territory. We support those groups in a variety of ways, including outsourcing some of our Parks and Wildlife staff to work with those groups to build the capacity so they can deliver those services across the Territory. We have always contracted some work on parks to Indigenous ranger groups that are located near parks, and we are intending to increase that significantly in the coming years because the skills sets are there, the opportunities are there. Those Indigenous ranger groups located adjacent to our parks

provide more opportunities for more Indigenous people to work on their own country that happens to be managed by us, as well as work on the country they are managing, usually through Commonwealth schemes like Working on Country or Indigenous protected areas. Some of their country is under Northern Territory management, and we believe by contracting to those groups, we provide more opportunities for people who have cultural responsibilities and want to work on their land that falls under the NT government's responsibility as well.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr Phelps. Through you, minister, my question is very direct and I would like a direct answer, if I may. How many Indigenous rangers are employed by the NT government in Central Australian parks? That is what I asked, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Okay. Mr Phelps, do you have those numbers?

Mr PHELPS: I actually do not have the figures broken down to Central Australian parks, but we can certainly get that information for you.

Mr HAMPTON: Can we take that question on notice?

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, thank you, minister.

Question on Notice No 7.2

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question, member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: How many Indigenous rangers are employed by the NT government on Central Australian parks?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.2.

Ms ANDERSON: The other question, minister, is how many Indigenous rangers have moved from positions with Central Land Council into full-time ranger positions with the Northern Territory government?

Mr HAMPTON: I do not know if Mr Phelps has that answer. We might have to take that question on notice as well. Do you have that?

Mr PHELPS: I certainly do not have that information. Any answer we provide to that would be anecdotal because it is not data we would necessarily collect directly. We can attempt to provide as accurate an answer as we can to that.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you. Minister, can I put that question on notice as well?

Question on Notice No 7.3

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question, member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: How many Indigenous rangers have moved from positions with Central Land Council into full-time ranger's positions with the Northern Territory government?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.3.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, the reason why I am going into these questions is, with any formal policy that you see the Northern Territory government developing - whether it be in education, health, family and community services, or parks - there is always talk that we need to engage in growing our own. However, it does not mean we move our own out of the public sector and give them pretend positions in order to have Indigenous employment. That is what I am getting at. We have done that with Aboriginal Health Workers, teacher assistants, ACPOs, and we are doing that with child protection workers. It looks as if we are going down the same path to do it with rangers. That is the only reason why I am going down this line of questioning.

Mr HAMPTON: We will take that question on notice. I totally agree, as a local Indigenous person, with what you are saying. Government has tried a lot in transitioning people from CDEP into full-time jobs, particularly in some of those positions you are talking about. This Labor government, particularly, is well focused on that. As the Minister for Parks and Wildlife, I will take that on board as well. We will take that question on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No problem, that question is on notice as Question No 7.3.

Ms ANDERSON: Okay. The third question, minister. Is Owen Springs Reserve currently staffed only by Central Land Council employees on-site?

Mr HAMPTON: Is that a question or a statement?

Ms ANDERSON: No, it is a question. Is Owen Springs Reserve currently staffed only by Central Land Council employees?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: No, is the simple answer. It is staffed by two Parks and Wildlife rangers on-site.

Ms ANDERSON: Okay. If the question is no, is it proposed that Owen Springs Reserve will be staffed on-site solely by Central Land Council employees in the near future?

Mr PHELPS: At the moment, the two we have on staff at Owen Springs are a couple, sharing one house. We have a spare house there. We are in some discussions with the Central Land Council at the moment about housing the ranger coordinator for the Tjuwanpa Ranger group based at Hermannsburg/Ntaria in that other house, because housing is not available for them in Hermannsburg/Ntaria. We are having discussions with the Central Land Council at the moment about that arrangement. That will initially be a one-year arrangement, and we will continue to have those discussions. Those discussions have not been finalised; we are still in the process of talking with them at the moment.

Ms ANDERSON: So the discussion is to have the Tjuwanpa Rangers live on-site at Owen Springs and take your staff out in the near future?

Mr PHELPS: No. The discussions are to house the ranger coordinator for the Tjuwanpa Rangers at Owen Springs. They will continue to work out of Ntaria and will continue to do the normal work the Tjuwanpa Rangers do on their land. We do contract them for some work for us, usually on Finke Gorge National Park. The discussions we are having with the Central Land Council at the moment are simply about providing housing. You might be aware the previous ranger coordinator of Tjuwanpa Rangers lived in house in Ntaria which was also the ranger station, and it was fairly taxing living conditions. The Central Land Council and Tjuwanpa Rangers felt that was not a sustainable approach for maintaining the ranger coordinator for Tjuwanpa Rangers. Because we work very closely with that group, we saw an opportunity to provide some spare accommodation we had on one of our parks to the ranger coordinator.

We are also looking at putting one of our Indigenous rangers support program rangers into Tjuwanpa. They have about 18 Indigenous rangers in their team. Both of their ranger coordinators left fairly recently. There is no housing for those coordinators in Ntaria or Hermannsburg, so we are looking at supporting that group by using one of our rangers based in Finke as a support ranger to work with the Tjuwanpa Rangers. We have housing available in Owen Springs, because we have a couple sharing one of the two houses there, that we will use for a 12-month trial period to house the Tjuwanpa Ranger.

I said before we are looking to increase the amount of contracting we do to Indigenous ranger groups for conservation work on park, and Tjuwanpa Rangers are a very functional, very highly skilled ranger group. We will certainly be looking at opportunities for them to do more contract work to improve our park management on the parks and reserves that are nearby to their base.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you. The last question I have, minister, are joint management funds paying the salary of any Indigenous rangers working in the Northern Territory government positions?

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry, could you repeat that?

Ms ANDERSON: Are joint management funds paying the salary of any Indigenous rangers working in the Northern Territory government?

Mr HAMPTON: I might ask Mr Phelps to answer that.

Mr PHELPS: Yes, indeed, of the \$3m that was provided, I believe initially in about 2005 to assist with the additional costs of joint management, some 59% of that budget is spent on Indigenous employment and training within Parks and Wildlife. There are 12 positions we fund for Indigenous people working on joint managed parks as rangers or trainee rangers in Northern Territory government positions funded out of some of that \$3m.

Ms ANDERSON: Thanks, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Parks Visitor Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move on to Output 1.2 Parks, Visitor Management Programs, and we are with the member for Brennan

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I have a concern with the figures regarding visitors to our beautiful parks remaining stagnant; that is, in the year 2010-11, \$2.8m, and for the 2011-12 year, you estimate \$2.8m. With everything you say you are doing, why don't you think the numbers will increase? Do you not have any confidence in the policies and programs you have to increase visitor numbers?

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Brennan. As I stated at the opening remarks of my Estimates contribution tonight, the Northern Territory government is proud of its record in maintaining first-class facilities in our parks. The \$8m stimulus package to improve infrastructure out there is very important. Joint management of our parks is very important but, often, there are factors outside of our control. We are coming off the back of a global financial crisis, a strong Australian dollar, and the tourism sector, generally, is going to find it very tough this year. There are a number of initiatives to lift those visitor numbers up in our Parks Visitor Management Programs. I ask Mr Phelps to talk more in detail about those.

Mr PHELPS: Our park visitor numbers we predict are developed in consultation with Tourism NT and their expectations of what visitor numbers are going to do. Largely, our visitor numbers have followed the Tourism NT trends. In fact, we did a little better than the trends in the current financial year but, basically, follow the trends of visitor numbers to the Territory.

As the minister said, and as Susan Kirkman mentioned before, there are a number of significant capital works programs which have either been done recently or are under way and will be under way to maintain and improve the visitor infrastructure on parks to make the parks as attractive as they possibly can be. This includes things like the West MacDonnell Visitor Centre, upgrades at Litchfield and the like. As I said, our visitor number predictions are based on the advice from Tourism NT and take into account the very strong Australian dollar and the impact of the global financial crisis on international travellers and arrivals which make up a very significant part of our visitor numbers.

Mr CHANDLER: Just from that, I noticed in the budget papers the visitor satisfaction going from between 80% and 87% up to 92%. What I am saying is your goal is that, whilst the numbers of visitors may not increase their satisfaction will. Following from that question, given the devastating cyclones and flooding in North Queensland, North Queensland is doing a massive amount of advertising to promote tourism in Queensland. What are we doing, or what could we do to counter some of that effect?

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to visitor satisfaction, it is good to see that is improving. The other really good one is the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. I understand visitor satisfaction is very high there, as well as Nitmiluk.

I met with the new Tourism NT General Manager, and he is working very closely with Parks. Mr Phelps might be able to talk more about that. However, we are acutely aware of what Queensland is doing. We know we have to be competitive to get the domestic market - people in Australia who may be travelling through - and getting them to experience the great parks here.

Infrastructure is really important. In relation to the budget, we were able to get extra money into the Territory Wildlife Park, as well as the Visitor Information Centre in Alice Springs where the new attraction is downloading the experience. If you go to the Visitor Information Centre in Alice Springs at the Desert Park, it is great to be able to download the experience of the Red Centre Way through the West MacDonnells before you actually go there, so you know what experience you are in for. We have to try new innovative

things such as this to get the market through the Territory. I might get Mr Phelps to talk about the discussions occurring with Tourism NT.

Mr PHELPS: Yes, we work quite closely with Tourism NT. Promotional marketing is the responsibility of Tourism NT promoting the Territory. The minister mentioned the online component of the West MacDonnell Visitor Centre. We deliberately went down that track of creating an online component to that visitor centre so we could reach people before they came to Central Australia to influence their decision to come; that they would be attracted to come by the information provided by the experience they could see they could have, and were also made aware of the range of options.

One of the classic comments one hears in Central Australia from tourists has been for many years, particularly around Alice Springs: 'I wish I had known there were so much to do here; I would have stayed longer'. We recognise that. Much of our previous Parks and Wildlife pre-visit information was pretty staid fact sheets, and did not really capture the imagination, and does not turn up on web searches internationally when you are sitting in the UK or Germany deciding where you might travel. We saw the opportunity of moving into that digital space in a big way with the West MacDonnell Visitor Centre as a way of supporting tourism in the Northern Territory, supporting Tourism NT in its marketing of the Territory, by putting a Parks and Wildlife presence into the international space where people would be able to access it before they came to Central Australia, rather than after they turned up and picked up a fact sheet at the local tourism centre or Parks and Wildlife office.

Mr CHANDLER: Was that downloading experience developed by a local company?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: Two parts of it - the back-of-house component, the technical component, was developed by an interstate company. The front-of-house component, the content, was all developed by a local Territory company, and the content is all produced from local Central Australian people.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions for this output, member for Macdonnell?

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, you will have seen the member for Nelson running to ensure these two are asked. This one is on Channel Point Reserve. Are you going to upgrade the toilets at the reserve? There are two toilets for at least 50 people and the septic cannot handle the load. Why can't compost toilets be built at the reserve?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Macdonnell, I will ask Mr Phelps to answer that one.

Mr PHELPS: We will take that one on notice. I was not aware we had a problem with toilets at Channel Point Reserve.

Question on Notice No 7.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will get that one more time.

Ms ANDERSON: Re Channel Point Reserve: minister, are you going to upgrade the toilets at this reserve? There are two toilets for at least 50 people. Recently, the septic could not handle the load. Why weren't compost toilets built there?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.4. I know the member for Nelson is listening. He will be getting that answer later.

Ms ANDERSON: The next question for my colleague is: when will the upgrade of Howard Springs Nature Park commence?

Mr HAMPTON: The government has made a significant contribution to Howard Springs Nature Park. We made some more announcements in this budget. Mr Phelps, I do not know if you have any of the latest details on when that will commence. However, regarding the water activity and the water experience there, we have made some announcements in the budget.

Mr PHELPS: There is \$1.8m allocated to develop the water play area. We are anticipating going to tender for that, probably within a month. We are working with DCI on that with the aim of having construction completed this Dry Season.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you. The last question for my colleague is: could you please give the number of visitors per every park over the last five years? Even if you took the question on notice and gave it to us later.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I will take that question on notice. Mr Phelps would like to add something to that answer.

Mr PHELPS: It is actually not possible for us to give data on every park over the last five years. Our visitor data is calculated based on the main parks that receive over 5000 visitors per year. There are quite a few parks we do not count. We also have some rotation of when the parks are counted, so I cannot provide the data as the question is asked. However, we can provide the data we have over the last five years, where that is available. It will not be for all of the parks because we simply do not count all of them.

Question on Notice No 7.5

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you mind repeating that question?

Ms ANDERSON: Could you please give the number of visitors per every park over the last five years where available?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.5.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is all the questions for Output 1.2, Parks Visitor Management Programs.

Output 1.3 - Conservation Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now proceed to Output 1.3, Conservation Management Programs.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, last year I raised the subject of vehicles driving on Gunn Point Beach, specifically Tree Point Conservation Reserve, causing much damage to sand dunes and vegetation leading to severe erosion problems. At the time, you advised Parks would ensure rangers conducted patrols and, where necessary, infringement notices would be issued. Can you please provide an update of that program and provide the number of infringement notices issued by your department?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Brennan. I did get some questions from you regarding Tree Point Conservation Reserve. I think the member for Nelson has raised that with us on quite a few occasions as well. I will get Mr Phelps to answer in a bit more detail on that one as well.

Mr PHELPS: Our rangers patrol the Tree Point area. You would, no doubt, be aware that Parks and Wildlife has responsibility for the Tree Point Conservation Reserve which is at the southern end of Gunn Point Beach. Most of that beach area and the area where all of the camping occurs is actually Northern Territory Land Corporation land, for which we have no management responsibility directly. However, we do, and are, working very closely with the NT Land Corporation to deal with the issue of people driving on the beach.

The update I can provide is our rangers patrol the Tree Point area on all weekends and public holidays and, usually, at least one day during the week as well. Over the course of 2010-11, they spoke with over 200 people in the course of patrols. When they do their patrols, they do not confine themselves to the Tree Point area; they actually drive into the Gunn Point area where people are camping and talk with campers to make them aware there is a point where they have moved off NTLC land, where they are able to drive along the beach on to the Tree Point land, where they are not allowed to drive and which we are trying to protect.

Earlier this year, we also conducted some patrols in cooperation with the Northern Territory Police. That was quite successful in raising the awareness of the situation. We have improved some signage there,

including signage as you come into the Gunn Point area - not just onto the Tree Point area - making people aware there is a conservation area further down the beach. We are working with the Northern Territory Land Corporation to come up with a more rigorous long-term solution which we believe could involve the development of some formal camping grounds, camping sites, which would enable a permanent presence in the area. That is the greatest challenge of managing of that site; it is a significant distance away from any of our ranger stations, and the area we have to manage is a very small reserve as part of that larger Darwin Parks area. Having enough rangers, or having enough staff or enough presence out there to have an ongoing impact is challenging.

You might be aware there have been some very serious motor vehicle accidents on the beaches there. All of those accidents have happened after 11 pm at night. You can imagine the challenges that are involved; that a large amount of the activity in that area that causes problems occurs between 11 pm and 3 am or 4 am, and involves a fair bit of alcohol often in the case, too. There are some real challenges in managing that site, and it probably will not be successfully managed or dealt with until we can get a permanent presence on the site. We believe we can do that through the development of some campground areas, formalising that area and putting some more structure into the management, and getting some on-site, on-ground permanent presence.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I worked for councils that do not mind writing a fine for someone that stays 15 minutes over a parking limit time. The question was how many infringement notices? You spoke to 200 people; how many infringement notices have been issued?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I will hand over to Mr Phelps again shortly. It is a difficult one, given the land issues, the land tenure, who owns the land, as well as the power of Parks and Wildlife rangers. As Mr Phelps has said, we are working closely with the land corporation as well as the police. I believe that is the right way to go about this, and putting extra effort into how we manage that particular park. Mr Phelps, do you want to add to that?

Mr PHELPS: We have issued no infringements in the patrols we have done there. Our approach has been predominantly educational, including people who drive past the signage on the beach at this stage. The vast majority of people, when stopped by our staff, are extremely cooperative and immediately turn around and head back. I could actually send you some photographs which show this education program, to some degree, clearly is working in that there are some tyre tracks turning around at the spot, at the sign, which has occurred when we have not been there. Whilst there are some ongoing problems with it, we have managed to get generally fairly good cooperation most of the time. Much of the particularly adverse behaviour is happening at times when our staff are not there, and we have no identification of the people involved and no capacity to issue infringement notices.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I do not want to harp on the matter, but I also have a number of photos that clearly show signage 'No Vehicle Access'. It has been going on for some time because I even have a photo here of the former Environment minister, Ms Scrymgour, who was visiting the area. Obviously, the matter has been taking a long time to address and I assume it is going to take much longer to address. Thank you, minister. That is all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3 - oh, sorry, member for Nelson, do you have questions to Output 1.3?

Mr WOOD: Yes, just a question on that because I know the Gunn Point issue has been going on a long time. Have you had any formal meetings with the Land Development Corporation over that plan? I asked this previously because I believe the only solution is for the two sides to get together to try to work out a management plan for the whole beach area.

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Nelson. In February this year, agency representatives from Parks and Wildlife, Lands Administration, and Northern Territory Land Development Corporation met to discuss ways forward, and alleviating the pressures upon the area and easing the angst of local residents. As Mr Phelps said, it was agreed at that meeting that Parks and Wildlife would undertake a basic survey of possible discreet campsites within Tree Point Reserve; contact possible commercial campsite candidates for the Gunn Point area; ascertain the interest in Tree Point Reserve; continue to maintain the liaison with the Northern Territory Land Development Corporation; check on road maintenance issues; and liaise with Northern Territory Police with long weekend patrols and joint patrols.

I am not sure if Mr Phelps wants to add anything further. That was back in February, and meetings have continued since then.

Mr PHELPS: Our Acting Chief Ranger for the area was meeting with possible campground operators this week. There is ongoing activity and discussions to try to come up with a resolution.

Mr WOOD: One of the issues is I have heard from the person who was given an infringement notice that the police will book people on the beach because they regard it as a public street under the definition of the *Traffic Act*. Has there been any discussion with the police in relation to how they hand out infringement notices? I must admit, it is hard if someone takes their quad bike up to the beach on a trailer, puts it on the sand, and then gets booked for not being registered. Technically it may be correct, but I would hope there is some discussion that will allow a sensible use of off-road vehicles there if that is part of the management plan. Are they talking to police on an ongoing basis as well?

Mr PHELPS: Yes, our staff are working very closely with police on the management of this area.

Mr WOOD: Just a few more questions. These ones are from the member for Macdonnell.

Mr HAMPTON: A tag team.

Mr WOOD: We work together. I will read it as she has it here. Minister, can you detail any additional resources provided to park rangers for prescribed burning programs and bush firefighting programs in the current or next financial year? I believe that is something she has also raised in parliament.

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure if that would come under a different output. I suppose we can answer it here regarding bushfires.

Mr WOOD: It is in relation to parks, I think. It talks about park ...

Ms Scrymgour: Would that not be 1.3?

Mr WOOD: It is in reference to management of a park if she is talking about park rangers.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are in 1.3.

Mr HAMPTON: All right. I will ask Mr Phelps to answer that. Before he does, we know we are upon a very big bushfire season, given the rain we have had and the fuel loads out there. It is very important for parks and reserves to prepare and plan for the upcoming bushfire season. The park rangers are part of a working group that was established in January this year, along with land councils and other landholders such as the Cattlemen's Association. Mr Phelps might want to answer more in detail.

Mr WOOD: The question was: have there been any additional resources? That was all.

Mr HAMPTON: In resources, Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: In the 2011-12 Budget there has been an increase of \$2.1m for conservation management on parks through Indigenous employment. Some of that money will go into fire management in Central Australia where we are facing a huge season this coming year. There has been no specific allocation for fire management, but fire management for conservation purposes is clearly a critical role to ensure we do not have wildfires rolling through the central region this coming year. We will be targeting that area as our key priority management action in this coming year.

Mr WOOD: For any more questions, I might ask if we can have a few succinct answers because Independents are on a time limit. How many Central Australian parks have a firefighting trailer on-site?

Mr CHAIRMAN: At the moment, Gerry, we are on track.

Mr WOOD: We have plenty of work.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We might take that question on notice. Do you have that answer, Mr Phelps?

Mr PHELPS: If I could answer that question more generally, every ranger station in Central Australia would have firefighting capacity, usually in the form of a slip-on for a tray, and usually more than one. Each of the Land Cruiser utes we have on parks are equipped for firefighting. By having that capacity in all ranger stations, that gives us firefighting coverage on all of our parks and reserves.

Mr WOOD: Do parks have emergency firefighting plans in place for when there are only one or two staff left on the park when a bushfire occurs?

Mr PHELPS: All our parks have fire plans and emergency fire plans which cover a wide range of contingencies including staff levels and bringing support in from other parks and reserves if required.

Mr WOOD: Do all Northern Territory government rangers receive bush firefighting training through Bushfires NT in the current financial year?

Mr PHELPS: All our rangers in the field will have bush firefighting training - or the aim is to have that. If they are new staff they may not have had it and it will take time for them to have had all the training required. They would not have all have had it in the last financial year, but there are very experienced rangers who would have been trained over the years. Our management aim is to have every park ranger who is out in the field who may be required to respond to a fire, to have that training.

Mr WOOD: What resources are available for aerial bush firefighting in the upcoming financial year?

Mr HAMPTON: That might be a bushfires question. However, we have aerial firefighting resources that can be used across the Territory based in Darwin. A working group was established at the beginning of the year with many of those stakeholder groups on board. Aerial firefighting has been raised in issues and meetings I have had with Bushfire Council NT.

Mr WOOD: Has there been an independent audit of bush firefighting capabilities and resources of parks?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, that might be a bushfires one. However, in relation to the parks, Mr Phelps ...

Mr PHELPS: No, there has not been an independent audit.

Mr WOOD: Minister, \$30.5m is allocated for conservation management programs in Budget Paper No 3, page 209. How much of that is for crocodile management?

Mr HAMPTON: Susan Kirkman might have the answer in relation to that. Can we take that question on notice, member for Nelson, and get back to you?

Question on Notice No 7.6

Mr CHAIRMAN: Repeat the question, please.

Mr WOOD: \$30.5m is allocated to conservation management programs under Budget Paper No 3, page 209. How much of that is for crocodile management?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.6. As I am sure many of you are old hands, when you are giving an answer to a question on notice, would you please quote the number of the question on notice.

Mr WOOD: The next question may be the same outcome. What grants have been given to the private crocodile industry in 2008-09, 2009-10, and to date in 2010-11? Were any of these grants to Indigenous organisations?

Mr HAMPTON: Happy to take that on board. Maybe we can take that question on notice?

Mr PHELPS: No, I do not think there have been any grants.

Mr WOOD: No grants to either the industry or to Indigenous organisations?

Mr PHELPS: No.

Mr WOOD: Okay. Can you tell me how many crocodiles were shot - not trapped and relocated - in 2009-10, and to date 2010-11, and what happens to the carcasses?

Mr HAMPTON: I will take that one on notice as well.

Question on Notice No 7.7.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat that, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: How many crocodiles were shot - not trapped and relocated - in 2009-10 and to date, 2010-11, and what happens to the carcasses?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.7.

Mr WOOD: The next one is a simpler one. How are saltwater crocodiles entering Manton Dam and what are you going to do to stop them?

Mr HAMPTON: I am aware of that issue, member for Nelson. For me, as a minister, public safety is, ultimately, the main thing. We have done, and are doing, night checking, and that is the best way to find if there are crocodiles in there or not, with the red eyes. Public safety is very important. We have our Crocwise strategy. For how we know they are getting there, I will pass on to Mr Phelps.

Mr WOOD: How are they getting there?

Mr HAMPTON: Obviously, with the high rainfall we have had, there are lot more on the move.

Mr PHELPS: During the Wet Season, Manton Dam joins up with Darwin River Dam. They are moving in from Darwin River Dam. We have traps between the two, but the connection is there and they are able to move into the main Darwin dam quite easily and, from there, move into Manton. Once the water levels drop in the Dry Season, that connection is broken and the likelihood of them getting in after that is much lower.

Mr WOOD: Any options like a fence of each unit where the two catchments meet?

Mr PHELPS: It is highly unlikely a physical barrier would be able to be constructed across the width of that area that joins up.

Mr WOOD: They are all the question I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes Output 1.3, Conservation Management Programs.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES
Output 2.1 Land Management

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move on to Output Group 2.0, Natural Resources, Output 2.1, Land Management. The member for Brennan has the call.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have jumped over a few questions, given the time. Tender No D11/0059 between NRETAS and Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticultural Ltd in the sum of \$148 500 was to develop and document effective methods of engagement between water planners and Indigenous stakeholders. Can you explain it to me, because this is a lot of money to pay to, essentially, have government employees speak to Indigenous people. You identify as an Indigenous man; we are speaking pretty well here – effectively, I hope. Could you please explain how spending \$148 500 is a good use of public money?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Diana Leeder to have a look at that. If we do not have the details on that particular tender, we are happy to take that question on notice.

Dr LEEDER: Diana Leeder, Executive Director Natural Resources. I believe that comes under water planning, and I might need to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.8

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you repeat that question please.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, tender No D11/0059 between NRETAS and Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticultural Ltd in the sum of \$148 500 was to develop and document effective methods of engagement between water planners and Indigenous stakeholders. Can you please explain how this is a good use of public money?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.8.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, given the Top End has had a record Wet Season and, indeed, even in Central Australia we have seen record rainfall last year, I am worried the land management budget has decreased this year. What guarantees can you provide that our hard work in bushfire services and volunteer groups will have resources to cover what could turn out to be a record fire season?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure where you have seen that it has decreased in the land management natural resources budget. I have met with Bushfires NT Council on numerous occasions and convened a meeting late last year with the Cattlemen's Association, Bushfires NT staff, and with the land council in Alice Springs.

Mr CHANDLER: There would be plenty of volunteers now.

Mr HAMPTON: Volunteers outnumber many of the Bushfire NT Council workers. In resources, in preparing and planning for the upcoming bushfire season, we are well placed, but we cannot be complacent. For the details, I am not sure if Dr Leeder has anything to add to that.

Dr LEEDER: In funding for actually fighting wildfires, whatever we require to do at the time, we make those resources available. In the Bushfires NT funding for this year, there has not been a decrease in the funding available for grants to the bushfire volunteer brigades and to the support for volunteer organisations and equipment.

Mr CHANDLER: What resources are available in Central Australia, specifically in regard to vehicles to construct fire breaks?

Mr HAMPTON: Regarding particularly Central Australia, I might have to take that one on board. As I stated previously, many volunteers work long hours, particularly through our regional areas, and are very important in preparing for bushfires. In volunteer vehicle replacements, there are eight per year, and that has not changed from the last financial year. In fact, it may have gone up. In the 2011-12 Budget for volunteer vehicle replacements, there is \$450 000. In the equipment subsidies, there is \$27 000, brigade operations \$508 000, and protective equipment \$11 000, giving a total of \$996 000 in Budget 2011-12.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, moving on to some weed control. I have had a number of inquiries from landowners since the release of the draft Native Vegetation Act. Although there will be time to deal with this in parliament, I have a couple of questions I am hoping to get clarification on. On reading the draft, I cannot help but consider we will never see another mine approved in the NT due to the fact they will never be able to get a land clearing permit. What do you have to say?

Mr HAMPTON: Can you repeat that, I cannot quite understand just what you said?

Mr CHANDLER: On reading the draft, I cannot help but consider we will never see another mine approved in the NT, due to the fact it is probably unlikely they will get a land clearing permit.

Mr HAMPTON: What acts, what draft are you talking about?

Dr LEEDER: Native vegetation.

Mr HAMPTON: Native vegetation - is that under this output? The Native Vegetation Act is a very important reform for the Northern Territory. We have gone out to lengthy consultation with the industry. We have put out a draft exposure bill to stakeholders, to the Northern Territory public. Given the situation with live exports the Cattlemen's Association is facing at the moment, I have actually extended the native vegetation public consultation period to the end of this month, which was a request put to me by Mr Luke Bowen. I have acknowledged they are facing tough times. It has been a long process, but native vegetation is an important reform we are going to continue with. I am not sure if Dr Leeder would like to add anything further to that.

Dr LEEDER: In the mining activities we have been in consultation with the Department of Resources and with the Minerals Council about how approvals for native vegetation clearing would be dealt with under the Native Vegetation Act, and are working progressively towards an acceptable solution that acknowledges the need for mining and the need for certain levels of clearing for development. The Native Vegetation Act is about clearing in the right place at the right time, and allowing for development to go ahead in those areas, but for protecting native vegetation in areas where development is not essential.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, have you considered the restricting impact this will have on future agricultural development in the Northern Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: We are actually working with the agricultural industry on this. As I said, we have put out a draft exposure bill to all stakeholder groups such as the agricultural industry. We have gone through quite a number of steps before we put out the Native Vegetation Act draft exposure bill, including our experiences through the Daly River in adaptation planning and land clearing caps, which are all very important. We have reached this point through the experience with the Daly River moratorium. We have worked with industry on that and we will continue to work with industry, whether it is the agricultural industry, the Cattlemen's Association or the general public. Mr Grant might want to add something further.

Mr GRANT: The Native Vegetation Act does not ban clearing. There is nothing at all in the Native Vegetation Act that bans clearing. It is simply designed to ensure the clearing happens in the right way, in the right place, and the right time, because we have had some very bad experiences with clearing in the Territory and in other places. It does it in a very reasonable way. There is much consultation going on for the people who have concerns about the Native Vegetation Act. To say it will stop mining or agriculture is simply ridiculous. It is designed so the clearing is done in the right place, at the right time, in the right way.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you please advise if, through this act, private and leasehold land is treated the same as Aboriginal land in regard to land clearing?

Mr HAMPTON: The Native Vegetation Act is there for all Territorians. We are consulting broadly across all different parts of the community. There is a process through the environmental assessment and through land clearing at the moment that everyone has to go through. I am not sure if Dr Leeder would want to add anything further to that, but that process is there for everyone to go through.

Dr LEEDER: The Native Vegetation Act is tenure neutral; it covers all land in the Northern Territory irrespective of tenure.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I want to touch on one thing quickly. We are talking about a draft exposure bill. That is fine. I will allow the questions but the test of relevance we use is anything going to the operations or financial positions to the departments. A draft exposure bill that has not even been introduced yet cannot go to the operations or the financial positions of the department. That does not exist yet; it is a draft. It has not been introduced. I am going to allow the questions. I do not think there are any problems with them, and people are answering the questions; that is fine. I should touch upon the issue of relevance as this is not a bill that has been introduced yet.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, the draft appears to provide the department with increasing powers. That is my reading. I would like to understand better what appeals process there is in regard to the decisions that will be put in place. At any stage, can a minister step in and overturn a decision?

Mr HAMPTON: Regarding the detail of the draft bill, I will ask Dr Leeder to make a comment on that.

Dr LEEDER: I do not have the exposure draft in front of me with the detail of the provisions, but I know much work has gone into making sure there is considerable ability to appeal. That has been one of the areas covered in the public consultation. As has previously been said, it is an exposure draft and the public consultation has not yet closed. Any of the issues that have been raised will be taken into account in providing advice on what the final form of the bill will be.

Mr CHAIRMAN: At that point we are just going to take a quick five-minute break and will return at 6.05 pm.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will start again. The Output is 2.1, Land Management, and the member for Brennan has the call.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I only have one more question on the land clearing. I appreciate it is at the draft stage; we will be debating this in parliament in future. One area that concerns me is the fact that if someone was to remove a branch from a tree, it is considered clearing and someone could, effectively, be fined for that. The same thing if you have a tree where a dead branch has fallen onto the ground. Under the current draft, does that imply someone would be fined for cutting up and burning a broken, dead branch?

Mr HAMPTON: That is pretty presumptuous. It is an exposure draft and, if you have those concerns I am happy to give you a briefing. It is an exposure draft. It is out there; put in a submission if you like. I am not going to get into those hypothetical situations you are raising.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, it talks about branches of trees being part of what is considered land clearing.

Mr HAMPTON: At the moment, with the current assessment processes, it is 200 ha or more that requires some formal applications in the current land clearing guidelines. Those guidelines are there. Maybe Dr Leeder can answer the detail. However, you are getting caught up here a bit. It is an exposure draft. If you have those concerns, put in a submission. Dr Leeder might like to add to that.

Dr LEEDER: Much of the detail around the actual clearing provisions is exactly the same as in the current land clearing guidelines in definitions and so on. So, the interpretation and the way in which those are applied would flow through to subsequent legislation. There has been much consultation around those guidelines and about making them effective. I have made a note of that as being a concern that has been raised by you, member for Brennan, so when we are looking at the detail and the explanation ...

Mr CHANDLER: I will have to move an amendment to save the branches.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are not going to ban the camp fires; put it out there. Member for Nelson, Output 2.1

Mr WOOD: Minister, on page 19 and 20 of the Agribusiness industry book, there is a column 1.1 which says:

Expand market options for Territory products. Review existing markets and identify further opportunities (DoR and NRETAS).

Further down it says:

Analyse feasibility of proposed products and markets (DoR and NRETAS).

What involvement does your department have in working out what our future market options or expanding market options for the agricultural business? It is in this document.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I am aware of that document. For the detail of what you are asking, I will ask Dr Leeder to answer.

Dr LEEDER: The department has been working closely with the Department of Resources on this, and on assessing soil and water resources with agricultural and horticultural potential, particularly in the area around the 20 growth towns. It has recently completed a preliminary assessment of that for discussion with the Department of Resources. In that, they will then be able to provide advice on particular crops for particular areas where we have the soil and water information from them.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. This says 'expand market options'. It does not say, for instance, land capability. This, to me, sounds like we go out and see where we can sell a few more watermelons, or if we can sell different coloured watermelons. It does not sound like it is an NRETAS ...

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant has something to add.

Mr GRANT: Member for Nelson, it is the carbon economy stuff that that would refer to, in NRETAS' job in developing markets. We have some very promising projects on the go, so I imagine the marketing part refers to carbon projects.

Mr WOOD: If I read this correctly, you are saying a Territory product will be - and this is an Agribusiness product - eating carbon.

Mr GRANT: Carbon is recognised in there as one of the land uses. The carbon market, while it is a good example, should not be underestimated in income for marginal land.

Mr WOOD: I am not denying that but, as I said to someone before, we have to eat. I am not a koala so, as much as I love native vegetation, I hope I am not going to be stuck with gum leaves and carbon for breakfast. I move on.

Part of that important strategy in regard to land clearing, I presume, is this section on land capability. You are looking at monitoring sites assessed within a certain time frame. I presume that is to do with assessment of land capabilities. Here it says that in 2009-10 only 57% of sites were assessed, and that was due to difficulty in recruiting qualified staff. Why is it difficult to get people to do this job, and will this not set back any proper assessment of the capability of land in the Northern Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: I will ask Dr Leeder to answer that.

Dr LEEDER: We have been looking at our monitoring program and more current ways of delivering that using technology, as well as having the staff available for it. I do not believe there is a disjunct between those two but, in some years, it is more difficult to assess as much of the land.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that your questions? Member for Brainting.

Mr GILES: Minister, in relation to the Bushfires Council in Central Australia, can you tell me how that is resourced, how often they meet, and who is on the Bushfires Council?

Mr HAMPTON: Happy to get back to Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: I am not sure I have the list of the members of the Bushfires Council with me. The Bushfires Council is a statutory authority set up under the *Bushfires Act* and is provided secretariat resources through the department, through Bushfires NT. It comprises members appointed by the minister. The convention usually has it that the chair of regional committees in each of the areas is a member of the council. If I do not have that before the end of the evening, if you wish, I can provide that.

Question on Notice No 7.9

Mr HAMPTON: Will you please repeat that question? I will take it on notice.

Mr GILES: Minister, who is on the Bushfires Council of Central Australia and how often do they meet?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.9. We had some experience last week where some questions were asked and guarantees made they would get back in that session, and it just got messy for Hansard. Questions and answers were done, but it was not very easy to track, so it is better if we take it on notice.

Mr GILES: Minister, are all the positions filled?

Mr HAMPTON: On the Bushfires NT, Central Australia, or ...

Mr GILES: Central Australia.

Mr HAMPTON: All right. Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: Is that the Bushfires NT staffing you are asking about?

Mr GILES: No. We will do staffing at the same time. I mean the appointments by the minister, but also about the staff. If the staffing is not filled, what has been undertaken to fill that?

Dr LEEDER: In the Bushfires Council, I believe a number of the positions are in the process of being appointed at the moment. The council positions run out at a particular time, and then there are nominations called for the chair and various others. That is an active process at the moment.

Regarding the staff, some time ago approval was given to fill the three vacancies in Central Australia. My advice today is the advertising has been completed, the recruitment is active, and we should have staff on the ground within a week or two.

Mr GILES: Minister, are those three positions full-time positions or are they only for 12 months or a certain period of time? Are they ongoing full-time positions? Are three the full complement, or what is the full complement of staff?

Mr HAMPTON: Regarding those three positions - and Dr Leeder might want to add to this - I am aware of those positions. It was raised with me during a meeting with the Bushfires Council this year. I understand two of those positions were particularly hard to fill in attracting people to Alice Springs because of accommodation issues in Alice Springs. As you know, there are some issues in finding staff accommodation. The person in Barkly had some long-term health issues that were related to that position not being filled as well. I am not sure if Dr Leeder has anything to add.

Dr LEEDER: The positions, I believe, are for about 18 months, rather than permanent. Because they are Central Australian ones they are to see the current predicted period of the fire season. It may be beyond that; if the fuel loads are still considerable those positions would be extended. Otherwise, the positions would probably revert to either the northern area or to some other area where we required them.

Mr GILES: It makes it difficult for people to plan their lives when they only have a part-time or short-term jobs.

Minister, do you have a plan in place for Barkly and Central Australia for fire management at the moment? Has it been implemented and what resources have been put towards fire management regarding building firebreaks and so forth? I am sure you are aware there are many pastoralists across the Barkly and Central Australia who have significant concerns that fire hazard is a major threat. There are opinions out there that you are not doing your role in fire management and preparedness for the fire that could come at any point in time.

Mr Chandler: Very true. Good question.

Mr HAMPTON: It is a good question. As I said, I met with various landholders last year in December. We are fully aware of the upcoming bushfire season with El Niña and the unusual Wet Season we have had with the floods. There is going to be a great deal of fuel load out there. Central Australia is drying out every day and I am very aware of that. We had a meeting in December last year with landowners. That is important because it is the responsibility of all landowners to be prepared and to plan for a fire, whether they are living in a rural area in the Top End or a large remote pastoral station.

We have our role to play, and the department has come to me with a fire management plan which I asked for last year, which is for working with the pastoralists, the Cattlemen's Association and the land councils. There has been significant training undertaken by Indigenous rangers over the last six months or so which we have been involved with in preparing those rangers and getting them trained for fighting fires. As Dr Leeder and Mr Phelps have said, in our responsibility of managing parks and reserves, there are park rangers who have all the equipment ready. In the pastoral leases, it is the cattlemen's responsibility, but we are working with them as part of this working group. There have been a number of firebreaks that have already been put in place particularly through Larapinta. Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: I cannot give you the detail of exactly how many firebreaks, but I can give more detail from what the minister has been saying. Our staff have visited most of the properties, or spoken with most of the landholders in Central Australia and the Barkly area. We have been actively involved with the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association in offering to provide training and forums for their members, particularly for those landholders who have had staff turnover and have not experienced a fire in Central Australia.

We are working closely with the government business managers in the shires and outlying communities which are seeking some assistance by way of funds for basic firefighting equipment in the shires, outstations and communities. We are also working with the landholders to ensure their communications are compliant or able to match with ours and their equipment is up-to-date; for example, couplings match on different pieces of equipment. It is a very active program ...

Mr GILES: Thanks, Dr Leeder. I am more concerned about preparing to avoid fire rather than putting fires out.

Dr LEEDER: That is advice around firebreaks and the basic fire plans each property should have. We have provided that information; made it widely available and encouraged pastoralists to take advantage of the expertise of our staff in assistance with that. The NTCA has been concerned about the take-up amongst their members and has undertaken to continue to interact with them to try to draw to their attention the need for firebreaks.

Mr GILES: Minister, who does firebreaks? Is it shire councils, pastoralists or NT government staff? What equipment do they use, particularly remembering shires are now supposed to take control of grading of the roads, not the pastoralists? What equipment is being removed from communities these days from to the shires? What equipment do you own or does the Bushfires Council of Central Australian and Barkly have available to it to do firebreaks?

Mr HAMPTON: There are a number of things in that question I am happy to take on notice and get back to you. It is the responsibility of landowners to look after their property. In relation to pastoral leases, it is the responsibility of the pastoral owner, the station person, to look after their property. The same as if it is a land trust - it is up to the land trustees as well as the land council to look after that. If it is a park or reserve, it is our responsibility, and our rangers are out there doing that now. There are a number of levels of responsibility in relation to equipment. I am happy to take that on notice and get back to you.

Mr GILES: Let me make it shorter and we can put in on notice and that will be the end of it. What grader or clearing type of equipment is available to build firebreaks and clear land? You could probably answer that now.

Mr HAMPTON: Happy to take that.

Dr LEEDER: Within Central Australia, Bushfires NT has a grader and loader at Tennant Creek, the Department of Resources has a grader that should be available, and we are negotiating with the Commonwealth for some assistance for some of the shires. Currently, we have at least a grader and a loader and a number of other smaller units for doing the work. However, it is the responsibility of the relevant landholder.

Mr HAMPTON: As part of the working group I have asked people to work together. If there is equipment in the Top End we need to get down there, let us do that. Whether it is the mobile headquarters, the base we can use, get it down to Tennant Creek and base them there. We have to work together.

Mr GILES: For clarification, there is one grader from Elliott down for Barkly and Central Australia?

Dr LEEDER: Yes, and a loader at Tennant Creek.

Mr HAMPTON: That is from Bushfires NT.

Dr LEEDER: Yes, that is Bushfires NT.

Mr GILES: They have one grader?

Dr LEEDER: Yes.

Mr GILES: For about 1.3 million square kilometres?

Dr LEEDER: That is Bushfires NT, but the property owners within those areas also have equipment.

Mr HAMPTON: And the shires.

Dr LEEDER: And the shires.

Mr GILES: The property owners still have them because the shires do the work. Thanks, no more questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Water Management

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move now to Output 2.2, Water Management.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, some of these questions will only need a yes or no answer. Last year during Estimates, we were speaking about the long and winding road relating to the Mataranka water allocation plan. At that time, the advice was you were very close to finalising that issue. Can you please update me and advise if that process is now turned off?

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to the Mataranka water allocation plan, I can give you a bit of background ...

Mr CHANDLER: I have plenty of background.

Mr HAMPTON: The plan for the Tindal limestone aquifer at Mataranka is funded under the Australian Water Fund. There has been much ongoing public debate around the water allocated to each user in that region. I can say regarding tourism, irrigated agriculture, and horticulture, Mataranka is completely dependent on groundwater resources. Regarding the specific engagement there is the Water Advisory Committee there that has been involved and talking to the community about the water allocation plan. For some of the more detailed issues on that, Dr Diana Leeder may want to add to that.

Dr LEEDER: It is expected that the planning process will be completed later this year. The draft plan should go out for public comment within the next month or so.

Mr CHANDLER: My understanding is this time last year, there was some outstanding court action that had been taken against government in regard to water allocation in the Katherine/Tindal aquifer. Is that action still pending or has it been resolved?

Mr HAMPTON: I will ask Dr Diana Leeder to answer.

Dr LEEDER: Most of the issues around the Katherine plan have been resolved, but there is still court action pending in relation to some appeals around licences for Mataranka.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, in regard to the Katherine/Tindal aquifer, for water allocation could you please advise how the determination is made regarding the division of the split, the 70:30 for conservation, Indigenous use, versus water allocation available for developers or landowners? How is that decision made?

Mr HAMPTON: For that detail, I will ask Dr Leeder to answer that.

Dr LEEDER: Normally, the position is that 80% of the water is reserved for the environment and 20% is available for consumptive use, in the absence of any science to allow that figure to be varied. Within the Katherine allocation and planning process, the science that was available allowed that to be determined to be a 30:70 split. It is always based on science and comes from the basic position of 80:20 unless a change from that can be substantiated.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Dr Leeder. Minister, that explains the next question in regard to the Ooloo aquifer where you use the 80:20 split. Was the science different on Ooloo over Tindal? Why was there a difference?

Mr HAMPTON: Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: That is probably the case for it because we always go from the 80:20 as the precautionary principle, then, as more knowledge is gleaned, things can be changed.

Mr CHANDLER: At some stage, minister, could I ask for a briefing on that? Just to get a better understanding of how that is different between the two aquifers?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, happy to take that on board and organise a briefing for you.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, the recent Coroner's recommendation to evacuate Mt Bundy has caused great consternation in the community, spreading across all people who own properties with bores in the region. I applaud your decision to offer free water testing, as I am sure this will alleviate some people's concerns. Can you confirm if all new bores are tested for heavy metals such as lead, mercury, cadmium, nickel, chromium and arsenic? Is that a standard test?

Mr HAMPTON: Regarding Mt Bundy, I went on the public record saying it was a very unfortunate and sad thing that has happened there. The community is a good community which relies heavily on tourism and being able to drink safe water. We are acutely aware of the issues there. For the detail you have asked, I will ask Dr Leeder to answer.

Dr LEEDER: A bore construction permit is required for all new bores within a water control district, and permits are issued with a requirement for the new bore owner to test the water for heavy metals in areas of concern. That means in any of those areas where we already have some knowledge about heavy metals, then we will make that a requirement that the bore owner tests for that. Bores on private land are private water supplies, so the responsibility for determining the water quality rests with the landowner. We certainly make them aware they should test for that.

Mr CHANDLER: My understanding is standard tests cost around \$90, with additional testing for heavy metals can cost as much as \$270, although - and these are commercial rates I have researched - I found one lab able to provide heavy metals testing for as little as \$22 on top of the standard rate. Do you consider heavy metals should be included as a standard requirement?

Mr HAMPTON: In these free bore testings for landholders - and I will get Dr Leeder to answer the other details - I have anticipated that \$200 each per sample is the cost, which is why we have announced \$200 000 for free bore sampling. For the other detail, Dr Leeder may want to answer.

Dr LEEDER: With the bore testing project we are running at the moment, the free testing will cover the full range of heavy metals. Once again, we recommend to people that they have their water tested for whatever is relevant to that area. In some areas, it might be for bacterial indicators, and in other areas for heavy metals determined by the geological formation.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, can you please advise whether testing for arsenic in bores at different times of the year could affect the results?

Mr HAMPTON: Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: My understanding is that volumetrically it can affect the results, which is why we continue to advise people they should have an ongoing bore testing program if they are relying on a private bore for drinking water.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Dr Leeder, you have just answered my next question. You are giving free testing now, would you consider free testing in six months, or at the peak of the Dry, or would you just recommend that people with private bores follow up?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, it is important we maintain that responsibility to the landowner and to the owner of that bore, given the circumstances we have had at Mt Bundy. That is why we have come forward and announced this free bore testing, but responsibility should be with the landowner.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any more questions to Water Management, Output 2.2.

Mr WOOD: I am happy to hear you say if someone puts a private bore down, it is a private water supply. If it is a private water supply, you cannot charge us for water; that is good to hear. Minister, you might guess I have some questions regarding some definitions in relation to the *Water Act* that come from some of the issues related to the Pelly Road/Lorikeet Court area in the Herbert subdivision. It is for my clarification as well, that I need to know the reasons for some of these comments. On 25 February this year, your department declared that a lagoon in this subdivision was a depression and not a waterway within the meaning of act. Minister, can you tell me when a lagoon is not a waterway and when it is?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Nelson. We had a few conversations over this particular issue when we looked at a number of areas of the *Water Act* in discharge licensing. I know there have been issues. I will get Dr Leeder to answer the detail of that.

Dr LEEDER: Under the *Water Act*, a waterway is something into which current flows in and out. In the particular area in question, the depression, water rises into it when the water table rises, and water lies in it at particular times. It is not a waterway in that sense of the definition of the *Water Act*.

Mr WOOD: Minister, if that is not a waterway - and I do not agree with that response but I am not having a go at Dr Leeder there - what would you call Wadhams Lagoon? It is called a lagoon. You drive through it if you are driving down Whitewood Road, Howard Springs. What do you call that lagoon, which is filled up by storm water as the water table rises, and it goes down again in the Dry Season and disappears? If you are going to make this statement that this lagoon is not a waterway, then please tell me which lagoons in the rural area are not waterways. That means, according to what has been going on in this discussion, that anyone can just drain them, which I believe would be a disaster.

The department has made a statement which, to me, leaves a lot to be desired in the way we protect our water in our lagoons and our wetlands. I know the lagoon we are talking about does flow out, and water flows in because it is in a small catchment, so water has to flow in it. I can tell you which block of land it flows out to. Even though they are doing contours, it flows out because it fills up and goes somewhere. There might not be a creek which goes out one end, or goes in the other end. Aren't we stretching the definition of waterway? If your department says that a water body is not a waterway anymore, then you are leaving it open for the destruction of some of our smaller wetlands, especially in the rural area.

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass to Dr Leeder but there are also planning issues around this, member for Nelson, as you well and truly know. Regarding the definition, I am happy to ...

Mr WOOD: I am sticking clearly to Water Resources responsibility. For the planning, I will ask the minister tomorrow.

Mr HAMPTON: Okay.

Mr WOOD: I am trying to get some clear definition. I will tell you what shocked me. Someone told me this lagoon, which I had walked through many years ago and had asked for it to be protected, was not protected during the planning process. Then I found out it is not called a waterway and someone can drain it without permission from your department because it does not come under the *Water Act*. That knocked me over because I thought for all the effort we make to try to protect our watercourses that was a decision that requires a good explanation.

If, technically, you think this is not a waterway that needs protecting, then I will go back to the legislation and I will put some amendments through to ensure those areas are given reasonable protection. Do you believe, minister, that is a fair definition of not being a waterway, as Dr Leeder said?

Mr HAMPTON: For the definition and explanation, I will ask Dr Leeder to comment.

Dr LEEDER: I believe some of the issues which were raised over the flooding in the rural area recently, that particular lagoon and the definition of waterway around that, and what is a waterway in terms of the other lagoons, is subject of ongoing discussion. I would have to take on notice the question as to which lagoons in the rural areas are waterways as per the definition, and which ones are not. I believe the department is mindful of the need to ensure meaningful wetlands are protected, and to continue to revisit this particular issue.

Question on Notice No 7.10

Mr WOOD: I will ask that question and I will relate it to Litchfield Shire if that is okay, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, you are fine.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you provide an analysis of all wetlands and lagoons in the Litchfield Shire as to whether they are, under the definition given, waterways or not? I believe it is really important.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That was question No. 7.10.

Mr WOOD: If I could also add to that, 'and if not, an explanation as to why not?'

Mr CHAIRMAN: Just a question, because that sounds like a great deal of work. Estimates Committee answers needed to be in by 8 August. That is all.

Mr WOOD: I am happy for an extension of that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes. It just might be something, with goodwill, member for Nelson, might be something that continues on beyond.

Mr WOOD: I believe it is an important environmental issue.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am not denying the importance of it. It just sounded like a great deal of work, but I could be wrong. I am just making sure you can deal with it in the time frame.

Dr LEEDER: It is a piece of work and we may not be able to provide the full answer to that. We can probably provide an answer that says what the department is doing to assess the state of the waterways within Litchfield.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am sure if it is all done in goodwill, member for Nelson, you will be happy with that.

Mr WOOD: Yes. I will need to ask a couple more questions in relation to this. It is important. On 21 March, minister, your department, when asked whether you need a discharge licence to pump water from the lagoon, said it was not a waterway, and the water being pumped was storm water. Storm water, by definition, is water that came from a storm. Can you tell me of any lagoons that do not get either topped up or filled up by anything else but rain?

What difference would it make if it was storm water? Storm water fills up the lagoon. Wadhams Lagoon gets filled up by storm water. We have ephemeral lagoons right throughout the rural area and that is the only way they get topped up. They stay up because the water table is up and, then, they go away. What difference does it make whether something is a waterway, or whether you can pump water simply because it is called storm water?

Dr LEEDER: I believe the issue is not so much around whether or not it was storm water or overland flow or how the water got in there, but the fact it was determined not to be a waterway under the *Water Act* and, therefore, if it is not a waterway, no discharge licence was required under the *Water Act*. The advice provided at the time was no permit or licence was required under the *Water Act*. However, that did not mean that other legislation or other requirements need not be met.

Mr WOOD: I totally agree with the answer I received from the minister:

Has the department issued a discharge licence for the water being pumped from the depression? If the department has not, reasons the depression is not a waterway and is not subject to the Water Act.

The water being pumped out is being discharged as storm water.

I understand there is another act which might require it if a drain is built that would come under the *Planning Act*. According to that, Mr Chrisp, the developer - I do not think he would mind me saying that because everyone out there knows who he is - has every right to pump every ounce of water out of that lagoon because it does not come under the *Water Act*. Is that what that means?

Dr LEEDER: That is correct.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the question that comes from that is: in the same response when asked about who owns the water - and consider this lagoon has been subdivided into about six blocks - your department said water is not owned by the residents. Well, who owns it? Who is the owner of the water? If one person on that subdivision decides he wants to water his pumpkins, another person who has water on his block decides he wants to water his tomatoes, and you say no residents own the water, who owns the water?

Dr LEEDER: The Crown owns the water rights.

Mr WOOD: If the Crown owns the water rights, how is Mr Chrisp allowed to pump water owned by you?

Dr LEEDER: I am sorry, I would have to take this on notice. It is becoming a fairly technical debate around definitions. I appreciate the seriousness of it, so I do not want to mislead you by my responses. I would need to take it on notice to be able to provide a clear definition.

Question on Notice No 7.11

Mr CHAIRMAN: Not a problem. Do you want to repeat the question?

Mr WOOD: I will try to ask the question so it makes sense to the people listening.

Minister, in the case of a water body that has been subdivided into a number of private blocks, your department has said the residents do not own that water. Who owns the water, and who is required to get permission to pump that water?

Mr HAMPTON: Happy to take that question on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That will be question No 7.11.

Mr WOOD: In relation to this, minister, an e-mail on 3 June 2011 states that besides a vegetation survey, the developer is commissioning a surveyor to map contours of the lagoon with the preliminary concept of a drain to lower the water levels. Do you support the lowering of the water levels of the lagoon? Has your department done an environmental study to see what effect this would have on the vegetation of the lagoon and to assess the recharge value of the lagoon?

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to the environmental assessment ...

Mr WOOD: This was a beautiful lagoon.

Mr HAMPTON: ... there are a number of triggers in planning, notice of intent of what they are meaning to do. I have not seen that. It is very technical and is becoming a very complex set of questions. Dr Leeder might want to add to that.

Dr LEEDER: In relation to the ongoing questions in that area, the Ombudsman is conducting an inquiry into the decision-making around it as part of the processes to determine where to go next. The developer has had a survey done of the contours, and we have had a vegetation mapping exercise done to provide to the Department of Lands and Planning. I cannot answer anything further than that at the moment.

Mr WOOD: I suppose what I am ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want that last question on notice?

Mr WOOD: No, it is okay. I need to ask, minister, if you would support – it does not have to be this lagoon, but there is a principle here - the lowering of water levels of the lagoon? You are in charge of Water Resources, the vegetation, of recharging of the Howard East bore field. Would you think it would be common sense and a proper process that before you gave any approvals to drain water from this lagoon you would have done at least a minimal environmental study on the impacts of lowering the water table? Not only on the vegetation, it could also be on the fauna and whether you are affecting the recharge of the lagoon.

I have been told by the person who has been doing the vegetation survey - and I know him, and I was not asking him to give me a policy opinion. He has been through that lagoon and he said it is a very peculiar piece of country. He said - and I am not holding him to it - he thought this could be a sink hole. In other words, it recharges the aquifer. Surely, you could ensure, before any decisions are made, that all those processes are checked, because this is the department NRETAS, and I would expect it to do that.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, we have a set of questions on notice here. I will undertake to go away, get the advice from Dr Leeder and the department, and get back to you. I cannot undertake here, now, to make those decisions ...

Mr WOOD: No, that is all right.

Mr HAMPTON: You can fully understand that. I will take those questions on notice and get back to you with advice from my department.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do you have any more questions to that output?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2, Water Management.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE **Output 3.1 – Environment and Sustainability**

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move onto Output Group 3.0, Environment and Heritage, Output 3.1, Environment and Sustainability.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, last year, we were speaking about raw or partially treated sewage entering Darwin Harbour from a small creek behind Berrimah prison. At the time, when asked about a discharge licence, you said there was no sewage coming from the prison. Just to remind you, that is the sign that is on that little creek. Last year at the Estimates, I was advised there was a process in train for a discharge licence. I am interested in how far we are into the process. Is there a discharge licence in place for the Berrimah sewage farm?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I know my colleague, the Minister for Health, was also asked some questions in relation to this particular subject. It has been a very complex issue. We take the issue of the health of our harbour very seriously, and particularly take advice of scientists.

I welcome some staff with me. I ask Mr Matt Darcey to answer that in more detail regarding those discharge licences. I also welcome Mr Paul Purdon. Mr Darcey, if you could just state your name.

Mr DARCEY: Matt Darcey, Executive Director, Environment and Heritage. My understanding is we discussed with Corrections about issuing a waste discharge licence for that facility. The discharge was a one-off; it was to do with a levee bank that had overflowed. Their intention was not to allow discharge in an ongoing manner and, therefore, we decided not to go ahead with the waste discharge licence.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay, thank you. One further question on that: if it happens again, are they in breach of the act and could they be fined?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Darcey.

Mr DARCEY: I will have to take that on notice. I am not sure.

Mr HAMPTON: Question on notice, Mr Chairman.

Question on Notice No 7.12

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr CHANDLER: In regard to the process of a discharge licence for the Berrimah prison, now that that licence has not been issued, if they permit waste water to flow into that creek and, therefore, into the harbour, will they be in breach of the act and could they be fined?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.12.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I am hoping this next question is not going to - I am not trying to be a smart Alec; I have some information here. I am just looking for some advice in regard to your understanding of the federal government's carbon tax. Please forgive my ignorance on this, but can you please detail when they are determining the weight? Is it based on carbon or carbon dioxide?

Mr PURDON: Paul Purdon, Environment Protection and Sustainability. My understanding is it is based on carbon dioxide, hence the term carbon dioxide equivalent.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. I was exposed to a very interesting word the other day, Avogadro's number - and I will read it out for Hansard - it is 6.022145×10^{23} . It talks about carbon atoms being 12 gm, and oxygen atoms being 18 gm; a mole - learning all these new words - 48 gm is one carbon atom and two oxygen atoms. So, there is more carbon in a tonne of carbon than in a tonne of carbon dioxide. I was just hoping to discover - and I believe it has been clarified here - if it will be on carbon dioxide not carbon, when they determine the rates?

Mr PURDON: Yes.

Mr CHANDLER: Beautiful. Minister, I personally think - and pardon the pun - too much oxygen is being wasted on the whole climate change debate when we should be getting on with the job and doing all we can to reduce pollution. I need to ask you if you think that governments of all persuasions are failing to explain the science of climate change because the argument itself is too complicated?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure what output group we are on, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Standing Order 112 does ...

Mr HAMPTON: I know Climate Change is coming up later ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, but questions should also not ask for an opinion. You might want to rephrase that.

Mr CHANDLER: All right. Given that the argument of climate change and how it affects our environment is complicated, can government do more to educate our students and our schools when it comes to this basic science?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before you answer, minister, there is a Climate Change output coming up which involves completely different witnesses and a different department. It might be more relevant to ask it there.

Mr CHANDLER: It will actually suit better, so I will put it in there.

Minister, while we are on education at the moment, on 5 June 2011, you announced 12 schools sharing green grants through the 2011-12 EnvironmeNT Grants program. Can you please detail how long it takes for these schools to receive these grants?

Mr HAMPTON: Those grants are very important. Mr Darcey may have some more detail on that. Educating our younger Territorians about the importance of protecting the environment is vitally important. This government's allocation of EnvironmeNT Grants to our schools is a very important part of our environmental credentials. I am not sure if you have something, Mr Darcey or Ms Kirkman? Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: All I can say is, if you are aware of any delays with grants getting to schools, please let us know and we will ensure, if there are any issues, we will have a look at them.

Mr CHANDLER: I will, and thank you. It probably flows on to the next question. This is in regard to a national grant, however. The reason I ask that is I know of at least one school which was successful with the National Solar Schools Program, the NSSP, in the 2010-11 funding round, which may not receive their funds until the 2011-12 funding year, simply because the federal and Territory governments have failed to reach some sort of agreement. This particular school cannot be advised, at this stage, when they are likely to get their funding because two governments cannot agree on something. Can you please advise what is the hold up? I figure the department would do all it can to expedite environmental initiatives?

Mr HAMPTON: Absolutely. I am not aware of that. I am not sure if Mr Grant can add to that. I will assist if I can.

Mr GRANT: No, I am not aware of it, but if you give us the details, we will follow up.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that a question on notice?

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. I am after other - sorry, I have a letter from the school I can provide you with.

Mr HAMPTON: Okay.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, appreciating government is working towards redirecting sewage from the city to the Ludmilla Waste Water Sewerage Treatment Plant, effectively closing down the infamous poo shooter, do you consider the sewage currently flowing into our harbour is contributing to the poor health of the harbour?

Mr HAMPTON: This was asked of my colleague, the Minister for Health. It is a complex issue. There have been a number of possible sources. We need to work together forward on this. Obviously, the Darwin City Council is a key stakeholder in this. They have some responsibilities, along with Health, my department, and Power and Water. As a government, we have invested a lot of money and resources in closing the Larrakeyah outfall and extending the Ludmilla one, and improving the way we treat our sewage in Darwin. Regarding any further details, Mr Darcey might want to add to that.

Mr DARCEY: Clearly, as the population of Darwin has increased fairly rapidly, the infrastructure that handles the sewage is struggling to keep up. We have been negotiating with Power and Water to increase the strength of the licences. They previously had a five-year licence and it was based on, basically, what the sewage treatment plants can discharge; what is likely to come out of the discharge. We have turned that on its head and are really looking at what impacts the treated water going into the harbour will have, in order to keep continual improvements of the process happening so, in time, we will improve that impact on the harbour.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I asked a few of the following questions of the minister for environmental health, but it is important to revisit them here. Although there has been a magnificent job done by both your department and environmental health in passing the buck, particularly in the media, in relation to pollution in the harbour - that is spelt 'poolution'; I do not know if that is a typo or on purpose ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Bad pun.

Mr CHANDLER: ... it was illustrated, again, in the *NT News* article recently in regard to the arsenic scare where both departments were suggesting the other one is the relevant agency to talk to. If I am confused, no wonder the general public is confused. We are 12 months down the track. Are we any closer to identifying the cause of high levels of *E. coli* and *enterococci* in our harbour?

Mr HAMPTON: With regard to what my colleague, the Minister for Health said today, the sources are becoming clearer, particularly regarding storm water drainage issues at Lake Alexander. The important thing is that, as a government, we have responded in allocating in this budget more money to investigate how we monitor and look after our harbour.

We are an open and transparent government regarding the health of the harbour report cards that are posted every year on the website for people to see. There are a few ways, but there is much more work to be done and we can continue to improve on that. We are also looking at the waste discharge licences and are reviewing those. In my department, what we have done as a government in response to these issues has been more than appropriate. Mr Grant may want to add further to that.

Mr GRANT: With regard to closing in on the causes, we have just commissioned some work from CDU chasing right up those creeks and drains. I believe that is the next step; to work our way up the creeks and drains and find the exact sources. I believe we are making good progress and we are working very closely with the Health Department on it as well.

Mr CHANDLER: In regard to posting the test results that come in, does it lie with the Department of Health or with NRETAS to post the results?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: We are working together, but pretty much ...

Mr HAMPTON: I will ask Dr Leeder to answer that.

Dr LEEDER: Was the question about who posts the results?

Mr CHANDLER: Who posts the results.

Dr LEEDER: The results are received simultaneously by NRETAS and Department of Health. Generally, they are posted by Department of Health. We do the sampling and send it away and ensure the results come back to both agencies but, because of the way in which the interpretation and the decision-making occurs, Health posts those results.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are going to be taking a half-hour dinner break at this stage. We will be returning to this output and this shadow minister.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is right on 7.30 pm so we will resume. We are on Output 3.1. Mr Chandler has the call.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, I am hoping you can provide me an update on the draft Northern Territory Environmental Offsets Policy. Is the document still in draft, or has it been signed off?

Mr HAMPTON: It is in draft but it is out for public – I am pretty sure we announced it was a draft for five years ...

Mr DARCEY: Two years.

Mr HAMPTON: Two years, sorry. Given the national debate around a price on carbon and other issues nationally, we want to get in that space of the offsets opportunities, and see those opportunities stay within the Territory. Potentially, more good projects such as WALFA (West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement) could come out of that policy.

Mr CHANDLER: Whilst it is still in draft form, can you advise if any developers have approached government to use the draft at this stage?

Mr HAMPTON: I will hand over to Mr Darcey to answer that one.

Mr DARCEY: I am not aware of ... Go on.

Mr FISHER: Sorry, Alaric Fisher, Acting Director of Biodiversity Conservation. Our division is actually responsible for working on the implementation of that draft document policy. At the moment, the situation is that when development proposals come forward through the department, we now make them aware of the existence of the draft policy and the opportunity to include offsets. The policy has only been in place for a few months now, so it has not reached the stage where there have actually been any formal offset proposals developed as part of that. However, we are certainly having those discussions with current development proposals.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent. Minister, can you advise the sort of programs a developer could initiate under this plan?

Mr HAMPTON: Obviously, we would like to maybe have a menu of projects we could offer to potential developers. It is targeted at those unavoidable environmental impacts that developments have. We would like to have a menu of projects which people could come in and look at on the shelf, so to speak, and choose from. There is discussion around INPEX now we have done our environmental assessment process. Projects such as that across the Territory could offer opportunities.

Mr CHANDLER: It could be something as simple as planting trees, for instance?

Mr HAMPTON: Exactly.

Mr CHANDLER: I hope the following questions do not sound too simple; these are really for my benefit. Can you describe the interdepartmental process in regard to environmental initiatives? For instance, if your department discovered a new product that could lower energy consumption, how do you spread that information across agencies?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Mr Grant to talk about that.

Mr GRANT: We are not in the business of doing that sort of discovery. Generally, with interdepartmental relationships with the environment, the key ones we work with will be Chief Minister's, Health, and the Department of Resources. There is a lot of circulation of documents, but there are also quite a number of informal meetings. It is a small jurisdiction so everyone pretty much knows each other. There is a series of formal and informal processes from circulating Cabinet submissions, circulating policy documents, right through to just cups of coffee, so there is a good way of dealing with those opportunities. I suppose the good examples at the moment are around carbon offsets and carbon credits. There is a great amount of communication between the Chief Minister's Department, ourselves, and the Department of Resources regarding how we can best make use of the carbon economy for the Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: NRETAS does not have environmental police going around to different departments and pointing the finger for wasting energy?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: No, inside our department we keep an eye on things regarding energy use. We have a team internally that looks after those sorts of things, but they are not really police. In things like carbon credits, yes, we are working together. In some areas NRETAS has a regulatory role, and you have seen that recently with the port, but that is a different matter.

Mr HAMPTON: Also, through the Department of the Chief Minister, there are various task forces tasked to do this on a whole-of-government approach. That is the other area where government departments are talking and working at that more strategic level.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. I know this is more a planning question but it does have to do with our environment. Does NRETAS have any, I suppose, buy-in to the proposed storm surge maps?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant?

Mr GRANT: Dr Leeder? Better you get it from the horse's mouth.

Mr HAMPTON: Get the expert.

Dr LEEDER: Just let me find my page. Our department has a coordinating role of storm surge mapping. We provide the technical expertise regarding queries on storm surge analysis and levels as part of the flood inundation assessment for coastal floodplain management. Normally any queries about storm surge from the general public would be directed to Police, Fire and Emergency Services and they then would solicit information from us. Regarding the levels that are currently available, those are based on the estimates derived on an external storm surge report by a consortium of consultants.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, I believe these maps are many years overdue now. I heard a recent promise that they were going to be released in the near future. Can you advise whether NRETAS has provided all its information and the people who release this information are not waiting on you? You have done your job?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: My understanding is we have provided all the information. There was a delay when the first pass of looking at the information indicated that for some areas such as marinas and so on, the levels had not been correctly recorded. So, some additional work had to be done for that. My understanding is all of that work has now been finalised.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent. Minister, in the past year we saw a number of your media releases becoming quite personal. Was I getting to you or was it someone in your department? I draw your attention to the media release 'Chicken Little gets it wrong again'. I particularly like that one, mainly because I have never ever been called 'little' before, so I appreciate that. However, I digress.

I would like it if you could table some of the evidence of your claims within that particular media release, starting with any proof that pouring raw macerated sewage in the harbour does not impact the health of our harbour. Also, if you can, why are we spending millions redirecting sewage if it has no impact?

Mr HAMPTON: All right. I know the member Nelson would not be happy with the headlines of that media release, but I believe my colleague, the Minister for Health, answered today, very technically, your question regarding the raw sewage going into the harbour and the effects on the open ocean. I ask Mr Darcey to explain more and give a more technical and scientific answers to that.

Mr DARCEY: Clearly, it is not an ideal situation for macerated sewage to be going into the harbour.

Mr CHANDLER: I thought you were talking about the media release.

Mr DARCEY: The outfall into that part of the harbour is quite a high tidal flow, as you are aware. As I said before, our intention is to tighten up the legislation and regulation around sewage going into the harbour. It is a matter of balancing that with the infrastructure costs that improve on the sewerage treatment plants.

Mr CHANDLER: That is all from me.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Under the section, Environment and Sustainability, on page 129 in last year's annual report, I noticed an interesting comment in item No 10. This relates to what we were talking about earlier, but it is in this section:

A report card was produced on the lagoons of the Darwin Harbour region to showcase the extensive of work undertaken to better understand the valuable environmental assets in our landscape. This was additional to what was estimated for 2009-10.

That may take a little work off the question I asked in the previous section. It is obvious you have done some work, and I was wondering what work you had done on the lagoons?

Mr HAMPTON: We have a question on notice in relation to rural areas.

Mr WOOD: That is right. A fair number of the lagoons of Darwin Harbour will be in Litchfield Shire. My question is where is the report card that was produced? The annual report says you did it.

Mr HAMPTON: Is that the health of the harbour report card?

Mr WOOD: This is under Environment and Sustainability. It does not say that; it says you have produced one. Where is it?

Mr HAMPTON: If it is the health of the harbour report card you are talking about, it would be on the website and publicly available. I do not know if Mr Darcey has anything to add to that.

Mr WOOD: It refers to lagoons specifically. It is in the annual report; I can show you.

Mr HAMPTON: Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: There is a whole suite of report cards associated with health of the harbour which deal with probably a number of things in the catchment area. I would have to see exactly what was covered by that, as it is described as health of the lagoons. However, they are certainly all publicly available on the website.

Mr WOOD: I find websites sometimes difficult to find things on.

Dr LEEDER: We could take on notice the provision of a copy of that for you, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: In relation to solar panels, it is my understanding solar panels in the Darwin region have still not been approved. A few people can get them approved by using engineers. Have you had any input into trying to solve the issue of the legality of putting solar panels on roofs in the Darwin region? Have you assisted the Building Board to get this up and running again?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Mr Darcey to answer that. In relation to our grants through our work with projects such as the Alice Springs Solar City project and numerous other projects, we support solar energy. Mr Darcey might be able to answer that in more detail.

Mr WOOD: I think he knows what I am talking about. You could not put solar panels up last year in Alice Springs, and earlier this year, because of a Building Board decision. However, that exemption does not apply to Darwin. I am wondering whether you are assisting trying to find a solution to allow people to put up solar panels in the Darwin region.

Mr DARCEY: It is not in our portfolio. I suspect it is in the Department of Chief Minister's area or Power and Water, but it is certainly not in NRETAS's bailiwick.

Mr WOOD: Solar panels would not come under Environment and Sustainability?

Mr DARCEY: No.

Mr WOOD: In relation to sustainability, I attended a great sustainability day at Girraween Primary School recently. One of the highlights was Jessica Mauboy, and we now have a chook there called Jessica. There was a large representation of schools from Darwin and the rural area at that sustainability day and many good people were talking to kids about turning off power, recycling, etcetera. My only concern is there tends to be an 'unreal' focus on the nice side of sustainability. We have permaculture and compost, and that is all fantastic. However, are we teaching our kids reality? I said at the school that kids should sometimes question what is being given to them. Are we giving them both sides of the story? You sit in this building and ask how much energy was required to build this building in cement, steel and aluminium. Is the government conscious that when it is educating children - especially young children at primary school - about sustainability, it could be seen to be only giving a point of view rather than a balanced point of view to allow young people to see the whole picture rather than a certain side of the picture?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: That is a really good question. My background is environmental education; it is pretty deliberate. What happens with kids is around 12 or 13 they become abstract thinkers but, up until around 12, they are very concrete thinkers. Environmental education, generally, when kids are young, is all about things they have control over and can touch and feel and do. Once they get to eight, nine or 10 it becomes more about abstract thought around buildings and what have you. In secondary school - my son is in Year 10 - they get stuck more into the nastier parts of it. It is actually not about whether it is nice or not; it is about concrete or abstract education at that stage.

Mr WOOD: I am not sure who organised the day, but it is a really good day - do not get me wrong. Kids need to see the whole picture sometimes. That is all my questions on ...

Mr CHANDLER: I just have one more on Darwin Harbour. Minister, do you accept that in the last 12 months government has been clutching at straws when it comes to the health of our harbour, and blaming nappies, dog faeces, bat poo, public drains, and not accepting that two Olympic pool sized amounts of sewage is flowing into the harbour has any impact? Do you accept that the general public does not have confidence in the government finding a solution to the problem? I know you are working on it now, but in the last 12 months?

Mr HAMPTON: The current government is doing more monitoring of our harbour than any other government since self-government. The number of freshwater and monitoring sites we have in the Darwin Harbour is around 59, I understand. We do a significant amount of monitoring of the Darwin Harbour. Beach monitoring was something the previous government closed down. As we have heard today, it is something we are looking at restarting during the Wet Season. We take monitoring the harbour very seriously. Our track record speaks for itself in the efforts of closing the outfall and extending the Ludmilla one. We are doing that. It has been a complex issue. There have been a number of sources identified for possible sources of *E. coli* and *enterococci*.

As the Health Minister said today in Estimates, the blame is looking more towards storm water drainage issues. We have to work with the Darwin City Council on that, because there are a number of responsibilities here. It is no good throwing stones at each other and blaming each other; we have to get on and fix it.

Mr CHANDLER: I agree, minister. I believe, for some reason in the last 12 months - because in my opinion; and I am not a scientist, there are people far more intelligent than I am in this room - our harbour is impacted by everything including people washing their cars in the driveway where the soapy water goes down into the drain. It is not one thing that is having an impact on the harbour ...

Mr HAMPTON: That is what we have been saying, yes ...

Mr CHANDLER: I do not think you have. What I believe has been happening is you have been clutching at straws to blame other things. I honestly feel if government came out and said it is a number of contributing factors, including the sewage going into the harbour, but you are working on closing off the outfall and towards finding what some of these issues are or some of the major contributors are, the average person would accept that. I would accept that. For some reason in the last 12 months, it appears to me you really are just clutching at straws, trying to find an answer you do not yet know.

Mr HAMPTON: That is your interpretation; you are entitled to that. Government has been fairly consistent in our message ...

Mr CHANDLER: Nappies, dog faeces, bat poo, public drains ...

Mr HAMPTON: A number of sources. I take the advice, very seriously, of scientists, particularly those in my department. We will continue to work with the Darwin City Council ...

Ms Scrymgour: You have had your head in the sand.

Mr CHANDLER: It is clean sand, Marion.

Ms Scrymgour: You did; you had your head in the bloody ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order, member for Arafura, thank you.

Mr HAMPTON: ... and try to fix the problem. That is what the people of the Top End particularly would want to see: us working together with the Darwin City Council to fix it. I am not sure if Mr Darcy would like to add any further on that in where we are today.

Mr DARCEY: Only to make a broader comment about other work that is going on around the health of the harbour. For example, the environmental impact assessment process is very attuned to developments on the harbour. The storm water strategies, the Darwin Harbour cleanup days, the report card process, and all similar work is feeding into the general understanding of the region. All of that is aligned to, hopefully, better understanding and improved health of the harbour. *E. coli*, as an indicator species, is not particularly good.

Mr WOOD: Can I just ask a quick one while you are thinking about whether you can? Where is CDL up to? I could not leave this question out of Estimates. Is it on time, and is it on target for introduction?

Mr HAMPTON: I know you have been a very strong advocate of our container deposit scheme. You have been on the working group with the member for Fannie Bay as well as previous ministers. It is full steam ahead. It has bipartisan support. As you know, the legislation passed through parliament this year ...

Mr WOOD: What about industry, where are we?

Mr HAMPTON: Regarding industry, I met with industry in Sydney, and they met again at the end of last month. They have been given the clear message from me and from government that it is full steam ahead. I encourage them to get on board as soon as they can. They need to be good corporate citizens here. Territorians want it. There is bipartisanship for this and, as far as I am concerned, it is full steam ahead.

I will soon be going to South Australia to meet with the South Australian minister to look at the intergovernmental agreement. There are issues around labelling and the transition over to the 10¢ deposit, and they are issues we have to work with the industry on. Mr Darcey might want to add a few more words about how we are going in consultations with the beverage industry.

Mr DARCEY: The beverage industry is not a united group, and there are various views within the industry. In the beverage part of the industry at least - putting aside the waste management component of the industry - the beverage manufacturers are still concerned about time lines. They are concerned about stock piling, labelling, etcetera. We are working through those issues with them, but it is not easy. They are continuing to push back as hard as they can, but we are continuing the message that we will have it up and running by the end of the year. We will have all our approval processes in place next month, and be calling for people who want to be licensed to run depots and be collectors. We are continuing.

Mr WOOD: Thank you for that.

Mr CHANDLER: Just one question on this, minister. During the debate in which the Country Liberals supported the legislation, I raised an issue in regard to some constitutional issues that you had said at the time you had legal advice that you were satisfied with. During that debate, you also mentioned you were about to head off to a COAG meeting, and you were going to raise this particular issue with colleagues from other states. Did you speak with COAG in regard to the CDL?

Mr HAMPTON: I am pretty sure I did not say I was going to go to COAG; that is normally the job of the Chief Minister.

Mr CHANDLER: Sorry, it was some meeting that you were going to attend in South Australia where this particular subject was going to be raised.

Mr HAMPTON: There was the meeting in Sydney at the end of May - or early May, sorry; I might stand corrected on that. That was the meeting with the beverage industry where I was going to again reinforce the Territory's position; that it is full steam ahead with CDL. I will be meeting the South Australian minister, hopefully, in the next few weeks, to look at the intergovernmental agreement. That legal advice still stands. I am confident, with the constitutional issues and the legal advice I have received, it continues to stand that way.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Drysdale, I have just sought some advice, and I am allowed to exercise my judgment and latitude and give you a question. Normally, we go from the shadow to the government, to an Independent, then to a member of the PAC and, then, strictly speaking, it is supposed to be to an electorate matter. I am assured the question you are about to ask is relating to an electorate matter.

Mr BOHLIN: Madam Deputy Chair, as the member for Drysdale, I have many constituents who use the beaches around Darwin. Can you not concede it is a farcical approach - ad hoc responses, and a failure to simply accept the raw sewage as the most likely probability of contamination? We have seen newspaper articles, the spin doctoring, that has suggested nappies. I personally have not seen a fleet of prams moving along dropping nappies everywhere. To compete with the two Olympic-size swimming pools of raw sewage would be a lot of nappies. To compete with the Olympic-size swimming pools every day would be a lot of dogs, a herd of dogs - whatever you would call a massive pack of dogs. Have you even done direct testing over the site of the outfall in radiating patterns, and what are those results? Two Olympic-size swimming pools per day, you would think that pattern would be pretty strong and indicative. Minister, has that been the case, or is there going to be continued spin? I believe, with regard to the public - and certainly those I speak to in my electorate - the simple acceptance that there is a problem would have been far more beneficial than creating a spin doctoring answer of a nappy or a dog 'do-do'.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, I take the advice of scientists, the experts. That is the advice I always look to in these very complex and scientific matters ...

Mr BOHLIN: Scientists would have said nappies?

Mr HAMPTON: Government is committed to fixing this problem but there are a number of sources. We have been consistent in what we have been saying, and at the front of it is my department. I will ask Mr Grant to talk a bit more about what they have been doing. Government is absolutely committed to fixing the problem. I believe we have been fairly consistent in saying it is a complex problem. There are a number of sources and the finger is more and more pointing to storm water drainage issues. Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: We are not spin doctors in the department; we are scientists. There have been tests around those outfalls and the *E. coli* drops to almost zero once you get a certain distance from those sewage outfalls. Then, between that area and the beach there is an extremely low *E. coli* and then the *E. coli* reappears in the areas where there is storm water. So, with the beach closures, storm water is almost 100% the culprit. We can give you a briefing on the science, if you like. It is pretty clear.

Mr BOHLIN: I am sure the shadow minister would like that and, perhaps, even a radiated map that would demonstrate your testing sites.

Mr GRANT: We can do that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: As local member, you would love that brief, member for Drysdale.

Mr BOHLIN: I would, actually.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are concluding on Output 3.1, Environment and Sustainability.

Output 3.2 - Heritage Conservation

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are moving to Output 3.2, Heritage Conservation.

Mr CHANDLER: In at least the last three Estimates periods we have seen a reduction in the heritage budget. Why is our heritage so undervalued by this government?

Ms Scrymgour: It is a legacy, mate.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, we value our heritage in the Northern Territory government. In the budget there are a number of external funding programs we receive. In 2010-11, we have had external funding for the Hermannsburg Historic Precinct, the Historic Shipwrecks Program and also an increase in this budget in repairs and maintenance allocation of \$100 000. I believe this government's commitment to heritage is second to none. I am not sure if Mr Darcey would like to add to that.

Mr DARCEY: The big ticket item in the change of budget for heritage was the carryover of almost \$0.75m project for Hermannsburg, in Central Australia, a Commonwealth government-funded project, and that is complete.

Mr CHANDLER: In the interests of time, I have no more questions.

Mr WOOD: Can I follow that. Thank you. Minister, if you look at the amount of money given to assist privately-owned heritage places, basically that has not gone up; if you count the CPI, it has gone down. If you look at investment to maintain our publicly-owned heritage places, that has not gone up. In fact, less money was spent last year than what was estimated. Would it be fair to say that, in keeping the status quo, the money has gone backwards in relation to maintaining heritage places, both private and public?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, this financial year, there is \$1m to maintain public-owned heritage places ...

Mr WOOD: Which there was in 2009-10, 2008-09, 2007-08.

Mr HAMPTON: In 2010-11, there is \$375 000 to support community-based heritage initiatives, including \$200 000 for the annual Heritage Grants Program to assist private owners of heritage places, and \$120 000 for the annual grant to the National Trust of the Northern Territory. We continue to implement the government's Heritage 2010 initiative which is to provide \$1m per annum for repairs and maintenance of publicly-owned heritage properties. There is the long-awaited new heritage act. It has been something like 11 years, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes, it is a heritage act in the true meaning of the word.

Mr HAMPTON: I thought I would bring that one up. There were extensive public consultation processes involving all sectors. A draft bill was released for public comment in February this year and comments closed on 19 March this year. A number of public forums were held. I am looking at tabling the bill in the Legislative Assembly later this year.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the heritage houses on Myilly Point still use septic tanks. When will the government connect these houses to the main sewer? Or are these tanks also heritage listed?

Mr HAMPTON: I introduce Michael Wells from the Heritage Division.

Mr WELLS: Michael Wells, Heritage. The department is aware of that problem. The situation at the Myilly Point precinct is there are five blocks of land in the precinct which is surrounded by roads on all sides. It is true there are septic systems and leach drain systems there which we believe were installed in the late 1930s when the houses were built. Those same systems survive today, and are what is being used for sewage disposal on the site today. We have discussed this issue with other departments, and all parties recognise it is not a good situation. The issue is the cost of connecting to the nearest reticulated sewerage,

which runs into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Commonwealth owns two of the properties at the present time. The National Trust, which owns the other three, has been in discussions with the Commonwealth to resolve the immediate issues around the disposal of sewage. However, they failed to secure the Commonwealth's agreement to make any substantial contribution towards connecting to reticulated sewerage. The Commonwealth believes it only needs to solve the immediate problem.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you please confirm the North Australian Railway corridor from Darwin to Adelaide River is either vacant Crown land or belongs to the Land Development Corporation so that it can be made into a rail trail for the enjoyment of tourists and locals alike? Have you given any thought to making sure that corridor is protected forever and a day so it can be used as a rail trail? Part of it is being protected now, because it is getting some black stuff put on.

Mr HAMPTON: I am aware there is an assessment report to the Heritage Advisory Council in relation to the North Australia Railway corridor. I am not sure if Mr Wells has any further details on the land tenure?

Mr WELLS: I could not say what the tenure is all the way from Darwin to Adelaide River.

Mr WOOD: It varies.

Mr WELLS: I am sure it does. In direct answer to your question, there have been moves to have cycle paths along the route, which is slowly ...

Mr WOOD: Happening right now.

Mr WELLS: Yes, that is right, and they are slowly but surely extending ...

Mr HAMPTON: In Katherine?

Mr WOOD: Howard Springs.

Mr WELLS: It is also happening in Katherine. Starting from the Darwin end, we have been working closely with DCI on the work from Yarrowonga to Howard Springs Road. This work is currently under way and almost complete, and involves building a cycle path on top of the route of the old NRA and reusing the bridges. It is an excellent outcome in regard to heritage. I attended a site meeting only the last week with DCI representatives who were proposing to extend the cycle path further from Howard Springs Road to Girraween Road.

Mr WOOD: That is in the budget.

Mr WELLS: I did not know that. We had the meeting and we are discussing getting appropriate heritage outcomes there. It will be a similar result to the area between Yarrowonga and Howard Springs Road.

Mr WOOD: You will have to find a bridge that was stolen - that is where the stolen bridge is. Remember? We will fill it in with something.

Mr WELLS: I can respond to that quickly. We did look at that bridge - bridge No 22. They count the bridges No 1 from Darwin. Yes, that was stolen a couple of years ago, I am informed. The abutments and the ...

Mr WOOD: The *Chicago Tribune* announced it as well.

Mr WELLS: The abutments of the old bridge and the footings on which it was established are still there. We plan to source the original plans of the bridge and attempt to construct something close to a reconstruction of the old bridge in new steel works so it can be used as part of this cycle path.

Mr WOOD: Good. My last question: what are the government's plans for the protection, preservation, and promotion of the Territory's World War II heritage? I will ask another one to go with it. Where are the heritage parks, as in the agreement I have with the Chief Minister? Does your department oppose or support the concept of World War II heritage parks?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, there are a couple of questions in there. The current status of the heritage parks: the proposed Defence of Darwin Trail will be designed to create a memorable visitor

experience of the impact of World War II on the Top End, in particular, the Darwin region. Sites that will form the Defence of Darwin Trail have been identified. We have committed \$567 000 in 2010-11 to undertake work on several sites that make up the Defence of Darwin Trail. Regarding the other question of World War II airfields?

Mr WOOD: The agreement is about having World War II heritage parks.

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Mr Grant to give you a bit more on that.

Mr GRANT: We are very supportive of the heritage parks. People are generally excited about the whole World War II Museum and the heritage parks right through. We are doing some very good work at the 17½ Mile right now. I do not know if you have seen what is going on out there?

Mr WOOD: Or the 27 Mile. Strauss Airstrip is the 27 Mile.

Mr GRANT: I know, but I am talking about 17½ Mile as well. Michael has more details. There is a lot of good stuff happening.

Mr WELLS: Just to be clear, we are proposing a World War II heritage park; the genesis of that being your proposal for heritage parks that was made a couple of years ago, with the first cab off the rank, so to speak, being a World War II heritage park for the Darwin region to be known as the Defence of Darwin Trail, as the minister alluded to. The concept is that it is linked to the new Defence of Darwin Museum based at East Point. The museum is conceived as a hub at East Point in what, in museum speak, they call a distributed experience which is, basically, a group of 10 sites in the Darwin region which will form what we are calling the Darwin Defence of Darwin Trail - working title - but is, in effect, a World War II heritage park for the Darwin region.

Mr WOOD: We have rangers to maintain these parks? That is what I thought heritage parks would have.

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant or Mr Wells.

Mr WELLS: The answer to that question is tied up with the governance model which is going to be used for the Defence of Darwin Museum as a whole. That governance model has not been finalised as yet.

Mr WOOD: Okay, better keep going. Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If there are no further questions on Output 3.2, that concludes that area.

Before we move to Sport and Recreation, I have been advised that Arts and Culture will be covered by minister McCarthy tomorrow. Should members of the committee have questions on the Herbarium or Darwin Botanic Gardens, you can ask them now because those particular officers from the agency are present.

Mr WOOD: I love the Herbarium. They do such a wonderful job. I do not have any questions for them. I love the smell of naphthalene, was it?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No questions about Herbarium or Darwin Botanic Gardens? Thank you.

Mr WOOD: It is a great place.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – SPORT AND RECREATION

Output 4.1 - Sports Development

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now be calling on questions relating to Output Group 4.0, Sport and Recreation, Output 4.1, Sports Development. Are there any questions? Member for Drysdale.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, how many athletes participate interstate or locally as Northern Territory representatives? You had this question once before, I think.

Mr HAMPTON: I introduce Mr Steve Rossingh, Executive Director of Sport and Recreation.

Mr ROSSINGH: Steve Rossingh, Executive Director of Sport and Recreation. Member for Drysdale, we do not collect that data. That data would be very expensive and very time intensive to collect. We do not believe that is any value, so we do not collect that data.

Mr BOHLIN: At least there is an answer to that; that is good. The last couple of years we have not had that straight up. It is a shame; I believe it is very valuable data. Without that data, minister, can you tell us how you determine what are your best played sports, or what are the sports that get best supported by different players, the sports that are getting the best outcome with the most representatives? How do you determine where you allocate your sport funding if you do not even know how many people represent the Northern Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: There are a number of ways we do that around where we allocate our grants, through Sport and Recreation. Much of that information on sport participation would be kept by the sporting organisations. We have annual grants and some of the major sporting bodies apply to us for those grants. For more detail, I will get Mr Rossingh to elaborate on that.

Mr ROSSINGH: As you could imagine, the allocation of funding across sports is a pretty complex exercise. Our overall vision is to have as many Territorians as possible involved in sport and active recreation on a regular basis, at whatever level they choose to do so. There is a whole continuum on the sporting pathway of which high performance and an elite sport is one component, grassroots is the other end of the continuum, and there is everything in between.

In the elite side of sport, the Northern Territory Institute of Sport has a very close relationship with the sports. They know which athletes within those sports – basically, provided by the sports - are elite athletes they are trying to develop and have the potential to go on to bigger and better things. That is also supplemented by their own research, generally of results at national championships and national events.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, can you not concede, perhaps, that by not having key data that demonstrates who is playing and representing sports, it makes it more complicated to determine how you better allocate your budget funding? It is always a difficult thing to be able to budget all this amount of money and ensure everyone gets a bite of the pie. If you do not have some key data and key output figures, it will always be difficult.

Mr HAMPTON: As Mr Rossingh said, this government is committed to sport and recreation. Our budget is around \$26m, which is a significant amount of money. We have recently launched the Sport Policy One initiative. I launched that at the Barunga Sports Festival the other week. The direction we want to see sport and recreation particularly focus on is all the principles in our sports policy. I believe that is what drives us in how we increase sports participation in our regions particularly, but also in our regional centres and Darwin. This government has developed the policy over quite some time. That will facilitate development and sports participation at grassroots level, as well as those at the elite level ...

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, I will just keep going as it is a very important point. Sport Policy One is a critical component of the Northern Territory government's strategy to achieving this vision that all Territorians have a lifelong involvement in sport. There were delays in the release of this policy because of the Australian government's Crawford report which was looking at the national sports framework.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you, minister. Talking of that budget of nearly \$26m, can you explain how we have gone from a budget in 2010-11 of \$34m to a 2011-12 budget at \$25m?

Mr HAMPTON: This is another regular question I get during Estimates. It is one we get a lot of external and Commonwealth funding for, and it can have an impact on the variants on the budget papers. Mr Rossingh might want to go into a bit more detail of that variation.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, there are probably two big ticket items that were present in the previous year's budget that are not in the 2011-12 Budget that were one-offs. First, the \$4m grant to squash to construct the squash facility in Marrara and, second, the \$2.6m for the Arafura Games. The Arafura Games are held every second year, so that \$2.6m will reappear again in the 2013-14 budget - if I have my numbers right - two years hence from this current year. They are the two biggest ticket items that account for the variance. The other major item is the \$500 000 grant to NT Hockey to replace its pitch on turf No 1. That accounts for those. Two of them are one-offs, and one is an every-second-year event.

Mr BOHLIN: That is still nearly \$3m short. That difference is a pretty big number. Can you further explain some of those key variants? You have mentioned the key variants in the budget paper; the fact that Sports Development output decreased in 2011-12 due to one-off funding received in 2010-11. The other key variant is the decrease in 2011-12 in the facilities and events due to the delivery in 2010-11 of various sporting events, resurfacing Marrara Hockey Stadium, and the contribution to the squash courts. They are straight out of your budget papers. Can you explain that sports development decrease, in that key variant, please?

Mr HAMPTON: Ms Kirkman.

Ms KIRKMAN: The reduction in Sports Development output is \$4.3m; \$4m of that relates to the one-off grant for squash facilities in 2010-11. Additionally, there was one-off funding from the Australian Sports Commission of \$229 000 within that output.

Mr BOHLIN: What was that for?

Ms KIRKMAN: From the Australian Sports Commission.

Mr BOHLIN: For what program?

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, we have this issue every year. The funding from the Australian Sports Commission is finalised after the preparation of the budget papers, so it does not show up in the initial budget projection and then comes up in the estimate. It then drops out again in the current year budget because it is not finalised at that point in time.

Mr BOHLIN: What did we do with it? That would be the question. What was it used for?

Mr ROSSINGH: Two things. First, to fund the Indigenous Sports Program which funds six Indigenous sports officers - three located in Darwin, two in Alice Springs and one in Katherine. Second, there is a smaller grant of around \$80 000 which funds us to deliver Australian Sports Commission programs which are resources that are beneficial to our own sport programs.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, has that money for the squash courts already been handed over? Signed off?

Mr HAMPTON: As far as I am aware, but Mr Rossingh might want to clarify that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Sorry, member for Drysdale, could you repeat the question?

Mr BOHLIN: The \$4m for the squash that has caused some of these key variations - has that money already been handed over and signed off to another department or signed off to the contractor?

Mr ROSSINGH: It has not physically left our doors as yet, but it will physically leave our doors this week.

Mr BOHLIN: Fantastic. That is all for 4.1.

Output 4.2 - Northern Territory Institute of Sport

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will move on to Output 4.2, Northern Territory Institute of Sport.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, we are looking at scholarship holders coming down from an initial budget for 180 and up to 190 in 2010-11. It is always great to see scholarship holders, but we are looking to go down to 120. That is a massive drop in scholarship holders. I know we have just finished Sports Development, but that is not really a great way to be developing our sports people if we have lost that many scholarship holders.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, in relation to that there is a drop in numbers for 2011-12 as all states and territories are implementing a national institute system through the intergovernmental agreement which takes effect on 1 July 2011. This agreement will align Australia's high performance sports systems, which was also part of the Crawford report.

There will be five categories: talented; potential international class; national professional league; developing international class; international class and world-class athletes. The agreement is a positive

development as the Northern Territory will have input into national high performance plans of sports involved with the NTIS, and will be able to attract better national support for its programs. NTIS will still be able to operate programs such as the AFL that sit outside the standard group of sports aligned to the national institute system.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you, minister. Athletes achieving national squad and national league club representation - initially we budgeted for 25. By the end of 2010-11, the estimate was we had done 20. In this year's budget, we are looking at dropping it down to only achieving 15. There are some cutbacks in sport which are pretty sharp. We have had a cutback in scholarship holders to 120 and are looking at wanting to cut back in our achievement in national squad representation to only 15. Can you explain that desire?

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to that figure, the decrease in athletes achieving national squad or national league representation is down to 20 from 25. This was as a result of less-talented athletes coming into the NTIS, as well as the NTIS having fewer available resources to deal with those. However, it goes back to the national institute system. I am not sure if Mr Rossingh would want to add anything further to that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, these things go in cycles. It is very dependent on the quality of the athletes presenting at the front door. You have concentrated periods of athletes who have high potential, then that reduces at times. This national institute intergovernmental agreement is really putting us best placed for as many athletes as possible, and for the best resources to be put into those athletes to give them the best chance of progressing on their pathway.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, does that not come back to my first question? Your expectation is you are going to have fewer people reaching national squads and national league club levels. In fact, you are going to look at cutting them down to only 15. Yet, you are not watching how many people represent the Northern Territory. One would think if you are representing the Northern Territory you are representing at that higher end of the sporting category – whatever that sporting category be. One is left wondering if that is why you have rounded your expectations down to only 15 because you are not sure who is out there; what talent is there. You said it is getting hard to identify that talent. You are not even watching the talent to know what it is doing. Can't you see the correlation between those key output concerns?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, for me, it is important we focus on getting those elite athletes achieving those levels. Sometimes we spread ourselves too far and wide and perhaps we are not achieving at the level we would hope to. By focusing on those 15 or 20 athletes we can, hopefully, achieve greater national squad or international league representation.

I am not sure if Mr Rossingh would like to add to that. My focus is ensuring we can achieve national squad or national league club representation with those 15. In the past, we may have spread ourselves a bit too wide in trying to achieve that.

Mr ROSSINGH: I am not sure if that information is necessary. I do not think anyone is slipping through the system, or not being given the opportunity to enter into or participate at the NTIS because there is no database of representation. I am very confident we know who the athletes are, across all sports, who have the potential to progress to that national/international level. What we really are trying to do now, as the minister said, is to focus our resources in a more concentrated and focused fashion on those athletes to try to increase the numbers. I am hoping that number of 15 is a very conservative estimate. We would always be trying to exceed that.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, not wanting to land any one individual in the proverbial pie but, at a recent event, the members for Nelson, Brennan and Fong Lim and I were competing together; there were four of us. There were some Australian champions there. Two of them had won Australian top level, and one of them did not even know he had the potential to get any assistance from NTIS. He is representing the Northern Territory at the top of the tree, did achieve, did succeed, and took out an Australian title, yet no one is knocking on his door saying: 'We want to represent you; we want to help you, even in the lowest level of assistance from the NTIS'. Surely, that is a free tick for your institute if you can throw two Australian champions, straightaway, on to your books? I am glad they are not missing the mark because their sport relied on them to hit the mark. It is a concern.

Mr HAMPTON: We can be very proud of our NTIS. We do punch above our weight in getting high achievers in sport. We all probably know people who are household names, not only in the Territory, but across Australia. Since the inception of the NTIS in 1996, it has supported over 1200 scholarship holders, and has identified scores of up-and-coming champions. We have a lot to be proud of. If you look at some

of the achievers at the Olympic Games level, Des Abbott is right up there amongst our greatest athletes, along with James Swan from Alice Springs, and Nova Peris-Kneebone. These people are household names across the country; Commonwealth Games representatives ...

Mr BOHLIN: Without a doubt.

Mr HAMPTON: ... Des Abbott is a champion today. Joel Carroll is another one, and Crystal Attenborough - the list just goes on. We can be very proud of it.

I, as the minister, want to focus on the 15 and ensure we can have the high achievers. Our Sports Policy One will also help people achieve lifelong sport participation. That is as equally important as our high achievers.

Mr BOHLIN: Madam Deputy Chair, we are ready to move on to Output 4.3, if everyone is happy.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions on Output 4.2?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That completes consideration of Output 4.2.

Output 4.3 – Facilities and Events

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Then we will move on to Output 4.3, Facilities and Events.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, leading up to the February Aboriginal All Stars game, this year we saw three helicopters, event relocation and, finally, cancellation of a fantastic AFL game. What was the original event cost, then the added extra cost of the helicopters, event relocation and final cancellation? In case anyone missed it, that is one photo of your helicopters flying over Marrara. It is a strange one to have. What were those cost breakdowns for the original game, then the added cost of helicopters, event relocation and, finally, the cancellation of the game?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, the All Stars game is part of our five-year agreement with the AFL worth \$8m. The government is very proud to bring AFL matches to the Territory, particularly Darwin and Alice Springs, and the All Stars is the jewel in the crown. Unfortunately, we had issues following inspection of TIO done by an independent inspector on 27 January this year ...

Mr BOHLIN: What were the costs, though, minister, please?

Mr HAMPTON: The costs, yes, I am getting to that, member for Drysdale. The cost of the helicopters was \$17 300, and the super soaker was \$1237, giving a total of \$18 627.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you, minister. Any costs in event relocation, or any costs incurred in the final cancellation of the event?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass that on to Mr Rossingh, as he is involved in those discussions with the AFL.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, as the minister said, the actual cost of the game is subsumed within the whole agreement amount. The annual licence fee to the AFL is \$1m.

Mr BOHLIN: Sorry to be rude, but were there any added costs as a result of the cancellation or the relocation? That is all I am after.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, as part of the agreement, there is a grant for the operating costs of each game. It started off in the first year at \$120 000. It is indexed to CPI each year. That grant was paid to AFLNT this year, and that has subsumed the costs of both the cancellation of the match at TIO Stadium and the relocation to Traeger Park.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, do we have a cost to repair the spongy area of Marrara's NTFL surface that caused that relocation? Who pays for that and whose budget does that come from?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, we have an annual grounds maintenance contract which is variable depending on the amount of work that is actually done, but would be between \$450 000 and \$500 000 annually. That is for the grounds maintenance of all of the facilities at Marrara, plus Richardson Park and the central area of the Turf Club where touch is played. A good proportion of that would be for maintenance at TIO Stadium. This year, we have had to do a fair bit of remedial work. I cannot tell you off the top of my head, but can take that on notice as to what the cost of that has been. Broadly, it would be around the \$40 000 to \$50 000 mark.

We also have a piece of machinery coming up which they call a Turf Barber which is, basically, a system that penetrates into the thatching system a lot more deeply than any equipment we have in Darwin. We will be bringing that up from Alice Springs. It is pretty proven on race tracks around the country. That will be at a cost of just under \$60 000. We believe those things will repair the surface for the long term, and will alleviate the need to do any other replacement or major engineering of the surface.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you for that. The Turf Barber sounds very interesting. Who actually does foot that bill though? Is it AFLNT or is it the Northern Territory government through the sports funding?

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, the Northern Territory government for that work.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you. Recently, we had a national broadcast game live to air, and we went lights out. What was the final finding on the lights out at Marrara Stadium? What part actually failed, and at what cost to fix it?

Mr HAMPTON: That was an issue for us. There was a light report done, which was received on 31 May this year. A copy of this has also been provided to AFLNT, with the recommendations that there is some work to be done on the lights around repairs, the replacement of all the 400 capacitors, and an audit of the four towers. The costs, delivery and installation of the capacitors is not confirmed at this stage, but is likely to be around \$16 000. Obviously, with the game coming up between Melbourne and Port Adelaide in early July, we certainly will be going hard to do that work.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, was that the failure a combination of capacitors using too much power and it then blew a transformer? What failed?

Mr HAMPTON: I understand it was a combination of a failure from the switchboard for one of those towers. Also, human error was another issue to do with the failure of the other tower.

Mr BOHLIN: I presume that human error was not someone literally turning the switch off. What was the human error?

Mr HAMPTON: It literally was that. Mr Rossingh might want to clarify that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, when they took the first tower down, they took the wrong one down. It gave the appearance of having failed when, in fact, it was literally just switched off. That was why, when a second incident occurred, that tower maintained its light.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you. Lights out, wrong switch. Minister, who will be actually footing that bill? I am presuming it is government.

Mr HAMPTON: That is right, the Northern Territory government.

Mr BOHLIN: How many meetings did you have with Power and Water to come to these conclusions? Did you need to have meetings with Power and Water?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, I cannot tell you how many meetings with Power and Water, but there were initial discussions which ruled out external power supply being an issue. That then allowed us to focus on the power supply within the boundaries of TIO Stadium, at which point electrical engineers were called in to provide the diagnosis and make recommendations on what we needed to do.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you. Minister, seeing we just discussed it here, is it possible that report could be tabled, or tabled at another time if you do not have it with you here today?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I am happy to take that on board. We do not have it with us.

Mr BOHLIN: So you are happy to? That is a yes?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, okay.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you. Fantastic.

Minister, I am an avid fan of automotive industries. The V8 Supercars is a fantastic event for the Northern Territory, an amazing event for tourism, and it keeps all our restaurants and hotels full. Compared to the numbers for 2005, how many corporate shade areas and marquees were at this year's event and what, attendance wise in people numbers, did that represent? I am presuming there is some indication of how many marquees and shaded corporate areas we had in 2005. What were those numbers of shaded corporate areas and marquees this year, and how many people attended those areas?

Mr HAMPTON: That event is part of Northern Territory Major Events Company. They are the ones that organise that. That would be a different output group. It would be through the Chief Minister, member for Drysdale.

In talking about Hidden Valley, we are proud of what we have done there in infrastructure. As you know, we had a \$4m election commitment, including \$1m in this financial year. That is going to all those other motor sports groups at Hidden Valley, including the speedway, the go-karts, and the drags. We are proud of our record in getting Hidden Valley up to international standard. We should all be very proud of that facility ...

Mr BOHLIN: It is fantastic.

Mr HAMPTON: The V8s is a NT Major Events Company.

Mr BOHLIN: As the minister for Sport, you take no ownership of the V8 Supercars?

Mr HAMPTON: It is not in my output group; Major Events is under the Chief Minister.

Mr BOHLIN: Then in that case, I dare say you will do the same here. The Superbikes, minister?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, that would be the same.

Mr BOHLIN: So, you are not interested in knowing what goes ...

Mr HAMPTON: Oh, I love the Superbikes; I would not get on to one. It is a different output group. I have driven a V8!

Mr BOHLIN: Yes, Landcruiser?

Mr HAMPTON: Have you?

Mr WOOD: I have been in the Bushfires Council vehicle. They are V8s now, aren't they?

Mr HAMPTON: No.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, you are not going to comment at all on the grotesque advertising of the Chief Minister in the Sunday newspaper of the Superbikes this year? A full-page ad of the Chief Minister?

Mr HAMPTON: It is a different output group, member for Drysdale.

Mr BOHLIN: You are not interested in discussing that? You do not think this was a waste of money; a poor promotion of a great sporting event?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Drysdale, the minister has already pointed out it comes under an output for which the Chief Minister is responsible.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, do you have anything to do with the drag car tracks, as you referred to. In your opening speech, you talked about the drag car tracks. It is the Hidden Valley Drag racing strip, not the drag car tracks. Do you take any ownership of that facility?

Mr HAMPTON: It does come under Sport and Recreation ...

Mr BOHLIN: I am checking before I ask the question.

Mr HAMPTON: ... and is one of our election commitments, along with the Commonwealth. In relation to the drags upgrade, we have put \$4.6m into that project. The Australian government has put in \$3m as well. As you know, that has been completed.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, can you state that figure again? How many million did you put in to the upgrade of the drags?

Mr HAMPTON: The overall upgrade to the drags was \$4.6m. The NT government provided a further \$1.6m to the Australian government's \$3m.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, considering about two years ago the federal government gave you the money to implement the upgrade, can you explain if, at that time, it was a suitable amount of money? Can you explain the delays in delivering that upgrade? Is that failure to deliver on time the reason it has cost an extra \$1.65m to complete the level of federal election campaign as promised?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, there were issues with the tendering for that project. Mr Rossingh might be able to elaborate on that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, it is always difficult when numbers are attributed to commitments of any sort when you have not gone out to the market to test the market cost of the facility. You will never know whether the \$3m was an accurate estimate or not. My suspicion is it was not, particularly given the market at that time. There were delays, as the minister said.

The main delay was the decision to hold the Superbikes, which meant we could not commence any construction from the end of the Wet Season until when the Superbikes occurred. The last thing we wanted was the Superbikes to be conducted around a construction site. That then led into the same type of problem between the Superbikes and the V8s. We had to keep the track in good condition between that period. There was a significant delay of approximately six months. With the Wet Season preceding that, the six-months delay was in an important part of the Dry Season.

Mr BOHLIN: I find it hard to believe some of those comments - I believe you as an individual, though - that it was delay after delay. Which department really should shoulder the blame for those delays? Is it your department of Sport, minister, or the department of Construction which was tasked with completing the task? Who shoulders the blame for drawing this process out, particularly over such a long time? Behind the doors, there were many concerns and heated discussion about who was to blame and why the costs went up so much.

Mr HAMPTON: I am not really in the blame game, member for Drysdale. I am really pleased with the facility we have. I am surprised you do not support that. I met with the MotorSports NT group and explained the situation to them. Mr Rossingh explained the issues behind the delay. It is a great facility. The Northern Territory and the Commonwealth governments have put a large amount of money into it, and people should be proud of the drag facility we have at Hidden Valley. I know the MotorSports NT people are.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, it is hardly the blame game trying to determine what area let people down. It is simply looking at a problem and trying to work out what went wrong. Do not say it is a blame game; it is a very useful tool to find out who, or what area, let us down so we can work on fixing it in the future.

As for any consideration that I do not support the drags, you would be so far wrong. I can guarantee you, I have run a pass on that strip, unlike yourself, at 13.78 seconds in my off-road truck.

Mr Hampton: Not quite the Finke Desert Race.

Mr BOHLIN: If you think I do not support it, you are crazy. I am concerned there were extreme unnecessary delays and, in the end, those delays led to increased costs. I am confused you are not interested in finding out who was at fault for those delays so we can better the system. Do you not agree?

Mr HAMPTON: I was concerned with the delays as well. As I said, I met with the MotorSports NT group and talked through the issues with them. Mr Rossingh has given an account of why there were delays. At the end of the day, we have a great facility and we should all be very proud of it.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, thank you very much. Have you calculated, or had your department calculate, what cost your federal Labor Party carbon tax will have on the running of a night AFL at Marrara or at Traeger Park in Alice Springs; a game of Rugby at Harvey Norman Stadium; or even a basketball game under lights at the Marrara complex? What cost will be an increase on those sporting facilities to run those games? Those lights are not cheap. You must have started looking at modelling and how that is going to impact our sports.

Mr HAMPTON: We are always looking at ways we can reduce our emissions. As part of our Climate Change Policy, we are going to be talking through that in another output group, Madam Deputy Chair. I am happy to talk about some of the positive initiatives we have done in Sport and Recreation to reduce our emissions. Do you want to talk about that now, or ...

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, I am honestly interested in finding out about what cost you have looked at. There will be a cost on the electricity that will power those lights so we can have fantastic events, as you said. What is that cost? Have you done any modelling to know where we are looking so we can start budgeting for it? Harvey Norman Stadium, the NTRL, is \$4000 a month in electricity as it is. Is that carbon tax going to cost them another \$1000 a month? Does that mean the gate price has to go up? Who is going to wear the cost? Have you done any modelling yet?

Mr HAMPTON: I will hand over to Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: Until we know the price of carbon and things are bedded down, it is impossible to do any modelling at all so, we have not done any modelling. There is just not enough detail. If we did, it would probably be a waste of time, I suspect.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, on that response, there is no way you could possibly support a carbon tax because we do not have enough knowledge of it?

Mr HAMPTON: That is a different output group, member for Drysdale. We certainly do not support anything that would disadvantage Territorians.

Mr BOHLIN: You do not support anything that would disadvantage our fantastic AFL games - the cost of running them?

Mr HAMPTON: It is all hypothetical, member for Drysdale ...

Mr BOHLIN: Oh no, it is real.

Mr HAMPTON: ... I think you are boxing at shadows.

Mr BOHLIN: The federal government has announced there is going to be this carbon tax. It is not hypothetical.

Mr HAMPTON: We do not know what the detail is. As Mr Grant has said, we do not know the details. I believe we have answered it, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Further questions, member for Drysdale?

Mr BOHLIN: Madam Deputy Chair, there is a lot of noise coming from the right-hand corner. Would you like to keep it quiet?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Under Standing Order 114, member for Drysdale - come on!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, member for Arafura..

Mr BOHLIN: What organisation is out there currently - government or otherwise - protecting our sporting groups and clubs when peak bodies or parent bodies go wild? Who is there as a watchdog to protect against bullyboy tactics, illegal association practices, or simply unethical practices? Is there a government body that has lawful authority empowered upon them to control the associations and the acts they are supposed to abide by, particularly considering all our sporting groups are associations? Is there someone out there you can advise us of to help protect these groups when there are some bullyboy tactics happening?

Mr HAMPTON: It is a good point, actually. Many people see the minister for Sport as a minister for fun! Probably one of the most difficult things in the portfolio is sorting out the politics within sporting organisations. It is something that has been an issue in recent times with various sports. What I have tried to do is work with the national sporting organisation, the peak body at the national level, trying to get them to come in and mediate with sporting groups, whatever the sport. The national sporting organisations play a very important role in that. Often, it is through the registration of corporations - the act. There are, obviously, avenues through legislation they can go to get a fair hearing as well, and the Ombudsman is another area. There are a number of areas people can go to with those complaints of bullying or harassment.

Regarding our grants process, I have tried to build that into our peak body grants of groups trying to sort out their troubles internally before it gets to that stage. There are a number of avenues available for sporting groups in that situation. Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: We recently introduced a code of conduct that has to be agreed to under the grants process, which has given us a lot more leverage than we have ever had before.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, thank you for both those comments. Most of our sporting groups are associations under the *Associations Act*. Do you see that there is any protection through the *Associations Act* for some of those groups that are doing that bullying or, in fact, can be identified as acting illegally under the *Associations Act*? Has your department sought advice on what support there is from the *Associations Act* - people like the commissioner for the *Association Act* for the Northern Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: I am sure Mr Rossingh would have something to say. Regarding that type of issue or conflict, the Department of Justice, through the Business Affairs Unit, would be able to provide assistance. I am sure we can always let people know better what services are available besides the ones I have already outlined. Through Sportsbiz, we try to talk to organisations about planning and running their organisation as a business. Through one of our other programs and through Sportsbiz, we offer that assistance. But, through the Department of Justice and the Business Affairs Unit, there could be assistance as well. Mr Rossingh might want to add something further to that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Drysdale, governance and the sustainability of all organisations is an area of significant concern to us. We put a lot of time and effort into doing what we can to assist organisations. If organisations or members of organisations come to us, we try to see where we can assist. If it is a matter of compliance, if they are incorporated under the *Associations Act*, we refer them through the Registrar, and we have a pretty good relationship there.

We provide a great number of information sessions. We ran public sessions this year through the Australian and New Zealand Sports Law Association advising on governance generally. We have had other information sessions for sports with governance experts make presentations. The key is to making sure that both members of corporations and boards/committees of corporations understand what their rights and obligations are, and then how to go about things if they feel those rights and obligations are not being met.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you. Minister, is there anyone in your department who has the teeth to take any action to pull any sporting body back into line when they are stepping out of line, because ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I ask you to clarify whether we are on Output No 4.3, which is about Facilities and Events. If the member for Drysdale wanted to pursue the line of questioning he is regarding sporting organisations and issues to do with sporting organisations, he should have done that questioning in Output Group 4.0, which was where you had the broad questions. We are on Output 4.3, which is ...

Mr BOHLIN: That is fine, thank you. I will point that out in a second. I will clarify that for you in a second.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Drysdale, you are exercising quite a bit of latitude here. You are talking about governance. If you can get to the point very quickly, that would be good.

Mr BOHLIN: Right, thank you. Let us get to that then, minister. Twice under your reign as the minister, facilities have been hampered and impeded by sporting groups through poor governance practices that are otherwise controlled by the association, but they are under sporting organisations for which you are the minister. Have you not referred, or considered referring, any of these poor governance practices to the commissioner for the *Associations Act* of the Northern Territory, to have these matters nipped in the bud properly and dealt with so our facilities can get back to being used for our kids? Have you missed the fact that the commissioner has a significant role to play in actually policing the *Association Act*?

Mr HAMPTON: I believe we have answered the question, but I will repeat it. We have gone through a process of what we try to do to mediate, to get people to talk and to resolve their issues before we have to go to the commissioner. In a couple of cases I know, we have been able to do that. In going further, we have commissioned a few reviews into some of those sports, and those reviews have given us a way forward with regard to the best interests of the sport, particularly for the younger athletes.

Mr Rossingh, I am not sure if you want to add anything. I believe we have answered that. We have outlined the process, what we try to do to mediate and help those organisations sit down around the table and talk, and move forward in the best interests of the sport. There is nothing further to add.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, those two occasions - if they are the same ones - were where associations or peak bodies controlling the facilities have locked out, pushed out, other sporting groups that were previously under them, at times in clear breaches of the *Associations Act*. Your department has been fully aware of them. On both occasions, they have ended up in court, and you have put your hands up, stepped back and said: 'Not my problem; I cannot have anything to do with it'. Perhaps a directive or a cup of coffee with the Justice minister or referring someone to the commissioner for *Associations Act* would have helped, where mediation has, obviously, failed. We are talking about kids getting locked out of facilities, and associations or sporting groups in court. Both times, you have put your hands up and said: 'It is not my problem'.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Madam Deputy Chair, I ask that you rule on Standing Order 114. Maybe, member for Drysdale, you should declare your conflict of interest instead of pursuing this line of questioning.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There is no point of order. There is a link to facilities but, member for Drysdale, the minister has answered. You have asked the question a number of times.

Mr HAMPTON: It is repetitious.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is becoming repetitious.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is what Standing Order 114 is; repeating the same question, even though the minister has answered the question.

Mr BOHLIN: Madam Deputy Chair, I say the minister has not answered the question, and I was asked to clarify ...

Ms Scrymgour: You are not satisfied with the answer.

Mr BOHLIN: If you are happy to say that he has, I am happy to leave it at that. We will just make sure everyone knows that the minister did not.

Ms Scrymgour: And you should declare your conflict of interest.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arafura!

Mr BOHLIN: Madam Deputy Chair, would that member like to explain their comments, or would she like to withdraw her comments?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arafura, I ask you not to interrupt. If we could move forward on further comments on Output 4.3, member for Drysdale, or are we finished?

Mr BOHLIN: No, I am fine, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, you had some questions?

Mr WOOD: I do. Minister, in relation to Marrara, I start off by saying Marrara No 2 is far worse than Marrara No 1. What are you going to do to Marrara No 2? It was a rice paddy last year.

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of ...

Mr WOOD: To fix it up. It was an oval facility.

Mr HAMPTON: At the AFL?

Mr WOOD: Absolutely. It was dreadful; it was just mud. I do not know whether there are any plans to do some upgrades on it. Sometimes the oval was shortened because it was in such a terrible state. I do not know whether much emphasis has been placed on Marrara No 1. Marrara No 2 is used just as much and has lights. Has there been any thought of doing an upgrade to bring it up to a better standard?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, as part of our agreement with the AFL. I take on board the priorities of AFLNT and they have had a large say in where much of that money goes in infrastructure at Marrara Nos 1 and 2. As you said, we have lights up at Marrara No 2 because of the need to get junior football playing there, particularly over the Wet Season and having children out there during the Wet Season all day. The lights at Marrara No 2 have been good but the priority for the AFLNT has been Marrara No 1 in regard to refurbishing their administration offices. I visited there before the refurbishments were completed and it was a real hazard for workers. At the end of the day, it is up to the AFLNT to come to me to say what their priorities are.

Mr WOOD: In relation to the Marrara No 1, you have said they are going to use a spiking machine. I have had experts in greenkeeping say perhaps the wrong species was put there. We had a very long Wet Season where there was very little sun; the species of grass grown is a subtropical species and is more used to longer periods of sun. There was also talk about thatching, and about whether the drains were blocked. What work was done to ascertain the real problems on Marrara No 1?

Mr HAMPTON: I visited the oval during the height of its problems. We had an independent person look at the drains. The advice I received was it was not the drains that were being blocked. We now have a new contractor to look after and maintain the oval with the right equipment to do the job properly. I hope, come this footy season, we are not going to have the same issues. I do not know if Mr Rossingh will want to add anything further to that, but that is the background I know.

Mr WOOD: I was going to ask who is responsible for the contractor.

Mr HAMPTON: We are - the Northern Territory government.

Mr WOOD: Have you looked at employing a fully-qualified greenkeeper because you have a \$1m oval and surface. Geriatric umpire as I am, I have run around that oval many times. Coming from a background of horticultural science, I did turf many years ago. I would see areas of weeds coming up in that oval which meant there was no one with a sense that this oval needs to be world class - top class. No one was saying there was an outbreak of weed. If you have someone there with ownership of that facility from the point of view of top-quality greensmanship ...

Mr HAMPTON: I might give that to Mr Rossingh to answer.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Nelson, we are fortunate that, for just over two years, the manager for the facilities is a qualified greenkeeper. He worked on sandbelt golf courses in Victoria before coming to us. He was able, prior to the last Wet Season, to diagnose the issues. They ended up being much more severe than we thought. Then the prolonged Wet Season exacerbated that situation. I have total faith in his abilities to diagnose the issue. He knows what to do and which equipment needs to be used. The focus is definitely on getting No 2, if not as good as No 1, pretty close to it. We know it needs to be upgraded.

Mr WOOD: There are two cricket, two Aussie Rules, two Rugby League, two Rugby Union and two soccer grounds there. That is 10 ovals or pitches, plus the car parking areas. Does the greenkeeper and his workers maintain all those facilities?

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Nelson, yes, his main job is to manage the contractors engaged to do that. He meets with them weekly, they look at the work program each week, and he provides them with advice and takes advice from them as well, to ensure the whole program is delivered.

Mr WOOD: He is employed by you, not by the contractor?

Mr ROSSINGH: The manager is employed by us. He is a qualified greenkeeper, but he has a broader responsibility than just managing that grounds maintenance contract for the Marrara, Richardson, and Fannie Bay surfaces. He has more jobs than that, but this is something that is outsourced to a contractor. His job is to manage the contract and ensure it is being delivered properly.

Mr WOOD: Just a couple of questions a bit further away than Marrara. Does your department give any grants to upgrade community ovals? I have been into the southern Barkly and I have not seen one blade of grass. I visited Windy Hill at Ampilatwatja. Yes, it has a bit of salt bush on it and that is about it. Is there any movement by the department to spend some money to help these communities have a little better facility than they have at the moment?

Mr HAMPTON: Absolutely. Our facility grants are annual grants and that would be an asset of the Barkly Shire. We encourage the shires ...

Mr WOOD: They would not have enough money.

Mr HAMPTON: The facility grant is up to \$50 000, which may not sound like a lot of money. In working with the shires, we need to sit down with them and work our way through a plan. We would be happy to do that for their sporting needs.

Mr WOOD: The other question that was raised with me when I was out bush - and this was from a cattle station - is too many football carnivals, meaning (1) people are not turning up for work on a cattle station, and (2) kids are not turning up for school. Does your department have a policy, or is it looking at this issue to see whether there can be some common sense brought back to the footy carnivals, which appear to be mainly in Central Australia? It seems to be having a very detrimental effect. In fact, I heard the other day that one football carnival was on for, I do not know what period of time, but only three kids turned up at school.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, as a local member of a large bush electorate, I can relate to that issue. It is not one that the department of Sport and Recreation can have a direct role in. It is one, across all government, we need to sit down and talk about with the communities. Many of these carnivals, from my own experience, are funded through their own money for prize money; often it is through the community stores. I am not sure if Outback Stores has helped deal with those issues. The prize money is very high in many of these carnivals, which attracts teams from all over, even from South Australia and Western Australia.

We need to tackle it on a number of fronts: with education, with the community and maybe Sport and Recreation ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, that is what I was going to say. You would not see yourself taking a lead role with the department of Education and, perhaps, talking to Outback Stores and saying it is all very well but, if the kids cannot read and write, there is not much point going to school; they may as well just play football all day?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, we have taken a lead role. We did some work with Yuendumu through our Indigenous Sports Officers, and in Tennant Creek as well, in looking at how we can better organise these sporting events and ensure they are done on time and not impacting on school attendance.

We have done a bit of work on it, but probably not enough. It is one, as a local member, I am concerned about, particularly regarding school attendance. I am happy to take that away and do a bit more work on it.

Mr WOOD: It was not just school. The cattle station I stayed at books a helicopter for Monday and 'Sorry, boss we cannot turn up'. The helicopter is worth, I think, \$7 per minute. There are employment issues as well.

Mr HAMPTON: If you look at the shires as well, in their workforce, there would be issues there. It is an issue, and we need to do more work on it.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. That is all, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration then of Output 4.3.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY
Output Group 5.1 – Environment Protection Authority

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move on to Output Group 5.0, Environment Protection Authority, Output 5.1, Environment Protection Authority.

Mr CHANDLER: Given we have 50 minutes without encroaching on Alice Springs Transformation Plan and ICT services, I am hoping, with the help of the member for Nelson, we can move through EPA, Territory Wildlife Park, and Climate Change as quickly as we possibly can.

Minister, first, through you, I pass on my sincere thanks to Andrew Tupper, the outgoing Chair of the EPA. Andrew did a marvellous job taking EPA from its modest start, including being criticised by me originally.

Mr WOOD: And his secretary. What is her name?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, I also thank Jacinta, who has been an absolute stalwart. Together, they have seen the organisation grow and, now, value adding to the work of government. I also welcome Professor Grahame Webb in his appointment as the new Chair. I wish him well - all the best in fact - maintaining and growing the organisation.

My first question: was that particular position advertised?

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Brennan. I start by joining you in thanking Dr Andrew Tupper for the fine job he did during his tenure. He certainly did take on a big workload when the organisation was evolving. It will continue to evolve. I place on the public record my thanks to him as well, and welcome Grahame Webb to that position.

In the process to getting there, I will again hand over to Jacinta Stanford, and welcome her to the Estimates Committee as well.

Ms STANFORD: Jacinta Stanford, Acting Executive Director, EPA. Member for Brennan, there was an expression of interest process held last April which elicited several expressions of interest in being board members. The appointment of the chair is actually at the discretion of the minister under the act, so the position of chair, as such, is not advertised.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, can you please provide a further update on the Alcan investigation in regard to petrol spills and the alumina spills?

Mr HAMPTON: For the detail of the Alcan Gove aluminium incident, I will hand over to Jacinta again, just to give the EPA's response.

Ms STANFORD: The EPA's alumina investigation was what we termed a watching brief. What that actually means is the EPA Board receives regular updates from the parties involved and draws conclusions at their meetings as to whether or not a final advice to the minister is warranted. They take into account things like the public interest factors involved.

In relation to the alumina incident, it was determined the advice that was actually being provided to the minister for Resources covered most of the issues the EPA would like to draw out of that incident, and so we did not proceed to final advice on that matter. There is a report that the board has that remains in-house in relation to that incident. The board rule is cognisant of the issue surrounding that incident, and they will continue to keep those in mind in relation to further incidents of that nature.

In relation to the petrol spill incident, we did proceed to final advice to the minister. That final advice is available on the EPA website.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Will the report in regard to the alumina spill be made public at any stage?

Ms STANFORD: No. The EPA only makes public its final advice to the minister. The reasoning behind that is there is much more expense involved in generating the final advice. If we do not feel there is public

value in proceeding to final advice, if things are actually proceeding through the regular channels then, generally speaking, the EPA makes the decision not to provide the final advice.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, could you please provide an update through the EPA on the Darwin Harbour Port Authority investigation?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I will ask Jacinta Stanford to respond.

Ms STANFORD: Member for Brennan, once again, the report is on the terms of reference we have actually been able to close off as such, and is on the EPA website. The nature of the terms of reference remaining are such that they will comment on the investigation process of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport. Because that is currently a matter of prosecution, we are not prepared to release the report as yet. There is some concluding advice on particular elements of that incident available on the EPA website.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, the EPA is reviewing the EIS process. Are you able to provide an update at this stage in regard to how that is going?

Mr HAMPTON: Ms Stanford.

Ms STANFORD: The EPA provided a final advice, again, to the minister, on the environmental impact assessment process. The minister is currently, through his department, responding to that advice through public consultation held last year and, I believe, a review of several acts.

Mr CHANDLER: That advice has been made public?

Ms STANFORD: Yes, that advice has been made public and, once again, that is on the website.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, my understanding is the Ranger uranium mine is considering using an acid leach process at its mine in Jabiru. Can you advise whether you will be instructing the EPA to investigate this particular process?

Mr HAMPTON: I do not instruct the EPA to ...

Mr CHANDLER: You can, though.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, in their independence and the *Environmental Protection Authority Act*, there can be third parties who can ask them to investigate. That particular project has to go through an environmental assessment process. That is the process where I certainly would be involved. I do not know if Mr Grant wants to add to that.

Mr GRANT: I believe the EPA is then free to review our processes once that is done the proper way.

Mr CHANDLER: I am getting through a few of these; I have done some culling.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You have the call, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, the practice of hydraulic fracturing is now being used in other jurisdictions. Unfortunately, there is evidence fracturing has led to natural gas entering aquifers, potentially destroying water supplies forever. Appreciating we have a different subsoil structure in the Northern Territory to other jurisdictions, should the practice gain momentum, would you consider encouraging the EPA to investigate this process?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not aware of that occurring in the Northern Territory. I believe they would come under some sort of management plan - whether it be a mine management or a licensed condition. So ...

Mr CHANDLER: I suggest that it go through an EIS process.

Mr HAMPTON: I am not too sure about that; it possibly could. However, if it is occurring within a heavy industry, then there should be some licensing condition applied to it. We are looking at a new licensing regime - I announced that last year - as well as harmonisation of on-and-off mining tenements.

There is much reform happening in that area, but in relation to that particular matter happening, I cannot give you a comment on that. It is a matter for the EPA as well, I suppose, to respond. I am not sure if Jacinta wants to respond to that from the EPA side. From my side, I am not aware of that happening, but we are making many reforms in on-and-off mining tenements, harmonisation, new licensing regimes, and those sorts of reforms. Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: Because groundwater is so important here, we would be taking a very rigorous look at any project like that through the system.

Mr CHANDLER: I hope the harmonisation is going to work after it has been fractured. That is all I have at the moment.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: One question in relation to the draft EIS from INPEX and their response to people's submissions. Has the EPA now a role to play in checking out the department's response to that final EIS?

Mr HAMPTON: Jacinta Stanford.

Ms STANFORD: The EPA has a role in ensuring government processes deliver appropriate outcomes in the public interest. It would be a matter for the board to determine if that was one they actually felt was worth looking further into. The secretariat undertakes work at the direction of the board. We are limited in that the notice of intent has been given after that section of the act actually came in. INPEX falls within that particular criteria, so we are not limited in that way. It is really a decision for the board.

Mr WOOD: Is it true that one of your roles is to see whether departments have carried out their functions in accordance with the act? Therefore, would you look at the department's response to the draft EIS to see whether they have given due diligence under the act in commenting on that draft EIS?

Ms STANFORD: Within the act, it would be within the board's power to determine to have a look at that and to provide advice to the minister if they considered there was significant public interest in matters.

Mr WOOD: Right. I also thank Andrew Tupper and you. I know you do a lot of work. I believe the EPA has a very important role to play.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sounds like a unanimous vote of thanks from the Estimates group.

Mr CHAIR: Have you finished with the output, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: That is it, yes.

**Answers to Questions on Notice
Nos 7.2, 7.3, 7.5, 7.6, 7.8, 7.9 and 7.12**

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Chairman, we have some questions on notice to table.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you answer them or do they need to be tabled?

Mr HAMPTON: Probably better to table them, because there are quite a few.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you please read out which numbers they are.

Mr HAMPTON: 7.9, 7.6, 7.8, 7.12, 7.2, 7.3, 7.5, and that is it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

**OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 - TERRITORY WILDLIFE PARKS
Business Line**

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case we go to Business Line, Territory Wildlife Parks, Output Group 6.0. Member for Brennan, you have the call.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, Territory wildlife parks are running at a loss of around \$1.8m a year, and when you include the community service obligations it is much more. Are you satisfied with the results, particularly in the last few years?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, as I have stated during the Parks and Wildlife Estimates hearing, many of our parks are facing challenging times coming off a global financial crisis and the strong Australian dollar. We need to continue to improve parks and infrastructure, and attractions to these parks. Government has put in a significant effort to do that. In this budget, we were very pleased to see some money for upgrades to the Territory Wildlife Park. Mr Rossingh might elaborate on that answer.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Brennan, the loss budgeted each year is a paper loss; it is not a cash loss. It comprises purely of the book entry of depreciation. The aim is to make a cash neutral position or, if possible, better, but a worse-case scenario of cash neutral. The loss is the book entry for depreciation.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, year after year we see the fall in numbers. To demonstrate, I draw your attention to Budget Paper No 3, page 250, from the 2008-09 year. The estimated visitors to the Territory Wildlife Park was 77 000, and the Alice Springs Desert Park, 91 000 visitors. In Budget Paper No 3, page 276 from the 2009-10 budget, the numbers were Territory Wildlife Park, 72 500 and the Alice Springs Desert Park, 74 500. In this year's budget papers, 2011-12, we see an estimate of 63 000 to the Territory Wildlife Park and 63 500 for the Alice Springs Desert Park. That is a dramatic reduction over the last three years - a third of total numbers.

Perhaps, in recent times, this could be attributed to the high Australian dollar and high fuel prices. However, the question needs to be asked: when was the last major investment in either park, and when was the last new ride invested in?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, the Territory Wildlife Park and the Alice Springs Desert Park are two great facilities, and it is great experience to get there. You have mentioned those challenges we have in trying to reverse the trend of those visitor numbers. I acknowledge there is a concern for government when we see those visitor numbers reducing.

In relation to the Desert Park, we have just opened the visitor information centre. If you walk around there you will see it is a fantastic facility. It is not a matter of government not putting in the effort and the resources to improve that experience; the visitor information centre is fantastic and provides people with a very modern experience and opportunities to download those stories and experience some of the beauty of the West MacDonnells before they get there.

In relation to the Territory Wildlife Park, we need to look at how we can reinvigorate that experience. We know it provides a high-quality education program for visitors and many of the schools. We need to continue to develop and promote the conservation aspects of the park as well. I am always looking at ways to improve both parks to increase visitor numbers and visitor satisfaction. I will ask Mr Rossingh to elaborate on that answer.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Brennan, I echo what the minister has said about the Alice Springs Desert Park and the new West MacDonnell Visitors Centre. We have also opened up the farm at the Desert Park which does a couple of things. It has, hopefully, turned into a community activity where people can come along and contribute to the farm. It also will provide produce to be used on the park, both as feed for animals and also, potentially, in the café. That is two major developments in Alice Springs.

In Darwin in the last couple of years, the significant new visitor experience is the Ooloo Sandbar, a presentation focusing on whip rays. It is where you can get a really good immersion experience - people can feel and touch in a guided and safe situation. That is another new experience at the Territory Wildlife Park. We also, as the minister said, have an extra \$1.5m in this budget which we have used upgrading and improving many of the existing exhibits ...

Mr WOOD: Can I just butt in there for one second? You forgot the most important animal in the Territory Wildlife Park. It does not need glasses ...

Mr ROSSINGH: The sea eagle.

Mr WOOD: The sea eagle. You would think you would be promoting it at the Estimates Committee. I am disappointed ...

Mr HAMPTON: We have two free-flying birds of prey, member for Nelson. I even named one of them.

Mr WOOD: Yes. How is the sea eagle going?

Mr CHANDLER: I was staying away from the stick rat; you should stay away from the ...

Mr WOOD: I want to know where the sea eagle is.

Mr HAMPTON: Your turn will come.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you please provide a breakdown of visitor numbers into adult, children, and separate school groups?

Mr HAMPTON: I understand we can do that but we will have to take that on notice and get that answer to you. So, you might want to repeat that question.

Question on Notice No 7.13

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you please provide a breakdown of visitor numbers into adult versus child, and separate school group numbers?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.13.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, one of the most glamorous holiday destinations in Australia - at least in their minds - is the Gold Coast. This region, just like Darwin, attracts visitors from all over the world. Even on the Gold Coast the major theme parks are reinventing themselves to ensure they grow their visitor numbers. What are we doing to reinvent our parks to provide that wow factor to again see our numbers grow? Have you considered accommodation and ecotourism as a part of that package?

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to the Territory Wildlife Park and Desert Park? Yes. We are looking at developing a new business model. I have been out there a couple of times and talked to the staff. As I said, we need to continue to build on the education, conservation, and interactive capacity of both parks. Mr Rossingh has explained some of the different experiences we have there at the moment.

We are always looking at ways in technology with the downloadable stories from the West MacDonnells; the Desert Park is another way. We need to be creative and innovative, so, absolutely, it would be bad if we did not keep trying to reinvent these parks and look at how we can attract visitors.

We are looking at the business model at opportunities to again work in with Berry Springs and the Territory Wildlife Park at how we can combine the two to make it another experience. As well as the location of Territory Wildlife Park, we will be putting a lot of money into the Litchfield National Park. We can take advantage of that whole experience with the drive through Litchfield opening up a couple of new experiences, but also linking the Territory Wildlife Park into that, as we do with the Desert Park with the West MacDonnells. I am not sure if Mr Rossingh wants to add to that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Brennan, we are also doing other things, as you say, to try to provide a different or new reason for people to come. One of the markets we possibly have not focused on sufficiently in the past but we are intending to from now on is the local market - trying to attract locals there. We have done things in Berry Springs, for example, trying to market it to local community groups by introducing recreational opportunities there. We have had the Darwin Runners & Walkers Inc club there, for example, using the circuit. We have had a disco, which was very successful. We had the DSO there a few weeks ago. We have had a little mini golf, which we call bush golf, which was very successful. We allow cycling around the paths in a very controlled and safe manner.

One of the big directions our research is telling us is tourists, especially international tourists - so we are trying to look at both the local market and then try to reinvigorate the international/interstate market. One of our big challenges has been the emergence of competition. As the minister said, there are both pluses and minuses in the Territory Wildlife Park's location. One of the challenges we have is a competitor here in Mitchell Street with Crocosaurus. We have competitors such as the waterfront offering many free activities and marketing to families. We have to try to be innovative to try to counter those things, and we are trying to do that through the things I have mentioned.

Mr CHANDLER: Given the time, I am going to pull it up there.

Mr WOOD: I will ask a more general question in relation to both parks. What is the use of both of these parks being a Government Business Division? If it is continually losing money, is it worthwhile being a GBD when it might just be a section of the department? My belief is there are disadvantages in where these two parks are. For instance - I have raised this before - they are told they have to hire their cars through the fleet, and we all know how much the fleet costs to hire. They do not have the ability to hang on to cars for 10 years. I also understand if they go below their budget - it is a very tight budget, and the way you can fix your budget is just not employ people when they go away, so they are very restricted on employment. I wonder whether there has been any discussion? In fact, it is mentioned in your challenges for the Territory Wildlife Park, in your annual report, on page 164. It says 'finalise a review of the park's future direction'. I would have thought whether it should be a GBD would be one of those things which should be reviewed.

Mr HAMPTON: You have raised some really good points, member for Nelson. I will get Jim Grant to answer some of those.

Mr GRANT: That certainly has been part of the review. Departmentally, we share some of those concerns and we will be looking very closely at the GBD status.

Mr WOOD: Minister, one of the areas - and I am no expert either, but I know the area reasonably well - which would make a difference is the completion of the sealing of the Litchfield Park Road. Is your department putting some pressure on to try to speed that up? I would have thought that one of the great day trips would have been Litchfield in the morning, Territory Wildlife Park in the afternoon, or vice versa. I have done it myself with some American tourists. The car fell apart on the way home on that section of road when it was all gravel, but it has now been sealed. Are you actually asking that the government seal that loop road?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, absolutely. I am pretty sure it is not too far away in that happening. As I said, we need to look at the broader region around the Territory Wildlife Park - and I did say Berry Springs may be an opportunity as well as Litchfield. We have just opened up a new part of Litchfield, so there are opportunities there for the whole experience. We need to look at that, and government is looking at that. The road sealing is not too far away.

Mr WOOD: We are lucky the chair of the EPA is not here at the moment. Crocodylus Park has a bus drive in to it, and Crocosaurus naturally has buses going right past its door. You speak about getting local people to go down to your parks, but the government has resisted having a public bus service to the Territory Wildlife Park. Why has it done that? Many backpackers and people who are on a limited budget would take public transport to tourism facilities; they will not go via an arranged bus company. It would also help local people have the opportunity to have a bus service back to Darwin or Palmerston. Have they given that any consideration? We already supply a bus to one park - one facility, a private facility - I do not know why we cannot do it for a government facility.

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Mr Grant to talk to that.

Mr GRANT: Again, that is a critical issue that is being covered in our review process as well. It is really pretty obvious.

Mr WOOD: The other would be - and I probably will not get smiles from the fundamentalists - there is no other park that I know has Banteng or Timor ponies, but you might get some with buffaloes. Even though it is a wildlife park, I am not sure why you cannot have an exotic - and nearly historical exotic - display of animals that have been very much part of the Territory. For better or worse, they have been part of the Territory, yet they have gone from the park.

Even now, I do not think you see any Euros (wallaroo). Do not ask me if I am wrong, I do not know whether you have Euros in the park, but there used to be. Where you walked through the park into that back lawn area, there were lots of wallabies. I was told you cannot have kangaroos there; they do not fit in with the area. However, Euros are around the Top End and tourists love them. Overseas tourists who come to our wildlife park want to see an animal that goes boing, boing, boing because that is the Australian symbol. Yet, if you go to that park, you might get a little boing, boing from a wallaby, but you do not see the big fellas.

I know the specialists and the fundamentalist people say this is the Territory Wildlife Park, but those animals could still be put into a different display that says where they come from, how they were introduced,

and what their importance was. This is the only place you are going to see some of those animals. Is there any consideration of reintroducing some of those animals into the park?

Mr GRANT: That is more an internal park matter rather than a departmental one. Essentially, what we have tried to do is differentiate the park from Crocodylus Park so we are not doubling up too much, and they have those species. That is the general thrust of it. It was to try to create two very different experiences so people would go to one and the other, rather than one or the other.

Mr WOOD: We will see how things go. Of course, I have to ask about 'me mate'. When will we see our mate up and running? He is going to be the star attraction. He was the fella on the shoulder was he not, at one stage? He was the logo for the parks. Where is the sea eagle?

Mr HAMPTON: We have all ended up with a bit of egg on our faces over that one, member for Nelson ..

Mr WOOD: Not to me, actually.

Mr HAMPTON: I can let you know that it is July.

Mr WOOD: July. Okay, I will be looking forward to that.

Mr HAMPTON: We do have another one there, Melaleuca. There was a great competition. There was a young sea eagle and it was quite popular.

Mr WOOD: Is this the one from down the track?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr WOOD: That is Melaleuca? Not Karl, Larrimah, Borroloola, or something like that?

Mr HAMPTON: No.

Mr WOOD: All right. It says in the annual report you are identifying and establishing a program to invest in equipment and plant reliability as a result of ageing infrastructure at the Territory Wildlife Park. What are you going to spend that money on? What areas are going to be upgraded?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, we did announce the \$1.5m upgrade in this year's budget. I will give that to Mr Rossingh to go through.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Nelson, there will be an upgrade to the general interpretations - explanations and education of the exhibits. There is a significant amount of \$300 000 going into the aquarium to upgrade that; painting and park housing maintenance is \$80 000; replacing the header tank, \$90 000; repairing the two-way communication system, \$49 000; monsoon forest repairs, especially to the paving and pathways, \$272 000; also the aquarium is getting a further \$100 000 air-conditioning upgrade; pathway repairs in other areas of the park, \$250 000; fire break maintenance, \$20 000; weed control, \$20 000; electrical maintenance, \$45 000; and we have left an allowance of \$270 000 for unforeseen and cyclical maintenance. That totals \$1.9m which comprises the \$400 000 which is pretty much the ongoing repairs and maintenance program plus the extra \$1.5m - which brings a total of \$1.9m. I am happy to table this for you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, you will table that?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. Happy to table that.

Mr WOOD: Just a follow-on question. In relation to the *E. coli* outbreak - I will call it that - in Berry Creek, was that proven to be related to the aviary? I gather you have done some work on that facility as well. Will you be able to give us an update as to whether it has been proven that the cause of the *E. coli* in Berry Springs was due to an outfall from the aviary, or was it some other matter?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass that question on to Mr Rossingh because there has been some work done.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Nelson, it is believed that there is a variety of reasons for the *E. coli* and *enterococci* levels in Berry Springs. It is possible that the draining of the ponds in the bird aviary could have been a contributor. That has not been proven; irrespective of that, we have taken steps. Rather than

cleaning out the pond and diverting it straight into Berry Springs, we have now reduced the size of the pond and, second, we are scooping up the faeces and other material rather than pumping it out. We are removing that as a possible cause.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. My last question: if there is a review of the park's future direction, is that going to be open for discussion or available to the public?

Mr HAMPTON: It is an internal review, but I am happy to look at taking comments from ...

Mr WOOD: Do you think it would be worth opening it up to the community and asking people if they have ideas? You had competitions to name the old sea eagle. You might get some ridiculous ones ...

Mr HAMPTON: Let us say nothing is off the table in relation to that. However, let us do the internal review and come back and have a look. Nothing is off the table.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of the Business Line, Territory Wildlife Parks, and concludes today's questions relating to the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport. Thank you very much for your time tonight.

DEPARTMENT OF CHIEF MINISTER – CLIMATE CHANGE

Output 7.1 - Climate Change

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output 7.1 – Climate Change. Do you have an opening comment?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes I do, Mr Chairman. First, I welcome Mr Phil Vivian, Chief Financial Officer and Vikki McLeod, Director of Energy Policy and Climate Change.

Coordinating the implementation of the initiatives under the Northern Territory Climate Change Policy forms a significant workload for both the Chief Minister's Department and the government as a whole. The Northern Territory Climate Change Policy has been in place for only 18 months, yet real results can be reported for more than 26 of the 40 targets. Some of the major achievements to date include: the Greening the Fleet Policy, the TelePresence secure video conferencing facility; the Climate Change Community Grants Fund; the Centre for Renewable Energy at Charles Darwin University; legislation to ban plastic bags and for Cash for Containers scheme; the Solar Champions Program, and a range of measures from the Power and Water Corporation to move to greener generation of electricity in the bush.

The shape of the emerging carbon economy will present the Territory with both challenges and opportunities. It would be entirely speculative to comment on what the effects might be until further important details have been determined by the Australian government. Such details include: the price of carbon; a compensation package with a level of household assistance; transitional assistance for emissions-intensive trade exposed industries; and the establishment of a climate change action fund. These details are not yet known, but we know consultation in the engagement is critical, and we will continue to ensure the interests of Territorians and our business community are well represented.

The Northern Territory government is committed to Greening the Territory becoming a reality which will benefit our current and future generations.

Again, I am accompanied by Vikki McLeod from the Energy Policy and Climate Change Unit of the Department of Chief Minister. Questions about energy policy should be directed to the Chief Minister, and I am happy to take questions concerning climate change. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. We are at Output 7.1, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I know you have questions.

Mr CHANDLER: I do; I have a number of questions. Minister, the other week the Prime Minister promoted her carbon tax by suggesting Kakadu would be inundated by saltwater. Do you seriously think the federal government carbon tax will prevent saltwater inundating Kakadu?

Mr HAMPTON: I welcome the Prime Minister's report. It demonstrates to us that climate change is real. I am sure there are still some sceptics out there. For the finer details of that report, I will hand over to Vikki McLeod.

Ms McLEOD: If I understand your question, are we on a track of dangerous climate change and what policy steps is the Australian government doing to avoid this climate change? Australia is a small percentage of global emissions, in the order of 1.2%. Action taken by the Australian government, as well as Northern Territory government, in a policy response, technology innovation, and playing our part, is critical. In connecting policy initiative to the final outcome, which is ensuring that greenhouse pollution remains below 450 parts per million, is defined as avoiding dangerous climate change.

Mr CHANDLER: I appreciate the answer. Minister, are you aware saltwater once inundated many parts of Kakadu?

Mr HAMPTON: The report has highlighted the increased likelihood of saltwater intrusion into the South Alligator River system due to its increased tidal pressure and levee. Regarding your evidence, I would like to see that it previously did. I do not know what you based it on.

Mr CHANDLER: That saltwater once inundated parts of Kakadu? You are not aware there is evidence in Kakadu that saltwater ...

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, the report did indicate that. Is that where you are ...

Mr CHANDLER: Yes.

Mr HAMPTON: Okay.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I started to ask this question earlier. Do you think we should be doing more to educate people about pollution and protecting our environment?

Mr HAMPTON. Absolutely, and the Climate Change Policy does that through it many actions. There are quite a number of areas where we could point to that occurring. It is important we include the younger generation. For the climate change actions, I am sure Vikki would like to add to that. The grants we provide through NRETAS.

CDL is a very important way to get kids to look at how they can be involved in Cash for Containers. There are a number of initiatives we can certainly involve the younger generation, in protecting the biodiversity of the Northern Territory. Eco-link, junior ranger programs, getting kids involved at the school level in getting knowledge of the flora and fauna and endangered species, some of the activities through the Desert Park, engaging school groups throughout the Territory Wildlife Park, are very important tools in raising that awareness amongst young children. Vikki, do you want to add anything to that? Through our climate change targets and those other initiatives I have just mentioned, there are great opportunities.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. So, you agree we should be doing more in our schools to promote our environment?

Mr HAMPTON: We are doing that as we speak through our schools environment grants. We can always do more.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. Would it surprise you to learn we have a woodworking teacher in one of our high schools teaching science and, because of their lack of scientific knowledge and experience, they are limited to conducting science experiments with chemicals no more dangerous than bicarbonate of soda? What chance do you think we have in improving students understanding of climate change, pollution, and its effect on our environment, when we limit their learning to bicarbonate of soda experiments?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not aware of that particular issue but I am more than happy to have a look at that. I suppose it is one you could have asked the minister for Education, given you are the shadow. I am not aware of that particular issue you are talking about.

However, in the actions of the Climate Change Policy, the Department of Education and Training has a number of actions they are responsible for, such as delivering green training packages in the private sector in working on a national green skills agreement, participating in a national licensing task force and contributing to vocational education and training. As well as those kids in schools, there are many opportunities through the Climate Change Policy to also look at employment and training, and educating people in those greening initiatives.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I could only assume you must be frustrated as a minister, with all these great initiatives in regard to education through a number of programs, to learn that we have some teachers in our schools who, perhaps, should not be teaching science in the first place.

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, that is a question that you should have asked the Education minister. I am not aware of the particular teacher you are talking about.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, given the recent backflips by federal Labor in regard to a CPRS, have you had to change your Climate Change Policy because, as I recall, it was based on a CPRS being introduced?

Mr HAMPTON: Certainly not that I am aware of. Maybe Vikki McLeod would like to add to that. As I said, we support a price on carbon, and those details are yet to be worked out at the federal level. I am not going to be getting into the detail of that. We are going forward with our Climate Change Policy. We have many actions there. In 18 months, we have achieved much, and we can certainly do a lot more. I am not sure if Vikki wants to add to that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before Ms McLeod answers, I remind members of Standing Orders 69 and 51, no interruption. While either the minister is talking or the member who is asking the question is talking, or one of the witnesses answering a question, I ask members, if they can, to not interrupt anyone who is speaking. Ms McLeod, you have the call.

Ms McLEOD: My only comment is an introduction of a carbon price signal into the economy makes it easier to achieve the stated targets we have. It makes it easier because private sector - or polluters effectively - can have more of a business case for switching to lower carbon intense fuels and swapping out inefficient appliances. In that respect, having a carbon price makes it easier to achieve your targets.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, do you agree that your job is made even more difficult, given the misinformation that is out there in regard to the carbon tax? We have heard today that you, as a government, cannot do modelling in regard to even finding out how much additional costs would be - whether it is to run a sporting event, run lights, run a government department - because of the additional costs, all based on the fact that not enough information has come out. We do not know how much the carbon tax is going to be set at per tonne. Does that make your job so much more frustrating and harder to do, given the misinformation or lack of information?

Mr HAMPTON: Oh no, it does not. We have our carbon policy and we have targets that make it very easy to achieve what we have set out to achieve in our Climate Change Policy. The details of a price on carbon are to be worked through at the Commonwealth level, and we have to wait for that to occur. In our Climate Change Policy, our targets are very specific. Departments have targets they have to achieve. Through the work that Vikki is doing through her unit, it is all happening in a very coordinated way, and we are achieving a lot in such a short period of time. We have our Climate Change Policy, our targets, and we are going about our business and achieving those targets.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I am certainly no scientist; today we have had very intelligent people in the room with far more knowledge about a number of issues. I heard something earlier today in regard to the Araluen Centre and the changing of what was once going to be a solar air-conditioning unit to another type of unit based on economics. We are hearing more and more now that some of the initiatives we are trying to promote and introduce are just not cost-effective. Is that providing a frustration in delivering on some of your policies?

Ms McLEOD: Just for common understanding, the introduction of a carbon price and a carbon price signal is an initiative of the Australian government. At the moment, the policy design and the architecture is being discussed at a political level with the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee. There are a number of inputs and design inputs in our discussion with the Australian government.

We have the Garnaut recommendation, so there is a recommendation for a carbon price. There are also other details such as thresholds of the amount of pollution, and also how that is passed through. We have a fair understanding the broad architecture.

What we do not understand is, effectively, what the fixed price is going to be. What we do know, because of early action by the Northern Territory in going to gas, is we will not be affected in price impact relative to the other states. For example, it is a tax on greenhouse pollution. If we take electricity, for example, Victoria has 1.3 units of pollution to every 1 unit of electricity. For the Northern Territory, we are less than 0.5 - 0.45 - so our impact is going to be quite a lot less than the other states.

The other detail we do not know is the transition package and assistance. The Australian government has already indicated they want to look at aggressive energy efficiency, so any budget, a householder, or business, for example, will have no net impact. That could be through lifting the tax-free threshold and other mechanisms. That is the detail that is going to be worked out over June and July.

Getting back to actions to reduce greenhouse emissions, you are quite right, the policy mechanism, being a market-based mechanism, is looking to drive least cost outcomes. The Araluen Centre and the solar air-conditioning – that was not a commercial product. It was what we would really say was research and development or an innovation. There is always going to be a premium cost in those types of activities. In the end with that particular project, there was not the confidence the project could proceed as they presented, so that is why it did not go ahead.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I honestly think - you are on the record here today, and the Chief Minister is certainly on the record - you will not be signing up to anything that is going to cost Territorians. Given the fact that most of what we use in the Territory is brought in from other jurisdictions - even like Victoria, which as you pointed out, has a very high ratio through the use of coal-generated power - unless we have a support package that absolutely everyone in the Territory is supported to the extent where they are not impacted by the carbon tax, then you will not be supporting this tax, I suspect.

Mr HAMPTON: As the Chief Minister has said, and Vikki has outlined very well, we will not be supporting something that disadvantages Territorians. There is still a lot of detail to be worked out of the price on carbon. We are on the public record stating we switched to gas quite some time ago. Through our climate change targets and actions, we are addressing much of those climate change issues Territory-wide through various government departments but, also, on a whole-of-government approach through Vikki's unit.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can't we just plant more trees?

Mr HAMPTON: In some of those initiatives and actions, member for Brennan, in Eco-link looking at the conservation corridor and how we best look after the biodiversity, there are areas we know are at risk, in not being managed well. Eco-link is one of these initiatives or targets in our Climate Change Policy that addresses that. I believe sometimes there is more to it than just planting trees.

Mr CHANDLER: Can you advise whether your climate change action plan has been fully costed?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Vikki McLeod to go through that a bit more. That costing, as I said, is a whole-of-government approach through Vikki's Energy Policy and Climate Change Unit. I will get Vikki to answer that regarding the budget.

Ms McLEOD: The total funding for the policy is \$33.2m over four years; that is, 2009-10 until 2012-13. That is broken down to a number of actions such as environmental grants, solar power generation, ecoBiz NT, support for the Centre for Renewable Energy, and our water tank grants and the like.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, this funding is only up to four years. Would it include recurrent funding for any particular program?

Mr HAMPTON: Vikki McLeod.

Ms McLEOD: Perhaps I will give that one to Phil.

Mr VIVIAN: Phil Vivian, Chief Finance Officer. It is funded out to the end of the forward cycle.

Mr CHANDLER: We may have solved climate change by then, you hope? Minister, ecoBiz is staffed at a cost of around \$100 000 a year. From what I can see from this program, it is very worthwhile and should be supported. Do you have any further plans for ecoBiz?

Mr HAMPTON: Vikki McLeod.

Ms McLEOD: ecoBiz is looking at energy efficiency, and the Australian government is looking at broader incentives for energy efficiency. In that context, direct grants for information become less relevant as those other programs come forward.

Mr CHANDLER: I understand that, yes.

Mr WOOD: A couple of general questions.

Mr ELFERINK: You go first, as long as we have an arrangement that I can go after you, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: My concern in much of this debate over the reduction in carbon is the reality is - I get back to how we teach kids at school; I have been to assemblies where we had a power reduction day or energy saving day - we know turning a switch off in a school does not reduce the amount of carbon being released. The figures I was given by Power and Water last year were you would have to have a 15% reduction in total electricity usage in Darwin to turn one generator off, because that is the only way you will reduce carbon in the Northern Territory. You have to reduce the number of power generation equipment that is producing the pollution.

Would a better way to approach this be like the Clyde Fenton Primary School, which had a sustainability day recently? They said: 'We have the power police at our school. They turn all the lights and all the computers off in every classroom and they fine the classroom a certain amount of money'. They save something like \$60 000 in electricity fees.

Wouldn't it be far better to say to people if you want to save some money, reduce your energy outcome? We are not always telling the truth because turning a switch off, turning an air-conditioner off - unless everyone does it so we get a 15% reduction - does not reduce carbon emissions in the Northern Territory. I get a little concerned we get people into this feel-nice business about reducing carbon when, in fact, we are not. Wouldn't it be better to say let us reduce our amount of energy and save some money in the pocket? In the end you might reduce carbon, but at least people would know the truth, rather than a feel-good truth. Do you think we are not telling people exactly where we are reducing carbon?

Mr HAMPTON: We are doing it through our Climate Change Policy on a number of fronts - through the actions and the targets. We are tackling the issues you mentioned on a number of fronts. In relation to the big emitter, we know it is savannah burning. We have the draft offsets policy to address some of those opportunities with the upcoming carbon economy. In the WALFA project, we know traditional owners on country burning off early can assist big emitters like ConocoPhillips. They are things we want to pursue even more. They are the big emitters in the Northern Territory.

In relation to the smaller stuff you were talking about, educating kids and educating households ...

Mr WOOD: I should have mentioned Channel Island Power Station and the one at Alice Springs; they must be fairly large emitters. How do we ...

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. In relation to renewables, we are looking at those, particularly in our remote towns. CoolMob and the Alice Springs Solar City are some of the things we are doing. In relation to Channel Island, perhaps Vikki would want to add something there. Our switch to gas some time ago puts us in a better position than many other places.

Mr WOOD: Minister, your Chief Minister and the previous Chief Minister have said gas is a clean form of energy. I dispute that entirely. Can you put your hand on your heart and say gas is a clean form of energy? It is not the same as nuclear, geothermal, solar or wind ...

Mr HAMPTON: Better than coal.

Mr WOOD: That is right. However, isn't it misrepresenting the fact - and I can get the figures for even the gas bottles used in the back of cars. What is it? LPG?

Mr Elferink: LPG.

Mr WOOD: Have a look at the emissions of carbon in Esso refineries in Victoria. Have a look at the emissions we have. I am getting to the point where I believe we are conning people a little in saying gas is clean. It is not clean. It is not as dirty as coal, but it is still dirty. We are saying to people: 'Turn your lights off and you will reduce carbon'. It will only happen if many of us do it, otherwise it is just a feel-good approach. Do you think we need to come out with some really - people should be intelligent enough to see what the real changes will be required to reduce carbon, not just the pretend ones.

Mr HAMPTON: We are looking at other sources of energy. You mentioned a few of those: geothermal, tidal, and wind. There was a report the other day about people living close to the wind energy windmills. They had complaints about living too close to them. I do not know. We are certainly investigating those other sources of energy, member for Nelson ...

Mr WOOD: Not all of them, but I will not go into that.

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Vikki McLeod to elaborate a bit more on what we are doing.

Ms McLEOD: Minister Hampton is correct in that the Northern Territory emissions are largely driven by savannah burning. The other part of that is energy use, of course. So, you are correct in saying there is a three-part response in reducing emissions from energy. It is energy efficiency - an aggressive energy efficiency; renewable energy; and switching to low-emission fuels. Where the clean label comes from is that the low emission is actually a technical threshold of about 0.6 intensity, as I was explaining before. Gas comes under <0.6, so that is where the clean comes from. It is technically referred to as a low-emission fuel ...

Mr WOOD: The average citizen says clean is when you wash a plate. It is not 6% of crumbs and jam on it still.

Ms McLEOD: Yes, it is a term an engineer would use, but it is not commonly known publicly. That is where it has come from. However, you are quite right; in energy efficiency there is a lot of opportunity. It does come to having to swap out inefficient appliances. Swapping out inefficient appliances is something we are looking at nationally. That comes through minimum standards and labelling, the star systems on appliances, phasing out incandescent lights, and hot water systems. These are the types of programs we are working with the Australian government and other states.

Mr WOOD: Just a couple of questions. This one is a bit long, but it relates to a question I asked in the Estimates last week. I quoted from the 2009-10 Annual Report for the Legislative Assembly:

Arising from an Energy Audit by the Office of Sustainability during the reporting period, we will investigate the potential of installing photovoltaic cells on the roof of Parliament House and, in conjunction with Power and Water, investigating the possibility of turbine wind power.

The response from Madam Speaker was - and this is a bit long:

Solar and wind power projects have been investigated. However, at this stage, both types of renewable power generation are not cost-effective. Legislative Assembly staff, in conjunction with DCI and Power and Water Corporation staff, have extensively investigated the potential of renewable solar and wind energy into the design of Parliament House. The feasibility of renewable energy is based on the investigation of: the intensity of solar radiation in Darwin; the degree of overshadowing, if any, over the proposed location of the panels; the potential energy generated from solar photovoltaic cells and wind turbines; the cost of installing solar photovoltaic cells and wind turbines; the potential for the energy savings to recoup the costs of installing the solar cells and wind turbines over 20 years ...

I might have missed a line there, sorry. No, that is right.

Although subsidies are not considered in these costs, it is not expected that the voltaic panels could even come close to a payback period of 20 years, even in the event of significant subsidies, so we are not pursuing it.

Minister, if our own Legislative Assembly, our own House that is run by the government, cannot find it is worth putting solar power and wind turbines on this building, how are we going to convince the public it is worth doing?

Mr HAMPTON: That is a long question. I recall the member for Brennan - I think he had a picture of Parliament House with all these solar panels on it a couple of years ago.

Mr WOOD: He might have, but ...

Mr Chandler: A good policy.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, that was yours, member for Brennan.

Mr WOOD: If we cannot do it on top of this building because they are saying it will not pay for itself, are we telling the consumer who put in solar - and I am not against people putting solar panels on their roof; I would be happy if you could get them on roofs in Darwin. Do we really tell people the full cost; for instance, the life of the solar panels? How much carbon was used in the manufacture of those solar panels? How much carbon was used in the transport of those solar panels? If we are talking about carbon reduction, we would have to look at whole-of-life, from when it was manufactured, where it was manufactured, what its life is, and its replacement cost.

Are we being honest with the citizens of the Northern Territory, or anywhere, when we come to carbon reduction by saying we are using renewable energy sources? Fine, I have no problem with that, but can someone come up to me and say my solar panels actually caused a reduction in carbon emissions, whole-of-life? I would be happy to find out if someone has an answer.

Mr HAMPTON: I think Vikki may have an answer to a very long, complex question.

Mr WOOD: It is important, because we do not want a pretend energy policy.

Mr ELFERINK: The answer is clearly, yes.

Mr HAMPTON: We are committed to being carbon neutral by 2018 as a government, and there are many other areas we can do that in Greening the Fleet, reducing our fleet numbers, and using smaller cars.

Mr WOOD: No, use more diesel.

Mr HAMPTON: That is right. I will give it to Vikki and she can give you a bit of an answer.

Ms McLEOD: I do not know the date of that report; it was before my time. What is important, particularly with solar PV, is that it is rapidly reducing in cost - effectively 5% per annum. We have seen a rapid reduction, and even the industry is quite surprised at how quickly it is reducing. It does become relevant in what year that costing was done. In renewable energy technology, solar PV is the most expensive of the commercial technologies. Wind is a lot cheaper, but in the Northern Territory we do not have a very good wind resource. It is not like Victoria ...

Mr Wood: It would be okay on sitting days here.

Mr Hampton: On the other side.

Ms McLEOD: Regarding your other questions, life cycle of PV, again, it is a fairly recent product, but it is usually 20 to 25 years.

Mr WOOD: Aluminium frames?

Ms McLEOD: As we were saying, the price is reducing quite rapidly, and we are getting to what they call grid parity. The cost of buying a PV panel, the electricity that you do not buy from the grid, is starting to match the retail cost of the electricity - it is about what electricity you can generate if you put it on the roof. We are also seeing it is householders who have a higher income who are more in a position and also want to do something about climate change. But it is still an expensive technology so, at this stage, I do not think that regulating it or requiring it - it is about providing information so householders can make that choice; those who have a disposable income and are in a position to be able to purchase them.

Mr WOOD: Do you put out a document that says if you are to buy a solar panel, the aluminium will cost this much in carbon emissions ...

Ms McLEOD: Oh, sorry, that was the other part of your question. There was a paper done by Dr Muriel Watt of the University of New South Wales. The concept was of a breeder panel. If you had one PV panel, you could actually produce seven generations; that is, the life cycle cost – which is low – in that it could produce another seven panels. Does that make sense?

Mr WOOD: I might try to get hold of that. I know that I have asked a long question, and John is asking for the last question.

Mr ELFERINK: What do we have – 15 minutes to go?

Mr Giles: We were supposed to finish 15 minutes ago.

Mr ELFERINK: In that case, I will ask one question. Minister, you referred to your draft offsets policy. Can you table that?

Mr HAMPTON: It is out there for public, as far as I know. It is on the website, it should be out there.

Mr ELFERINK: I am blaming him. He was the one who told me to ask that question.

Mr HAMPTON: You should have asked the member for Brennan.

Mr Chandler: Yes, I have one.

Mr ELFERINK: He has a copy; in which case, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, we have concluded consideration of Output 7.1, Climate Change. Thank you very much for coming in tonight, I realise you have waited around a long time to come forward.

DEPARTMENT OF CHIEF MINISTER – CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Output 7.2 - Alice Springs Transformation Plan

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move on to Output 7.2, Alice Springs Transformation Plan, and I believe there is a change of witnesses. Minister, do you have an opening statement?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I do, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr HAMPTON: The Northern Territory government is working in partnership with the Australian government to make fundamental and lasting improvement to the lives of Aboriginal residents and visitors in Alice Springs, particularly in town camps, and to reduce homelessness through housing and infrastructure upgrades and provision of suitable support services.

The Alice Springs Transformation Plan demonstrates an extensive and ongoing commitment with more than \$150m invested under three key areas dealing with social issues, transforming town camps, and reducing homelessness. The Alice Springs Transformation Plan is built on the premise that residents of Alice Springs town camps should enjoy living standards comparable to other Alice Springs residents, and visitors should be able to access a safe place to stay.

I am pleased to report that the Alice Springs Transformation Plan is achieving real progress to the community. The plan is helping to remodel the town camps to bring them to the standards of any other suburb. It is providing decent infrastructure such as roads, power, water, sewerage and drainage, improved street lighting and better community services. The Trucking Yards town camp recently had 18 new street lights connected to the community, new main connections, power lines and reticulated connections to homes.

With four new accommodation facilities and 85 new homes, an extra 500 beds will be available for residents and visitors to Alice Springs. To date, 34 of the planned 85 new houses have been built in the town camps and a further 35 are under way. In addition, 77 of the 134 re-builds or refurbishments of

existing houses on town camps have been completed and 20 are under way. These projects are providing jobs with 53% Indigenous employment as part of the housing and infrastructure workforce.

A working group has been established to enable home ownership on town camps. Considerable effort is being made by town camp residents in naming roads to enable the delivery of postal services to town camps.

More than \$18m is being spent on expanded social services support programs in key areas of alcohol rehabilitation, early childhood services, domestic violence, improved patrolling services and tenancy management in town camps. These programs are aiming to make a difference on the social pressures in the community.

The Safe and Sober program is just one program working with a caseload of 350 clients to help deal with the devastating effects of alcohol abuse. In addition, two alcohol licences have been bought back and a further buy-back is under negotiation.

Four accommodation facilities have opened, aiming to make a difference on homelessness and create new safe places for people to stay in Alice Springs, including a 150-bed facility and the recently opened 28 unit managed transitional accommodation complex.

The Alice Springs Transformation Plan is about changing people's life chances and providing greater opportunities. There is still more to be done but early results are already making a fundamental difference.

I welcome to the Estimates Committee Tracey Brand, Manager of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan, and Mr Rob Kendrick, Acting Executive Director of the Southern Region. The climate has changed. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there questions to Output 7.2, Alice Springs Transformation Plan?

Mr GILES: Yes, I will ask a question. Thank you, Ms Brand, for your briefing in Alice Springs a month or two ago. Minister, why was the liquor licence at Hoppy's Cash Store bought with money from the Alice Springs Transformation Plan when that was supposed to be devoted to enhancing social support services?

Mr HAMPTON: That was Commonwealth dollars, and it was on the premise of the devastating effects we are seeing from alcohol, particularly takeaway, in places like Charles Creek and Hoppy's in Alice Springs. If they were to apply for a liquor licence today, given what they are selling, they probably would not be eligible for a liquor licence. I am happy to ask Tracey Brand to answer in more detail why that came through the Alice Springs Transformation Plan.

Ms BRAND: Member for Braitling, the buy-back was not used from the \$25m under Strategy One. There was an additional \$1.5m that FaHCSIA had provided for the Northern Territory government for this purpose.

Mr GILES: Did it cost \$1.5m to buy back Hoppy's?

Ms BRAND: No.

Mr GILES: How much did it cost to buy back?

Ms BRAND: It is commercial-in-confidence.

Mr GILES: What was the other store that was bought back?

Ms BRAND: BP.

Mr GILES: You probably should say your name.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, you have to say your name, sorry Tracey. Then I will say, Tracey Brand.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There are two things there: (1) I should have asked you to say your name, so apologies for that; (2) after the initial question goes through the minister, the standing orders allow consequential question on that same issue to go directly to the witness.

Mr GILES: You are asleep on the job, Mr Chairman.

Mr HAMPTON: It is 10.20 pm. It has been a long week-and-a-half; everything is working.

Mr GILES: I know Hansard will come down and crack the whip. How much did we pay for the BP store licence buy-back?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Braitling, Ms Brand has said that it is commercial-in-confidence.

Mr GILES: How much have liquor sales decreased at Northside because the Hoppy's Cash Store liquor licence was bought?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not aware of that. That might be an output group for the minister for Licensing. I do not know if that question was asked of the minister

Mr GILES: In reality, minister, all the things under the transformation plan come under someone else's portfolio. If you cannot answer any questions, it is pointless me asking you any questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Operational things can be asked of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan. However, if you get down to a certain level of detail, that would be under a different output. There are a whole range of questions ...

Mr GILES: Mr Chairman, just rethink that. The opening statement spoke about \$150m and about the number of men at work on town camps, housing refurbishments, liquor licence buy-backs, and a whole range of other things. If it is in the opening statement surely I can ask a question on it?

Mr CHAIRMAN: And you have, and they have been answered, to a degree, until you got to a question where it was in another output.

Mr Elferink: That is cute!

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, that is what happened

Mr HAMPTON: It happens at all Estimates.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Nineteen questions were answered in a row, then you got to one about liquor sales, which we know is under the minister for Licensing.

Mr GILES: In reality, he is the minister for transformation plan with no money expended to it, so he cannot do anything because it comes under other people. The point is if you buy a liquor licence back at Hoppy's camp store, and there is a liquor shop right next door a fair and reasonable question to ask is how much has alcohol sales decreased in that shopping complex when there are two next to each other and one shuts down?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is a very reasonable question. I did not rule it out. All we are saying is the Minister for Alcohol Policy ...

Mr HAMPTON: It is a good question, but the Minister for Alcohol Policy would have ...

Mr GILES: You are not over the brief because you do not know ...

Mr HAMPTON: No, no, it is not that, member for Braitling.

Mr GILES: It was under the transformation plan so if you are not going to answer questions we may as well give up ...

Mr HAMPTON: The minister for Licensing would have those details.

Mr GILES: If you are not going to answer questions on that, we may as well give up, because everything else comes under different output areas under different ministers. If you are not over your stuff ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is your decision, member for Braitling, if you choose not ask questions at the output.

Mr HAMPTON: Do other members have questions?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, member for Nelson, do you have a question?

Mr ELFERINK: After you, Gerry. I got such a good go last time, I will trust you this time.

Mr WOOD: All right. The Gap Youth Centre, which I have been interested in during the times I have visited, received \$1.5m. Does that mean the Gap Youth Centre will be open longer hours and have a more sustainable management than it has previously? We noticed last year the manager said he only had a one-year contract. Have things changed to put the Gap Youth Centre on a longer-term plan so it can be sustainable and people can have faith the place will stay open?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, the Gap Youth Centre has a long history. When I used to live across the road I used to go there myself in the 1970s. In recent times it has struggled. It has been under administration previously and, now, the governance of the organisation had another look at that. They have recently appointed someone as general manager. They get funding from a number of areas. My department of Sport and Recreation provides funding in the vicinity of \$40 000; we have provided some funding through the boxing program for a new ring. They receive much funding from the Commonwealth also.

In relation to the ASTP, the process is for the social package, the \$50m, there is a joint steering committee made up of representatives from Tangentyere, the Alice Springs Town Council - the Mayor is on that. They assess these applications. I hand over to Tracey Brand to talk in more detail about the Gap Youth Centre funding.

Ms BRAND: The answer to your question is yes, it will have expanded services and expanded hours for young people to access that facility. It will not only be for young people, but it will also be a community centre, which means people within the neighbourhood of The Gap Youth Centre and those town camps and Aboriginal Hostels in close proximity will be able to utilise services which will be delivered from that facility during the day.

Mr WOOD: One other question that interests me. You have here over \$0.5m for the extension of the Alice Springs Town Council dog control program on town camps for a further two years. What magic wand are you going to put over the town camps - I know this is a really difficult issue and is also a health issue - to bring dog numbers under control? This is not only in those town camps; many of the communities I visited on the Plenty Highway have dogs everywhere, and they come under councils too. What is this program going to try to achieve, and has it had any success up until now?

Mr HAMPTON: The program has made a significant difference. All of the town camps now have a two-dog policy. They are working closely with the town council rangers ...

Mr GILES: Two dogs per?

Mr HAMPTON: A two dogs per house policy, yes. There is also a very good program of vaccinations, de-sexing, treatment of dogs ...

Mr WOOD: Are they registered?

Mr HAMPTON: And registrations. Tracey, do you want to add anything? It has been a very successful program. As you said, there are very important environmental health outcomes for children and old people particularly who, in the past, had to deal with many of those dogs. In fact, there have been of a couple of coronials from Hidden Valley Town Camp as well. Tracey Brand has some more to add.

Ms BRAND: Member for Nelson, as the minister indicated, it has been a very successful program. Thus far, we have had 170 dogs microchipped and registered through the dog control program. The town council is very active in engaging with the residents in having these dogs registered. We have an arrangement with Centrelink that allows the members to have their dogs registered through a Centrepay arrangement.

Mr WOOD: Has there been a large number of dogs removed permanently from the town camps?

Ms BRAND: Yes.

Mr WOOD: And that has made a lot of difference?

Ms BRAND: Indeed, it has.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you for that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: I realise we still have IT to go. I do not want suck oxygen out of that important area.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes then ...

Mr GILES: Actually, I do have one other question.

Mr HAMPTON: He is finished, isn't he? He did not want to ask any.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will allow some flexibility for the member for Braitling.

Mr GILES: As the member for Braitling, not the shadow minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Okay.

Mr GILES: It has been more than 18 months since ANZAC High was closed. It is now a Youth Hub. How many youths went through there in the last calendar year 2010?

Mr HAMPTON: Through the Youth Hub?

Mr GILES: Yes. At the Youth Hub as known at ANZAC High School.

Mr HAMPTON: Not wanting to be difficult, but that is another output area, member for Braitling.

Mr GILES: I thought you might be able to answer ...

Mr HAMPTON: In education, I suppose that would have been a question for the Education minister, but ...

Mr GILES: Minister, you talk about the Youth Hub as part of the transformation plan, of which you are the minister.

Mr HAMPTON: No, it is part of the Youth Action Plan.

Mr GILES: You talk about this Youth Action Plan, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are in the Alice Springs Transformation Plan.

Mr GILES: Is that part of the transformation plan, or it is not?

Mr HAMPTON: No, no, it is not. The Youth Hub has been a very important transition ...

Mr GILES: How many have been ...

Mr ELFERINK: It is not in the output group.

Mr GILES: How many have been through it?

Mr HAMPTON: I cannot give you the numbers, but in coordination of the Youth Hub, the whole idea of the Youth Hub was to get organisations to work better together - in Children and Family Services, the police, and education - offering alternative programs ...

Mr GILES: At the Youth Hub, is there not a residential component where some youths could stay there?

Mr HAMPTON: No, that was announced in this year's budget. That is to build the residential facility. That is not operating at the moment at ANZAC High.

Mr GILES: But ANZAC High has been shut for coming up to two years. What has been happening there?

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, in integrating government offices and departments, intervening and helping families, family group conferencing, and early intervention with families. That is the whole idea of the Youth Hub; providing a one-stop shop to help those families – kids who are falling out of the system.

Mr GILES: It would be fair to say that the Labor government has shut a school to put in bureaucrats?

Mr HAMPTON: Absolutely not! What we have done is create the Centralian Middle School. Many of the students who had previously gone to ANZAC are now at Centralian Middle School. Centralian Middle School is seeing record numbers of enrolments ...

Mr GILES: I am not talking about Centralian Middle School. I am talking about the actual facility at ANZAC High.

Mr HAMPTON: As I have said, it is a one-stop shop. It is where we have integrated different parts of Children and Family Services to help children who are not engaged in education, who need ...

Mr GILES: Who would be the minister who could tell me how many youth have been through that?

Mr HAMPTON: The Education minister.

Mr GILES: All right, so it is not a youth program, it is a school program now.

Mr HAMPTON: There are many different parts to the Youth Hub, member for Braitling; many elements to it. It encompasses child protection services, education, police, youth, and sport and recreation, so there are a number of elements to the Youth Hub.

Mr GILES: Sounds like it is just a maze of mystery that no one can really understand.

Mr HAMPTON: I think you need a briefing. I know the member for Nelson has been there, and ...

Mr GILES: I have asked to go there; I was not allowed.

Mr HAMPTON: I do not know about that ...

Mr WOOD: You just walk in.

Mr GILES: Well, I was not allowed.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has just invited you ...

Mr HAMPTON: I have invited you to come down ...

Mr GILES: Anyway, it seems like a farce, but let us get on to IT.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 7.2, Alice Springs Transformation Plan. Thank you very much for coming all this way and staying here this late to answer questions to the transformation plan. I appreciate you taking the time.

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

Output 8.1 – Information and Communication Technology Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you have an opening statement?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes I do, Mr Chairman. The ICT policy portfolio is not associated with a separate budget output, and the resources allocated to achieve portfolio objectives are included within the Information and Technology Services output in the Department of Business and Employment. The portfolio includes responsibilities for whole-of-government Information and Communications Policy, development of e-services, telecommunications, and broadcasting. The Territory government has created a separate portfolio for ICT policy because of the strategic importance of information and communications technology.

These rapidly developing technologies have the potential to transform government administration and service delivery, business and industry, but also the way citizens access information and communicate with each other and with government.

My colleague, the Minister for Business and Employment, has responsibility for the operational aspects of Information and Communications Technology Services, including the management of whole-of-government ICT service contracts, the NT government Data Centre and ICT security.

Under the federal arrangements, the Commonwealth government has prime policy, legislative and regulatory responsibility for telecommunications and broadcasting and, consequently, the prime funding responsibility. As a result, the significant part of the role of the Northern Territory government ICT policy portfolio is that of identifying Territory issues and needs, ensuring the Commonwealth government minister is aware of those issues and needs and takes them into account in formulating and delivering Commonwealth policy and programs.

Information and Communications Technology is a key priority for the Northern Territory, both because of the challenges of communication across the vast distances of the Northern Territory, and also because of the potential of ICT to contribute to increased productivity in the economy, and to innovation more generally. Improving access to and use of technology, particularly information and communications technology, is an important element of the *Territory 2030* strategic plan.

One of my objectives as minister has been to use NT ICT resources in a strategic way to attract significantly greater Commonwealth and private-sector funding to address Territory priorities. In the last few years, we have leveraged \$22m of Northern Territory government telecommunications funding to secure \$130m investment, including Australian government and private-sector funding to address the needs in the Northern Territory. This includes a \$70m fibre-optic link now under construction connecting Darwin and Alice Springs with Brisbane and Adelaide under the Australian government's Black Spot program. For the first time, many Territorians will be able to enjoy the benefits of competitive broadband services. We also secured funding of \$7m under the Australian government's Digital Regions Program to deliver broadband capacity and telemedicine to 17 of our 22 growth towns; the successful Territory government bid for \$2.2m of Australian government funding under the National Partnership Agreement to deliver free public Internet access to 40 of our remote communities; and the completion of the \$35m Arnhem fibre link connecting nine communities in the Top End for the first time, providing broadband services comparable to services we enjoy in Darwin.

One of the key priorities of this portfolio is the development of the electronic services delivery in the Northern Territory, especially in the areas of e-health, e-learning, and e-government support to business. Obviously, such development can only take place in close partnership with relevant portfolio agencies.

As a Territorian who lives in the region and an MLA of a bush electorate, I am proud to say the Territory leads the country in development of e-health records. Our successful bid under the Digital Regions Program will see electronic health records extended to be used in our growth towns, as well as the use of digital communications for remote diagnostics.

Mr Chairman, I look forward to responding to members' questions. I also acknowledge Mr Graham Symons from the Department of Business and Employment to take on questions of the Estimates Committee as well.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions on Output 8.1, Information and Communication Technology Services?

Mr GILES: Minister, what has been the growth in the last year of greenhouse gas emissions from the ICT sector owned or operated by the Northern Territory government?

Mr HAMPTON: I will ask Mr Symons to answer that.

Mr SYMONS: Graham Symons, Chief Executive, Department of Business and Employment. The question probably strictly comes under minister Knight because it is operations. Data Centre would be the biggest one. Tomorrow night we can provide that answer for you, if you like.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. Put that on notice?

Mr GILES: No, I will just take it myself. I will ask it differently. Minister, what has been the greenhouse gas emissions from the ICT sector as a proportion of global total emissions in the Northern Territory in the last financial year?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will give that a number.

Mr GILES: No, that is not on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. Sorry.

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Yes, that would also come under minister Knight as an operational question.

Mr GILES: I just need some clarification because I understand this is ICT policy and under, minister Knight, it is ICT for the government.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I thought that was explained in the opening comments. Since minister Knight is ICT ...

Mr HAMPTON: Responsible for operations.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am not sure if you are actually putting the right things in the right column still. Basically, what you said then is correct, but ...

Mr GILES: No, I am asking about the global emissions increase in ICT in the Northern Territory in the last financial year.

Mr Elferink: It is policy. You should know that.

Mr HAMPTON: That is operational.

Mr SYMONS: Can you just ask the question again?

Mr GILES: I understand that greenhouse gas emissions from the ICT sector as a proportion of total global emissions are forecast to increase from 2% in 2009 to 6% by 2020. What was it in the last financial year?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: For government ICT, we can answer that question through minister Knight. The answer for ICT in the Territory as a whole, we do not have those figures. We can make some guesstimates. Government would easily be the biggest user of ICT in the Northern Territory.

Mr GILES: We will take it on notice then.

Question on Notice No 7.14

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr GILES: Minister, what is the increase in greenhouse gas emissions over the last financial year from the ICT sector as a proportion of total global emissions in the Northern Territory? Do you have a number for that one?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, it is question No 7.14.

Mr GILES: Minister, with the roll-out of digital television in the regions of the Northern Territory, can you update me on what is happening at Nhulunbuy? I am sure Mr Symons understands my question.

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to the Nhulunbuy issue, it was brought to my attention by the member for Nhulunbuy some time ago. I have written to minister Conroy on quite a number of occasions about it,

including in October 2010. For the current situation regarding the satellite delivery of television using DVS technology, I will ask Mr Symons to provide that information.

Mr SYMONS: We will bring Mr Doug Cooke to the table, if you do not mind. Doug is the Director of Telecommunications and Broadcasting.

Mr COOKE: Doug Cooke, Director of Telecommunications and Broadcasting, DBE. As the minister said, a letter was written to Senator Conroy pointing out it would be more economical to put in a central broadcast service in Nhulunbuy rather than satellite dishes on each roof. The minister has written back to the effect he will have his department consult and negotiate with broadcasters to come to some arrangement. We have not had an update since then.

Mr GILES: Thanks, Mr Cooke. Can I ask you a question directly, to make it easier? Is it a possibility everyone in the Nhulunbuy region could get a VAS system, or do they definitely need to have a satellite dish on their roof?

Mr COOKE: To get VAS you will need a satellite dish, yes.

Mr GILES: Mr Cooke, is Nhulunbuy in the same situation as the remote areas of the Northern Territory where they are not up-to-date with digital television, or is Nhulunbuy out on its own?

Mr COOKE: I am not sure I understand the intent of the question. The digital switch-over for all of the Northern Territory will be finalised by December 2013. It will have a six-month switch-over period from 1 July. Darwin is currently broadcasting digital but the switch-off will occur in 2013, as it will in the rest of the Territory. In that six-month period leading up to December 2013, the expectation is everyone will go on either a toner VAS system or will be on a terrestrial rebroadcast system such as Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin.

Mr GILES: It would be fair to say Senator Conroy has really forgotten about people of the Nhulunbuy region. It is very sad. Will there need to be, minister, a rebroadcast service continued until the end of 2013, or will it have to go beyond that in the leasing from ABC and Channel 9 relating to Broadcast Australia?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Mr Cooke to answer that. In relation to the switch-over, that is occurring in some places as I understand it. The actual switch-off is 2013.

Mr COOKE: If you are referring to the rebroadcasting of Channel 9, SBS, ABC from Deloraine Road as an analogue signal, those signals will be terminated in December 2013.

Mr GILES: Will there be a digital rebroadcast from there, or will that not be necessary?

Mr COOKE: All digital rebroadcasts will centre around Deloraine Road. There is a likelihood there will be some infill requirements for some areas around Darwin. There may be infill requirements for other areas in other major centres; that is yet to come to light.

Mr GILES: Thanks, Mr Cooke. Can you confirm or provide an update that the current rebroadcast service for analogue is \$130 000 per annum as at the last number I had. What is that new figure? Will that continue until 2013? What will be the figure for rebroadcasting digital from Deloraine Road and any other facility?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Cooke.

Mr COOKE: There will be no cost to rebroadcast digital. The rebroadcasting of the analogue signal is an historical issue with the erection of NT House causing a shadow. That shadow effect is evident only with analogue TV; digital eliminates that.

Mr GILES: So, you will not need to pay that ...

Mr COOKE: That is correct.

Mr GILES: Are there line-of-sight issues for digital TV reception at Fannie Bay, Bayview and Cullen Bay? Are there issues that need to be fixed?

Mr COOKE: Yes, there are, and they are being investigated by the broadcasters currently. As I was referring before, there may be the additional infill sites required.

Mr GILES: Will that be a cost on the Northern Territory government, or will that come from the federal government?

Mr COOKE: That will be a cost to the broadcasters.

Mr GILES: To the broadcasters themselves?

Mr COOKE: Correct.

Mr GILES: Thank you, Mr Cooke. Minister, a \$5m loan was provided - or advanced, or similarly provided - to the Northern Land Council in relation to the laying of the Arnhem optic fibre link. That money was supposed to be repaid last financial year to the Northern Territory government. Has it been repaid and what was the interest component?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Mr Symons, but I understand that is funded through the Digital Regions Program ...

Mr SYMONS: The story with the \$5m is that originally, with the Arnhem fibre project, the Northern Territory government was going to contribute about \$6.5m. \$5m was agreed to come from the Aboriginal Benefits Account through the Northern Land Council and the remaining funds - up to about \$35m in the end, I think - came from Telstra. Sorry, some came from Rio Tinto as well. What ended up happening, the \$5m was rather slow coming through ...

Mr GILES: From the ABA?

Mr SYMONS: Yes. ... and the Northern Territory government, ultimately, paid \$11.5m towards the Arnhem fibre. When the \$5m did come through from the Aboriginal Benefits Account, the Northern Territory government contributed that \$5m. By that time, it was effectively Northern Territory government funds. We contributed that fund to the Digital Regions Program. That became the Department of Business and Employment contribution of the \$6.4m Digital Regions Program under which Healthy Towns is funded.

Mr GILES: Thanks, Mr Symons. Does everywhere in the Northern Territory have access to broadband?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, through the National Broadband Network in the fibre. We know 17 of our growth towns are connected to fibre and have access to broadband. In the other remote communities, through the Glasson report and the review, there are significant issues in getting that broadband out to the other remote parts of Australia. In wireless and satellite, they are issues we are working on. Through programs like the Digital Regions Programs and initiatives we have been lobbying for, we are working towards getting that access to everyone in the Northern Territory. I am not sure if Mr Symons would like to add further.

Mr SYMONS: Yes. All the main regional centres in the Northern Territory are connected by optic fibre. As the minister said, with the Digital Regions Program, 17 of the 20 growth towns will end up being connected. There were 11 connected, I think, with the Arnhem fibre, and another six will be connected under Digital Regions. On top of that, with the Telstra optic submarine cable, Alyangula and Angurugu are also connected. Umbakumba is not. There are the island communities of Nguuu, Galiwinku, and Millingimbi which do not have optic fibre; they have high capacity radio links.

Mr GILES: One hundred and fifty megabits, yes?

Mr SYMONS: Yes.

Mr GILES: It would be fair to say, minister, that before the NBN, everyone had access to broadband, and some places, a majority of the major centres, had access to optical fibre or a significant large radio link?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, many of those places with radio links had those prior.

Mr GILES: All right. I suppose the question I am getting to is: what will change outside the major centres of Darwin and Palmerston and rural Darwin, with the roll-out of the NBN? We know 93% of the

country will have fibre to the home, there is some 4%, I believe it is, of wireless, and the other 3% is satellite. What will change in areas of the Northern Territory that do not already have that?

Mr HAMPTON: Under the NBN, or the NBN Co, with the launch of their two new satellites, we would be seeing the capacity of many of those people in those remote regions being provided with much more capacity – 12 MB down or 10 MB up. The launch date of the satellite is expected to be in two to three years. Essentially, what I am saying is, through the NBN what we are wanting to see is people who do not have access to terrestrial broadband, particularly in the communities and pastoralists, able to access the interim solution being offered by NBN Co today, if they qualify. What we would be seeing is an increase and a better service in what they can upload and download. I am not sure if Mr Symons really has anything; I think that is essentially it. What we want to see is people in remote regions being able to have more capacity, and this is what NBN Co does offer, particularly through their satellites. Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: The key thing NBN brings is access to the premises. Although we have optic fibre to the community exchanges in many cases, for individuals, businesses, or organisations to get access, they need to pay the provider for it. NBN Co does provide access to the premise. At this stage, NBN Co has not finally advised us exactly what is happening where, but our understanding is, in quite a few cases in remote communities it will be by satellite or wireless, not optic fibre to the premises.

Mr GILES: If people already have wireless, what will be the increase? If you were at one of the growth towns such as Wadeye and you are operating on wireless, what will be your increase now that the NBN has been announced?

Mr HAMPTON: I think Wadeye has fibre, but for the answer - Mr Symons.

Mr GILES: Will Wadeye be fibre to the home, or will it stay at the exchange?

Mr SYMONS: We do not know for sure. We suspect, in this case, communities like Wadeye probably it will not be fibre to the home; I suspect it will be satellite. I will pass to Doug Cooke for the detail there.

Mr COOKE: As I am sure you are aware, the federal government has made no announcements regarding the footprint of fibre, wireless or satellite to date, primarily because they are waiting on the agreement with Telstra. From the analysis we have done, or from our understanding of the current policy position, we believe communities such as Wadeye and the other 20 growth towns will be targeted with wireless. The minister has written to Senator Conroy asking that those communities be fibre on the basis they are the 20 growth towns and they are central to delivering on the Commonwealth's commitments under the 20 growth towns program.

Mr GILES: The list of Queensland and Northern Territory cities that will get optical fibre which has been published by the NBN certainly does not include Wadeye or any growth towns. It does not include anywhere with a population of fewer than 1000 people, including where the optical fibre goes straight past in places like Elliott on the Stuart Highway, which is just absolutely ridiculous.

Minister, I take you back to some comments you made in the House some time ago when you spoke about the benefits of NBN when you said - I do not have it in front of me but I am pretty sure I know what you said – the benefits of the NBN are people in the bush will now be able to get Facebook. Was that right? Is that what you said?

Mr HAMPTON: I do not know.

Mr GILES: You did; I can quote it. You also said they will also be able to read the *Northern Territory News* once NBN is rolled out right across the Northern Territory. Isn't it a fact that that is actually incorrect? They can already do that now? There is already broadband out in all these locations and access to the Internet? Right across the Territory no matter where you live?

Mr HAMPTON: Absolutely, but why I have written to the federal minister is because I do not want to see those ...

Mr GILES: Were you misleading the House, or just being cute?

Mr HAMPTON: Can I finish, Mr Chairman? I am certainly aware of that issue. What I do not want to see under the NBN is people in those communities in the remote areas worse off. That is why I have written to the federal minister because I am acutely aware of that issue. As Mr Cooke said, those

negotiations are still happening. We know Telstra owns that infrastructure, the fibre that is in the ground at the moment. Those negotiations are under way. It is more than appropriate and important that I have written to the federal minister outlining those concerns for the Northern Territory. I would not want to see Territorians disadvantaged.

Mr GILES: Thank you, minister. What you said was 'even read the *NT News* or even share some information on Facebook with their friends'. You were either being too cute by half or you were just misleading the House. I will leave that up to you to decide what you were doing. The fact remains ...

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Mr Chairman! The reference to misleading the House can only be made under a substantive motion.

Mr GILES: I have just proved the point that he was.

Mr ELFERINK: Speaking to the point of order, he described it as one or the other. He has not made the allegation.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I suggest, as it is 10.59 pm, rather than getting caught up in a fight do you mind just withdrawing, for the sake of ...

Mr GILES: Let us just move on. At Casuarina, the roll-out of the NBN has been delayed. How many houses will the NBN be rolled out to - do you know at this point in time - and at what time frame and why the delay?

Mr HAMPTON: NBN roll-out, particularly in Casuarina, has been delayed. All second release sites have been until such time as an agreement with Telstra for the use of Telstra's infrastructure is struck; similar to what I have just been saying. Without this agreement, NBN Co will be installing infrastructure that otherwise would not be necessary; for example, a pit and pipe through which to run the optic fibre cable. Access to Telstra's infrastructure represents a significant saving to the NBN and NBN Co. Those discussions are happening.

Mr GILES: How many houses at Casuarina?

Mr HAMPTON: I will ask Mr Symons to give you that detail.

Mr SYMONS: NBN Co has not provided that information yet. We have had a number of meetings with NBN Co. The Northern Territory has set up a NBN coordination committee across agencies to ensure that the Northern Territory government is working closely with NBN in the roll-out. They are just not at that point. Originally, in Casuarina they were intending to start by around June. At the moment, we do not have a date. We believe the agreement with NBN Co and Telstra is likely to be finalised by about August/September. We should get that information after that point.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming in tonight. We appreciate you staying for the late shift. Thank you, minister. The Estimates Committee will resume in the morning at 8.30 am.

The committee suspended.
