

The Estimates Committee convened at 8 am.

MINISTER MOSS' PORTFOLIOS

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Madam CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome back to the third and final day of the estimates hearings for 2017. I acknowledge that we are gathered on Larrakia land and I pay my respects to Larrakia elders, past and present.

Minister, I welcome you, and I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you this morning.

Ms MOSS: With me this morning I have the Executive Director for Corporate Services, Ms Vicki Highland; the Executive Director for Flora and Fauna, Dr Alaric Fisher; the acting CEO for Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Jo Townsend; and the Executive Director for Environmental Protection, Mr Paul Purdon.

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

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

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Environment and Natural Resources?

Ms MOSS: Yes, please. Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Estimates Committee for the opportunity to make an opening statement today. I am very proud to be the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources. I know that members of the committee understand how important our natural environment in the Northern Territory is and how much of an asset it truly is for us.

We have invaluable natural resources in the Territory. It is one of our greatest assets in regard to our lifestyle, tourism and a range of industries. We need to make sure we are maintaining and preserving our environment for future generations of Territorians and ensuring the sustainable allocation of those natural resources.

We have been very strong on our environmental policy. It definitely underpins economic development in the Territory, and good economic policy is underpinned by good environmental policy. It is underscored by our key commitments to environmental regulatory reform, our focus on returning the community voice with transparent, science-based water allocation and licensing decisions, and effective regulation of mining and petroleum activities.

I am very pleased to be joined by the executive team of the department today. It comprises a number of land resource and management outputs. In establishing the new department, a shared service hub for the delivery of corporate services that used to service four different departments was unwound and that has resulted in 42 corporate staff being transferred to the Department of Tourism and Culture.

The department has a budgeted full-time equivalent staffing of 279 FTEs in 2017–18. That provides a range of services across the Northern Territory around natural resource assessment and monitoring services to ensure conservation and sustainable use of resources across the Northern Territory. They do incredibly important work in feral animal management, weed management and wildfire, all very important across the Northern Territory, and they undertake environmental impact assessment and compliance activity, providing services to the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority to meet their statutory responsibilities. It has the following output groups: Flora and Fauna; Rangelands; Water Resources; Bushfires NT; Environment Management and Policy; and Corporate and Governance.

We have a number of election commitments in this area with \$500 000 per year over three years, starting in the next financial year, for the establishment of an Aboriginal carbon unit to provide advice and support to ranger groups across the Northern Territory, and Aboriginal landholders seeking to create sustainable

enterprises through carbon abatement and sequestration. There is \$10.1m over three years to support our Aboriginal ranger groups, including \$4.1m in capital grants over two years for essential equipment, and \$6m over three years to establish a land management and conservation fund to approve conservation practices on Aboriginal land and sea country and to support our ranger groups.

We have formed an Aboriginal land management advisory group, which I look forward to talking more about, to provide advice to the department on the development and implementation of those initiatives. I thank that group very much. There is \$280 000 a year in five-year funding agreements for different environment groups, including the Arid Lands Environment Centre, the Environmental Defender's Office, the Australia Marine Conservation Society and the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory, to employ policy officers to help keep government to account and provide meaningful submissions on policy and our discussion papers on committees regarding the community engagement they conduct. It is important to us that those groups are able to engage with us in a meaningful way and have a voice.

There are a number of new initiatives that have also been announced in this budget. The Mapping the Future initiative is \$9.9m over five years. It is about ensuring we have better data on our land use across the Northern Territory and we are able to use that evidence-based data to manage and preserve, in particular, our water resources and make sure we have the best use of our land, and that we preserve and maintain that into the future.

We have budget allocations into noxious weeds, which have a significant impact on the Northern Territory, and on our environment communities, including \$600 000 for intensified cabomba eradication in Darwin River, and \$300 000 ongoing to reduce the fire risk associated with gamba grass. That is through enhanced compliance and proactive control strategies. I look forward to highlighting that. Karen might like to continue on AAPA and give a quick overview on that, but I will go as quickly as I can.

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority will also be joining me this morning. It is a statutory body established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* in 1989. AAPA provides an incredibly important regulatory function to preserve cultural values in the Northern Territory, maintaining a balance with the economic and social aspirations of all Territorians.

During this financial year AAPA has been exceptionally active in improving its service and efficiency through adjustments to its internal processing, plus enhancements to information technology and business systems. It has a new database coming online, which will be really great in regard to of creating a better service there. A total of 134 applications for authority certificates were submitted in the nine months to 31 March 2016, and 99 authority certificates were issued for the same period.

The average time frame for an issue of an authority certificate was 94 days and it includes authority certificates for major projects, including the Jemena pipeline project, Project Sea Dragon and major and minor road works projects. There was a review by PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting in 2015, which was a review of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* and the day-to-day operations of the authority. That review was published in July 2016, and there was a review of the 39 recommendations, which included some proposals for legislative and administrative changes. They were presented to government and made public and currently, in conjunction with the authority, we are considering how to proceed with taking that review forward.

I commend AAPA and its board members for the incredibly important work they undertake there, and I look forward to answering any questions that the committee has today.

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

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

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

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

Ms UIBO: Yes, Madam Chair, I hold some questions from the public for the minister. Minister, in regard to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, this question comes from Christopher Walsh. There are several questions from him.

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

Ms MOSS: The total travel by chief executives of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 was \$5814. We had an active CE in Alastair Shields, and the total of his three trips from 1 July to 11 December 2016 was \$3665, and those trips included Tennant Creek and Katherine for community engagement and staff functions, and some interstate travel to meet with project proponents.

I will just give an overview and then I will table the detailed answer, which has more of that detail requested. Jo Townsend, acting chief executive, between 12 December 2016 and 31 March 2017, has travelled on six trips with a total cost of \$2149, which was Katherine and Alice Springs for water resources meetings and the Food Futures event, and interstate travel to Cairns for a national environmental science program. I table that detailed answer.

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

Ms MOSS: There has been no international travel between 1 July 2016 and 31 March 2017 by chief executives in this department. The second question is not applicable.

Ms UIBO: The second question from Mr Walsh has been answered as there is no international travel, as you mentioned.

Ms MOSS: There were lots of trips to Katherine though.

Ms UIBO: The following question is slightly different. Please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including, but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for public servants in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Ms MOSS: In a department that does a lot of research and field work this is a complex and involved question. I have a detailed spreadsheet, which I will table for you. Total travel expenditure for the department between 1 July 2016 and 31 March 2017 was \$741 514, and \$91 997 of that was externally funded. People who work for the department are members of national committees which might be federally funded, so costs of the trip may be federally funded.

Total intrastate travel was \$634 799 and total interstate travel was \$96 359. I will outline the three international trips, one to Queenstown, New Zealand; Auckland, New Zealand, which was externally funded; and Atlanta, America, which was also externally funded. These often relate to conferences and committee work due to the nature of the work in the department.

I will table the complete spreadsheet of travel undertaken. Note the disclaimer on it that the travel was not necessarily acquitted or expended within that period of time, but it is an accurate reflection of the travel that occurred.

Ms NELSON: To clarify, you said federally funded. It would mean one of your chief executives or staff members is a member of a committee and they were invited to participate by the host of that program or committee.

Ms MOSS: I will ask Ms Townsend to give a more specific overview. We are party to a number of national agreements around water and different environmental priorities, and we participate on national committees.

Ms NELSON: They get a bit confused with the funding. Federally funded means they are not giving up money to ...

Ms MOSS: There is a budget in the federal budget for those committees.

Ms TOWNSEND: For example, I am a member of the National Environment Science Programme on the steering committee. That is a federally-funded program which has a component set aside for participation

form steering group members. I would participate in that. I would still complete a travel movement form and acquit that travel, but the costs would be met by an external party.

Other examples will be where we have entered into a research arrangement. That research project is paying for the travel component. We would always fill out a movement requisition form so it is recorded as official travel, but it is not necessarily paid for by the NT Government.

Ms NELSON: That is what I needed. Thank you.

Ms UIBO: You have alluded to the three international trips. I will ask the next question from Mr Walsh. In the case of international travel, please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip and the written report into what taxpayers gained from the trip. If no report was given to the department chief executive exists, please explain why.

Ms MOSS: If the committee is happy with me tabling the more detailed answer I will do that in a moment.

In terms of the three trips I talked about earlier, there was a trip undertaken by the Director for Land Assessment, Jason Hill, to attend the Soil, a Balancing Act Down Under conference in Queenstown, New Zealand between 9 and 16 December 2016. He attended as the NT representative and as Chair of the National Committee on Soil and Terrain. These are important professional development opportunities for people within our department and an opportunity for us to share the work that we are doing. There is a lot people can learn from our unique context.

We had an externally-funded trip for Chief Botanist, Ian Cowie to attend the Heads of Australasian Herbaria meeting in Auckland New Zealand between 6 and 11 November 2016. He is the Heads of Australasian Herbaria representative for the Northern Territory. We have had a presence at those meetings for a significant length of time, decades in fact, so there is a lot of knowledge there.

There was an externally-funded trip for scientist Danielle Stokeld to attend a Spatial Capture-Recapture Modelling training course in Atlanta, America.

This is a great professional development opportunity for people who are working in specialised work not only in the Northern Territory, but nationally and internationally. I am happy to table the more detailed answer in the interests of time.

Ms UIBO: This is the final question from Mr Walsh, which I think you have answered in the tabling, but I will ask it so that it is on the record. Please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by public servants from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017. Please list the number of times the public servants have visited that location over the last five years.

Ms MOSS: In terms of those three international trips I talked about earlier—Queenstown, New Zealand; Auckland, New Zealand; and Atlanta, America—those public servants have not visited those locations in a work capacity over the last five years.

Ms UIBO: This question comes from Naomi Hogan about the Beetaloo appraisal of water. Has the Northern Territory Government undertaken an appraisal of the financial value of groundwater and surface water in the Beetaloo Basin area?

Ms MOSS: As I said in my opening statement, we have such precious resources in the Northern Territory, and our water resources are one of those. They are so important to us socially, culturally and economically. I appreciate the questions from the public in relation to this.

I am not aware of any groundwater or surface water value estimations undertaken in the Northern Territory. A key principle of all water planning in the Territory is the water values of the region. There are a number of values that are attributed to that resource. The examples are the cultural values, environmental values and amenity values.

In relation to the Beetaloo Basin region, I note that the independent scientific inquiry into hydraulic fracturing of unconventional gas reserves in the Northern Territory has highlighted in one of its recent community updates, released in May, that the economic impact assessment being undertaken by ACIL Allen Consulting will make an economic assessment of the potential direct and indirect economic benefits, impacts and risks in the Beetaloo sub-basin.

I encourage people to sign up for those community updates because they are a great way to get the information about the work of that committee.

Ms NELSON: To touch on what you just raised, what community consultation has been undertaken in regard to the Beetaloo basin?

Ms MOSS: In what regard?

Ms NELSON: Water resources.

Ms MOSS: Ms Townsend can talk a bit more about water resources in general, but the independent inquiry into hydraulic fracturing of unconventional gas reserves has been doing extensive consultation across the region and the Territory. That covers a range of issues, including community concerns about water resources. It would be fair to say that water resources comes up through those community consultations.

Ms NELSON: No specific consultation just for the Beetaloo basin? Has it been rolled into the independent inquiry into hydraulic fracturing of unconventional gas reserves?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Ms UIBO: I have some further questions from the public. Minister, this question comes from Justin Tuddy, of the NT Greens. After over 30 years of operation at the Ranger project in Kakadu, mining has now ceased and rehabilitation has commenced. Although the mine plans to continue processing stockpiles for a few more years, there is a hard deadline to be packed up by 2026. Has the NT Government budgeted for a dedicated cross-portfolio working group to address issues related to the Ranger rehabilitation?

Ms MOSS: This is interesting, because it currently falls under the outputs for the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources, Minister Vowles. I understand he has provided some information in relation to this.

We are not aware of any dedicated working group in regard to that, but budgeting that would come from the Department of Primary Industry and Resources. We are very open to working closely with that department, and there are a range of things we are doing in regard to environmental reform process that will see a number of functions come over to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any more questions from the public?

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES

Output 1.1 – Flora and Fauna

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider Output Group 1.0, Natural Resources, Output 1.1, Flora and Fauna. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Rangelands

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

Ms UIBO: I believe this is the correct output, but please correct me if that is not the case. I note that the budget has allocated \$4.1m over two years for grants to assist Indigenous ranger groups to purchase essential equipment. How will the grants process be administered through your department to ensure equity between the Indigenous ranger groups?

Ms MOSS: We really value the work of our ranger groups across the Northern Territory in their natural resource management and the protection of land and sea. Within this budget we have the start of the \$4.1m capital grants commitment over two years and the beginning of the \$2m land management and conversation fund.

We are very pleased to have an advisory group established. I am trying to find the list of members for that. I will let you know the members of that advisory group. They are established to help guide the implementation of some of these initiatives.

There is Matt Salmon from the Northern Land Council; Peter Donohoe from the Central Land Council; Brian Tipungwuti from Tiwi Land Council; Adrian Hogg from the Anindilyakwa Land Council; Ricky Archer from Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation; Linda Ford from Twin Hill Aboriginal Corporation; Dean Yibarbuk from Warddeken Land Management; Henry Wilson and Conrad Ratara; there will be another Central Land Council nominee; Melissa George from NAILSMA; Paul Donohoe from the Indigenous Land Corporation; and Karen and Alaric Fisher from our department.

They have been established to help implement some of the significant investments we have put into supporting those groups. We also have a discussion paper which is currently out. The department is having ongoing consultation with ranger groups about how we can maximise the benefit of those grants programs and ensure we are well represented across the region.

It will be a merit-based process, but we want to ensure we have good regional spread and support those really innovative projects happening through ranger groups across the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO: Minister, what is in this budget to improve our understanding of the Northern Territory's natural resources so we can better protect them while identifying land forward development?

Ms MOSS: There are a number of initiatives under this budget, but the most prominent is the Mapping the Future project, which is over \$9.5m over five years. It is about making sure we have better data collection for appropriate land use across the Northern Territory. It is about having a better understanding of the management and future of our water resources, making sure we are getting the best use out of our land while also maintaining those really important environmental values.

The community and stakeholders have been receptive about that project. The first stage is a significant planning process and getting the scientific team out in the second half of next year to start doing that field work. There is a lot of planning that needs to be done. It cannot be understated how important this project is to all of our future planning of land use in the Northern Territory and management of our natural resources. That planning process is really important.

Is there anything else you want to add to that?

Ms TOWNSEND: The Mapping the Future program is a culmination of work that is already done in the agency, but for the first time it will really accelerate and bring together the Flora and Fauna division and its work in vegetation and biodiversity mapping, water resources and quantifying water resources, and our rangelands program and its soil and land assessment and mapping work.

In the past we have done this sort of work where there is a proponent that might be ready. The difference with this project is to spend some time identifying the areas of prospectivity in the Northern Territory over the next three to five years so that when proponents or the government want to develop that land, the baseline work has been done. It is important preparatory work that will de-risk investment for external parties, but also make the decision much more streamlined for government around the growth of future towns, areas of agricultural development and the growth of regions. In the scheme of things it is still a small program, but for us it is a very big commitment.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, I have another question for the minister. It relates to the previous output, but it is also regarding the Mapping the Future project which was just talked about. How does the budget help combat weeds in the Northern Territory to protect our environment?

Ms MOSS: Weeds is a major body of work for this department and a number of environment groups which undertake work, both with the department and through ranger groups to combat a number of weeds across the Territory. I have learned a lot about weeds in the last nine months, I am pleased to say. We are continuing the important work, particularly with cabomba. We know that gamba grass is a huge issue in the Northern Territory and a significant fire risk. We are continuing with \$600 000 for our cabomba management program and \$300 000 per annum ...

Ms UIBO: Minister, is that a name or an acronym?

Ms MOSS: Cabomba?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Ms MOSS: It is a name.

Ms NELSON: That is why I like flora and fauna.

Ms MOSS: There are some spectacular names.

There are ongoing weed management programs and cabomba and gamba are two that have specific resources in this budget. Our approach to gamba grass has moved much more into the enforcement and compliance space, which is important. There has been a significant amount of education that has been done about the fire risk of gamba grass by the department's field officers. That is important, but now it is equally as important that we move into that enforcement and compliance and make sure that people understand the importance of maintaining their blocks with the removal of gamba and the risk that is associated with it.

Mr PAECH: Minister Moss, a quick question while we are talking all things weeds. What constitutes a plant being put on the registered list as a weed?

Ms MOSS: I will defer to the experts who have much more expertise in weeds than I do. There is a classification system and a process for that to happen.

Dr FISHER: It is not my specific area but I can help you a bit on that. A weed is a plant that is not native to the area. We focus on what we consider significant weeds, particularly ones that are declared as weeds under the Northern Territory *Weeds Management Act*. There is a group of weeds which are declared weeds of national significance throughout Australia and there is a Commonwealth process of doing that.

We have a formal weed risk assessment process which takes into account a whole lot of factors like how likely the plant is to spread through the bush, what the effects of it would be on both the productive systems and the natural environment. That gives a ranking. Things like gamba grass and cabomba come up as highly significant and that is why there is a focus on them.

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

That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Water Resources

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Water Resources. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, can you please provide an update on water licensing in the Darwin rural water control area, please?

Ms MOSS: I will find my notes on that. This is an area of significant community interest in the Darwin rural area; that is safe to say. The department has undertaken a significant amount of work in the rural area around educating the community on sustainable water use.

Water is an exceptionally precious and finite resource and the work that is being done in the Darwin rural area is about ensuring that we protect our water resource for the people who use it for a range of every day reasons, which we all take for granted, and the licences that currently exist, and well into the future. This is about maintaining and preserving that water resource.

In July 2016, under the former government, there was an amendment to the declaration of exemptions under the *Water Act*. That removed the exemption for bores pumping less than 15 litres per second in the Darwin rural water control district from a licencing requirement under the act.

There has been the establishment of Bore Central at the Goyder Centre in Palmerston to provide a one-on-one service to residents and users in the rural area to talk about their specific circumstances and whether or not they would require a licence under the new policy change under those amendments.

It is very encouraging that the message is coming through and users in the rural area recognising the importance of protecting that resource into the future and increasing our knowledge of it. The Water Resources Division has received more than 263 licence applications to date and 73 of those have been processed to a point where beneficial uses have been verified.

I can provide a further breakdown of the uses if the committee wants that, but the advertising of the notices of intention to make water extraction licence decisions for commercial licences happened in April this year.

As I said, the department continues to utilise a range of communication methods in the rural area, including public meetings, information distributed through local members' offices, attendance at markets and shopping centres, and making sure that face-to-face communication and ability to actually talk to the agency about your bores and what is happening—the signs on the roadside that people will have seen that show the water levels as well.

I will ask Ms Townsend to add a little more detail about that.

Ms TOWNSEND: There are three areas of focus in the Darwin rural water control district. The first, as the minister talked about, is the decision to remove the exemption. That exemption meant that if you had a bore that was equipped to pump less than 15 litres per second you were not required to be licenced. It is unique to that water control district so if you are in Katherine you do need a licence, and they are highly sought after. That has happened, which suddenly meant that a lot of businesses and industries that were operating without a water licence are now required to get one, so we are catching up.

We have made a commitment to people that we will allocate water to them based on what they are currently using, so it is not an opportunity for additional water. The reason that exemption was lifted is because we are well aware of a long-term downward trend in groundwater levels in the Darwin rural area, which if it is not properly monitored, measured and managed the region will end up with significant difficulties.

The second thing that has happened is we two back-to-back poor Wet Seasons. The aquifers in the Darwin rural water control district are what we call spill and fill aquifers, which means that they do not hold large volumes of water. Other systems like Katherine and Daly can hold water and see you through some tough times. That does not happen in the Darwin water control district, so we started to warn people last year that they may experience water supply difficulties in that region. We expect more climate variability and that those difficulties will happen again.

The third thing that happened is we are now no longer allowing for new bore construction permits in certain areas in the Darwin rural water control district, notably Berry Springs, which has interim development control water in place through the *Planning Act*. There are at least 10 other areas across six aquifers where we would no longer allow for additional bores, only replacement bores.

Ms NELSON: Is that information available to the public?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes. All this information is available on our website. We encourage people to talk to us. We can give one-on-one information about their personal bores. We have their bore records. We have done public meeting and there is signage in all the MLA offices.

Mr PAECH: Following on from that, and apologies if it is in the wrong area. In those particular areas those bores are people's only source of water? There is no mains water to those areas?

Ms TOWNSEND: Some parts of the Darwin rural area have reticulated water supply. We have said that if you have reticulated water supply we will not also issue you a bore construction permit, because that is double dipping. In some instances it is their only water supply and that is why we would always replace bores. They is why it is of deep concern that they may experience difficulties into the future.

Ms UIBO: You started the work with the Water Advisory Committees, how many are there across the Northern Territory?

Ms MOSS: I will get my list for you. This is an incredibly important area of policy. Returning community voice to water allocation plans has been a focus, and re-establishing those Water Advisory Committees is really important. I will find them so I can tell you the exact number and their locations.

Ms NELSON: Katherine has one.

Ms MOSS: Katherine does have one. I have been very pleased to attend the Ooloo Water Advisory Committee recently. They are made up of a whole range of stakeholders with different interests in those Water Allocation Plans.

We have the Rapid Creek Water Advisory Committee, Mataranka, Daly Waters, Ooloo, Katherine, Alice Springs, Ti Tree and Howard. I want to advise that the draft Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan is currently out for consultation, and I imagine the one for Ooloo will be out for public consultation in the near

future. Those groups perform an important function in the Northern Territory in terms of getting those water allocation plans in place and looking at future sustainability of water resources.

They are already looking at how we include the Strategic Indigenous Reserves into those water allocation plans. While we continue to work through the modelling for the Strategic Indigenous Reserves we are making sure it is upfront and considered in those allocation plans that are being drafted.

Mr PAECH: Following on from the Member for Arnhem's question, I recall some time ago the Member for Stuart talking on radio around the issues of water security in places like Yuendumu and Mount Liebig. Does that fall under your portfolio area or is that best saved for Power and Water?

Ms MOSS: That would be best placed, in terms of specific questions, under Minister McCarthy's outputs.

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

That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Bushfires

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 1.4, Bushfires. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: I have a question in regard to the Indigenous carbon unit. Can you explain what the \$0.5m for the establishment of this unit will specifically be used for?

Ms MOSS: I will start by commending the groups that are doing such incredible work across carbon abatement programs, because there is some innovative work happening already in the Northern Territory. We went to the election with a commitment for \$500 000 per annum to establish the Indigenous carbon unit to support the development of carbon abatement projects and associated economic development on Aboriginal land.

We are still finalising the structure of the Indigenous carbon unit; it will require bringing together a range of expertise and knowledge from across the department and government, and that will be led by Bushfires NT. We continue to consult with the relevant stakeholders, of which there are a number, including our land councils, Indigenous land corporations, North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, other Northern Territory government agencies and a range of other stakeholders who are undertaking carbon abatement projects.

We have also been consulting with the Darwin Centre for Bushfire Research at Charles Darwin University, which is doing some very interesting work in this area as well. I am very pleased that a discussion paper will be finalised really soon, and I expect that will be out over the coming weeks. I think that is really positive. A draft strategy will then be provided to me later in the year.

There are many economic opportunities available through these kinds of programs on country, and that is a really important initiative that we continue to support. It is economic development on country for lots of our ranger groups. Dean is on our Indigenous advisory committee for ranger group support and the work the ranger groups are doing in East Arnhem Land. He is being held up as one of the best. They were recently down in Ross River talking to the CLC ranger camp about the work they are doing, as well as the Jawoyn association with the rangers, Nitmiluk, and parks regarding their fire abatement program. There is some really great stuff happening and this is a good opportunity to harness those opportunities.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – ENVIRONMENT

Output 2.1 – Environment Management Policy

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 2.0, Environment, Output 2.1, Environment Management Policy. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, how is the budget supporting the government's planned environmental reform agenda?

Ms MOSS: This is a huge body of work which I know you will appreciate. It is a really important body of work to provide certainty to the community around protection of the environment over future generations

and giving certainty to people who are looking to invest in the Northern Territory regarding the expectations and the processes that they will need to go through in terms of major projects and others.

We have the environmental regulatory reform agenda, which will be developed over two stages, the first stage being the repeal of the existing *Environmental Assessment Act* and replacing it with a new environmental assessment process, and stage two being the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act* and similar associated legislation to replace it with a fully-functioning environment protection act.

It is a huge body of work and there is a lot of consultation that needs to go into that. The new act will incorporate environmental matters from other legislation, such as the *Mining Management Act*, so that will see a number of functions come over from the Department of Primary Industry and Resources to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and we are still working through what that looks like.

We have a policy unit within the department that is working solely on our environmental regulatory reform agenda, doing an incredible job, and we have a discussion paper out for the public and our stakeholders to give us feedback on some of the ideas that are being proposed.

A significant amount of consultation has been undertaken by the department not only over the last nine months since I became the minister, but before that. That is about what people expect to see when it comes to environmental assessment in the Northern Territory. That has not been thrown out the window; we still recognise that a lot of our environmental non-government organisations, particularly, have been providing feedback and ideas on the ways these things should be managed for some time.

We are harnessing all the feedback that has been provided. We encourage people to look at the discussion paper, share with constituents and stakeholders and encourage people to engage with it. This is a fantastic opportunity for us to reform the process and do things differently in the Northern Territory.

I will hand over to Mr Purdon—if you have any information you would like to add about that work.

Mr PURDON: As the minister has stated, a team was set up in the last nine months to lead that reform work. It is a huge amount of work that we are all excited about. We have all been keen to see reform in our environmental legislation for some time. That team is headed by another executive director in the division because we see it as very important that we can set up two senior people within a division, one looking after operational work, which is my role, and another overseeing policy and reform. The work is progressing well. We have had a lot of consultation over many years on these issues and we are recognising all the input received over a long period of time. Things are starting to take shape.

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

Ms UIBO: How is the Territory government supporting environmental organisations to ensure transparency and accountability in government processes and decision-making?

Ms MOSS: There are a number of environmental groups in the Northern Territory that do an incredible job with the resources they have. They provide submissions to a whole range of things from inquiries, environmental impact assessments that are open for exhibition, and community education. We recognise that.

We have reinstated funding for a number of those groups. There is \$280 000 per annum. We have five-year agreements, which gives some certainty to those groups for their future. To fund policy officers so that they can engage with a significant body of work, particularly given we are talking about environmental regulatory reform and how big a job for government that is. It is also a big job for our environment groups to engage with that work.

We have funding reinstated for the Arid Lands Environment Centre, the Environment Centre, the Environmental Defenders' Office, the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory and the Australian Marine Conservation Society. In terms of government priorities this term, coastal and marine management strategies are under way as well and a lot of the groups are engaging in that work, as well as range of other national and Northern Territory priorities. We are continuing to engage with those groups.

We recently released our water portal. It is a really great tool from the department. Our stakeholders and everyday Territorians—anyone with an interest in water licensing and our allocation plans—can hop onto the water portal, see the information about who is on the water advisory committees, the water allocation areas, individual factors in licensing decisions, and a range of other information that is now available

through that water portal in a way it has not been before. I commend the department and the team that has been working on that initiative.

It is important that we continue to increase transparency around water licensing and water allocation.

Madam CHAIR: Are there further questions on this output?

Mr GUYULA: Today is 10 years since the intervention, and I need to acknowledge the gravity of that. This day 10 years ago had a devastating effect. It was the most pervasive colonial assault, and our communities are still suffering greatly. We are yet to heal. This parliament needs to ensure it does not make the mistakes of past governments, and work towards justice for all Indigenous people.

Minister, the government gave an election promise to increase the powers of Indigenous ranger groups. Can you advise on the progress of this area?

Ms MOSS: Thank you, Member for Nhulunbuy, for making that statement and acknowledging that here. It is incredibly important that we take time to acknowledge that. So thank you for being here and asking that question.

It is an interesting question because a lot of the Indigenous ranger work commitments we have made within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, but this one sits under Parks and Wildlife within the Department of Tourism and Culture.

Mr GUYULA: If that question does not fit there, then please guide me to somewhere ...

Ms MOSS: Yes, it comes under the Department of Tourism and Culture, but I am happy to answer it and we can come back to it during the Department of Tourism and Culture outputs if you would like further detail at that point.

We have a commitment to our ranger groups and ensuring they are adequately recognised for the incredibly valuable work they do in our parks and wildlife legislation. That legislation comes under the remit of the Department of Tourism and Culture. Our consultation on that is ongoing, so we need to consult with our land councils and a number of other stakeholders across the Northern Territory. That is an ongoing piece of work, but I am very happy to speak further with you about ensuring your region is well represented in that consultation.

Mr GUYULA: Minister, landowners living on country would like the resources and support to maintain and manage their own country. Is the government able to provide assistance with this?

Ms MOSS: We have \$4.1m over two years to support capital grants for our ranger groups, starting in the next financial year. We also have \$2m for the land management and conservation fund that will also start next financial year. We have the advisory group which has been put together to help shape what that looks like and how we can ensure we are supporting people in the best way.

It is also important to speak about the Strategic Indigenous Reserves across the Northern Territory. Water is one of our most precious resources in the Territory, and there are many demands on our water resources. There are our environmental and cultural flows, and there is the economic benefit that comes from our water resources. We are continuing to shape the model of Strategic Indigenous Reserves to ensure there is water available for Aboriginal people on Aboriginal land to use for economic development into the future. That is really important.

Our Mapping the Future project will also support that work and those aspirations.

Mr GUYULA: This is something that comes from the people on the homelands. Rangers come and work around the country, but the actual TOs on country know where to go. They have always looked after country and would like to be part of working with the rangers. If the local people can be supported with resources as well, it will make it greater and better.

Ms MOSS: I agree. Across my portfolio, in regard to joint management on parks, we work quite strongly in joint management of parks across the Territory, but we could probably do better. I am happy to hear ideas, Member for Nhulunbuy, from your electorate about ways in which we can support that work more strongly. We have joint management arrangement and we want to be looking all the time at how we can make sure

we are improving those opportunities for people on country. If there are specific initiatives I am more than happy to talk to you about those.

Mr GUYULA: East Arnhem Land is becoming very popular for people to visit. This week, *Sunrise* on Channel 7 will be reporting the weather from Yirrkala. We are happy to welcome visitors, but there are many environmental issues that come with this. I am fighting to open up roads, but it will bring some good and bad. Already, we have many vehicles entering our country, including tour buses. Ranger groups need to be able to exercise quarantine authority to ensure that our country is not harmed.

We are concerned about the introduction of weeds, such as gamba grass, and other harmful pests. Can you advise if the government will enable this kind of authority and protection?

Ms MOSS: Again, it is an interesting one because while weed management is Department of Environment and Natural Resources, those enforcement powers under the legislation sit under the Department of Tourism and Culture. If you are comfortable with it I will answer it now, but if you want more regarding the Tourism and Culture outputs I can provide that then. Are you okay with that?

Mr GUYULA: Sure.

Ms MOSS: We have spoken to a range of ranger groups, as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources does through its everyday work. There are a number of different ways in which ranger groups would like to be able to enforce rules on their land to ensure they are adequately protected. Those are the things we want to hear from ranger groups to ensure that when we look at those legislative changes and how we can strengthen their power of enforcement that we are looking at those types of issues.

When I was at Ross River and met some of the rangers at the CLC ranger camp, the transfer of weeds was one of the issues that was raised. So it is definitely something we are very aware of. I will link the people within my department with you and those stakeholders regarding what they would like to see and ensure they are part of that consultation because we want to make sure we are providing that support to allow ranger groups to adequately enforce those kinds of rules on their land.

Mr GUYULA: Sure. Recently, Yolngu in homelands have found fishermen in restricted waterways and camping on floodplains, leaving rubbish and beer cans behind. We do not want visitors having unrestricted access to our waterways. We want to control our land and waterways. How is the government assisting landowners to keep waterways restricted and how is government assisting landowners to maintain control of land and waterways? Again, this came from people on homelands there.

Ms MOSS: Member for Nhulunbuy, this question spans across—there is obviously a role for sea rangers in ensuring we are supporting our sea ranger groups in that regard, but in terms of the access question, that is one for the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources, noting that he has already been in front of the panel. Given that Minister Vowles has already been in front of the committee I will take the question on notice and ensure we get an answer for you.

Madam CHAIR: We will take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.1

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

Mr GUYULA: Recently, Yolngu in homelands have found fishermen in restricted waterways and camping on floodplains, leaving rubbish and beer cans behind. We do not want visitors having unrestricted access to our waterways. We want to control our land and waterways. How is the government assisting landowners to keep waterways restricted and how is government assisting landowners to maintain control of land and waterways?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that question on notice?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nhulunbuy of the minister has been allocated the number 7.1.

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

That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – STATUTORY AUTHORITY
Output 3.1 – NT Environment Protection Authority

Madam CHAIR: We will now move on to consider Output Group 3.0, Statutory Authority, Output 3.1, NT Environment Protection Authority. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Has the government taken any steps to improve the transparency and environmental assessment processes as per its election commitment?

Ms MOSS: As discussed earlier in terms of our environmental regulatory reform agenda, there is significant work being done in relation to that, and it relates to the Environment Protection Agency Authority. However, I want to talk a little about their decisions made by the Environment Protection Agency Authority.

It publishes a lot of things around its environmental impact assessments. Its recommendations to government and a range of other work is uploaded to the website for stakeholders and the public. I am really pleased the EPA is now moving also towards publishing reasons behind its choice not to assess certain projects. It is really important because it improves accountability and a broader understanding about why a project might not reach a threshold by consideration of the EPA for further assessment.

I do hold a great belief that the EPA and the department publishing those reasons and having that greater broader dialogue with the community about reasons why things are and are not assessed will greatly improve transparency and understanding around those processes into the future. That is a big one relating to the EPA, but it is more broadly part of that environmental regulatory reform process work as well.

Ms NELSON: There has been a lot of criticism about the EPA not having enough teeth and not being resourced enough, and we certainly did see that over the previous four years. What steps have we taken since being in government to make sure the EPA is sufficiently resourced?

Ms MOSS: A stronger look at the EPA is part of that environmental regulatory reform work and making sure that we are looking at the resourcing restructure is definitely part of that work. I will hand over to Mr Purdon in a moment to talk about that. There has been a prosecution over the recent period as well.

In regard to transparency and more information coming from the EPA, what we saw with the Jemena pipeline was a set of recommendations provided around the EIS, to government, and a request was made as a result of that for anything relating to the environmental management plan to be made public where it can. That was a positive step forward. That was recommended by the EPA and the EIS since that time.

We are seeing changes. I commend the board for the work it does; it is a huge workload with a huge amount of expertise.

Ms NELSON: I think you have answered the question.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 3.1 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE
Output 4.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 4.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.1 and Output Group 4.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

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

This now concludes consideration of output groups relating to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who provided assistance to the minister today.

The committee will now consider outputs associated with the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

The committee suspended.

ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Ms MOSS: I rolled my opening statement for AAPA into the original opening statement, so I will introduce those at the table with me: Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, Dr Ben Scambary; and the Director of Corporate Services, Mr Alan Buckingham.

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2017–18 as they related to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

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

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

Ms UIBO: There has been a decrease of \$1m in Budget 2017–18 for AAPA. Can you explain why?

Ms MOSS: There is no significant change in the budget, but the \$1m that was apparent in last year's budget related to issuing of certificates, which is a source of revenue for the agency. We project that that will be the same, but that revenue has not come to the agency at this point in time.

Ms UIBO: This relates to whole-of-agency budget. How does the budget for AAPA support the ongoing work in regard to best-practice approaches and the protection of sacred sites in the Northern Territory?

Ms MOSS: I will ask Dr Scambary to talk about the work being undertaken by the authority over the last 12 months. I commend that board for the immense amount of work it does. The support provided to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority allows staff and that board to do a range of work around the protection of sacred sites when it comes to proposed projects. There is a whole range of work with providing advice and issuing certificates.

They are undertaking a significant amount of work, upgrading their database of sacred sites to ensure there is more efficient service delivery and accessibility where there can be to services delivered. I will ask Dr Scambary to talk more about the work undertaken in the last 12 months.

Dr SCAMBARY: In terms of best practice, first and foremost our task is to comply with the act, which sets the standard of sacred site protection in the Northern Territory. It is a highly-regarded piece of legislation nationally. It is regarded as one of the strongest frameworks for Indigenous heritage protection in Australia.

Internally, we adhere to rigorous research methodologies which involve detailed pre-field work assessment of issues that come before us. Field work which is based on consultation and primacy of consultation with custodians of sacred sites is enshrined in the land rights act, the enabling legislation for sacred sites act. There is a rigorous checking process of our research outputs ensuring any conditions we impose for the protection of sacred sites are supported by specific consultation notes direct from custodians.

We have about 11 anthropologists working for us who are the coal face of the organisation. They have a minimum qualification of an Honours degree and are involved in an ongoing scheme of professional development.

As an organisation we adhere to the ethical research within Indigenous people guidelines defined by AIATSIS in Canberra. That entails ensuring there is prior and informed consent reciprocity in the research process, and recognition of intellectual property rights and the information we deal with. As an organisation we are a member of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, ICOMOS, an organisation affiliated with UNESCO, which defines the international standards of heritage protection that we adhere to.

The minister mentioned the database we maintain at the authority which contains all the information we have collated over 35 years on sacred sites in the Northern Territory. It is an enormously powerful research tool. We are embarking on the redevelopment of it.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

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

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – PROTECTION OF SACRED SITES **Output 5.1 – Protection of Sacred Sites**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 5.0, Protection of Sacred Sites, Output 5.1, Protection of Sacred Sites. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE **Output 6.1 – Corporate and Governance**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 6.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 6.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 6.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

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

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank departmental officers that attended today.

The committee will now move on to consider outputs relating to the Department of Tourism and Culture.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM AND CULTURE

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consider outputs relating to the Department of Tourism and Culture.

Welcome, everybody. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Tourism and Culture.

Ms MOSS: Today I am joined by the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Tourism and Culture, Mr Alastair Shields. To my left is Ms Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Tourism and Culture; and Mr Hugo Leschen, the Executive Director for Arts and Museums in the Department of Tourism and Culture.

I am very mindful of time, but we have a lot to say in this department which spans a diverse range of agencies that used to be independent of one another.

On coming to government we made the decision to bring those agencies together. It includes tourism, arts, museums and heritage, sport and recreation, and parks and wildlife together in one agency. There is a good reason for this. There were already strong alignments between those areas which naturally work

together. This is about ensuring that they work more collectively and cohesively. We understand how important all these areas are in creating our vibrant, connected, healthy and engaged communities. They are areas that are vitally important to growing our economy and delivering jobs for Territorians.

The Department is supported by a budget of \$252.7m in 2017–18, including a grants program of \$100.6m. That includes our sports and arts grants, which can be sizeable.

Despite tough economic times in the Territory, we are continuing to invest in our job-creating tourism industry. It becomes even more important. It is coming to the fore and is crucial that we continue to support the more than 2000 tourism-related businesses, and more than 15 000 tourism-related jobs in the Northern Territory.

We are investing \$100m into linking and enhancing our amazing museums, art galleries and keeping places via an arts trail that will run the entire length of the Territory. As we have talked a lot about it, the centrepiece will be an iconic national Indigenous art gallery in Alice Springs. I note that our steering committee is currently meeting for the second time in Darwin.

Yesterday we saw the design tender release for the new museum of the Northern Territory at Myilly Point. We will be engaging with the community soon on the 10-year museums masterplan for Darwin.

We are investing \$43m into tourism marketing and associated activity. It is a very competitive market and it is important that we continue to have a very strong presence on the national and international stage.

According to the latest statistics, in the 12 months to December 2016 the total domestic and international visitors to the Northern Territory was estimated at \$1.8m, which is our highest figure in the past decade and they are definitely very encouraging, but it is really important that we do not take our foot off the pedal and get complacent.

Mr PAECH: Minister Moss, we might go into questions because you seem to be answering half of the questions that I want to ask you. If that is okay, we might proceed into questions.

Madam CHAIR: No worries.

Ms MOSS: That is fine, I just wanted to stress how important this is to our connected communities to creating better opportunities for kids and engage communities across the Northern Territory and to creating jobs. I am very happy to take questions.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions in relation to the minister's statement?

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

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

Mr PAECH: Not at this stage.

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

Mr PAECH: Yes, Madam Chair. I have a number of questions, but I just seek permission while I am doing so—I also had a question for AAPA as well. Is it possible to ask this question and it be taken on notice in relation to government expenditure on that area?

Madam CHAIR: Sure.

Question on Notice No 7.2

Mr PAECH: Minister, I ask you to take this question on notice for AAPA and Tourism, because I understand there is a lot of travel within Tourism so it would be a huge volume of work to pull together. The questions I have are from Mr Chris Walsh.

Minister, can you please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for all chief executives in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Minister, please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by chief executives from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 and please provide the list of times the chief executive has visited that location over the last five years. In the case of international travel please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip and the written report into what taxpayers gain from the trip. If no report given to the department ministers exists, please explain why.

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

In the case of international travel please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip and the written report into what taxpayers gain from the trip. If no report given to the department chief executives exists, please explain why.

Finally, please provide a list of international cities or towns visited by public servants from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, and please provide the list and the number of times the public servant has visited that location over the last five years.

If you could take that on notice, please that would be great.

Madam CHAIR: We will take the question in relation to Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority as a question on notice with number 7.2.

Question on Notice No 7.3

Madam CHAIR: We will take the questions from Mr Chris Walsh on travel for the Department of Tourism and Culture for the Minister for Tourism and Culture as Question on Notice 7.3.

Mr PAECH: Thank you very much. If I may proceed with other questions from the public, I have another question from Belinda Quinlivan in relation of the Mataranka region and hot springs. Has there been evaluation of the tourism industry surrounding the Mataranka region hot springs, and is an analysis available on the value that the hot springs water has and how it is rated by tourists annually?

Ms MOSS: Thank you, Member for Namatjira. I appreciate the question, noting that there is a significant tourism focus on the Katherine region. I commend the Katherine Town Council members for their leadership in this area. They have a significant vision for the region and the feedback from people who are visiting and the buzz in town is testament to a collective effort in that region. It is a beautiful place to visit.

In 2016 the Parks and Wildlife Commission reported 128 904 visit counts to the Mataranka Thermal Pools, which is a significant natural asset and attraction for the region. This was a 9% increase compared to visits counted in 2015. I do not have the visitor numbers in front of me for Nitmiluk, but I understand it has had an increase in its visitor numbers as well. There have been increases across the region, which is fantastic news.

The last visitor satisfaction study conducted in the region was in 2009. It said that 52% of domestic and 38% of international travellers went to the Mataranka Thermal Pools. The natural hot springs in the region had led to positive visitor satisfaction.

The department has not conducted analysis in regard to the economic value of the Mataranka Thermal Pools. It is a complex piece of work; however, we continue to link in with a range of tourism stakeholders in the region to get our data around the visitor experience and numbers in a range of ways. I look forward to getting to Mataranka to meet with the tourism stakeholders, who are very active in promoting their part of the Katherine region.

I am very happy to answer any further questions about that.

Mr PAECH: Great, thank you, minister. I have another question from Mr Chris Walsh.

From 5 to 23 March 2017, Mr Alastair Shields attended the International Tourism Bourse in Germany and the United Kingdom for meetings. What was the itinerary? What were the dates he travelled in Germany? What dates was Mr Shields in the UK from? What meetings did he attend, and what were the dates he attended them? What report filed on what value to the taxpayer was received for this travel?

Mr Robert Crack also attended the international meeting in Germany. What was his role?

Mr George Christakis also attended the International Tourism Bourse in Germany. What was his role?

Ms MOSS: In a moment I will hand this over to Mr Shields to speak about it more broadly. It is important to note at this point that the ITB is a significant international tourism event. To put it to scale, this event brings together tourism operators, initiative and businesses from across the world to a building the size of about four or five football fields. It is a place where a lot of work is done to promote destinations, attractions and experiences. It is incredibly important that we maintain a presence at these valuable tourism stakeholder meetings.

It is really important to note that a number of workshops and meetings take place. Mr Shields, Mr Crack and Mr Christakis all perform very different roles within the agency, and will all undertake a range of very different meetings through attendance at these events. I will get Mr Shields to speak in more detail about that event. I look forward to heading over and being part of promoting the Territory at ITB in the future.

Mr SHIELDS: Thank you for the question. The dates of travel were from 5 to 12 of March, rather than 5 to 23 March, as per the question. It was quite a bit shorter than the question would suggest.

That travel allowed me to have one full day of meetings in London before I moved to Berlin to attend ITB. In London I had a networking meeting with Voyages Australia, which runs Uluru. Also at that meeting were Tourism Australia, Tourism Queensland and Tourism NT market representatives in the UK.

On 7 March I met with Sheldon Hee, the UK manager with Singapore Airlines. We discussed the Silk Air route in and out of Darwin and onward connections, and what can be done to promote use of that service.

Later that day I met with Mick Heitzinger, who is the Product Director with Flight Centre travel group. We spoke a bit about the work they are doing and the demand they have for tourists to come to the Northern Territory and Australia.

Over lunch I met with our Tourism NT market representatives Chris Lee, Robert Hardless, and Fleur Sainsbury. In the afternoon I met with Denise von Wald, who is the Regional General Manager for the UK and northern Europe with Tourism Australia. And finally, I met with Tony Russell, who is the Managing Director with Trailfinders, a much more traditional wholesale tourism operator.

On 8 March I flew to Berlin, where ITB is. ITB is the world's largest travel expo. It is a remarkable exhibition in a number of buildings, and pretty much every country and major tourist destination in the world is represented there.

On that day I familiarised myself with ITB. I did not have fixed appointments, although I met for dinner at Tourism NT Central Europe with the head office teams there.

On 9 March, again at ITB, I met with Christopher Huckle, who is with Knecht Reisen, a Swiss wholesale tour operator. On the same day, I met with Reinhard Kotaurek, Managing Director, Central Europe STA Travel, the Student Travel Association.

Again, on 9 March, I met with Dominic Eckert, Managing Director of Dreamtime Travel, from the Best ofr Travel Group;

I also met on 9 March with Phillipa Harrison, the Executive General Manager International, and Eva Seller, who is the regional manager, German speaking and Eastern Europe, both of whom are with Tourism Australia at the ITB Tourism Australia stand.

On the evening of 9 March I hosted the Tourism NT industry dinner for our 14 industry members for the NT who travelled to Berlin to be part of ITB, plus a number of our other key stakeholders in Europe.

On 10 March I met with Mohamed Rafi Mar, who is the General Manager for Germany, Austria and Central Eastern Europe with Singapore Airlines, to primarily discuss the Ghan linkages in and out of the Northern Territory ...

Madam CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Shields, can I intervene? Are there any more public questions following on from this, Member for Namatjira?

Mr PAECH: Yes, there are still a few outstanding questions from Mr Walsh.

Madam CHAIR: Okay. I am just wary of the time. Mr Shields, I will ask you to table your document. I notice we still have a couple of days of your itinerary we could still cover, but I am wary of the time and I wonder if we could put those on the record?

Mr SHIELDS: Of course. I am more than happy to do that.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you very much. Member for Namatjira, would you like to continue with the public questions, please?

Mr PAECH: Minister, I have another question from Mr Chris Walsh. How many international countries have you, as the Tourism minister, visited since becoming a minister? What were the dates and what were the purposes of these trips? Did you file a report for each of these trips?

Ms MOSS: Member for Namatjira, I have undertaken a significant amount of intra-Territory travel since becoming minister and to Sydney for the ATE, the Australian Tourism Exchange, recently as well. I have had no international trips. However, I plan to go to China next week and will be releasing associated costs as per our policy before I go, and ensuring that reports are filed when I return.

Mr PAECH: Thank you, minister.

Ms MOSS: We have some quite complex figures around travel given the nature of the agency. We have a number of Parks and Wildlife rangers who are also part of this agency who run and attend a number of events, both nationally and internationally. I am happy to provide or table that information if the committee so desires.

Mr PAECH: Minister, I have another question in relation to the botanic gardens. Why did it cost—I am assuming that is \$5000 and not \$5—for Mr Brian Hardy to attend the State of the World's Plants Symposium from 11 to 12 May 2016 in England?

Ms MOSS: It is \$5. It is an interesting one where ...

Mr PAECH: Very cheap travel!

Ms MOSS: If that is not the whole cost of the travel—the expenditure acquittal would have been before the end of the financial year, and this cost would have fallen outside of the financial year.

Mr PAECH: Emma Darby and Patrick Gregory both attended the International Network of Emerging Library Innovators from 10 to 14 July 2016. What was the significance of this event that two staff members were required? Why did it cost \$338 for Ms Darby to attend and \$279 for Mr Gregory to attend?

Ms MOSS: To provide some context around our work in libraries, we have just released the new vision for libraries in the Northern Territory for comment. We are entering into a new arrangement with local governments. We have an interim arrangement over the next year, and then we will move into a new arrangement with local governments for the provision of library services.

There is a broad understanding of the changing nature of libraries in our communities not only in the Northern Territory but nationally.

I am very proud of the work the department has undertaken in recognising the community hubs and the changing nature—the technological advances and the amazing things we can continue to provide for Territorians through those community hubs.

It is specialised work and I support those staff members from the department in being part of that ongoing professional development. The Gates Foundation covered all travel and accommodation costs for that trip, so that is why it was that figure. The Northern Territory Government covered the TA.

With the upcoming agreement and the new vision for libraries, it is fantastic that they availed themselves of that professional development.

Mr PAECH: What is being done to help remote communities with swimming pools, maintaining and keeping the pools open and staffed with qualified staff?

Ms MOSS: Sporting infrastructure is a huge part of what is delivered by the Department of Tourism and Culture. Swimming pools are an important part of that, as are remote ovals. An important consideration in regard to new or existing pools and sporting infrastructure is the ongoing cost of providing those services to communities. I will hand over to Mr Phillip Leslie, Executive Director of Sport and Recreation.

Mr LESLIE: Government responsibility for swimming pools has been capital cost up front, as is currently demonstrated with the contribution the government has made to the new compliant pool being built in Parap.

Recurrent costs for swimming pools across the Territory are the responsibility of local government out of ratepayers' funds. That is the case in remote and urban environments. From time to time, however, there is a contribution, and remote and urban councils are able to apply to the department for facility and capital equipment grants, which are considered on their merits according to the priorities that exist at the time.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, how many remaining questions from the public do you have?

Mr PAECH: I have three from Royal Lifesaving NT and some from the Badminton Association and Mr Simon Harvey. I will ask for those questions to be taken on notice to be reported back.

Madam CHAIR: We will do that, because we have 10 minutes remaining with the minister. If that is okay with you, minister, I will get the Member for Namatjira to run through his questions and we will allocate the numbers and take them on notice.

Ms MOSS: Absolutely fine, and happy to respond to all the questions that have been put forward to us.

Question on Notice No 7.4

Mr PAECH: The next question is from Royal Lifesaving NT. We understand the rationale for merging agencies, but the budget paper no longer includes outcome and performance indicators of key sections such as Sport and Recreation. Parks and Wildlife merged with the Department of Tourism and Culture, yet they still have their own section in Budget Paper No 3, whereas Sport and Rec appears not to. Are there outcomes and performance indicators for Sport and Recreation?

Madam CHAIR: That question will take the number 7.4.

Ms MOSS: Do you want me to answer that, because I can answer that quite quickly, or would you like me to ...

Madam CHAIR: We will take them all on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.5

Mr PAECH: The next one is from Royal Lifesaving NT on the sports vouchers scheme and eligibility for schools' swimming programs. Page 198 of Budget Paper No 3, Investing in Children, states \$11.5m in grants, including the Sport Voucher Schemes. Can families and schools use sports vouchers for school swimming and water safety programs during school hours, especially if their pools are not utilised?

Madam CHAIR: That question will be given the number 7.5.

Question on Notice No 7.6

Mr PAECH: This question is from Royal Lifesaving NT. What were the sports vouchers schemes in place and Learn to Swim vouchers statistics for 2016–17. How many vouchers were redeemed? What happens to the unexpended provisions? How many families are being consulted and surveyed for improvements to this scheme?

Madam CHAIR: That question has been given the number 7.6.

Question on Notice No 7.7

Mr PAECH: From the Badminton Association: what is envisioned for the Arafura Games investment? How many sports will be invited to participate in the Arafura Games? What will be the basis of cost appointment for the Arafura Games? What are the principles for cost-bearing to be applied and how does that reciprocate attendance at other peer regional competitions to the Arafura Games?

If badminton were to be included in the 2019 Arafura Games, what are the venue options being considered? What is included in the cost projections for the venue hire for the Arafura Games badminton program? What is the expected athlete draw for badminton nations and numbers?

On the projected venue—over how many days for the Arafura Games? What investment in hosting officials and volunteer support is forecast for the 2019 Arafura games program? What are the expected outer years following budgets likely to deliver with respect to a suitable permanent badminton playing venue to host the Arafura Games, as well as locally and nationally significant competitions?

Madam CHAIR: That question has been allocated the number 7.7.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions from members of the public?

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – TOURISM AND CULTURE
Output 7.1 – Tourism and Culture

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 7.0, Tourism and Culture, Output 7.1, Tourism and Culture. I am mindful we have five minutes remaining.

Are there any questions on this output?

Mr PAECH: I am aware that the Engawala community, also known as Alcoota, mega fossil project was deferred in the mini-budget, but I note in the 2017-18 budget a significant commitment of \$2.3m has been made to develop a state-of-the-art exhibition space in Alice Springs, in Todd Mall, to showcase the impressive collection. Can you advise if any further works or discussions are planned to occur at Engawala community where the funds were originally allocated?

Ms MOSS: It is well appreciated amongst some that there is a significant and impressive collection of megafauna in Central Australia that has not been known about for quite some time because it has been spread out across a number of different buildings that the museum of Central Australia, including on their dance rehearsal space on their sprung floor and in the aviation museum, and that is where the palaeontologist is working on what is brought in from the Alcoota fossil beds.

There has been additional funding allocated in this budget for the display and the movement of that collection to the Alice Springs CBD, which includes the fit-out and the exhibition, and moving that whole collection there, which will then see the freeing up of that community space—the dance floor and the Araluen Arts Centre as well.

There will be an opportunity, as part of this process, for the Engawala community to be part of the development of that display, and I see it as an opportunity to really grow the interest in and awareness of that collection of megafauna to free up a number of other community assets and to start a journey of looking at how we can showcase the megafauna and look at the other opportunities that exist around that exhibition. It is an amazing collection.

Yes, discussions will be undertaken with the community about that display and around what that looks like into the future in the region.

Mr PAECH: To clarify, will this project allow the Araluen Arts Centre to have a space back to continue the growing community space as required in the community and showcase those in the Alice Springs Todd Mall to generate interest from tourists and business?

Ms MOSS: Absolutely, yes. That was a temporary arrangement that has not been so temporary. This means that rehearsal space can now be used for its intended purpose, which adds value to both the Araluen Cultural Precinct and to the broader community. I understand that people are very interested in the fossil beds and what will happen there, and I am more than happy to continue that conversation and that work to look at the future of opportunities there.

Mr PAECH: What is in Budget 2017–18 to support the Territory's crucial tourism industry?

Ms MOSS: There is a significant amount in this budget for supporting tourism right across the Northern Territory and, importantly, as I said earlier, we have brought together a number of different agencies for a reason. Parks are incredibly important to conservation and education they are also really important places for our visitors, so we are working very strongly to support that across a number of areas.

There is \$1m in the repairs and maintenance budget for the Territory Wildlife Park and Alice Springs Desert Park. I understand they have already identified a number of projects on which they can use that repairs and maintenance money to improve what they are doing at those important community assets.

There is \$200 000 to support a public transport link trial to Territory Wildlife Park and the improvement of its website and marketing through that. There is also funding in Budget 2017–18 so they can undertake some strategic planning for their future, because it is a community asset, a really important tourism asset, that continues to deliver for visitors, but we do have ageing infrastructure and we have a very dedicated team with lots of ideas, and this is an opportunity to really have a look at the future of that.

We have funding for our regional stimulus grants to go to regional arts galleries, centres, museums, libraries and keeping places. That will begin in the new financial year. It is important for the regions and for our broader arts trail commitment.

This is about allowing those smaller art galleries and centres which are providing so much in the way of meaningful employment for local communities, showcasing culture and incredible art, the opportunity to improve their facilities for a better working environment and visitor experience. That is included in this budget.

More toward the marketing side, as we spoke about having that international presence, there is the \$4m in this budget for attracting the Chinese and Indian markets, which were identified as a key priority for government. We need to continue to maintain our focus, as a department, on traditional markets for tourism in the Territory, including our European and domestic markets. We must make sure we have an eye on our share of the growing Chinese and emerging Indian market.

This includes a number of grants around getting tourism operator and hotels China-ready. We have a program training Mandarin speakers in tour guiding in Kakadu, as well as a range of marketing activities and research to put our best foot forward to attract airlines, visitors and showcasing the unique and magical place we all know and love. We are continuing with a number of major events important for tourism industry.

Members of the Estimates Committee based in Central Australia will recognise the buzz when those major events are on. It is important we continue to support festivals and community events.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I am wary of time, but I understand the Member for Nhulunbuy has one final question.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise of any support for small tourism businesses in homelands that are struggling due to poor road access following the extent of this Wet Season.

Ms MOSS: In terms of road infrastructure, we have input at a whole-of-government level when providing feedback to Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. Road infrastructure sits with Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, but if there are concerns from operators in your region I am happy

to connect with them to make sure we get that feedback through that channel. I know you have asked a number of road infrastructure questions of the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. Please let us know if there are specific roads you want us to look at in terms of tourism-related impact.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

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

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Tourism and Culture. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officials who provided assistance to the minister today. I also thank all the public servants who assisted Minister Moss with her preparation to be here today.

The committee will now break for fives before we return to consider the Department of Education.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER LAWLER'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Madam CHAIR: Good morning, minister. I welcome you to today's hearings and I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Ms LAWLER: Good morning, Madam Chair. I am very pleased to be here to answer questions for estimates. I hold a wonderful portfolio and am very proud to be the Minister for Education.

On my right I have the Chief Executive of the Department of Education Vicki Baylis; the Chief Financial Officer, Shaun O'Brien; the Deputy Chief Executive, Marion Guppy; and the Executive Director of Corporate Services, Jasmin Aldenhoven.

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

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

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Education?

Ms LAWLER: I thank all the people in the agency who prepared the briefs. I know how much work goes into that, so thank you to all the staff in the department for doing that.

There are 190 schools in the Northern Territory providing education to over 46 000 students in government and non-government schools. In addition, there are 23 government homeland learning centres operating in 2017. Between 2016 and 2017 we have seen substantial enrolment growth in government schools with 927 additional students. During this time enrolments in non-government schools decreased by 389, indicating some movement toward the government sector.

Seventy-three per cent of Territory schools are located in remote and very remote areas, and 44% of our students are Aboriginal, the highest proportion of Aboriginal students in any state or territory. Almost three-quarters of student enrolments are in Northern Territory Government schools.

Our government school students are supported by a workforce of over 4100 full-time equivalent staff. School-based employees make up 87% of the workforce and include over 2300 teaching staff. At 14%, the Department of Education's proportion of Aboriginal staff is amongst the highest of any Northern Territory Government agency. That does not include school council employed Aboriginal staff.

The average attendance rate for non-Aboriginal government school students continues to be approximately 90%; however, for Aboriginal students attendance is around 69%. We have further work to do to meet the COAG target of 90% attendance for those students. We know how important regular attendance is to achieving learning outcomes. We continue to see attendance strategies across all levels of government fail to make a substantial and sustained improvement.

Our cross-government priority to put children at the centre includes joint work on improving attendance with a particular focus on setting positive patterns of school attendance from the early years. This joint work will see all agencies and levels of government working together to set children and their families up, ready for day one, term one, year one of school.

This government understands the importance of investing in our children and is investing an additional \$124m over four years into our schools. This additional funding has been allocated from the start of the 2017 school year. Building on this, the total investment in education in 2017–18 will be \$1.1bn. There is \$489m allocated in 2017 to meet the costs of operating Northern Territory Government schools. This includes funding for growth in student numbers as well as an additional \$20m to meet student needs, especially in preschool, middle and senior years, and schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal students.

This additional funding was distributed to schools in Term 1 and has already resulted in about 125 additional full-time equivalent staff in our schools. This year I have visited many schools and heard loudly and clearly how important it is that resourcing for schools is distributed on the needs of students.

We have commenced an independent review of the school funding model to ensure it is equitable, meets students' needs and is transparent and efficient. A total of \$1m will be provided to support and develop school business managers to ensure principals and school councils receive the best support possible to manage their school resources and meet accountability requirements.

The 2017-18 budget provides important investment in education infrastructure totalling \$141.7m. The 2017–18 budget includes \$34.1m for repairs and maintenance, including new funding of \$1m for repairs to homeland centres. There is \$17.6m allocated for minor new works for government schools, which includes \$13.5m for year one of the Building Better Schools project.

A total of \$2.7m has been allocated to fund year one of the Building Better Schools project in our non-government schools. The non-government education sector is an important part of the Northern Territory education system and provides choice to Territory families and students. The Northern Territory budget for non-government schools in 2017–18 provides support to the non-government sector of \$233.4m, which includes \$174.2m of Commonwealth Government Quality Schools Funding.

The total Department of Education's operating budget in 2017–18 is \$999.3m, a minor decrease from the 2016–17 final estimate of \$1.004bn. This increase is the result of a one-off event in 2016–17, primarily the grant of \$21.2m to the Catholic Education Office Northern Territory for the new government school in Zuccoli, a decision of the previous government.

In summary, this 2017–18 budget aims to deliver an education system that is fair and equitable for all students by resourcing schools based on the needs of the students. We are creating safe, positive and inclusive school environments and ensuring that every classroom has a quality teacher and every school an exceptional leader.

We respect and value the role of families and communities in their children's education. We are investing in areas we know will make the most difference to the quality of education to ultimately deliver better outcomes for all Northern Territory students.

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

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

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

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

Are there any questions from members of the public?

Ms UIBO: Yes, Madam Chair. I have several questions for the minister on behalf of the public. This question comes from Michelle Tiedeman. Are there any incentives to support apprenticeships and traineeships for long-term Territorians?

Ms LAWLER: Apprenticeships and traineeships are important for our government. We know the value of vocational education and training. This portfolio I cover, Education, is focused on vocational education and training in schools. The broader, higher-level training for adults is under the portfolio of the Chief Minister. Vocational education and training is a strong focus in our schools. We have the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training, which focuses on those training aspects and ensuring that children and students have those choices.

I will pass to Marion Guppy, the Deputy Chief Executive, School Education to talk more about the specifics of scholarships.

Ms GUPPY: Member for Arnhem, thank you for your question. As the minister has said, we have a focus within our department on the provision of vocational education for our students within the school sector.

In addition to that we are offering scholarships to staff members to undertake specific training in specific areas of great need within our schools and the profession. In particular there are a range of scholarships being offered to staff that will enable them to undertake additional training in the areas of students with additional needs.

I think this is an enormously positive move by the department and government in growing our own, identification of a skill area where we have needs and then making provisions to ensure that our staff are able to upskill to best provide the service for children with those additional needs.

Ms UIBO: Just following up to confirm, there were two scholarships for educators?

Ms LAWLER: Yes.

Ms UIBO: What is the value of those scholarships?

Ms LAWLER: I will ask the deputy chief executive.

Ms GUPPY: In the scholarships on offer—there will more than two on offer. I will ask Maree Garrigan, our Acting Executive Director for School Support Services just to outline the number of scholarships that will be on offer and the value of them.

Ms GARRIGAN: May we take that on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 8.1

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

Ms UIBO: Minister, what is the value of these scholarships for the teacher training?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question as a question on notice?

Ms LAWLER: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you very much. The question asked by the Member for Arnhem of the minister has been allocated the number 8.1.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Ms UIBO: Yes, Madam Chair. These continue from the public. This series of questions comes from Mr Walsh.

Minister, please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for all chief executives in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for all international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Ms LAWLER: In the Department of Education there is no instance of overseas ministerial travel during that time. As Minister for Education, I have had a firm focus on making sure I get to all schools in the Northern Territory, so my travel has been in the Territory in the first instance ...

Ms UIBO: Minister, just to clarify, this question pertains to chief executives.

Ms LAWLER: Sorry, I am getting there. I thought I would just get in first to make sure it is very clear I have not been overseas. The Department of Education's expenditure on travel is very closely monitored. The department maintains strong controls over travel and it has travel audits regularly.

The Department of Education's expenditure on travel from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 was \$4.61m. I will pass to the chief executive to provide more detail on the travel.

Ms BAYLIS: In relation to chief executive travel, since my appointment in September 2016, I can acknowledge that I have been to three countries. I have been to China, in both Anhui province and Hong Kong, and to Dili, in Timor-Leste, where we have a government school operating from. I will provide further detail in terms of the breakdown of the itinerary as part of a question on notice.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister. I will continue; we have had some information from your chief executive for question two from Mr Walsh. Minister, please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by chief executives from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 and please list the number of times the chief executive has visited that location over the last five years.

Ms LAWLER: I will pass this to the chief executive to answer those questions.

Ms BAYLIS: Having only been appointed to this position in September 2016, I have provided the details and have been to each of those countries once. I will be attending a celebration very shortly in Timor-Leste for a graduation for students out of our school there.

We will provide a more fully detailed comprehensive analysis over the last five years because we need to go back and check across the range of CEs that have existed within the agency at that point in time, so we will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.2

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

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

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. Is the minister happy to accept the question?

Ms LAWLER: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question is allocated number 8.2.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, the next question from Mr Walsh will be quite similar to the previous question. In the case of international travel, please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip, as well as the written report into what taxpayers gained from the trip. If no report for department minister exists, please explain why.

Ms LAWLER: I am more than happy to table all of those things. In education there is a range of travel. We have the corporate areas of the department, but we also have principals and schools that travel overseas. We have a range of trips overseas from our principals. We have sister school arrangements as well as an executive leadership program that involves travel to China. We could spend a long time listing and going

through all of those. I would much prefer if we used this time for broader questions on education. I am more than happy to table all of that information.

Madam CHAIR: Are you planning on tabling those today, minister?

Ms BAYLIS: They are being tabled now.

Ms UIBO: Minister, this next question may be included in the documents you are tabling now. Please inform the committee if so. This question is again from Mr Walsh. Please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of traveling, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for public servants in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Ms LAWLER: I can read those. It will take up some time but I am happy to do that.

Ms UIBO: Minister, if you have the document I am happy to receive it as tabled because that response will go to the member of the public.

Ms LAWLER: Okay, I can do that. I can table the attachment.

Ms BAYLIS: Can I also clarify the previous one we are tabling. Because of the extent of the question we have three months more work of analysis given the time frame that was asked of us from Mr Walsh. We will provide that as a question on notice and we will table it. That was the question prior to this one.

Ms UIBO: Thank you for that clarification. Two more questions. Minister, again if it has been tabled please provide that information. Minister, in the case of international travel please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip, as well as the written report into what taxpayers gained from the trip. If no report given to the department chief executive exists, please explain why.

Ms LAWLER: We will table that information.

Question on Notice No 8.3

Ms UIBO: This is the last question from Mr Walsh. Please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by public servants from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, and please list the number of times the public servant visited that location over the past five years.

Ms LAWLER: Those questions with the five-year time frame will be taken on notice. There is considerable work needed to provide that due to the diversity of staff who travel. One of the issues with education is that it is not just about the corporate areas. We have school staff who also travel overseas, and sometimes that is with school relationships and school camps as well.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister and Member for Arnhem. We have the previous wording for Mr Walsh's questions so we will take that specific one with the five-year time frame on notice. It will be allocated number 8.3.

Madam CHAIR: I just want to confirm, the documents that have been tabled contain part of the answers but not all of the answers. Any remaining answers will be provided.

Ms LAWLER: Yes. The answers provided have been in the 2016–17 financial year, which is the usual thing at estimates. For stuff pertaining to five years back there is considerable work needed to retrieve that data. We will take those on notice.

Ms UIBO: I have more questions from the public. This question comes from Connie McDowell: can you please advise how Rosebery Primary School is managing its increase in enrolments and what it is doing to manage class numbers? What is its future infrastructure plan to cater for a growing school?

Ms LAWLER: As a member with an electorate in Palmerston, I am aware of issues of growth in the eastern side of Palmerston, in the Zuccoli, Bakewell and Rosebery areas.

In education we have a number of spots of considerable growth. That is the story in the Territory for places like Girraween and the CBD. In this budget we allocated money for transportable items: classrooms can be put in temporarily to find immediate solutions, and then they look at longer term solutions. The department works hard for a clear plan for the future of our infrastructure.

The other thing I will talk about before passing to the General Manager Planning and Infrastructure is that the Catholic Education Office NT will build a Catholic Primary School, Mother Teresa Catholic Primary School, in the area. That school will be opened January 2018. The previous government made the decision to allocate a \$21.3m grant to the Catholic Education Office NT to build the primary school first. It will be a joint site. The Northern Territory Government is spending \$9m in this budget on the joint facilities we have. We will look to the future to build a primary school at Zuccoli too.

I will pass to Leanne Taylor, Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure, to provide more information.

Ms TAYLOR: To put the school infrastructure in context, Rosebery Primary School currently has 577 enrolments, 441 of which live in the priority enrolment areas of Rosebery or Bellamack. One hundred and twenty-six enrolments have addresses outside the priority enrolment area. The school currently has 490 in primary and 87 in preschool.

The capacity of the school, in total, is for 508 places in the primary school and 88 places in the preschool. It is acknowledged that the gap in the capacity of the school and its enrolments is closing. Of those 73 enrolments have addresses from Zuccoli. That is an area placing pressure on Rosebery. The nearby school of Woodroffe can cater for families from Zuccoli and has done in the past.

Recognising the growth in Zuccoli, and that the government school will be delivered in stages, our plan is to augment Rosebery school with two quality transportable classrooms by Term 4 of 2017. There will be additional capacity for 50 places by the end of the year. Our strategy is to prepare that site for an additional two classrooms in 2018. In total we are providing an additional capacity of 100 by the end of 2018 for Rosebery school. Noting priority enrolment area is for Bellamack and Rosebery.

Ongoing, our strategy will be to deliver the government school at Zuccoli in stage. The first stage will start in the 2017–18 financial year with the \$9m, as stated by the minister, to develop services for the site and for a community oval. Following that the department will commence a 450-place school at Zuccoli.

Ms UIBO: I have one more question from the public for the minister. This question is from the Royal Lifesaving Society Northern Territory. Children's swimming and water safety abilities in the Northern Territory are a real concern. Less than 4% of Northern Territory primary school students are meeting the national benchmark and the Northern Territory has the highest drowning rate per capita in Australia.

Every state and territory in Australia, except the Northern Territory are either conducting well-established programs through their Departments of Education—Tasmania, New South Wales, Western Australia, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Queensland—or reviewing current funding and programs and investing in children and schools for swimming and water safety. The Victorian government's latest budget has allocated a total of \$17.1m over four years.

In 2015 the Northern Territory parliament was presented with a petition from Northern Territory families requesting a funded swimming and water safety program for primary school students in Years 4, 5 and 6 to enable them to reach the national benchmark. Progress on this issue has stalled since the change of government and children need government to help them in this area. Will this be addressed through the 2017 budget?

Ms LAWLER: The issue of swimming in schools is one that we have looked at very closely. The minister for sport has also looked closely at this issue. It is one that we continue to work on.

What we have now is global budgets in schools. Schools can make those decisions on programs they deliver. There are 85 schools across our system, 63 in government and 22 in non-government, which participate in a swim-and-survive program. About half our schools are delivering a program. All up, there are about 11 000 students that are participating in the swim-and-survive program.

I will pass to the Deputy Chief Executive School Education to talk more about those swimming programs.

Ms GUPPY: As the minister said, we work closely with Royal Lifesaving NT to improve the swimming abilities and the water safety knowledge of children through our policy development and water safety training.

The Department of Education currently provides annual funding of \$30 000 to Royal Lifesaving NT. That is to fund the collection of swimming and water safety data, including lesson participation and the ability levels of the students undertaking those lessons.

The most recent available data from the Royal Lifesaving Society in the 2015–16 financial year indicates, as the minister has already informed you, that we have 63 Northern Territory Government and 22 non-government schools participating in swimming and survival water programs. That has taken account of 7749 NTG and 3934 non-government primary school students participating in swim-and-survive programs. Of the students who have participated, 741 have achieved up to a level four or above, which is the national benchmark at the end of primary school.

Additionally, the Department of Education delivers a range of programs to increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of Northern Territory students in the area of water safety, including Swim and Survive and the Royal Lifesaving Water Smart program. There is a range and a diversity of programs on offer for our students in schools throughout the Northern Territory, both government and non-government.

The Water Smart program focuses on water safety knowledge and it provide teaching resources mapped to our Australian curriculum for students up to year 10, and a water safety award for students in Years 4 to 6. On the successful completion of a Water Smart award, students are presented with a Water Smart certificate in recognition of that achievement.

The department continues to explore partnerships with other government agencies to improve access to swimming and water safety programs for NT children and we provide advice and options about NT government funded primary school swimming and water safety programs.

Access it is acknowledged is variable dependent on the facilities that may or may not be available and dependent on complexities in regard to transportation.

Ms UIBO: I am interested in the Swim and Survive program. I know that operates and supports many remote schools and I want to see if that is being supported in terms of funding in this budget.

Ms LAWLER: Those are decisions that schools make. Schools have global budgets. As you would understand, Member for Arnhem, in places that have access to swimming pools—communities such as Ngukurr in your electorate, Yuendumu and places where there is a swimming pool—it is much easier to facilitate those swimming. In Ntaria, which is an hour out of Alice Springs, it is easier to facilitate swimming. I am sure you understand how in a place like Numbulwar, in your electorate, how much harder it is then to facilitate swimming lessons.

That is one of the issues we face around the delivery of swimming lessons. It is more often the cost of transport rather than the actual swimming lesson, but it is also the amount of time that takes out of their classroom teaching and learning programs. Even in an urban setting it may be that you have to take an hour of transporting to and from to get to a swimming pool and to get the children into the pool.

I will pass to the deputy chief executive if there is anything further to add on that.

Ms GUPPY: Minister, I think I have covered off on the detail.

Ms UIBO: Thank you. Minister, I will raise any urban teacher an hour of transport to two and a half hours one way—five-hour round trip for swimming lessons from Numbulwar to Ngukurr.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – GOVERNMENT EDUCATION

Output 1.1 – Early Years

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Government Education, Output 1.1, Early Years. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: This government said it would increase funding to schools by \$20m to reinvest in education. Can you tell me how this funding has been distributed?

Ms LAWLER: It was remiss of me not to thank also the members of the public who sent in those questions. So thank you very much to the members of the public who did.

One of the very positive things about being the Minister for Education has been the wonderful news that we have been able to deliver the election commitment of \$20m to go directly into global school budgets. All schools have received their final 2017 global school budgets and that additional funding has hit the mark and gone into those school budgets.

With regard to global school budgets, and with schools having autonomy around the way they use that \$20m, the department surveyed our schools and asked them how they are spending that money, and it has been lovely to hear some of the great new stories on how they are spending that additional money.

There has been additional staff employed—teaching staff, assistant teachers and tutors. There also psychologists, guidance officers, counsellors, speech pathologists and social workers. Some schools have chosen to use some of those dollars to bring expertise into their schools. Instead of employing an additional one or two teachers, they have kept that money and will use that to bring in a school counsellor or a child psychologist for a certain number of hours each week. There are also specific programs, such as in sporting and arts.

That \$20m, which is divided across all schools, has been wonderful. In my visits to schools they have been grateful for that. A good example is from your electorate, Member for Arnhem. I received an email yesterday from the school council chair at Jabiru school, thanking me and the government for the additional money the school received. It is nice to hear the good news stories about the additional money that has gone into education. As we know, the previous government did not have that focus on education and dollars had been stripped from the department.

I will pass to the chief executive to provide some more details on exactly where some of those dollars have been spent.

Ms BAYLIS: Member for Arnhem, in response to the question about the global school budgets, there were a number of areas that were our key priorities to look at where the funding would be targeted. We chose to focus on areas where we had clear feedback from our school leaders and teachers. Those included the senior year students, middle year students, preschools and Transition, which aligns very closely to the government's commitment about children. We needed to think what was happening for students who were enrolled in the homeland learning centres and what the educational provision was for them.

We also needed to take into account schools which had a high concentration of Indigenous students because we had feedback about the mobility of students and the impact that was having in schools and the turnover in classrooms. We also needed to address the issues around students at special schools and those who accessed distance education.

The degree of detail you would like me to answer that—we can provide you with a dollar breakdown if you would like that as well.

Mr PAECH: Can I follow on from that? I am using the circumstance of Sadadeen Primary School in Alice Springs, which is a predominantly Indigenous school. Recapping on what you have said, would that apply to that school?

Ms BAYLIS: Absolutely, Member for Namatjira. Sadadeen would have had an impact in its budget around its preschool and Transition students, particularly its concentration of students who were Indigenous with their mobility factor and the percentage of students there. Yes, those two factors would have featured, along with their primary school balance.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, I am happy if the minister would like to table the breakdown of those finances so it is on the record.

Ms BAYLIS: We can attach that or answer those questions depending on where you want. We can give that to you in the geographical location and the type of school, if that would be sufficient for tabling.

Ms UIBO: Yes, I am happy with that, Madam Chair.

How many more teachers and school support staff have been employed this year? I have heard you speak numerous times in the parliament Chamber about the cuts to school staff numbers over the last couple of

years. I am wondering, under your leadership, what are the numbers of teachers and schools staff and have they increased in your term of holding the portfolio so far?

Ms LAWLER: Yes, they have increased. When you put \$20m into the system you expect to see an increase. There are about 125 FTEs. One of the things we need to be a little careful about in education, as you would understand, is that some of those schools have chosen to take some of those dollars and put them into their school council funds and then employ people through their school councils.

It may be that they employ—this is a great thing—some extra Indigenous people in their communities to support the Learning on Country Program, or it might be that they employ some extra people for reading support. It may be a specialist, like a child psychologist or a counsellor or guidance officer, so it is a really difficult one to just be cut and dry around when you talk about the \$20m going into global budgets, because schools have the autonomy to choose how they will spend those extra dollars. The figure was that of 31 March, as those budgets rolled out.

The other thing is that schools now have their budgets; I think we look for the next six to eight months for schools to employ more people. Schools are probably a bit tentative at the beginning of the school year regarding their numbers because that funding is also based on their student numbers. As their numbers consolidate this year I think we will see even more people being employed as well. I will pass to the chief executive for some more detail.

Ms BAYLIS: The way that we look at our full-time equivalent is around our school-based employees, which will include, as the minister described, teacher assistants, who are paid by the Northern Territory Government and not by the school council, as well as our teaching staff. This does not include our principals, who are sitting in a different funding regime.

For the quarter from the beginning of 2015–16 when we compare it to the January to March quarter of 2016–17 what we have seen is an increase from 3536 staff to 3635 full time-equivalent school-based employees. We need to note that at the beginning of the year, as the minister says, people are cautious; the principals are making decisions to see which students return, which students have moved to different schools or interstate, so they are waiting to have that final data and we will see further employment opportunities throughout the year as that stabilises.

Ms UIBO: Minister, I understand the Malak Re-engagement Centre caters for students who would otherwise not be in mainstream school, and there is a similar program being delivered in Alice Springs. Can you inform the committee of this type of engagement program?

Ms LAWLER: When I became minister I had concerns about the number of students that were disengaged from schooling. Things change, and in education you see that. Schools are a microcosm of our community, so it was about how we cater for a full range of students. Our Labor government in 2012 had established the Malak Re-engagement Centre, which was to address students in the northern suburbs who were not attending school regularly. The department has that data on students who do not go regularly to school.

In Central Australia, again the Labor government in the 2011–12 period, established the St Joseph's flexible learning centre, so those two areas were being catered for. One of the things that I was very keen to see as minister was for us to expand those engagement programs for those students who do not necessarily find school as an easy thing for them. They often choose, and it is often in those middle years, not to attend regularly.

We have established the Palmerston re-engagement centre, which is a positive thing for those students in Palmerston. It is slightly different but along the same vein—our government has committed \$1m in Katherine and \$1m in Barkly, and we are calling it the Healthy Life Creative Life program. One of the important things is to be able to hook those students in and get them back into school and into activities they enjoy.

I believe the previous government made substantial cuts to schools. When you do that you pull out those extra programs. For example in the Palmerston area, which is my electorate, was Rosebery Middle School. It lost teachers, staff and kept maths, English and those subjects going. But if you lose staff you take out those additional programs, which are often the ones that encourage kids to go to school and keep those who find school difficult or not engaging.

Besides the \$20m being able to put more teachers into schools like Rosebery—so they can employ an ESL teacher to cater for kids with English as an additional language—it is about setting up engagement

programs so we can get children back into routines and support them. The positive thing is to then get them back into a mainstream school.

I was recently in Tasmania for the Education Council meeting, and I took that opportunity to see a flexible learning centre in Hobart, which caters for the types of children we have in the Territory. It is not necessarily for children who are bad or naughty; there are children with mental health issues and who are highly anxious. For them to attend school can be a major trauma and it can be hard for them.

When we talk about re-engagement, it is not just to pick up the bad kids; it is about providing outreach services. If a child is highly anxious and finds it hard to leave home, and wants to stay at home where it is safe and secure—it is about providing outreach services to that student.

I am pleased to support these re-engagement programs because they are critical. There are a number of children who do not fit the four square walls in traditional educational programs. In the past those students would have just not attended, but now we have a mechanism for tracking those students. I am very pleased to see those additional dollars into those programs.

I will hand over to the deputy chief executive to talk more about those programs.

Ms GUPPY: The minister mentioned the Healthy Life Creative Life programs that will operate in Tennant Creek and Katherine. I will provide an update on that.

There is \$2m per annum being invested in those programs to provide alternative education pathways, especially for the middle and senior year students who are at risk of disengaging from school and potentially from their communities. The aim of those programs is to return, if at all possible, those students to mainstream schooling or, if that is not their desire, to provide progress to a job or other training through re-engagement activities. Some of those activities include sport and the creative arts, social and emotional learning, culture, language and learning on country.

In Katherine the stakeholder consultation is well under way, and a potential site has been identified. Negotiations around a lease for that site are being undertaken. That program will offer flexible learning options and wraparound support that students at risk and disengaged youth require so much.

In Tennant Creek that program has resulted in a 10-year lease being agreed to with the Barkly Shire Council for the lease of the Juno training centre. Work has already been undertaken toward site clean-up, repairs to infrastructure and the positioning of some accommodation and demountables at the facility so it becomes a regional hub for the Barkly region, so students can come in and have a provision of service. While it is based just outside Tennant Creek the vision is it will provide for students at risk more broadly across the region.

The Certificate III construction students from Tennant Creek High School have begun a vocational education program on site already. That program at Juno will be fully operational for Semester 2 in 2017. It is a significant step forward in the provision of service for those young people within our regions. It is exciting times.

Ms NELSON: I want to ask for clarification on a couple things. You mentioned there is \$2m allocated for the education re-engagement programs. That is something I am passionate about, especially in Katherine. With that \$2m can you tell me how it is split between Katherine and Tennant Creek?

Ms LAWLER: We are probably muddying the waters a bit, but that Healthy Life Creative Life is \$1m for Katherine and \$1m for Tennant Creek. Our government also committed \$8m to supporting kids with additional needs and challenging behaviours. Some of the re-engagement for Palmerston is out of that \$8m pool. It is about a whole-of-education focus on making sure we cater for every child across the Territory.

Madam CHAIR: We are still on Output Group 1.0, Government Education. Member for Nhulunbuy, I understand you have a few questions.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise me what output I ask questions about bilingual education?

Ms LAWLER: I am happy to take those questions now.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise about staffing at the Mitchell Centre in Darwin and regional offices? Could you provide details as to how many staff are situated in the Darwin department office, and how many of

those staff are allocated to the running and developing of the bilingual program? How many Darwin Mitchell Centre and regional staff are allocated in running and developing the LANE program and the Direct Instruction program?

Ms LAWLER: I have spoken many times in the House about this. It is about our schools having something our government is strong about, that is, a say in the programs they want delivered in their school community. The ultimate goal is to make sure we have students leaving our schooling system literate and numerate. It is vital for students to be on a pathway to jobs, further study and long, healthy and productive lives. Our education system is focused on that.

The specifics of who is employed in those jobs—I will pass to Vicki Baylis, Chief Executive, and she can provide a response on those.

Ms BAYLIS: I would like to invite Maree Garrigan, Executive Director for School Support Services, to provide us details about employees for the literacy and numeracy essentials. I will start with the bilingual program.

In Mitchell Centre there is one dedicated staff member who is provided to work across all nine schools that offer a bilingual program. The remaining staff of the bilingual program are associated with their schools and are school-based employees. There is only one person. She works very closely with the person employed and based in the Mitchell Centre around the total Indigenous Languages and Culture Program. They work in partnership with each other.

Beyond the nine bilingual schools we have a number of schools which are exploring language and culture, and others which are introducing vocational education in language for Certificate II work. We also have a number of schools beginning to do language maintenance work. They are not dedicated bilingual schools as they are broader in their curriculum, but they are part of our languages blueprint that we have across the full suite of languages. In short, there is one full-time equivalent position in the Mitchell Centre for bilingual.

The Direct Instruction program is funded by the federal government predominantly. The Northern Territory Government is providing in-kind resources for support in that area and we only have one person who is a full-time equivalent as part of the team and is providing the range of support to Direct Instruction, in addition to other things that she does.

The resources for that program are provided through Good to Great Schools Australia and through the National Institute for Direct Instruction. I will pass through to Ms Maree Garrigan, our Executive Director for School Support Services, to comment on the team providing our Literacy and Numeracy Essentials program.

Ms GARRIGAN: I could provide the budget total for the Literacy and Numeracy Essentials, or LANE, team. It is provided to support schools in the implementation. As at 31 March 2017 the budget was \$3.567m.

In regard to LANE, there is a team operating within the Mitchell Centre that provides, at this stage, support in writing the program and supporting schools to implement. That is, the training of staff. As that program has developed, more of those staff will move into regional areas and based in regional offices to provide direct support to schools from the regional offices.

Vicki Baylis, our CE, provided information about Direct Instruction. That is in a number of schools. There is a very small team within our department, one FTE that provides that support and other team members who have input. There is an external provider that does most of the training and support for schools. There are some regionally-based people who provide direct support within schools to implement DI.

Ms BAYLIS: The exact number of people in addition to the budget that Ms Garrigan mentioned in the central office in 2017 is 11. We have six people in the regions providing additional support, which is the coaching and mentoring to the schools who are participating in the literacy and numeracy program.

At this point in time, when we think about the number of schools that are involved in the literacy and numeracy program, there are 38, which is a much bigger group of schools that receive the funding. That is why we have so many staff. They are spread across the Northern Territory.

Mr GUYULA: I might have missed your quote, but I am interested to hear how many staff are in the LANE program?

Ms BAYLIS: There are 11 in the Mitchell Centre who are writing, designing and preparing the professional learning for 2017. There are six based in our regions that help support the implementation with the central office team.

Mr GUYULA: I might be asking questions that you have answered before, but just for the record I want to talk through the questions. Could you also provide details of the operational budget of the Darwin-based bilingual support team, as well as the operational budget for the Darwin and regionally-based LANE program?

Ms LAWLER: Again, Member for Nhulunbuy, it is about the numbers around that. There are nine bilingual schools in the Northern Territory, and the budget is about \$3.2m for bilingual schools. The staff in the bilingual schools, and rightly so, are working within the schools. As the chief executive said, there is a person who is in the corporate area, but the actual staff members are in schools working with the students with Direct Instruction. There are 17 schools that are doing the Direct Instruction literacy areas and there is about \$4.5m, but that is federal government Direct Instruction money from the Commonwealth Government.

With LANE the budget is about \$1.9m, but there are about 38 schools. We work very closely around the number of schools and how much support is required of that.

I will pass to Maree Garrigan, the Acting Executive Director for School Support Services, and she can provide any more detail on the staff numbers and how those programs are working and developing. The bilingual program, as you know, has been around for quite a number of years, long term, and the LANE program is evolving and developing now.

Ms GARRIGAN: The LANE program is Literacy and Numeracy Essentials, and we have been provided with the number of staff that are centrally based and those who are working in schools. In relation to Direct Instruction, literacy is being implemented in 17 schools and Direct Instruction maths in eight schools which means additional support for those schools.

In relation to bilingual education, the FTE—we can take that question on notice because, as advised by the minister, apart from the one person supporting centrally, the staff are in schools.

Ms BAYLIS: I can answer that for you, Member for Nhulunbuy. Through the targeted bilingual program for schools there are five teachers across our schools, nine assistant teachers in our schools and 15 literacy and language workers who are employed to support across the schools that are bilingual.

Mr GUYULA: Thank you. That is clear. Minister, what were the funds budgeted for 2016–17 Direct Instruction program and what are the funds appropriated for Direct Instruction for 2017–18? How much is being contributed to this program by the Northern Territory Government?

Ms LAWLER: Direct Instruction is being delivered through the Commonwealth Government's Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Programme in 17 schools. The budget in 2016–17 for DI and LANE was \$4.6m, and the 2017–18 budget is \$3.6m. It goes from \$4.6m in 2016–17 to \$3.6m in 2017–18.

I will pass to the Chief Executive, Vicki Baylis for further details.

Ms BAYLIS: The change in that implementation is that we have been doing a lot of writing and developing for the literacy and numeracy program and that will largely be complete during this calendar year, so we will not need those people to write and develop resources. When it comes to the Direct Instruction program and the federal government's ongoing commitment to that, it is yet to be declared and we are yet to fully understand what the implications of that will be, and we will need to continue to work with both the Australian Government as well as Good to Great Schools Australia and our school communities beyond the 2017 calendar year.

Mr GUYULA: Minister, \$300 000 is included in the budget for every school for refurbishment and upgrades. Does this include an allocation of \$300 000 for every homeland school and learning centre?

Ms LAWLER: Thank you for that question, Member for Nhulunbuy. No, it is not for every homeland school and learning centre. The \$300 000 is for the hub schools, such as Maningrida hub school or Arlparra hub school. However, we have put \$5m into upgrades for homeland learning centres across the Northern Territory.

About two or three weeks ago, I went to Yirrkala homelands and flew around with the principal to have a look at those homeland learning centres in Yirrkala because they are the first lot that will get upgrades. There is \$1m in the 2017–18 budget for upgrades to Yirrkala homelands. But the \$300 000 is for schools.

I will pass to Leanne Taylor, who can provide some more detail.

Ms TAYLOR: As stated by the minister, we have an allocation of \$1m per year additional funding in our repairs and maintenance budget, which will be targeted at the homelands schools.

The first tranche of homeland learning centres will be the Yirrkala homeland centres. We have been to each of those homeland centres to scope the works that are required. The funding is in repairs and maintenance, but it will provide an improvement in the level of amenity for each of those homelands.

We are also looking beyond the Yirrkala homeland schools, looking at all the other homelands that have active enrolments at the moment so we can develop a five-year plan for upgrades.

Mr GUYULA: Minister, the department is using NAPLAN results as key performance indicators. I understand that the federal government requires that you adhere to the NAPLAN testing process. Do they also require that you set the NAPLAN results as your KPI? Does this also apply to bilingual schools?

Ms LAWLER: First, yes. NAPLAN results do apply to bilingual schools. We understand the complexity of that, particularly if a school is using a step bilingual program, because in those early years up to 90% of their time is spent using their home language. But that requirement around KPIs and NAPLAN is used as a consistent measure across Australia, along with a number of other tests. We have TIMS, PISA and a number of national tests that are also international tests.

Yes, we have NAPLAN as a measure across all our schools and have those as our KPIs. I will pass to the Deputy Chief Executive School Education, Marion Guppy, who can provide some further detail.

Ms GUPPY: We have a very systemic approach to assessment of literacy and numeracy within our department to inform teaching and learning. It is monitored at a system level using data from a number of standardised assessments.

You are quite correct, Member for Nhulunbuy, that NAPLAN is a significant and important measure of students' attainment. But it takes that child's attainment at a moment in time. We are looking to be able to have data so we can actually see the ongoing development and growth in our students' learning as well as having that snap shot of NAPLAN.

In 2016–17 an investment of \$0.45m has been made in the implementation of systemic assessment through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Aboriginal Investment. This agreement has funded the implementation of the benchmarks project during the first phase of the Indigenous Education Strategy 2015–17.

From 2016 Progressive Achievement Tests, which is abbreviated as PAT, in reading comprehension and mathematics were administered for students in Years 1 to 10 in all Northern Territory Government schools. We have had approximately 19 000 students from 146 schools participating in that PAT testing.

In Semester 2, 2016 the foundations of early literacy assessment for the NT was implemented in nine schools across the NT. In 2017 that assessment is being implemented for all transition students and students in higher year levels who are not yet ready to be able to access the PAT testing.

I think the importance is that we have a range of mechanisms by which we are able to measure a child's learning, so whilst NAPLAN is important it is one of a suite of assessment items that we would use.

Ms BAYLIS: I would just like to add in relation to the point you were making about bilingual, particularly for students around NAPLAN, we recognise that in the early years especially, this can be a challenge where students are not speaking English as the test is administered in English. Part of the NAPLAN assessment is able to be communicated in the mathematics to help students, but not in the literacy testing in the early years. That can be assisted by the teachers where it is required.

What we have chosen to do, as Ms Guppy has indicated, is look at the foundations of early language acquisition. That it was we refer to as our feeler testing. We have designed that deliberately in partnership

with people in our bilingual area of education as well as academics in the area of English language acquisition.

To be sure we are able to assess the growth of students to inform teachers on where their students are so they can pitch the teaching. We also continue to monitor English language progression for students where English is a second language against the national standards so that we have more than one point of reference around student progress.

NAPLAN is every two years. It is an important national instrument, but it is not the only instrument and we need our teachers to have better information that helps their teaching practice now, not by the time they get the test results back.

Ms NELSON: Can I pick up on the NAPLAN question from the Member for Nhulunbuy? It is a bit confusing for me, and I am sure that the Member for Nhulunbuy will agree with this. NAPLAN is a national testing tool, the lowest-performing school based on NAPLAN results does not necessarily equate to getting more funding from the federal government, right?

You have NAPLAN and Gonski. They are both federal but they do not seem to be working together; is that right?

Ms LAWLER: Yes. We are following your trend of logic there. It is a little complex. Often the children who are not performing well in NAPLAN experience the most disadvantage. It is about poverty, English as an additional language, remoteness and Indigeneity.

We are making sure, as the government, that the funding we give to schools is based on need, so the highest need is where we put more dollars. We are continuing to lobby Simon Birmingham and the federal government as well. It should be about where the highest need is; that is where you need additional resources.

Where students do not have English as a home language, you need additional support in the classroom for them. In an ideal world you would look at all that data and look at the funding.

Ms NELSON: I am a bit of a budget nerd and have been looking through the federal budget papers. The NT schools are not doing particularly well in the federal budget. I just wanted some clarification on that.

Ms LAWLER: I think we all agree on that.

Mr GUYULA: I see ESL as a strength and not a disadvantage.

Ms LAWLER: Absolutely. We all agree that across the Territory it is not just Indigenous children. We are seeing more migrants and refugees. In Palmerston we have some Syrian refugees coming. It should be seen as a strength. The research shows that children who grow up with more than one language do much better in the long term.

Mr GUYULA: Yolngu teachers require a unique skillset. They must understand Western knowledge taught in classrooms and convey these ideas cross-culturally to Yolngu children. They require a unique training program to assist them to gain the skills and knowledge to teach cross-cultural concepts as well as teaching Yolngu language and culture.

Does the department support training for Indigenous assistant teachers to develop their skills in these unique areas?

Ms LAWLER: Yes. It is something that should be done and there is more work happening in regard to that. We want to see not only Yolngu but children across the Territory having more Indigenous teachers in schools.

We have about 14% Aboriginal workforce, but we want to see those people as classroom teachers, not only teacher assistants, being able to work their way up and become teachers.

Vicki Baylis can provide some more detail.

Ms BAYLIS: A number of strategies are in place to grow our assistant teacher capabilities and our existing teacher workforce, as well as our Balanda teachers so they can work as part of the Northern Territory

strategy for Indigenous education. There is an element in our workforce strategy where we have been clear on how to go about orientating teachers, what professional learning there is for teacher assistants and what we are doing to progress teacher assistants through the pay scales, making sure they are achieving qualifications.

One part of that is team teaching. This has been in existence historically and we have refreshed and modernised it. That is equally as important for the Yolngu and Balanda staff, as it is often a co-teaching relationship and both need to understand each other's strengths and work in two ways to implement the curriculum. The question is important. It matters in our schools. It is applied in a Yolngu context and more broadly across our Aboriginal workforce in the Northern Territory.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise what funds are being allocated to assist school councils to begin a community-led school process, and how will this process unfold?

Ms LAWLER: There are a couple layers to this. Firstly, the Northern Territory Government supports COGSO, Council of Government School Organisations, which runs professional learning for school councils around governance. Vicki Baylis, the CE, can provide more details about that.

The community-led schools initiative is being led by the Department of the Chief Minister because it is about all of community. It is not just about education, but health and local government also. Our community-led schools initiative builds on the whole-of-government local decision-making initiative to empower remote and very remote schools to participate.

The 2017–18 budget for community-led schools is \$2.3m, which includes a repurposed core funding of \$1.2m for consultation to provide community development activities and build capacity of schools. There are a number of layers. Some of our schools, like Gunbalanya, have a board. It is about support for community-led schools.

That autonomy and independence of those schools is a journey. It needs to build on that to make sure the community and people on school councils feel comfortable, qualified and are able to do a good job so that we are not setting them up to fail.

Ms BAYLIS: This is a twofold process, one where we work in partnership with the Chief Minister around the notion of community-led—for the broad range of decision-making. In our school situation it is around the governance and training.

Our Council of Government School Organisations additionally receives funding to provide training in our school communities. In the 2016–17 budget they were receiving \$300 000. In 2017–18 they are anticipated to receive \$306 000. They are providing the governance and financial data training so people understand information around the budget and how they can be active in determining priorities within their school communities so they can deploy resources. They run two types of governance training: good governance decision making, running a council and board; and the second is around financial literacy.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output Group 1.0, Government Education?

Mr GUYULA: This last one possibly relates to Output 1.7. We will see how we go.

I was lucky to be apprenticed as an aircraft engineer. I would like young adults to be given these opportunities, particularly once they have left school and in later years as they are growing up. They are children in areas such as teaching, nursing, plumbing, electrical et cetera. Could you advise what is happening in communities and homelands to assist adults in training areas that give them the western knowledge to assist their communities and take over the roles that are often held by visiting Balanda?

Ms LAWLER: To be clear, my portfolio is responsible for school education, vocational education and training in schools. Broader adult education is in the portfolio of the department responsible for business and training. That is under the Chief Minister.

Vicki Baylis can add some detail. We also have our area of training in the Department of Education, or our area of Indigenous education. They can probably add some information on the things that happen in communities.

Ms BAYLIS: I will ask Tony Considine, our manager for Indigenous Education Strategy implementation, to join us.

Importantly, at a school-based level, we need to work in partnership with the other training providers, Batchelor and CDU and often the external providers. We know there is an economy of scale on the number of students, adult and school-based, so we can maximise it.

We are also working with organisations like ALPA to design the delivery of what we can in partnership with them, to be able to ask how we get into the construction industry, for example at Milingimbi, where they already have adult training? What can we do to engage our students in a school-based traineeship and apprenticeship?

We have a number of other areas, particularly the Learning on Country Program, which is important in our schools, but it transitions. The relationship with the other training providers to ensure young people transition into adulthood is important.

As the minister indicated, we also need to work with the Department of Business, Training and Innovation to ensure we continue to wire that up. For particulars I will hand over to Tony. He can talk to you about the range of vocational programs that are available through the schooling area.

Mr CONSIDINE: To expand on the range of programs, it is very important that we match contextually the training with the different communities. We have been doing that across your electorate and others. We have seen the expansion of the maritime training program. What we have put in place provides a bridge which allows students to enter the program in Years 9 and 10 and gain entry-level qualifications, usually a Certificate I qualification, and those qualifications build to Certificate II qualifications, which are considered some of the industry entry qualifications.

We have seen that matched in other places. In the area of Numbulwar and Ngukurr, work on the pastoral programs has been delivered through a certificate in agriculture. In Maningrida we have seen the delivery through the Learning on Country Program. All those programs align with a training area. The Learning on Country Program aligns with a conservation and land management one. It allows kids to get in early, develop some skills and, importantly, because the training we provide is accredited it allows the students the training they have had in schools to be counted towards their further adult training at a Certificate III and a trade level.

Ms LAWLER: To finalise that question, the 2107–18 budget around vocational education in schools, because we are education services, has a budget of \$6.4m. In 2016 there were 1320 qualifications achieved in the vocational education and training area. That was Certificates I, II, III and IV. Those numbers are increasing. It is very positive to have those kids on the path to vocational education. When they leave school they are already on that journey and can go on to the qualifications that you talk about—aircraft mechanics and things like that.

Ms BAYLIS: Before we go into the next output area, I have a response to the question about scholarship training opportunities. I have more detail here that I could submit if that would be useful.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. We will table the document. Are there any further questions on Output Group 1.0, Government Education?

Ms UIBO: Minister, I note there is an additional \$8m in the 2017–18 budget for early intervention to support and tackle challenging behaviours and support students with additional needs. I am interested to know how this money will be spent.

Ms LAWLER: This \$8m is something we are very pleased and proud, as a government, to have put into the area of disability and challenging behaviours. The previous government took considerable amounts of money out of education. This is one of the areas that suffered under that.

We have heard parents complaining they have long wait times for their child to be assessed. We know those wait times then delay the programs that can be put in place to support those children. The other positive thing is it is supporting the children who have already been identified.

First and foremost, some of the work that is being done—we have already talked about the re-engagement centre at Palmerston. The other lovely things I have seen and been able to be involved with are around two new autism spectrum disorder intervention programs, so we will see an autism unit at Palmerston as well as the autism unit at Malak and Alice Springs.

Ms BAYLIS: Yes, and Katherine.

Ms LAWLER: It is lovely to be able to support parents who have children with autism. It is about growing that program and the support for those children.

The other one is the (inaudible) centre at the old Henbury School site. I visited it a couple of weeks ago. That site now has a number of programs to support early intervention. It has Families as First Teachers for children who have additional needs in those early years of zero to four. That is support for families of those children.

It also has two classes in a positive learning centre. The positive learning centre is about intensive support for children who may have behavioural needs. It is about them being able to transition back into mainstream classes. It has the autism units there as well. It was lovely to visit and see that work in place.

The \$8m is also providing some lovely things such as additional scholarships for teachers to study special needs. It is an area that grows. The area of special needs is increasing, so we are making sure we have teachers who feel confident and are qualified to teach in the area of special education. We are providing scholarships in those areas of teaching children with a disability.

A number of programs we have put in place to improve student access to allied health professionals—speech therapists, OTs, hearing, child psychologists being able to provide more support. We put \$1.5m of that \$8m into that area.

If you talk to any teacher, these are the students that the thought of which keeps you awake at night. As a teacher, you are very worried about how you provide a program that will meet their needs. How will these children be able to achieve their full potential? I am very passionate that all kids in the Territory get a quality education. I am very pleased to see this \$8m.

I will pass to Vicki for more detail.

Ms BAYLIS: Thank you, minister. The budget has been spent multiple times in our dreams—that \$8m within our agency—because the need is clearly there.

But by the end of this financial period, as the minister has said, the (inaudible) facility and programs have been established and we have been able to put funding towards the kids in town camps and education in Alice Springs.

We have also been able to provide one-off funding to be able to upgrade support for students in our very remote schools to have the water and mirrors to be able to mitigate against trachoma. While we do not see it in our children; we see that in our adults. It is one of those areas where, through education and provision of services, there is a very practical solution and we can actually eradicate something if we provide that healthy environment for young people.

We have provided additional funding into mainstream classrooms with the special education support program, because we know that funding provides schools, in addition to their global budgets, the opportunity to make the educational adjustment through additional support staff, programs or resources to assist those children.

In the 2017–18 financial year the scholarships are a part of growing our workforce capability; continuing with the Malak Re-engagement Centre and into Palmerston, continuing to support students at risk in Alice Springs; and for the KITES program. Importantly, there are the ASD programs, which is an area where we have seen increased need, will be expanded into Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs along with existing Malak programs, and we will continue to support and develop the early intervention hub at (inaudible). That is an important precinct for the Darwin and Palmerston area.

When you think about the areas we have from the early allied health input, and then into our Namarluk special education provision for that area, then into Henbury, and right beside all of that facility is Carpentaria—we are trying to create a precinct of support for that area, but it is also an area where we can provide professional learning and bring our other educators in to see what they can do and take back to their schools and communities, which is the longer-term.

Ms LAWLER: Just to conclude, I am very happy to see that \$8m. As you said, it has been spent many times over, but we have doubled the budget in that area of ASD, Autism Spectrum Disorder. I am very pleased to see that. Those are students in our schools who need additional support, but the staff also need support in teaching those children because those children have additional needs. Sometimes they are the

students who can exhibit explosive behaviour, so it is great to see that additional money being in there. We have literally doubled the budget and a bit more in that ASD area.

Ms UIBO: Minister, just to clarify, does that \$8m include the early intervention programs that have been mentioned? Is that under the same bucket of funding as the \$8m?

You also spoke about bilingual programs. I am interested in revitalisation language programs and how they are funded or supported through the department?

Ms LAWLER: The lovely thing about being the Minister for Education is that you can deliver some of the things you see such a need for. One of the key works through the Northern Territory Board of Studies was the launch, in April this year, of Keeping Indigenous Languages and Cultures Strong and the plan around that. I had the opportunity to launch that at Sanderson High School. Sanderson has actually been teaching in Indigenous language for a number of years, and that is a really positive thing.

The Indigenous language and culture plan provides the department and the schools with that overarching plan around Indigenous language and culture. The Indigenous language and culture component of the NT curriculum framework, which includes that curriculum plan and document for language maintenance, revitalisation and the language learning programs, is being reworked as well. We have a really strong focus on that Indigenous language and culture, language maintenance being about language revitalisation. I will pass to Vicki Baylis, who has been on the Board of Studies so can provide some more detail.

Ms BAYLIS: And I have also been on the amazing journey. This is a really important part of our identity in the Northern Territory, so it is one where if young people have a strong connection to their community, their family and their learning, and if we can build that together, we have better opportunities of keeping young people engaged, but also making sure they grow and succeed as learners in an academic environment.

The minister has talked about the way we have done that. We have committed in the 2017–18 budget an additional \$197 000 to support the implementation of the languages and culture framework so that we can continue to do that. The investment we have made has been a collaborative co-designed process with an enormous input and we need to recognise the members of the workforce who have been part of this and community members who have committed an inordinate amount of time and travel to help us design, create and even paint the graphic work for us in this area to help convey the messages.

For the 2016–17 financial year we had a budget estimate of \$173 000, and by the end of March 2017 we had expended \$102 000, so we are on track to be able to make that financial commitment. Then there is the commitment that schools make from their global school budgets, but that is the centrally-funded component.

Ms UIBO: There is \$3.5m in the budget for transportable infrastructure to support peak enrolment periods so I have a couple of questions with my ex-teacher brain and my remote hat on.

How many new transportable classrooms will this include?

Ms LAWLER: Yes, as I said I think it is a great initiative, and I will call up the Executive Director for Planning and Infrastructure to elaborate further. We have those peaks in our schools and we need to plan and forecast where we have higher enrolments.

I tell the story of Stuart Park Primary School. About 10 years ago we thought Stuart Park Primary School was a school that had very low numbers and probably was in decline, and now Stuart Park is crying out for additional classrooms and we will have to look at putting in transportables.

We have that, the allocation of \$3.5m for these transportables—we often look to other states at how they manage these peaks and troughs in student numbers. Link the populations and you see families there, and when their children grow up they sell their homes. Victoria is one we have looked to where they will build the spine, we call it, which is some key areas of the school but then bring in transportables to support that.

This is a mechanism for us to manage those peaks, but I will pass to Leanne Taylor, who will be able to answer your questions.

Ms TAYLOR: The \$3.5m is estimated to cover seven high-quality transportable classrooms, each of around 72 square metres to cater for up to a class of 25 depending on each school. The cost varies from

site to site. In the Darwin area you could expect, depending on the service connections, spending between \$350 000 and \$400 000.

Conversely, a number of years ago we placed additional classrooms at Angurugu School at a time with peak secondary enrolments. There was a very high cost for transporting those classrooms by barge, which added considerable to the overall cost. You asked how many; we are estimating an additional seven from the \$3.5m allocated and as we get into the detail planning of each site, if there is surplus we will be adding more classrooms into that pool.

Mr PAECH: Can I add a question on for Ms Taylor? I hope you can help me get my head around this. When we are talking about transportable schools I have a vision of a caravan with 'school' written on it—the silver bullet. Is it a bit like what is commonly referred to as an ATCO? What is the structure?

Ms TAYLOR: Member for Namatjira, thank you for your question. It is an important point to qualify because I did state these are quality classrooms, which is why they are quite high cost. Many of us in the Territory have a vision of the ATCOs that were introduced post-Cyclone Tracy, and we called them demountables because you can demount them from site to site with ease. These are transportable classrooms and they come in sections. Sometimes they are transported to the site and constructed onsite.

Ms NELSON: Like flat packs.

Ms TAYLOR: Similar, but with very big steel structure. There are a number of different designs by Territory companies, including in Alice Springs. There is a style of transportable classroom that is built on a slab on the ground. The company transports a slab and mounts the classroom on top of that and then fits out the classroom.

They are large spaces and they conform to our design standards, but they have the ease of being transported. We are creating a pool so we can augment schools during peaks and troughs.

Ms UIBO: Does the \$3.5m include the transport of the transportable classrooms?

Ms TAYLOR: Yes. The \$3.5m allocated in the capital works program will include all costs associated with those classrooms, including design; services such as upgrading the power; mechanical services and air conditioning; and any ground services, decking, ramps for accessibility. All those costs are covered under that program.

Ms UIBO: What will the transportables be used for when they are not being utilised in schools?

Ms LAWLER: We would like to say some are not being used, but I think they will all be used constantly. You probably know that when schools get an extra classroom they do not like to let go of it, because then they can use it for a music room or after-school care.

We have had that situation in Larrakeyah, which recently had some new buildings added, and they have lobbied hard through their local member to keep one of the transportables.

I do not think we will have them stock piled and waiting anywhere; they will be used. It will be the opposite; we will have to pry them out of the schools' hot little hands. I am sure they will want to keep them.

Ms TAYLOR: That is correct. They are very sought after by schools. They have multiple uses, including being used for after-school care or specialist programs and can be fitted out accordingly. We do not envisage a point in time where additional classrooms are not in use.

We are hoping to build the pool over a period of time so they can be rotated around schools that have peak enrolment periods or, conversely, have an additional program introduced. Katherine High School, when the Clontarf program was introduced, required some additional space for it to operate. At that time we had some surplus classrooms at another school because they had some permanent classrooms added, so we were able to move those to Katherine to support that.

Ms UIBO: When they are designed and constructed, where will they suitably be stored before use?

Ms TAYLOR: They will be stored on site with the successful contractors until they are ready to be relocated and connected at the school. Our plan is as soon as they are ready they will be transported to site. I mentioned under a different question that there are two classrooms targeted for Rosebery school by

the end of the year. As soon as the manufacturing is completed they will be located to Rosebery. In approximately a month they will be fully connected and fitted out, ready for the school to use.

Ms UIBO: In regard to Direct Instruction I understand there were implementation coaches in each school when they started Direct Instruction. I understand these positions have been removed or not further funded. I am aware of one school that has a Direct Instruction staff coach. Can you tell me the number of staff or coaches teaching staff in those Direct Instruction schools to date?

Ms LAWLER: Direct Instruction is funded through Good to Great Schools and the federal government. They have extended that funding, but it comes to an end at the end of this school year. I will pass to Vicki Baylis to respond.

Ms BAYLIS: I will take that question on notice because it seems to move around people's employment and whether they have had promotional opportunities and whether there are vacancy rates. I will get that information for you and provide you as at a date in terms of implementation coaches and what is happening in addition to that, if there are vacancies or support coming from another area.

Question on Notice No 8.4

Madam CHAIR: As we will take the question on notice, Member for Arnhem, can you please restate the question for the record?

Ms UIBO: It will probably be slightly reworded. Minister, can you please provide the number of staff who are currently employed in the Northern Territory as Direct Instruction coaches that are based in the school?

Madam CHAIR: Minister for Education, are you happy to accept that question on notice?

Ms LAWLER: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Arnhem of the minister has been allocated the number 8.4.

Ms NELSON: I take every opportunity I can to talk about Katherine and the great things happening there. I was excited at the beginning of the year to hear that Katherine will have a Families as First Teachers program this year. From memory this is happening at MacFarlane as the first school.

For the people who do not know what Families as First Teachers is all about, this program provides a great opportunity for families to engage in learning. It helps us to support health and wellbeing. I am a strong advocate for it. I love the fact it has been rolled out the Katherine this year. Can you tell me how many Families as First Teachers programs are actually being delivered? How many staff are employed with this program, and how many more will be established at which schools?

Ms LAWLER: I love talking about Families as First Teachers. It was established in 2008 when Marion Scrymgour was the Minister for Education, and held the portfolios of Territory Families, Child Protection, at the time. We looked for a program that would support our most disadvantaged children and families.

Families as First Teachers is playing in the space of the years before school. As the Member for Nhulunbuy says, if you only start the formal education at four or five years old there are a lot of things before school we need to work with families on.

The Families as First Teachers is a great program which this government is continuing to roll out. By December 2017 there will be 38 Families as First Teachers programs in remote and urban sites; 11 sites will be established in 2017, six in remote and five in urban locations. The total budget commitment is \$11.1m for Families as First Teachers.

I can read out the expansion sites for you. One is in Ampilatwatja. We went to the Member for Namatjira's electorate for a community cabinet and got to see the lovely new preschool that is being built, the early learning centre at Ampilatwatja in the Barkly region. Ampilatwatja will get one, Jilkminggan and Mataranka will have a joint one, Minyerri as well, and Warruwi in Arnhem Land. On Melville Island there will be one at Pularumpi and Milikapiti, Yirrkala homelands, and Ludmilla Primary School. I visited the school. They have

about 50 families involved at Ludmilla in their FAFT. It was delightful to see the little ones painting and playing with playdough.

The one in my electorate is at the Palmerston Child and Family Centre operated by Gray. That is a lovely site. They also have the young mums' programs so through childcare and FAFT young mums are able to return to school, doing certificate-level courses, and at the same time their little ones are being babysat, and there is all the wraparound support. That is an added dimension to the FAFT, where we are getting the mums back into education.

I visited Larapinta recently with the South Australian Minister for Education, Dr Susan Close. South Australia has been impressed with the FAFT program and will trial FAFT in 11 schools in the APY lands. FAFT is growing. It is lovely to see that another state has recognised the great work that we are doing in this area. It was lovely to be at Larapinta to see the FAFT, also at Macfarlane.

We will continue to keep a close eye on FAFT. I am keen to make sure the money we spend is spent on evidence-based programs. FAFT uses an Abecedarian Approach which has about 20 years of evidence of it working elsewhere. The University of Melbourne is doing a three-year study at Maningrida and Galiwinku on FAFT.

If it is not hitting the mark, how do we improve things? Ongoing research is needed on things we put a lot of money into. I am very keen to make sure programs are evidence based and they are delivering for us.

Ms NELSON: It is not part of the global budget?

Ms LAWLER: No, FaFT is in those before school areas, so that zero to four. I will pass to Vicki Baylis.

Ms BAYLIS: In addition to the minister's clear energy around FAFT, and it is a mutual passion for many of our staff, I wanted to add to your question on how many staff. We currently have 77 staff across the 29 sites that are operational. Of those, 48 are Indigenous community members and four are Aboriginal family educators, so 68% of our workforce in the FAFT program is Aboriginal. The majority of them are family liaison officers. But 14% of them are in senior positions.

This is one of those exciting programs. Not only is it about our young people and families, but the story continues to grow. It grows our workforce capability and our employment prospects in communities, which is equally as important. It has multiple layers of impact. We see that as a positive outcome.

Madam CHAIR: We have been discussing Output Group 1.0, Government Education. I am checking with the committee for Output 1.1, Early Years. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: I am interested in how our Northern Territory Government is supporting families in early childhood services.

Ms LAWLER: I will pass that to Susan Bowden, who is the General Manager. It will be a great opportunity for her to talk about something we are all very passionate about. We all understand the analogy of the river, which I often talk about. Do we allow children to fall over the waterfall and we rescue them as they are drowning? Or do we support children and families in the early years?

It is important that the early years are a strong focus for government in the Northern Territory because, in regard to children who experience disadvantage or have English as a second language, it is useful to start early and work in that area.

Susan Bowden has a lot to say about the early years.

Ms BOWDEN: There are a range of programs in the early years, and we have already mentioned the success of the Families as First Teachers program. We also have a number of child and family centres in six locations across the Northern Territory. Those centres provide an integrated service model for children in those communities.

In Budget 2017–18 the total commitment is \$2.9m, and the NTG contribution to that is \$2.1m. We also have some programs emerging which are Australian Government-funded under the Connected Beginnings project. Those projects are about an integrated service model. There is one in Alice Springs and another in Tennant Creek. There is another on Elcho Island. Those programs look at the wraparound support for children in their early years.

I also want to mention the early childhood subsidy which the government provides. There are rates for working families, and according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data we have about 75% of non-Aboriginal women in the workforce, and many of them are located in Darwin and Palmerston. We provide subsidies for those working families.

The subsidy rates are \$30 or equivalent for a full-time place for a child under the age of two. It is \$22 or equivalent for a full-time place for two- to five-year-olds. That is a significant commitment by government for the childcare subsidy. In 2017–18 that will be \$5.96m allocated for that initiative.

Ms LAWLER: I want to reiterate that subsidy. It is not often talked about. A total of \$5.9m is given to families by government. We are the only state or territory that does that. We provide childcare and family daycare with this additional subsidy to keep the rates as low as possible for our working families. It is a nice one, but it often goes unnoticed.

We talk about back-to-school vouchers and sports vouchers; this is a childcare voucher. It is a lovely story for people who need some support with that.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 1.1?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Preschool Education

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

That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Primary Education

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Primary Education. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: We have spoken already about the Direct Instruction program. I am interested to see if any schools have withdrawn or will withdraw from the process in the next calendar year.

Ms LAWLER: One of the things that this government and I are very keen to embrace and support is school communities having a say in the programs they want in their schools and communities. Some of the feedback I received as a minister during those early days was that there were some programs some of the schools did not want to continue. There are two schools that have withdrawn from Direct Instruction. But we have put in place a process around that, because it is not just about withdrawing from that but is about what then needs to be put in place to ensure students are still getting high-quality teaching, learning and explicit instructions that are needed for those children to achieve results.

There is a process in place. Two schools have withdrawn. I will pass this to Vicki Baylis to speak more.

Ms BAYLIS: As the minister says, we had two schools withdraw from the literacy part of Direct Instruction once it commenced. The process of withdraw requires the principal to work with school council, community and staff to be able to have a conversation around what are the strengths of the programs, what are the impacts they are seeing, and what are the areas where it may be problematic within their school. They are also then required to provide a plan around what their literacy program will be and how they will ensure the continuity of curriculum delivery, and be able to monitor and track student learning progress and staff capability of teachers and assistant teachers in their school.

Both of the schools which have chosen to withdraw have been able to do that and have taken up the Literacy and Numeracy Essentials which has a very strong, explicit teaching focus. For 2018 we are still in negotiation and still seeking clarification from both the Australian Government and Good to Great Schools Australia around what will be available for the literacy program and what support will be required so that schools can make an informed decision about what it is they will contribute and what they will receive if they continue this program and what the expectations are.

At this point in time the literacy element of the program is heavily funded through the Australian Government flexible literacy in remote primary schools strategy, and that supports the 17 schools in that area for that program.

Ms UIBO: Minister, can you please provide a breakdown of the amount of funding provided for the following: how many government schools are there; government school funding allocation; how many non-government schools are there; and non-government school funding allocation.

Ms LAWLER: It is probably easier to pass this to the Chief Financial Officer, Shaun O'Brien. There are 190 government and non-government schools across the Territory. As I said in my opening address, one of the positive things is that we have seen about a 970 increase in the number of students attending government schools, which has meant an increase in the budget for government schools. Besides the \$20m there has been an additional \$12m go into the government schools budget because of those additional students.

Ms NELSON: An increase in the NT budget, but a decrease from the federal government?

Ms LAWLER: The Northern Territory Government. One of the things we see with the Northern Territory Government is that if the student numbers increase then the finance and dollars into our education budget increase. The education budget has increased by \$42m. Some of that was around the additional dollars for having more students in our school system.

I will pass this to Shaun.

Mr O'BRIEN: The budget allocation for government education is set down by outputs, as you probably know. For government education in 2017–18 the total budget allocation is \$734 692 000. For non-government education it is \$233 415 000. What I can find for you is in relation to government schools directly around the global schools budget funding, which is direct funding to schools themselves

Ms UIBO: Yes minister. The total number of government and non-government schools is 190. I am also interested in the breakdown. How many government schools?

Ms LAWLER: Yes, 153 government schools. That figure has just gone up by two. We have had the Malak Re-engagement Centre gazetted on 31 March, and Forrest Parade, the special school at Palmerston, which I was fortunate enough to open, so 153 government schools and 23 homeland learning centres. The homeland learning centre figure changes at times because people will move between them and may not be in that community. The total is 153, 23 and 37 non-government schools.

Mr O'BRIEN: In relation to direct funding to schools themselves, funding is provided under the global school budgets. The total budget allocation this year for 2107 calendar year—we work on calendar years for schools—is \$489m, which comprises \$426m provided directly to schools in global budgets and a further \$63m in centrally-managed programs, which covers the principals salaries, workers' compensation, the centrally-funded items themselves.

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

That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Middle Years Education

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.4, Middle Years Education. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: What has been the commitment in the budget to improve education outcomes for middle years students?

Ms LAWLER: It is a good opportunity for me to restate that I am firmly committed to the middle years, and this government is too. Middle years schooling was one of the Labor government's initiatives in about 2005–06 under Minister Stirling. It is about the middle years, but making sure that what we do in the middle years is done very well. They are a particular cohort of students. If you think back to your teenage middle years—they are a group that need considerable support and considerable wraparound.

We have six standalone NTG middle schools. One of the nice things we have put in place that I saw happening late last year was a conference for middle years teachers in the Northern Territory. They were able to get together, share ideas, talk about stories and the great things that are happening in our middle years schools. I will pass to Marion Guppy to talk in a bit more detail about this great area of our education.

Ms GUPPY: We have a very strong focus on the middle years within our department. As the minister said, students of a middle years age are at a very critical part of their development. We have to ensure that the curriculum that we have on offer for them is rich and relevant and that it develops the resilience that young people need to cope with the vagaries of life as they come along.

We want them to be lifelong learners and we need to make sure that at that critical time we are supporting them and instilling in them a love of learning and, really importantly, they need a strong sense of self-efficacy as learners and as young people.

In 2016–17 the budget for improving teaching and learning in the middle years was \$824 000, and that has supported strong transitioning plans as students move from primary to middle. It is well recognised within the community that the step from primary years into middle years is a significant transition point in the life of a young person. The department, with this funding, has been engaging with schools to make sure the transition processes and programs in place from primary to middle is developed, further refined and better constructed to meet the needs of the students. The funding has also enabled the sharing of some best-practice teaching and learning strategies through interschool peer-to-peer engagement.

The 2017–18 budget for that is \$825 000. The minister has already referenced the middle years conference held in September last year. That conference focused on student wellbeing and classroom strategies to support quality teaching and learning programs to enhance student wellbeing in those important middle years. It was a tremendously successful conference. The feedback from staff was excellent. You have heard us mention a number of times this morning the importance of an evidence base. The keynote speaker brought in for that conference brought with him a substantial evidence base to explore the issue of resilience and wellbeing in middle years students, and teaching and learning. That really is a focus.

We have also invested in the provision of professional coaching for middle years principals, in recognition that it is a critical area, and we want to make sure our principals are well supported in being able to develop the learning environments within their schools. That came off the back of a recommendation from a review conducted by Vic Zbar. The strategy we have in place for the middle years is one where we are monitoring the performance of our schools and students.

Madam CHAIR: No further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.4.

Output 1.5 – Senior Years Education

Madam CHAIR: We will now consider Output 1.5, Senior Years Education. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, what secondary options are the government providing to remote and very remote students in the Northern Territory.

Ms LAWLER: I want to be up front about this. One of the things that was an initiative of the previous government was to make sure that students had the option of being able to undertake senior secondary studies in their home communities. It is about choice and giving families in remote communities choices. Just like every other family in Australia has choices, I am very keen to make sure that students and families in our remote communities have choices.

There are layers to that. A student can stay in their community and continue their schooling. They may have to access distance learning. They can attend a regional high school and access regional residential facilities—attend boarding school in Katherine, Alice Springs or Nhulunbuy. If they are in Darwin or Alice Springs they can attend a high school in Darwin. They can also attend boarding school interstate. There are a number of organisations and schools as well as that provide scholarships and other financial assistance for families to be able to attend boarding school interstate.

From my point of view, just as we all have that choice about going interstate to a boarding school, going to a boarding school in a regional centre, staying home to do you study or doing distance learning if you are on a station in a remote area—you have those choices. I am very keen to see all of our Indigenous students in our remote communities have those choices too.

Ms UIBO: I am aware that there is the Transitional Support Unit, which is providing support in that area as well.

Ms LAWLER: Yes. Through the Indigenous Education Strategy the Transition Support Unit is very much needed. It is about that support around uniforms or whatever else that might be needed, but also to settle children, take them to the boarding facility to support, as any family would do as well.

Madam CHAIR: Any further questions on that output?

Ms UIBO: Yes, minister, I am interested to see, in regard to senior years' education in the Northern Territory, trade training centres in remote communities. What is the vision or support from the department?

Ms LAWLER: While I am talking, I will call up Tony Considine because he probably has a hell of a lot more detail than I have on this.

Again, trade training centres was a federal government initiative. It is about some of the things the Member for Nhulunbuy talked about. Students in our schools need to have those options around those pathways. Some students will choose to do an academic pathway. Whether you are in Darwin, Alice Springs or a remote community, there should be those options available.

But there are a number of students who will choose to do a Vocational Education and Training pathway. Both pathways, to me, are important when you look at the development of the Northern Territory. We need to have people with trades and those sorts of qualifications. The trade training centres provide those physical spaces to be able to do that.

As I travel around the Territory visiting schools, I see some wonderful examples of that. We were at Ntaria and we saw the kids making saddles. It was amazing to see those hands-on activities that are localised to those communities around the jobs that are needed in those communities.

I will pass to Tony Considine.

Mr CONSIDINE: We have built a large number of trade training centres across the Territory and most of our larger remote communities now have a trade training centre or have the capacity to have visiting resources. A couple of points: one is that in many of the trade centres you should not focus on just one trade. If you do that, there is no point in having 20 plumbers at Numbulwar.

Ms UIBO: One would be handy.

Mr PAECH: One would be good.

Mr CONSIDINE: The idea of the trade centres is to prepare young people, through their schooling, to move into a trade. To give some flexibility, we have allowed our trade centres to move in and out different lots of resources. We have a building but moveable resources that can go into that building. So, over time, you vary the training that happens at these places.

We should also note that within those trade centres we are not just focused on kids getting one element of training. They pick up all the elements that can fit within the Northern Territory Certificate of Education, and that allows them to use their vocational education credits to complete an NTCET, or in some of our centres where we have introduced the new employment pathways program, they use the skills they pick up in that and their vocational learning to prepare themselves for a job.

Mr UIBO: Thank you.

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

That concludes consideration of Output 1.5.

Output 1.6 – International Education

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.6, International Education. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Yes, Madam Chair. Minister, this is not an area that I think in terms of income for the Territory, although I know it provides a good income. I am interested in how many full fee paying international students are enrolled in government schools in the Territory.

Ms LAWLER: Yes, you are right; international education is an area that is growing around benefits to the economy in the Northern Territory. I understand in Victoria international education is their number one economic driver. It is one that our government and the previous government is very keen to see continue growing. In 2017–18 the full fee paying overseas students in government schools are 51, the full fee paying overseas students in nongovernment schools is 98 students.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.6.

Output 1.7 – Tertiary Education

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 1.7, Tertiary Education. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, there is over \$9.5m to tertiary education in this budget. Where is that directed to.

Ms LAWLER: CDU and Batchelor are the two main tertiary education sectors in the Northern Territory. In the 2017–18 budget for tertiary education there \$9.671m and that goes to Charles Darwin University.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.7 and Output Group 1.0

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION

Output 2.1 – Primary Education

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 2.0, Non-Government Education, Output 2.1, Primary Education. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Minister, can you provide the committee with an outline of the funding that was provided to Kormilda College at the end of 2016?

Ms LAWLER: We all know this story. When I came to be Minister for Education, I think it was actually on the first day, I was alerted to the fact Kormilda College were in dire financial strife. As a parent, teacher and principal I could understand the graveness of that situation. You do not want teachers to lose their jobs; in October you do not want children from preschool to Year 12, students doing the International Baccalaureate, needing to find another school to attend.

There was a matter of urgency and I sought additional funding from Cabinet of \$5.1m. That \$5.1m also covered the loan that Kormilda College had with a bank. We were concerned that the bank may foreclose on that loan, so the additional money was to cover that. Fortunately, through grants from the federal government, the total that the Northern Territory Government had to pay out was \$1.78m, which supported Kormilda College to stay open for the 2016 school year.

I thank Senator Scullion for his support in this area. He also came in to support Kormilda College. Between him, the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Government, we were able to make sure the 660 students there at the time, and the staff, were able to complete the school year. The federal government then also continued to fund for 2017 on the proviso that some significant work take place to make sure that Kormilda was on a footing to be able to be financially viable into the future and to give families the opportunities to know about their education. The total from the Northern Territory Government was \$1.78m.

Ms UIBO: I have a second question in this area. Minister, can you please outline what you have done following the release of the KPMG report on Indigenous boarding in the Northern Territory? What is the funding allocated to support Indigenous students who are boarding here in the Northern Territory?

Ms LAWLER: One of the key concerns coming in as a new minister was Indigenous boarding. Kormilda alerted me to the fact the Indigenous boarding was an area that was taking considerable funds from them. I had also heard from a number of other boarding facilities, such as St John's, that the allocation that they had from the Northern Territory Government, the Australian Government and ABSTUDY was not hitting the mark.

I asked a question immediately and I heard the previous government had asked for a review into Indigenous boarding. From my point of view the previous government had a strong push for Indigenous boarding, but they only did half the job. They did not then look at how those boarders would be funded in their schools. It was all very well putting in place the policy saying we want to encourage boarding but the policy work was not done around the support for those boarders.

Once we had a good look at that report, which came out in November, it showed what the schools were telling us, that there was an under fund of \$10 437 per student. I have met with the Independent Schools Association and the Catholic Education Office NT, the key people who provide boarding for our Indigenous students.

I have a Non-Government Schools Ministerial Advisory Council, which I have met with a number of times. I briefed them and provided them with a report and asked them to look at this issue and provide some solutions around this. I also met with Senator Nigel Scullion around the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and I have written to him about this issue.

The Northern Territory Government provides a number of top-ups to Indigenous boarding facilities; that is historical. Kormilda College has had a top-up over the years for their boarders. Wooliana School was given a top-up of about \$300 000 by Minister Chandler. There had been top-ups that showed me very clearly that there was not enough funding for Indigenous boarders.

What I am aiming to do is tidy this up. I would like to see a number of layers to this so we know Indigenous boarders through the Department of Human Services can access ABSTUDY, which needs to provide some funding, the federal government and the Northern Territory Government need to provide some funding. I have had conversations with the department. The Northern Territory Government is willing to provide additional funding of \$3.8m, but those extra bits around the additional sections need to be tied up. We want a needs-based formula for staffing, so we need to have that across the system for boarding, but I am seeking it from the federal government also.

It is ABSTUDY, plus some additional money from the Northern Territory Government, plus the money from the federal government. If we are providing boarding schools and think that boarding schools or boarding schools are an important option for our Indigenous kids, we then need to make sure there are enough funds to provide those options for families because it is a very different setup to a family choosing to send their child interstate to boarding or a child getting a scholarship. We need to make sure there are dollars for that.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Middle Years Education

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.2, Middle Years Education. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Senior Years Education

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now call for questions on Output 2.3, Senior Years Education. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.3 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Output 3.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 3.0, Corporate and Governance. Output 3.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Can you outline the funding that is anticipated to be received by the Commonwealth Government for schooling in the Northern Territory?

Ms LAWLER: That is quite a pertinent point at the moment. I think it is going through; I am getting text furious messages about that. Literally, as we talk, I think that legislation is going through federally. It used to be called Students First Funding, and that was given to states and territories. Now it will be referred to as Quality Schools Funding.

We have seen in the Northern Territory about 24% of the schooling resource standard. This is for our government schools. Non-government have been getting about 66% of the school resource standard. We

are looking into the future, if this legislation passes, for the Northern Territory to transition down from 24% to 20% for the government schools. For the non-government it will transition up from 66% to 80%.

As Minister for Education I am the minister for government and non-government schools. The non-government schools will be in a favourable position in the Northern Territory and the government will not be. Under the Quality Schools Funding, Senator Birmingham has said there will be an additional amount for the Northern Territory of \$35.6m for the years 2018–22. That is a sweetener and an acknowledgement that our funding is transitioning down rather than staying the same or increasing like elsewhere.

I am concerned about that. At the end of those four years that additional \$35m will go. We will then see a drop-off in funding from the Australian Government. The concern from the Northern Territory Government is that at the same time as these changes from the federal government for our government schools we are also seeing a downturn in the GST. It is a double whammy for education. The federal budget will impact us considerably.

We have worked hard. I thank the Australian Education Union and COGSO for the work they have done lobbying the federal government around this funding. I will pass to the CE.

Ms BAYLIS: I will ask then Shaun, as our Chief Financial Officer, to add further information. What we have is a strong working group in the Department of the Chief Minister and Treasury working with the Department of Education to fully understand the impact of the Quality Schools Funding. We are working closely with the Australian Government to help them understand the Northern Territory context in which we are required to deliver.

It is important we understand not only from a narrow point of view of an education budget, but from a Territory budget capacity. There are unique circumstances that inform service delivery for government and non-government schooling across the geographic and diverse range of students and schools we provide a service for. We need to ensure we do not end up with the modelling that creates a perverse outcome for the Northern Territory.

The work we do is about giving clarity and consistency so the minister and Chief Minister are well able to advocate strongly around our position, and the Treasurer to be equally as clear around where education fits. It is important we understand the Northern Territory is a significant part of the north. The strategy for who we are as a country—we need to play that role. We need others to understand the vital role we continue to play in that space.

Mr O'BRIEN: What we have budgeted for in the 2016–17 year for the Quality Schools Funding is an increase from the Northern Territory Government's original budget which was \$168.5m. The Commonwealth budget now for the government schools is \$180.8m, so that is a \$12.3m increase in the funding in 2016–17 for the government schools.

In the 2017–18 Northern Territory budget we had based that off the previous MYEFO figures which showed that the Northern Territory Government had \$155.5m in the Commonwealth budget which has now come out for the 2017–18 year now shows that to be \$196.1m. That will be dependent on the outcome of the legislative changes that the Commonwealth Government is currently putting through, but that is based on the forward estimate figures that were published by the Commonwealth Government at this point in time.

Ms UIBO: Minister, there are a lot of issues with contracts in the Territory; I am wondering how many teachers in our government schools in particular are sitting on fixed-term contracts and how the department is supporting staff in getting their contracts sorted so we can keep good teachers here in the Territory?

Ms LAWLER: Again, this issue is very concerning to me; I would like to see that number of teachers who are on contract decrease. In 2012 when Labor left government the number of teachers on contract was about 8%. That figure is now nearly 30%, so over those ensuing years of the CLP government we saw that figure change from about 8% to 30%, an increase of about 22%.

I have been working with the department on how we can change that figure and decrease it. One of the issues is that now we have global school budgets; as we say, the principals have a set number of staff and those staff have position numbers, so when that is their budget they are quite nervous about putting on permanent staff because it could get to the stage where somebody who is on maternity leave or study leave is back and they will then blow their staffing budget.

We are looking at options around that and what we can do. There has been an increase, it is something that when I meet with the education union—we meet monthly—we have conversations about, but it is something I would like to see decrease. I am a firm believer that if you have a permanent job you are more likely to stay in the Territory, which is a great thing. If you have a permanent job you will buy a car and a house, and that will keep us here. I will pass to Vicki Baylis, the Chief Executive, to provide some more commentary.

Ms BAYLIS: The minister has provided you with the broad percentage around where we are with those fixed period contracts, and as at the end of March 2017 that was a number of about 803 employees across our teaching workforce, which was around 33% of our teaching staff.

Ms UIBO: Minister, this question is related to infrastructure; we have seen the roll-out for the \$300 000 for upgrades and refurbishments that will be going to each of the schools in the Northern Territory. I am wondering if you could provide an update to the committee on how that is being delivered.

Ms LAWLER: This is one of those nice ones that I think very positively about. The \$300 000 is for every school; I know there has been some talk about needs-based—the Member for Nelson caught me the other day to talk about that. If you asked every principal and school council, they would say, ‘We all need money to upgrade’. The positive thing about these dollars is it gives the school the choices of where they see the upgrades need to be. Often minor new works dollars go to certain things and the school does not have a lot of say and they are on a long list.

This \$300 000, from my point of view, having been a principal, can then be spent on something that is a priority for those school. We are seeing some really lovely things coming up like front office upgrades, resurfacing and redeveloping basketball courts, refreshing learning areas or upgrading bicycle paths. It is covering a huge number of areas ...

Mr PAECH: Minister Lawler, while you are talking about that, I wonder if I could as a question following on from the member for Arnhem. There is a school in my electorate in the remote context which is desperately looking to \$300 000, if that would be appropriate, to build an ablution block to allow a second toilet for the children but also to get ready for school. Is that considered within the realm of the \$300 000?

Ms LAWLER: Absolutely. It is the same at a school in my electorate. I was at their school assembly when they announced the \$300 000. They said, ‘We are getting new toilets’, and the kids all cheered. You realise that toilets are important. They talked about having many sizes—small toilets for the little kids—and the kids having a say in the tiles and those sorts of things. Yes, ablution blocks may have been on a later waiting list. It may not necessarily be a high priority in the education budget.

There are 45 government schools this financial year that will get those funds. All non-government schools will get those funds as well. We have given the work to the non-government schools to look at their priorities. They have come up with the priorities, so there will be nine non-government schools this financial year that will have upgrades. All up there will be 54 schools this financial year.

I need to emphasise that it is a great thing for schools, but it is also great for the economy of the Northern Territory. It is about economic stimulus when you looking at tiles, painting, resurfacing basketball courts, putting up walkways—all those things will be using local firms and employees, so it is great.

Mr PAECH: Yes, I am sure every school in the Northern Territory would be banging on the door to access those funds. What is the process for acquiring the funds? Are Northern Territory schools required to apply for the funding and then the department determines that on priority? What is the process?

Ms LAWLER: I can ask Leanne Taylor, Senior Director in Planning and Infrastructure, to provide more detail. There was a very clear process because all is fair. There were priorities around putting projects that are close together, especially when you are in remote communities. You talked about not having a plumber. I will pass to the Senior Director ...

Madam CHAIR: Sorry, I will interject there. We have one minute remaining with the minister’s time, if we can keep our answer brief.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you, Member for Namatjira. We implemented the program by inviting schools to put in an expression of interest. We provided them with guidelines about the kind of work and how the work would be delivered. None of the schools need to manage the projects or any contracts or builders. This is all being managed through the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics with our support.

We had schools submit an expression of interest. Of those, 45 have proceeded within the budget allocated this year. The \$17.6m is covering those 45 government schools. There are 12 schools which were not in round one, but we are starting a design phase and planning with those schools so they are ready to progress to the next round.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.4

Ms LAWLER: We table the answer to the question on Direct Instruction as well, number 8.4, the one that was taken on notice.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

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

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Education. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for attending and the departmental officers that provided advice to the minister today. I also acknowledge and thank all the public servants who assisted in your preparation to appear today, minister.

The committee will now adjourn for a 30-minute lunch break before returning at 1.30 pm to discuss outputs related to Territory Families. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER WAKEFIELD' PORTFOLIOS

TERRITORY FAMILIES

Madam CHAIR: I welcome you, minister, to today's hearings and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Ms WAKFIELD: I am here as the Minister for Territory Families, a portfolio I am very proud to hold. I have with me Mr Ken Davies, who is the Chief Executive Officer; Ms Jeanette Kerr, who is the Deputy Chief Officer of Operations; Ms Nicole Hurwood, who is the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Organisational Services; and Kim Charles, who is the Chief Financial Officer. We also have Bronwyn Thompson, who is the General Manager of Operational Services; and Luke Twyford, the Executive Director of Strategy, Policy and Performance.

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

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding Territory Families?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes. I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about the formation of this department, but first of all I acknowledge all the other staff who have been involved in preparation for this. It is a long process that a lot of people have had a hand in. I thank them for that work.

With the establishment of Territory Families in September last year this government brought together a range of policy, advocacy and frontline services delivery functions all aimed at supporting Northern Territory families. The agency is now the key port of call for family support services delivered by this government to help build strong communities. It is a diverse and complex portfolio stretching across a whole-of-life demographic, nought to 99 and beyond, in terms of its reach within our community.

Territory Families supports and delivers services within statutory child protection services; family support services, youth justice; women's, men's and children's policy; multicultural and youth affairs; and domestic and sexual violence reduction policy, as well as domestic and family violence service delivery.

This broad portfolio is an intended measure of this government to consider and address the needs of our community as a collective and not to isolate the social issues we know are relative to each other. I think this provides us, as a government, with a strong opportunity to focus, as we said throughout our election time and through our time in government, on early intervention and a commitment to realising real reform in our youth justice space as well as our child protection space.

Territory Families is tasked with a number of challenges in the near future, but we are committed to investing in children and building safer, fairer and stronger communities. The agency, its executive and I, as Minister for Territory Families, are extremely committed to achieving the outcomes through the agency for our diverse community.

Within the child protection portfolio Territory Families acts as a safety net and support mechanism for the Northern Territory's most vulnerable children and families. This is delivered by statutory and community-based services through out-of-home care services and family and parenting support. These services are delivered either directly through the department or with our partner non-government organisations, and they are vital to ensuring our future generations are safe and have bright outlooks.

The Northern Territory Government recognises the challenges of the portfolio and the increased demand for this department's services. In 2016–17 the government increased funding to the department by \$23.4m, increasing by a further \$10.1m in 2017–18. The 2016–17 budget was \$253.5m and has increased to \$276.9m, an increase of \$23.4m. Fifteen-million of this increase is to meet the rising costs associated with supporting children in care and youth detention centres. A further rise of \$10m [on 8 August 2015 the minister advised that the number stated at the hearing was incorrect and the correct figure was \$10.1m] in 2017–18 reflects the implementation of the investment in youth diversion for better youth justice outcomes. The 2017–18 budget reflects the larger and broader remit of the new Territory Families agency and a commitment to youth justice and child protection reform.

I have said previously that any harm to a child is a matter of concern; however, we are in a circumstance where our analysis is telling us that notifications to our department of harm may increase. Our focus must be on early intervention and family support to curb this trend. Rather than waiting for the harm to occur to react, this government will invest earlier in families to reduce harm to children. As a commitment to this, more funding has been provided to family support services in 2017–18.

In 2016–17 the agency projected it would receive 21 000 notifications from concerned citizens and professionals. This was later revised in March at 22 000 based on activity. This number continues to rise.

In 2015–16 over 20 000 notifications were received by the agency. This is compared with over 17 000 notifications the year before. Of the notifications 78% were related to Aboriginal children, and 43% of these notifications were reports of neglect.

In 2016–17, \$23.6m was invested into child protection services, with a minor increase of \$0.1m related to attribution from back office support costs. In 2017–18 a budget reduction of \$2.8m to \$20.8m mainly reflects one-off funding for the 2016–17 period for the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory and cessation of Commonwealth funding for Mobile Child Protection Teams.

In 2016, \$100.6m was invested into the out-of-home care system, which rose to \$114m across the year, related predominantly to an additional \$12.8m provided by government to meet the rising costs of purchased care for children.

In 2017–18 there will be a reduction of \$4.6m, which reflects cost containment strategies being implemented by the department, including the planned transition of out-of-home care to the non-government sector.

There are currently 1046 children in out-of-home care, 89% of which are Aboriginal, and 636 will be in care until they are 18 years of age. More needs to be done to provide safe places of care for Aboriginal children within their local communities. There also must be more effective trauma informed support services for children to assist them in overcoming the impacts of trauma and in fulfilling ambitions in their lives.

Our focus is to work with the non-government sector partners to achieve these outcomes.

In 2016–17, \$25.6m was provided, which decreased by \$0.2m to \$25.4m as a result of adjustments in the attribution of back office supports, and reductions in non-cash building related expenses, such as depreciation. Due to these reductions, what is not clear is that in 2016–17, funding of \$375 000 was continued and improve after-hours service delivery in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. The previous government did not provide for that in 2016–17 and beyond.

In 2017–18, \$30.1m, an increase of \$4.7m, has been invested to provide support to families, parents and children. The increase includes \$3m to implement a dual pathways model, providing referral services to families to keep them safe and supported.

It also includes an additional \$1.4m building on a \$0.4m investment provided in 2016–17, which is a total of \$1.8m for after-hours youth activities in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, which we are pleased to providing.

In 2016–17, \$2.5m [on 8 August 2015 the minister advised that the number stated at the hearing was incorrect and the correct figure was \$25.6m] was provided, increasing by \$7.7m to \$33.3m in youth justice. The increase relates to \$2.2m to meet rising costs of operations for detention facilities and \$1.8m to commence at the establishment of the youth outreach and re-engagement teams. The remaining increase of \$3.7m relates, predominantly, to non-cash building related expenses and notional charges delivered by the Department of Corporate Information Services.

I am excited to report that in 2017–18 an unprecedented increase in funding of \$9.9m or 30% has been invested to improve youth justice outcomes. I am proud to say our youth outreach officers are on the ground as we speak in Alice Springs, Darwin, Palmerston, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Nhulunbuy.

The other important area we have responsibly for in Territory Families is domestic and family violence. In 2016–17 \$24.2m was invested, increasing by \$0.8m across the year. This increase relates to adjustments to attribution of back office support costs and non-cash building related expenses such as depreciation. In 2017–18 the \$29.1m has provided an increase of \$4.1m. Incorporated in that figure is the \$6m for the Alice Springs Women's Shelter through a capital grant to upgrade premises.

There is a reduction in Commonwealth funding predominantly around the Alice Springs transformation plan of \$2.3m for domestic violence programs.

What is not apparent in the published numbers is the \$6.2m government has provided to extend domestic and family violence services. The previous government did not fund for these services beyond 2016–17. With the continued investment comes a renewed focus on prevention with a strategy under development to incorporate the outcomes of the third national action plan.

We have continued our funding of \$4.1m for gender equity and social inclusion services. The funding focus is on informed strategic economic and social policy decisions that encourage social harmony, equity, inclusion and diversity.

In 2016–17 \$31.7m was provided for seniors and carers increasing by \$32m [on 8 August 2015 the minister advised that the number stated at the hearing was incorrect and the correct figure was \$3.2m] to \$34.9m. Additional funding was provided to address rising demand for concessions. The concession scheme is under review and will address issues related to high-level power and water concessions being received by only a few. It ensures a more equitable distribution of the financial benefits of the scheme for all Territorians as well as safeguarding the scheme from fraud and exploitation.

These changes must occur to ensure the scheme is sustainable into the future and delivers fair and equitable benefits to all Territorians. The government is preparing to consult with the public to ensure the changes implement wise and reasonable support for all those affected. In 2017–18 \$33.9m has been allocated. Although this appears to be a decrease of \$1m it mainly reflects the cassation of one-off funding of \$3m provided in 2016–17.

Included in the 2017–18 budget is new funding of \$2.1m provided to meet the government's commitment to supporting senior Territorians who have previously not been able to join since the previous government introduced means testing in 2014. It is estimated 3000 senior Territorians will benefit from this result.

In conclusion, Territory Families was created in September 2016 with a vision of being a capable contemporary agency fulfilling its statutory obligations and meeting community needs and expectations. Territory Families and I are working diligently through contemporary and efficient practice to ensure the funds allocated to the important work of the agency are spent wisely and measured regularly for their intended community outcomes.

Over the last few months the entire Territory Families executive and staff of all levels and external partners have been contributing to the development of a strategic plan, vision, mission, values and participating in a co-design process around our reform agenda, and these will direct the agency over the next three years. The values of these plans will underpin how the entire department will interact with all its stakeholders, in particular community members and in turn rebuild its reputation.

The Territory Families team should be commended for all its efforts in not only building a new agency, but having to progress so far in a significant platform of reform in such a short time.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions on the minister's statement?

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

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

Mr PAECH: Thank you, Minister for Territory Families; I just wanted to ask a question, and I am sure you will outline it in the time we have allocated today; as an Aboriginal person, I am interested in what the department is doing in the area of kinship care, being that Aboriginal children are placed with Aboriginal families where appropriate. I am wondering if I can get a description from you around what the department or agency is doing in that area.

Ms WAKEFIELD: It is an area that we know we need to do much more work in. We have had a significant amount of feedback and a range of reports that have showed the department has not done as well as it can in the areas of kinship care and making sure we are placing kids in the appropriate place when they need a support, and making sure we are not imposing a western and linear idea of what kinship is, that we are working within a culturally-appropriate model of kinship. There is significant work to do on this.

Just to give you a sense of where we are at, on 31 March we had 14 kids who were in trauma or emergency care, which is the high-cost care that we often hear about. We had 188 kids with foster carers who are not related to that child; 202 kids with kinship carers and another 87 children with specific foster carers, which is in regard to having someone with a specific need.

I think we are doing better than we have in the past; we still have a lot of work to do in that area. We have too many kids in paid care and we know kids will do better if they are placed in a family setting. It is work we need to do; it is ongoing.

I was very proud within the last couple of months to sign the SNAICC agreement around Aboriginal placement. What we need to do now is move that from being in our legislation—the Aboriginal placement principles are clear in our legislation. We have also signed this additional agreement saying this is what we are working to. The next bit of that stage is to actually put it in action on the ground and on the front line. That is the bit we are working on.

Mr PAECH: Thank you, minister. Just one further question, if I may. I am always alarmed at the statistics that my mob shows on the books. If a child is in kinship care is it still recorded as a statistic with the department?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes, definitely.

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

Ms NELSON: Yes, Madam Chair. I have some questions. Just so we can understand this process—these are questions that have been submitted by members of the public and I will ask the questions as they have been submitted.

I have about five questions and they are from Sam Bowden from Making Justice Work.

Making Justice Work asks specifically about the proposed renovations to Don Dale as opposed to redirection of funds to cover the government's promised construction of a new facility. What funds are being set aside for this new facility, if any, if so much is going into repairs and renovations of Berrimah gaol, and is the government reneging on the promised new facility to reinforce the continued use of the Berrimah prison to house children?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I think the simple answer to that is no, we are not reneging on that promise. One of the first things I have done as a minister, and I have talked of this often, was the very first afternoon I was minister I went out to the Don Dale facility, which is based in the Berrimah gaol, as referenced in the question.

I was quite shocked at the state of that building, as something we inherited. There was, visible to the eye, significant hanging points; there were clear security issues; there was a sense of a retro-fitted youth facility into an old adult gaol and not even a contemporary adult facility.

It was a place where we had staff under considerable stress, having to work in a facility that does not support them to work safely—and in terms of best practice. There was no air conditioning in certain parts; there was no access to toilets in some cells. These were all things that I found unacceptable and I was appalled that we were in a state where that needed to be done.

One of my first directions to Mr Davies, the CEO, was that we need to do some remedial work to make sure we are meeting our duty of care, not only for community and community safety but in terms of making sure we have a safe work place for our workforce and providing a level of care that is acceptable for the children in our custody.

This is money we have had to spend; it is not money we want to spend, but until we have recommendations from the Royal Commission around a model, we feel that it would be imprudent for us to go too far down the track of building and designing a new facility and what model would do—the practice model that would be inside that facility.

At the moment we have a provision of \$20m that has been made to the 2018–19 design list for the development of new youth facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs. As I said, those further decisions will be made once those findings are handed down. The funding for the new facility is in addition to the \$10.5m in capital works funding allocated by the government over two years, which is in the 2016–17 and 2017–18 numbers. These are the works necessary to make the existing centres. We have basically put some additional money to that.

We know we will need to put additional money to a new facility. The type of infrastructure we are looking at, I think the figures are around \$1.35m per bed to build new facilities so this will be a significant cost to the Northern Territory in the future, and one that we will need to be working with our federal partners on funding. Until we work out the design, size and scope of that project, where we locate and how many locations we have facilities in, we need to keep working through those issues before we allocate funds to that.

It will be a long-term process, so we need to make the facilities that are being used—because we are doing this reform on a live system where we have kids in custody today whom I am responsible for as a minister.

Ms NELSON: What money is being allocated towards youth diversion programs in the Northern Territory as opposed to boot camps?

Ms WAKEFIELD: One of the gaps in the service delivery system has been the availability of diversion programs, particularly diversion programs where judges can sentence kids. I think our judiciary has been hand tied in the sentencing options available. It has been giving us, as government, quite clear feedback about that.

One of the things we have done is allocate money to a range of programs, as well as our boot camp program. We have invested \$4.86m for bail support programs, which is about supporting kids to remain in the community while they are on bail, rather than going straight to detention. We are also making sure that bail is much more accountable for that child.

There is \$200 000 for a road safety program, which is about giving kids another option, and I may get the Deputy CEO to talk more about that. We also have \$8m allocated for our youth outreach workforce, which is about also working with kids on bail. There is also money for wilderness camps, which I have already outlined.

Mr DAVIES: Member for Katherine, going through that breakdown there is significant investment in this area that will be going through into the 2017–18 financial year. As well as the diversion programs, we have the bail support programs that we will also be rolling out. We are scoping facilities like Yirra House to offer bail support. The mums and bubs facility in Alice Springs is also being remodelled to offer programs for bail support into 2017–18.

Ms NELSON: It is noted that the current budget has proposed significant ongoing funding towards boot camps. What evidence base is there currently, as has been ongoing evaluation as to the continued utility of boot camps in terms of demonstrated reduction in recidivism rates and success in diverting youth?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Boot camps have been discussed a lot and are often raised by members of the public as a way of supporting youth to get back on a more positive path. It is something we have all discussed. I am sure that when most members of parliament have been doorknocking, this has been raised with them.

Boot camps that are funded at the moment started in 2013, although there have been previous models before that in the Territory. There was a review of that current government program in 2015. The words they used were 'provided optimism'. There was some optimism in the outcomes but further development was required. There was some work done with the agencies that were providing that service.

In 2016 the Department of Correctional Services, where youth justice was sitting, committed to an ongoing review of boot camps and programs, and it engaged an external provider called Connected Self to undertake a review. We have the review and I can table that today.

To give you a sense of the recommendations, they have come up with three recommendations that we have broadly accepted—that the NT government implement a stakeholder consultation strategy to review the critical findings of the report. We will include that in our broader consultation with the sector regarding options.

It also said that all future youth justice models are subject to broad stakeholder engagement and consultation at the point of the program conceptualisation and that key junctures are within the program cycle. This supports our current government approach of co-design and working with local communities and local decision-making around the best ways to work with youths within your own community as well. We all know Katherine and Alice Springs are very different to Darwin. We also need to be looking at particular supports in those areas.

It also said the report findings are openly disseminated to talk about the key learnings that have already been done through that government investment. This has been available for the last day or so on our Intranet. I am happy to table that today. It is a great piece of research that will guide us in the future.

Looking at this as a model, it has broad community support. We will continue to look at ways to improve the model.

Ms NELSON: The next questions are from Mr Rod Shepherd. How much is budgeted for the NT Pensioner and Carers Concession Scheme, operational budget only, for the 2017–18 year, and what is the breakdown between pensioners and carers?

Ms WAKEFIELD: One of the most complex parts of the portfolio I have inherited is the concession scheme. Not only is it in the middle of investigation—I saw in today's *NT News* that there was a further conviction of someone who has rorted this scheme. As we start to really look at the data we have, it is quite complex and in some areas unclear. I will get Nicole to talk about that in a minute. It is a very old scheme that has been in place since the 1980s or 1970s and has not had significant reform in that time.

We have a significant amount of work to do. As a government we are committed to providing a level of support to our seniors, acknowledging the important role they have played in building the Northern Territory, and the specific pressures they have around costs and ensuring they have access to concessions where appropriate. We have increased that budget to \$32.3m. It is difficult to break it down. I will get Nicole to explain why. But that is one of the things we will need to do as part of our reform to make sure we have access to clearer information.

Ms NELSON: Do you have a breakdown of it to table?

Ms HURWOOD: The current data system we operate under does not currently differentiate members by their eligibility and many members in the current scheme are grandfathered, so we cannot differentiate them by pensioner, carer or senior. We are currently undertaking a process to validate membership within the scheme. Through that we will seek to get further detailed information and set up a system going forward that will enable us to have better information about the members.

Mr PAECH: If I may add to that further. I want to pick up on some comments the minister made before. Am I clear in understanding that the purpose of this review is to bring that scheme into contemporary Australia's view of aged care, and also that we are looking to ensure it is put in terms of a more fair and equitable system so people living in remote parts of the Territory can have access to senior concessions?

Ms WAKEFIELD: That is the goal of the review. First of all, we have a system that is open to illegal rorting which has been shown through the travel scheme. In terms of responsible governance we need to set up a system that cannot be easily rorted. We have a number of issues within the department with the way the scheme is set up now. We have a small group of people using high rates of water and electricity because it is uncapped under the current scheme. We have five users who are getting over \$10 000 a year back on their power and water bills.

We have a very inconsistent spread of use across the whole Territory. The majority of the users of the scheme are in urban settings, particularly Darwin. There are not as many people in remote settings accessing this scheme. Some of that is access to sign up to the scheme. The way the scheme is focused may not suit the person. Someone living in a remote community may have a card system for their power. There is not necessarily a mechanism for them to get a concession. There are a range of things that impede that.

We also have the Office of the Ombudsman looking at the prescription area of the scheme because there has been a significant increase in the uptake of glasses, so we are getting an external view on why that is happening and if there is anything we need to be aware of.

We hear a lot of people have theories around the scheme. We hear there are people accessing the scheme who no longer live in the Northern Territory. The person on the power bill may not be the person who is accessing the scheme in the house. The more we look at it the more complex it has become.

We have pulled all that information together in an information sheet. I am cognisant of the fact we are talking about seniors who are becoming anxious about what they may lose in this process. We need to get a whole-of-community agreement about what is fair, who should be able to access it, what is the level of access and how we may do this more fairly.

We are going through a consultation process at the moment. We want to give senior Territorians an opportunity to have as much input into the design of this scheme as possible. We have amazing seniors. I am lucky to have such great advice from my Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians, who are some of the most forthright with honest advice of any group, and an expert reference committee who are specifically looking at this.

I want to reassure people we will not be doing anything without discussing it. The more we looked at this scheme the more complex and concerning it became in terms of governance and sustainability. We want this to be clear and sustainable into the future.

Ms NELSON: I have another question from Mr Rod Shepherd. For the period commencing 1 September 2016 and ending 31 March 2017, what was the expenditure for the PenCon scheme? The second part to this question is on the break down between pensioners and carers, but you have already answered that so we will just stick to the first part.

Ms WAKEFIELD: It is difficult to do that because we cannot split the two. Unfortunately we are unable to identify it—showing our need for reform.

Ms NELSON: So what was the expenditure?

Ms WAKEFIELD: That is information you would expect from a contemporary scheme to be able to tell you, but we are not there.

Ms NELSON: So you cannot answer what the expenditure was for the PenCon scheme?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Because we cannot separate the carers from the pensions, particularly under the grants section.

Ms HURWOOD: The total expenditure for that actual period, not split as the question has asked, is \$20.6m. That is for the period as is processed; however, we get invoices in at the end of the month by our various partner agencies. That is the amount recorded.

Ms NELSON: Following on for Mr Rod Shepherd: I will going to ask these so they can be on record. For the period of 1 September 2016 ending 31 March 2017, specifically for the amount provided for carers, what was the expenditure for carers who meet the current eligibility requirements and those who remain in the scheme and were eligible under the previous requirements?

I understand we do not have the database to provide that response.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes. As I said it is something we need to work on.

Ms NELSON: This question is from Rod Shepherd. When was the decision made to change the criteria to the PenCon scheme by removing eligibility for holders of the federal government's carer allowance?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will read through the answer. The Northern Territory Government currently provides financial subsidies as concessions to members on a range of goods and services through the Northern Territory Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme. The scheme aims to encourage seniors to remain in the Northern Territory and provides financial assistance to pensioners and carers through the provision of concessions on a range of cost-of-living expenses.

New membership to the scheme was restricted on 14 May 2014 to those eligible through means testing. At the time existing scheme members were grandfathered, that is, allowed to remain in the scheme regardless of mean testing. This was a decision of the previous government.

The Department of Human Services' carer allowance is not mean tested. Carer allowance is open to anyone caring for a sick, frail or aged parent. It is not considered income. It is not income or asset tested. It is not taxable and can be paid in addition to wages or any other income support payment.

The Department of Health continued to allow persons on carer allowance to access the scheme after the May 2014 decision to means test access. The Northern Territory Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme transferred to Territory Families through the machinery of government changes in September 2017. As part of the review of the scheme it was determined that those persons on a carer allowance had been admitted to the scheme in error since May 2014.

In March 2017 the NT pensioner concession unit started restricting access for new membership to the scheme for those in receipt of the carer allowance unless they were eligible by other means. Existing members in receipt of the carer allowance remain on the scheme.

In response to concerns being raised by the community and key non-government organisations, Territory Families is currently preparing options for the chief executive officer's consideration in regard to allowing persons in receipt of carer allowance. This decision will be made by the end of the month and will be communicated with key stakeholders.

The new scheme will be implemented on 1 January 2018 and eligibility requirements will include the application of the federal government's current means testing for members to receive maximum concessions.

The bottom line is it was part of the decision of the previous government and it was wrongly applied by the department, but the decision of the previous government is now correctly applied.

Ms NELSON: The following six questions are from Mr Chris Walsh. Can you provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for chief executives in each agency from 1 July to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Over that period of time the CE, Mr Ken Davies, did not undertake any overseas travel, but he did travel interstate and intrastate, as you would expect from someone in his position.

The total amount spent on his travel was, for interstate travel, \$22 505.92, and for intrastate travel, \$18 984.69.

I invite Mr Davies to talk about where he went and the purpose of the trips.

Mr DAVIES: In regard to the interstate travel, just to give some examples, there were two meetings with interstate chief executives of department of families, youth justice and corrections and so forth. We travelled to Adelaide to meet with senior officers from the South Australian Government, such as the head of Education, Rick Persse, to discuss his handling of the Royal Commission recommendations from South Australia.

We have travelled in the context of visiting youth detention infrastructure and a visit to Adelaide was made to see the youth training centre to see it in operation, getting ready as much as possible for the Royal Commission outcomes. I understand Royal Commissioners have visited that facility in Adelaide.

It is very important work that we have undertaken. I have had other officers accompany me to make sure we make interstate connections in my role as chief executive, making sure Territory Families is connected into the national agenda with the Australian Government.

In regard to intrastate travel I have undertaken along with other officers, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy are part of that important regional footprint. We will continue to do that. They are important things that chief executives must do. As our regional footprint expands then visits to locations like the Utopia region, where there is currently no Territory Families formal footprint—we will be looking to Groote Eylandt and making sure we have a footprint at Wadeye and so on. I would envisage that travel will expand over time, but it is all with purpose and is not about wasting money.

In terms of the CEO's travel, \$14 000 of that was for airfares for intrastate travel, and for interstate \$17 000 of the \$22 500 was airfares.

Ms NELSON: The second question I have from Mr Chris Walsh you have already answered but I will ask so it is on record. Please provide a list of all international cities or towns visited by chief executives from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017, and please list the number of times a chief executive has visited that location over the last five years.

You have just responded saying that he has not travelled internationally.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Just for the record, there was no overseas travel by the CEO in Territory Families.

Ms NELSON: Thank you. That brings me to the third question. In the case of international travel—do I actually have to read these out if they have already responded? That has been answered.

Next question, still from Mr Chris Walsh: Minister, can you please provide the total expenditure and itemised details of travel, including but not limited to travel-related costs such as itinerary, accommodation, travel allowance, entertainment, hospitality, car rental, meals and incidentals for public servants in each agency from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2017 for international, intrastate and interstate travel.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Territory Families has a significant travel budget because it is a core part of the work we do. The expectation of the community is that if we have investigation work we need to visit communities and see children on the ground. If there is a report of a child at risk we will travel to that community to do the proper assessments to work with the community around that work. This is a really key part of our work. Travel can be via plane, but I think most often troopie. Whilst we have extended travel there is a lot of travel that happens that way because it is fairly low cost.

We also need to accompany children if they need to go to medical appointments or anything where a staff member will need to accompany a child for guardianship issues, so that is also part of the travel costs.

We have broken down the travel in this. During the period 1 September 2016 to 31 March 2017 period Territory Families incurred a total of \$3 383 808, and that included client-related travel of \$979 851. To break it down, \$13 905 was for international travel; interstate travel was \$395 579; and intrastate travel is \$2 974 324, which also includes staff travelling between Darwin and the regional cities and staff going

along to support them. Making sure staff are supported is a really important part as well as access to training.

This expenditure has been comprised using TRIPS, which is the database we use which contains the value and the approved estimated amount by the delegate. It may vary from the actual expenditure, which could be lower rather than higher, as the cheapest rates on the booking day are obtained, so it could be slightly under.

Ms NELSON: You mentioned those international travel costs.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes, I can go through what that is.

Ms NELSON: No, but I have to ask this question now. In the case of international travel, please provide the purpose, itinerary, persons and costs involved in each trip and the written report into what taxpayers gained from that trip. If no report given to the department chief executive exists, please explain why.

The nature of your portfolio and this department ...

Ms WAKEFIELD: We will not be breaching any confidentiality in the reply. We have one trip by the Executive Director of Youth Justice who accompanied the Royal Commissioners to New Zealand. That was at a total cost of \$3305.43. We thought it was important as a government that we sent someone with the Royal Commissioners to get a sense of what they were seeing—the programs they were seeing and making sure we had a good understanding of the directions the Commissioners were taking. The Commission reported back to us about that it was very useful for them to have someone there who, when they were asking questions, could put them in a specific Northern Territory context in what they were talking about.

I have the report for tabling. It is a very thorough report and shows it was value for money for the Territory, making sure our reforms are heading in the right direction.

The rest is client-related travel—that is, international travel for children in care—which is \$10 600. One of the lovely surprises for me as a minister who signs off on some of that international travel, although we have now put that delegation to the CEO, was how many times families who are foster caring include their foster child in international travel. We have children in foster care going overseas for schooling activities or school camps. It is really important that if a child is at a school where there is an international trip that we, as a department, enable them to fully participate in their community in a way that any parent would. There is a range of client-related travel in that.

Many people will ask us for permission to take their foster child or their child in kinship care overseas and not request payment for that. This extraordinary work of our foster and kinship carers is often hidden from the public, so thank you for the opportunity to talk about that.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Output 1.1 – Child Protection

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 1.0, Children and Families, Output 1.1, Child Protection.

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

Are there any questions in regards to Output 1.1, Child Protection?

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise what funding changes have been made in this year's budget to assist with keeping Indigenous children on country and strengthening approaches of kinship care.

Ms WAKEFIELD: It is a very important question and something we have talked about on numerous occasions. We have a range of barriers in place that we need to address in terms of making sure kids stay on country. One of the things we have discussed is making sure we have kinship carers that are in place, that are pre-checked. One delay that often happens with kinship carers is that there is a need to do police

checks and a range of other checks that take time. That is one of the reasons people do not immediately go into kinship care.

We have been undertaking a significant body of work on how we better identify appropriate carers and a broad range of carers. As I said before, I think one of our problems has been that we have had a very narrow view of kinship and not used the right consultations around the broadest understanding of Aboriginal kinship, and have not worked closely enough with our Aboriginal workforce and the community on identifying who is the most appropriate person to do that.

We have been doing a range of work on the mechanism that can best do that. I will hand over to the chief executive officer to explain the specifics of the things we have been looking at.

Mr DAVIES: It is a challenge for us to secure additional kinship carers in our system. This will be a big focus for us going forward. One area that the minister has directed us very clearly to work on is the Arnhem region—and I know you have had concerns about children being removed from community and brought to Darwin.

One of the things we are looking at doing is putting into place some interim solutions. We are putting in place a program in Nhulunbuy where we have approved carers where young people who need to be removed from a family situation—whilst kinship care can be identified, rather than bringing them to Darwin we are looking at making sure there is a Yolngu family based in Nhulunbuy in a facility that can look after young child in an appropriate context and keep them on country. That is the start of the journey.

Additionally, we are looking at training programs for kinship carers. We are looking at how we select kinship carers and fast-track that selection process. Member for Nhulunbuy, you would know we are required under our obligations to ensure the children are being placed into a safe environment, and that requires that we meet some legislative requirements and checks.

We are looking at how we can accelerate that and get more of our Territory workers on the ground to start identifying Aboriginal families that are able to become kinship carers. We want to see the number of kinship carer families rise significantly and the number of foster carer families for Aboriginal children to decline. If we could get that balance much more in favour of keeping young people on country—that is the commitment we are making. Clearly, we have much work to do in the Arnhem region around this.

Ms WAKEFIELD: We need to acknowledge that this is an issue right across the Territory as well, so we will have people raising issues around Alice Springs—kids being taken, removed and placed to Alice Springs and placed in foster care in Alice Springs rather than on communities in Central Australia.

We also have the complication in Central Australia of kids being removed from South Australia by a different department and placed in foster care in Alice Springs, which is a really complex situation.

One of the things we discussed in the joint Cabinet meeting between South Australia and the Northern Territory Government was in relation to better ways that we can work together across that border region.

The NPY Women's Council has been a strong advocate in the area regarding people not being able to visit their child because of the significant travel cost, which then impacts on the bonds with that child, their ability to speak language and a range of things that will not support that child into the future.

Mr GUYULA: When I speak on behalf of my electorate, I would like to speak on behalf of the rest of the Territory and Indigenous communities around the Territory, as well as around the nation if possible, on Indigenous issues.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Member for Nhulunbuy, when you raise those issues I always ask the department to brief me on the whole of the Territory, not specifically around the Arnhem region with the systemic issues that you raise.

Mr GUYULA: When I am working with the department and working with families in communities with Indigenous children, department and senior elders would be most probably be there, working together to make a good outcome in what happens in the family.

Ms WAKEFIELD: I have been talking with the Chief Minister regarding this is. The local decision-making model will be an important mechanism for our department as well. In regard to the model we come up

with—that broader agenda of the government as wanting to work with NGOs—we need to make sure Aboriginal controlled NGOs are the forefront of this conversation as well.

There is a range of ways—but I think the broader agenda supports the work we will be doing in making sure we are talking to the right people at the right time.

Mr GUYULA: Minister, can you provide the current rates of Indigenous child removal from families now and in the last 10 years?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I am afraid it does not tell a great story. I heard your acknowledgment of the intervention earlier this morning, and I acknowledge that was a painful time for a lot of people. The anniversary causes all of us in government to reflect on what we have achieved in 10 years, particularly those of us who have been working in the welfare field for that period of time. I started at the women's shelter in Alice Springs the week the intervention started. It is a week that is very strong in my memory.

Looking at the total numbers, in 2007 we had 268 Aboriginal children in care, and in 2016 we had 907 [on 8 August 2015 the minister advised that the number stated at the hearing was incorrect and the correct figure was 935]. That is an enormous leap. When you look at Aboriginal children placed with Aboriginal carers, you will see the figures are quite poor. In 2007, 56% of Aboriginal children in care were placed with an Aboriginal carer, and today the figure is 36%. We have some significant work to do in this area.

Mr GUYULA: Minister, family violence is a problem we are experiencing in our communities. This is due to a breakdown in cultural practices that in the past have taught young people responsibility in relationships. Yolngu elders have spoken to me about using cultural practices and ceremonies to assist young people to develop into strong Yolngu people who are respectful of others. They want to use cultural strength and address problems that have arisen since colonisation and in the aftermath of the intervention. Could you advise how the government can support Yolngu leaders and elders to strengthen already existing social structures to combat family violence?

Ms WAKEFIELD: As you know I can talk for a long period of time on this topic, but I will try not to today. We have met and discussed some of this before. One of the things we have talked about is that during the intervention there was a lot of discussion around women's and children's safety. I do not know if that conversation happened with communities. We have a significant issue with domestic and family violence across the Northern Territory in all aspects of our community. We also know Indigenous women are completely overrepresented in all our statistics in this area.

We need to have a wide range of responses across the Territory for domestic and family violence. One thing that happened throughout the intervention was safe houses being put in communities. That process was not very consultative—as someone who was working the NGO sector at the time. There was not a lot of consultation about which communities got what. A range of things happened around men's safe houses and women's safe houses, but the support model was not very clear. We ended up with a whole lot of buildings in communities, and the Northern Territory Government was working hard to work out how to provide a service in those communities rather than it coming from the community up.

When women and children are in danger there needs to be a range of responses so that woman can choose what response she wants, what suits her needs and will make her the safest. I am very proud that we have committed \$1m to a safe house in Galiwinku, but we need to make sure that we are not just constructing a building, but a whole service model that the whole community supports and understands what that service model is and how it might work.

We are also working with the community. I went out there myself and had a meeting with the senior women, which I found really useful in relation to how we move those conversations forward. I think there needs to be a lot more conversation around how we make sure that we respect traditional cultural practice and that along with women's safety they are moulded together in that service delivery.

We are doing a range of things across the community. I am sure I can talk more about domestic and family violence, but does that answer your question?

Mr GUYULA: Yes, it has answered my question.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Out of Home Care

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Out of Home Care. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Minister, I was just wondering if you can give us an update on the progress of the election commitment that was made to transition out-of-home care to the NGO sector.

Ms WAKEFIELD: That was a significant promise because of the problems we have outlined. We know our out-of-home care system needs reform, and we need to make sure it is as responsive to the needs of the children in that care as possible. We know that non-government organisations, specifically the Aboriginal-controlled non-government sector, are much more able than government to be responsive to communities' needs and are much more likely to provide a culturally-appropriate and safe environment.

We are committed to this; we have started to do that work. One of the things we promised was an audit of our out-of-home care; we have started that process. More importantly, what we have done is start a process around co-designing with the non-government organisations. I think one of the things government has done in the past is come up with ideas and then consults and ask what people think about our ideas and do not necessarily incorporate that feedback.

What we want to do is make sure at this very early stage that we are getting the voices of people on the ground in asking how this can work in the long-term. We have formed a partnership with APONT around this issue, and we have seconded a position in there so that someone from Territory Families will be based in APONT to really drive that process. I think that is a really important step.

Our promise was around over seven years. We would like to do it sooner than that and have some good steps forward, but working with APONT to make sure that Aboriginal organisations are driving this conversation right from the very start, and seconding Territory Families staff into Aboriginal and community organisations so they learn the skills and have a better understanding of the sector, is a really key starting point. I am proud we are at that point now.

Ms NELSON: Is that what contributes to the \$8.8m. I note that in the budget papers as well the out-of-home care budget has been increased by \$8.8m this year.

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will hand that to the CEO.

Mr DAVIES: The 2016–17 budget for out-of-home care was \$100.6m and increased to \$114m in the estimate; an increase of \$13.4m. It was because of the growth in out-of-home care outtake.

With the 2017–18 budget it is \$109m, an increase of \$8.8m on the 2016–17 budget. The \$13.4m net increase in Northern Territory funding in 2016–17 predominantly relates to \$12.8m in additional Territory funding for the rising cost of children in care.

We are spending \$28m on employee expenses, \$8m on administrative expenses and \$72.5m for grants and subsidies going to out-of-home providers to provide the service.

Ms NELSON: You commented on the increase of children in care. Is that number stable? Are we still facing that increase?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Fortunately there is evidence that the number of children going into care is stabilising. There are a range of things indicating that. Territory Families has never had a proper baseline funding for the outputs it was meant to do. That has been a long-term problem since the board of inquiry was handed down. There has never been a proper base.

While people are saying there was just not enough money in the child protection budget in previous governments, they were just not properly funded for the base outputs we were required to provide under our legislation.

Something we did in this budget was to look at being real about the actual costs of out-of-home care, provide funding and look at ways of reducing that demand, such as by properly investing in other reforms—what we are doing in health around nurse partnerships, early intervention programs, making sure we have good things happening in schools and dual pathways, initiatives aimed at keeping kids out of the child protection system in the first place.

Those reforms will take time. We need to be real about what it costs us. I am proud to be part of a government that has acknowledged the structural problem with the Territory Families budget.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concluded consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Family Support

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Family Support. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Neglect and emotional harm makes up over 80% of all substantiated harm. What investment is made into family and parenting support groups in the Territory?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will hand to the CEO to make overarching statement around that. We need to be very aware that Aboriginal children are often overrepresented in our system because the issues that come again and again are inadequate housing and poverty. That is often where neglect, substance abuse and a whole range of issues can come in.

Emotional abuse is often because of domestic and family violence. Opportunities in the new structure of our agency—I had discussions at last week's policing conference around domestic and family violence in Alice Springs on how the child protection system better recognises the impacts of domestic and family violence, acts on them and supports the mother to continue parenting in a way safe for her and her children.

We will work with the national organisation on the research into women's safety, and they have done some work in other jurisdictions. I will meet with them in August regarding this issue. This is where our new structure has given us the opportunity to make some meaningful changes to the statistics. I will give the CE some time to give more specific detail.

Mr DAVIES: In regard to the total budget allocated to family and parenting support services—in 2016–17 the allocation was \$25.4m. It is now \$30.1m for 2017–18. From 2017–18 an additional \$3m has been allocated to improve the support services available for families through the introduction of a dual pathways model that we are working with the non-government sector on designing. We will try to go as quickly as we can to make that live. We want to make sure we have the right negotiated framework in place with the NGOs that will action work on this model.

We have also put in an additional \$1.4m for after-hours youth activities. This is all focused on improving the wellbeing of children and early intervention support services across the Northern Territory.

Government has committed to expand the range and scope of family and parenting support services provided by non-government organisations, and there is currently \$10.2m invested in non-government organisations in this area.

As I said before, \$3m is set aside to implement a dual pathways service to reduce the number of vulnerable children and their families entering the statutory child protection system. We want to use that process to identify the best responses required for child protection notifications and undertake initiatives to support the delivery of high-quality support programs and services to families early, before the children are brought to the child protection system.

That is where we are up to with this at the moment. We are well resourced, so it is a start. The dual pathways service, once we get the data into it and measure what is going on inside it, will get a really good picture of its effectiveness. In terms of focusing the support, especially with the NGO sector, there are a lot of services available. This is about service delivery coordination and getting in early.

Ms NELSON: Will the dual pathways service be rolled out in regional centres throughout the Territory? Is it in the strategic plan to do that?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes. What is important in this area is that the federal government funds a lot of family support services in the Northern Territory. It gives us money to provide those services. For example, we have \$8m in the 2016–17 budget, provided by the Australian Government, to provide remote family support services. That is a new program that has commences in the last 12 months. That is about basing support workers on community. It is mainly an Aboriginal workforce.

It is about making sure we have people on the ground who are working with families and have a good understanding of the families within communities. That will also help with some of the issues we have with kinship care and working out who is the best person to provide that service. This means that when a statutory worker comes into the community, they have someone who is skilled and resourced and has a good understanding of what is happening in that community.

That is a federal program. We obviously need to build off that, but one of the things I am always concerned about in this portfolio is making sure the federal government and the Northern Territory Government have a shared vision of the child protection and youth justice system in the Northern Territory, because what does not work—again, I mention the intervention—is when there is no shared understanding or cooperation across jurisdictions—and I would say local government as well—to make sure we have the same model and vision of what a safe family looks like.

We have done a lot of work on the design of the dual pathways. The technical issue around that is when we receive a call as a statutory body, how do we then refer that information out—information concerns and making sure we are meeting our statutory obligations as well. That is the bit we are working on at the moment. We have had about 90 organisations feed into that process. We have a lot of skill in our NGO sector and we are utilising that to make sure we are getting the best system that is sustainable into the long term.

Ms NELSON: How much funding has gone into the regional youth services in the previous year, and will this funding be continued or increased?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will just get that information. A total of \$1.3m has been distributed through the regional youth services funding program and the Alice Springs youth services initiative to 31 March. That includes a range of services. It includes the \$3.75m [on 8 August 2015 the minister advised that the number stated at the hearing was incorrect and the correct figure was \$0.375m] in the 2016-17 financial year, but next year that will improve in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek to \$1.75m.

We have the regional youth services funding program, which is funded between 2014 and 2018. That has been supporting early intervention and prevention by providing funding to non-government organisations primarily in Darwin, Palmerston, Tennant Creek, Katherine, East Arnhem and Alice Springs. We are doing quite a lot of work on how that will look into the future.

With our youth justice reforms we have had to start with the detention area because that is the most urgent part. We have then stepped back and looked at the youth outreach centre. The next bit we need to look at for how to better reform is the universal youth service delivery to make sure we have a proper base of youth activities that any kid can access across a whole area.

A lot of youth services in remote communities are funded by the federal government and we need to be working with them to get a shared understanding of what their funding is so we are all on the same page. That is really where we are stepping through. There is some money in the budget for that, but it is an area we need to do further work on how we better support young people to access a range of not just activities but services as well.

Ms NELSON: There is a focus on regional areas, and I will specifically speak about Katherine and Tennant Creek so that I have some reassurance and can provide reassurance to constituents in my electorate. We see quite a bit of the ping pong between Darwin and Alice Springs, and there is the infamous Berrimah Line as well. There is a focus on regional Northern Territory, correct?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes. Absolutely. As part of that program, the YMCA has a funding of \$150 000 to fund youth activities in Katherine. We are continuing to work with the Barkly Regional Council in Tennant Creek. They get \$242 000 to provide services across the Barkly. That is baseline youth services across a range of dates. We really feel that we need to build that base so that when we have higher-risk times around school holidays. We have a stronger youth sector that can respond and reduce offending and other types of antisocial behaviour. We need that baseline of service delivery with skilled workers who are supported to provide a service.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Youth Justice

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.4, Youth Justice. I note that while the Minister for Territory Families has overall responsibility for Youth Justice under the *Youth Justice Act*, the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services is responsible for Part 3 of the act relating to the diversion of youth, and the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice is responsible for Part 4 of the act relating to the youth justice court. Consequently, questions regarding such have already been answered. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Yes, Madam Chair, I have quite a few in this output.

What specific steps have been taken by the department and the minister to support Territory Families staff members who deal in the youth justice space and face criticism by the public?

Ms WAKEFIELD: This is very important and I want to be clear about this across my whole portfolio. When I say we are not doing some areas really well, I am not talking about the performance of our frontline workers. That is important to say.

What we are dealing with is a system problem. We have a broken system when it comes to youth justice. My experience from visiting youth facilities and seeing a range of programs is we have some very dedicated, hard-working people on the front line who are committed to their jobs who have been put under a great deal of scrutiny.

When we made a decision to do a recruitment campaign for the youth justice officers, I thought we would struggle. But one of the things that happened was we were actually overwhelmed with applications. We ended up with ...

A Witness: Over 300 applications.

Ms WAKEFIELD: ... over 300 applications for—how many positions?

Mr DAVIES: Twenty-four.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Twenty-four. That showed that we have a range of Northern Territorians who are prepared to put their hands up under a great deal of scrutiny and be part of a change in our youth justice system.

We have put a range of supports in. When we have had different media events, we have had to put in systems around different people answering the phone because, unfortunately, we have had a rise in abusive phone calls at different times though the area.

We have made sure staff have had access to support where necessary. The most important thing we have done is provide additional training and a new focus and support, particularly for our youth justice officers working in detention centres, as well as making sure we have had a high level of support. I know the CEO and the Deputy CEO are there often providing that leadership and support to workers on the front line.

A lot of work has been done, but I would like to publicly put on the record again we appreciate the work of those workers and acknowledge that there are many good people doing very hard work every day in the Territory.

Ms NELSON: So there are protocols and processes in place to support the staff members? The department has addressed all of that? Yes?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will hand that over to the deputy CEO, who is more on the operation side.

Ms KERR: There is a range of employee support protocols in place, but more specifically the training includes trauma informed practice and self-care around working with children who have been subject to trauma. There is an organisational reform working group that is set up within the detention centres that specifically focuses on workforce issues.

In addition, the leadership team in youth justice, youth outreach and youth detention has been significantly bolstered so that there is much more support for workers at every level and support around having a better environment to work in, and clearer processes so they are not working so much in ambiguity and risk.

In addition to that, there is a range of programs and innovation going into the detention centres in particular at this point, which makes the job itself far more satisfying. The children are a lot happier, there is less tension, there is less conflict and the outcomes overall are better for the staff and the children.

Ms NELSON: You have raised the youth outreach recruitment process and the new youth outreach staff and you have been hired recently by the department and working in the regional areas.

How many new staff have been recruited for the youth outreach for each region in the Territory and what is their role? How will they be interacting with the community?

Ms WAKEFIELD: One of the really important parts of this process is that we have invested in a workforce that is filling a hole in the service system. However, I will get the CEO to talk about the number of staff and where they are.

It is important that we are working with the community about how these workers—this is an ongoing process. I have been involved in building services from the ground up in several situations, and you need to allow an organic process of working with the NGOs as well as making sure we have the right people on the ground building those relationships.

Their role will be very much at the pointy end around when kids have come to the attention of the police or are at risk of being detained or have been detained, so the through-care model. We really do want this workforce to work with police, with the courts and at that end of the service delivery, and hopefully over time stepping back from that to be intervening earlier and earlier.

One of the reasons we located this service in government rather than in the NGO sector is we really do feel that it needs to be—and we were looking at co-locating where we can—working closely with police and with the truancy officers who are an important part of this process, because we know kids that are dropping out of school are likely to be offending. We are also making sure we are working well with the courts and that these workers can provide information to the courts so the courts can make better informed decisions about kid's futures.

At this stage, or maybe in the future, we will put the service back out to the NGO sector, but at this stage we want it located in government so that we can get all those bits of information-sharing more easily put together and stitch it up in some ways.

Mr DAVIES: The recruitment for the first youth outreach reengagement officers was completed. There were about 280 applicants. Similar to the youth justice service, we were really pleased with the number of applicants and the quality of the applicants. The other thing is the mix as well—Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and gender. A good mix of women, men, older, younger ...

Ms NELSON: Do you have a breakdown of those percentages?

Mr DAVIES: I could get them for you. I would have to take that on notice, Member for Katherine, but we would definitely be prepared to get those for you.

Madam CHAIR: I might place that on notice right now.

Question on Notice No 9.1

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

Ms NELSON: Could you please provide a breakdown of the percentages in your recruitment?

Mr DAVIES: Would you like that to be for youth justice officers and for the youth outreach officers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal?

Ms NELSON: Yes. Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and gender breakdown as well, please.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that question on notice?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes.

The question asked by the Member for Katherine of the minister has been allocated the number 9.1.

Mr DAVIES: Since May 2017 the youth outreach and re-engagement teams across the Territory now have 70 active clients. They participated in 318 interactions with young people and their families and undertaken 321 interactions with key stakeholders. This brief was put together about two weeks ago. There will be significantly higher numbers in there than what this says.

The teams are located in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Nhulunbuy and in the southern region, in Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. In terms of the numbers of people actually located there at the moment, in Darwin and Palmerston the intention is to have 25 youth outreach officers in place; at the moment there are 17. In Alice Springs we have 16 as the intention and there are 13 on the ground at the moment. In Katherine the intention is seven and there is currently five. In Tennant Creek there are two and Nhulunbuy has two as well. We will have operation staff at about 52 when the full program is rolled out.

We think it is a fantastic start; the minister asked me to work with GPT, which runs the Casuarina shopping centre to start to look at a youth outreach service in a facility there. We are exploring that option with GPT and with the Darwin City Council on developing a model where there are three partners in it utilising non-government services where the private sector is investing with us in supporting youth who are at risk, and giving them opportunities around training and experiencing programs where they can work in business and interact with businesses inside the Casuarina shopping centre. We think it is a great start and we are doing to co-located program in a similar vein in Alice Springs.

Mr PAECH: I am wondering if I can lead in to the minister around what programs are in place for youth diversion in my hometown, and the minister's hometown, of Alice Springs and how they actually fit in the overall youth justice reforms.

Ms WAKEFIELD: There have been a range of youth diversion activities in Alice Springs. In Central Australia we have access to BushMob, which we have continued to fund, and that will be part of our ongoing review into that type of wilderness camp or boot camp. We also have the existing services of Relationships Australia, and the MacDonnell council has some money for diversion activities, which is usually around victim conferencing and taking referrals from police. That is a long-standing service that we also will be looking at how we can better support.

We also have our new workforce in youth, and we announced last week that they will be based in what is known locally in Alice Springs as the old central comms building, which is strategically located in an area where we know young people often congregate. It is also close to other youth services in that area. This is about making sure we have the opportunity for people to intervene.

One of the things that we talked about, the recruitment—all the workers we recruited in Alice Springs have worked in Alice Springs and live in Alice Springs, and some were born there. One of the things I want to make sure we do with this workforce is that we are not going into it with rose coloured glasses, that we have people who have been on the ground, know the particular nuances of providing youth service delivery in Central Australia and have existing relationships with the ranger people and players in that area.

We have a lot to do and I can give you some specific figures as well around what the investment is.

Mr PAECH: Sure, I am happy to hear it.

Ms WAKEFIELD: We have been giving the MacDonnell Regional Council some money, which I know directly impacts your electorate, and there is \$144 000 for some youth diversion work and I met with those youth workers who provide that service. That adds on to federal government funding for youth activity. They run a very specialist youth service and are well embedded in the communities they work in.

We also provide money to the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation, WYDAC as it is known. That is \$330 000 for Mt Theo programs, which are very well known and respected, and are making sure we are providing some outreach.

Operation Flinders is still receiving funding of \$740 300. That was a previous contract that we will continue to look at because it is a South Australian company and we will be continuing to look at the best way to deliver those services. We are very pleased to have the review of those programs to help guide that decision-making.

We are also giving Relationships Australia \$814 000 to provide that diversion work. That is something we need to continue to work with police on. I am very pleased that we have a good and strong working relationship with Northern Territory Police. They are very committed to the youth area, and reform in that area. We will continue to work with them. Police refer kids who are suitable for diversion into that program. We will continue to look at the best ways of doing that.

We also fund BushMob, a well-known program in Central Australia. They receive for their sentenced youth boot camp \$1 181 205.30. I hope they spend that wisely. They also have some Loves Creek youth programs, which are a bit broader for kids that are not sentenced in that area. That is \$746 155. We also are providing some further funding to Central Aboriginal Australian Congress for the social and emotional wellbeing process of \$41 000.

We have got a range of services. I still think we need to look at how they all join up. There is still some work to do there. There is definitely some work to do on how the youth sectors coordinate and how we, as government, coordinate with them. There have been information blocks there. We need to make sure we have police as equal partners but we also need to see how we can support kids before they get into that program. Working more closely with the Education department will be a key part of that process.

Mr PAECH: The money that was paying for the bus services in Alice Springs, is that out of your department, or the Chief Minister's?

Ms WAKEFIELD: It is out of our department. It was originally in Chief Minister's office and it has transferred to us in the machinery of government changes. Unfortunately it was one of those surprises we got when we came to government to realise that the previous government had made no allowance into future governments for that. There was no money set aside for that whatsoever.

Ms NELSON: There was probably no real desire to keep it sustainable. Sorry, that is an opinion.

Ms WAKEFIELD: We have extended that contract until September. I thank the Alice Springs Town Council and Congress for being so flexible on that because they have taken on another short-term contract which is difficult

We are continuing to talk to them and the wider sector about whether this is the best model. There have been some questions raised about it being a transport service and that it has not necessarily had the impact that people thought. There are a range of conversations we need to have around how to best place that.

I think it is fantastic that we have got the town council actively involved in service delivery for young people. We know that the third tier of government is essential if we are to meaningfully change the situation for young people. As a previous councillor, you know the importance of that tier of government in making wider social change.

There are some great things that have happened with that program, but we need to continue to make sure we are doing the best we can in the circumstances.

Ms NELSON: I have one quick question about the department's youth outreach workers. I was perturbed to read in the *Katherine Times* today a report about one of the department's new youth outreach workers who pleaded guilty to drug charges in the Katherine Local Court. Can the minister please advise how this incident is being responded to, and what mitigating steps the department is taking to address it?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I have probably had the same response you did. Clearly this is unacceptable. I spoke with the CEO about how it has been handled. I will hand over as an HR issue to him.

Mr DAVIES: I became aware of this issue today just as you did, Member for Katherine. The youth outreach officer was terminated today. It is not anything we would accept as being standard. He should have let us know he was being charged and he did not. I have move immediately, based on the conviction, to terminate him today.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Can I ask to talk about the expectations we have around recruitment.

Ms NELSON: I was just about to ask that.

Ms WAKEFIELD: All staff in Territory Families have requirement for an Ochre Card. We are currently looking at the process around Ochre Cards in relation to the Royal Commission into sexual abuse in institutions recommendations around Working with Children Clearance Cards nationally. I have a brief on my desk at the moment regarding that and how we best ensure this is the most effective system as possible. We continue to make sure we have the proper checks and balances in our workforce and the NGO sector we provide funding for.

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

Ms UIBO: I have a couple questions in relation to the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre upgrades. Looking in my notes I found several different figures and I wanted to clarify the correct figure and why I found two different figures. One figure is \$1.3m and the other is \$4.7m. I am looking to determine the difference and if that is an allocation over four years or for the 2017–18 budget.

Ms WAKEFIELD: When I first went to Don Dale I had concerns around hanging points and other obvious safety issues clearly visible to someone not well trained in the area. Ken will talk on the exact detail on the money and the fix and make safe program. We became aware of issues around the contemporary nature of our fire systems in the area; that is a separate program. Those figures are different because they are two separate programs.

I will get Ken to talk because there are complexities about us spending some of the money, and that is where the figures may appear slightly different.

Mr DAVIES: I will have a go and if I get stuck I will hand to Nicole Hurwood, who is the Organisational Services person and budget expert. In a nutshell; the Don Dale make safe capital works program 2016–17 was \$3.780m. The expenditure as of March 2017, that is the cut-off point for preparing these briefs, was \$1.4m. There is more work going on right now, so that will change by the end of the financial year.

In the capital works program, Budget Paper No 4 indicated a \$1.331m revote which is a carry forward into the 2017–18 figure. The Don Dale capital program for infrastructure works in \$4.7m in 2017–18. For Alice Springs the work around the make safe program is \$1.1m. That full value will be revoted across into the 2017–18 Budget Paper No 4, and it indicated \$0.2m revoted.

We have to seek permission. Because it is a small facility, we have to close it down to fix it and make it safe. There is a huge amount of consultation taking place with legal services and congress in Alice Springs about clearing the way, explaining what we have to do to get what was an old, low-security facility for adults up to a standard that is safe and purposeful for young people while we build new infrastructure going forward.

We will spend that money allocated in 2017–18 once we have worked out the contract price and time frame. We are doing that quickly.

Ms NELSON: That is just infrastructure spend? That does not include the expense of moving. That is strictly for ...

Mr DAVIES: No, Member for Nelson, that is purely about infrastructure. We will have to fly the detainees who are currently inside—remember there are young people moving in and out on remand. If we do not have other options we will have to fly them to Darwin for that six- or seven-week period while we do the refit.

What we want to do is expand the perimeter of the Owen Springs centre to create some more room for young people. We want to build a separate section that is very secure for young women. We also want to move a transportable from the current Berrimah site to Alice Springs so there is a proper education classroom for the young people.

It is all temporary, but we want to make it a better facility than what is currently pretty archaic infrastructure. That will take some time. That money will be well spent and will not be wasted.

The other thing we would like to try to do is shift some of the security infrastructure from the old youth detention centre here down to Alice Springs to make the fence line more secure.

Ms NELSON: Obviously, it is a bit hard to give a dollar amount until you know what you have to do or what you can do with the youth who are in that detention centre at the time and all of that?

Mr DAVIES: Yes, Member for Katherine, We want to make sure we spend it on what we need because we want to ensure we have as much money available for the new infrastructure as we can.

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

Ms UIBO: Yes, Madam Chair, this question is in regard to the \$1.2m for youths requiring bail accommodation. I am happy to ask them in two parts. I am sure it will be leading to the answer.

Minister, what accommodation services are currently used for bail support for youth in the Darwin greater area?

The second part of my question is how is bail accommodation supported in connection to the wraparound services you talked about for youth offenders?

Ms WAKEFIELD: The reality is we did not have any bail accommodation facilities for young people prior to this government coming in and funding it. Every other jurisdiction in Australia and most jurisdictions across the world have the ability to provide for a child who perhaps does not have the right home circumstance for them to be bailed to but does not require to be in detention.

We have high levels of public concern about children on bail. The reality is we have had no system in place to make them as accountable as they need to be when they are on bail. The aim is to have some bail accommodation services in place that have 24-hour staffing, specialist staffing and the ability to support a child to make sure they meet their bail conditions and get themselves back on track. It will provide that wraparound case management to help them get back on track.

One of the things many people do not understand about our youth justice system, which is a large proportion, is that often the majority of people who are in detention at any time are on remand so they have not faced the court for their crimes. They have not been found guilty. Often they are only there for—I think the average is about eight days. So we have a great number of children cycling through the system, therefore not getting any adequate support or any access, meaning that the kids who are sentenced are not necessarily getting the attention, rehabilitation and focus staff could give if they were not constantly having to deal with and manage a lot of new kids coming through.

We know this system is not working at the moment, and we want to provide a range of options for the courts to help courts and police make better decisions regarding this.

I will pass over to the CE to provide some more detail on specifically what we are delivering, but we feel this is an important piece of the puzzle we have never had in the Territory in regard to making significant reforms to the youth justice system.

Mr DAVIES: The amount allocated to the bail support program in the 2017–18 budget is \$4.866m.

I was at Yirra House yesterday, which is being repurposed to use as a facility to provide support for young people on bail or in remand. We have had NGOs go through that facility and they have expressed a great deal of interest in what the model could look like if they took on the service.

We will also upgrade the mums and bubs facility in Alice Springs to make it available to an NGO for bail support. In Alice Springs and at Yirra, these facilities will be used for young men and male children. Part of the work we are doing on the bail support program is starting to scope what it will look like for young women as well. There is a very clear view that the boys and girls need to be kept well apart, and we are dealing with far fewer young women, although the number is growing with young men.

We are keen to look at infrastructure. There is currently an unoccupied piece of infrastructure in Tennant Creek that has not been utilised, and we are talking with the Australian Government about that. We will look at expanding the service into other regions as we test the program and take it to scale.

Eventually we would love to have a facility in Katherine and the Nhulunbuy area as well as Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

Ms NELSON: What plans are there for accommodating young people who are on bail but have no stable home environment to support their bail conditions?

Ms WAKEFIELD: This is what we think the gap in the bail accommodation services will provide. As part of reform of the act, bail conditions will be part of the review. How that will be applied, working with the judiciary as well as police, is something the Royal Commission will make some recommendations on. We will accommodate those. We are clearly putting that out to tender for the non-government organisations. We think this is important for the non-government sector to run. That is why we have involved them in discussions on how the program might look and work from the early stages, including the design of the infrastructure.

Ms NELSON: Are we putting funding into extra support at home? Are we building new accommodation?

Ms WAKEFIELD: The youth outreach workers would provide that community support at home if people have family who require additional support to ensure there is bail accountability as well as case management.

I also see bail accommodation as a pathway. If someone is picked up late at night, rather than going into a detention centre they go into the bail accommodation—and then a plan being wrapped around that child so that there are no decisions made. We have been in a court house when these are happening. You have defence lawyers running around trying to find a family member, and that is often where things fall down because that right decision-making at that time has not happened.

This will allow the judiciary, the courts and the police to take a deep breath in some ways, place someone in secure accommodation and then provide wraparound support and accountability.

We are clear that we want to stop reoffending. This is a community safety issue. We know there are issues with kids breaching bail conditions. It is very clear in our data. We need to make sure bail is accountable and we are stopping the reoffending by making sure the right family support is wrapped around that child.

Ms NELSON: There have been several discussions regarding shop fronts being rolled out across the Northern Territory to provide face-to-face services for clients of Territory Families, particularly in the youth justice sector. When does the department foresee these shopfronts being rolled out? What services will the youth outreach workers' shopfront offer? What steps are being taken to ensure the safety of staff that will be providing these face-to-face services? The last part to this question is what exactly are the youth outreach workers? What are they tasked to do and how do they plan on engaging with community?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will hand over for the specifics. One of the things we need to make sure with this program is that services are accessible for families and for kids if they want to access those services by themselves. We need to acknowledge that whilst we want to include families there may be kids who also want to access services by themselves and may not have family who are able to provide them with the support they need.

I looked at the building, the shopfront in Alice Springs. It is a big, open space and it will be open to kids coming through. There is also provision for staff safety in terms of making sure there are secure areas where staff can be. Staff safety is essential in everything we do. I think we need to have those spaces where people feel comfortable to access or else this service will not have the outcomes of how they have become embedded in the community, which is what your question is implying.

Mr DAVIES: I think I might refer this to Jeanette, the Deputy Chief Officer Operations. She would be best placed to talk to you about when the shopfronts will come online and staff safety.

Ms KERR: I will start with the safety issue. All the YOREOs have been trained in managing anger and aggressive behaviour. In saying that, they are not patrollers or second-tier police. Their role is outreach. If there was an incident where there was any threat to them their role is to withdraw.

We have committed to consultation and co-design at the local level to determine exactly what their role will be. There is a function of coordinating after-hours youth activities across the various locations. They will, once we have some legislation changes, take over responsibility for youth community corrections, supervision of youth. They have a role within the youth courts, which has already started and been very successful.

They will be doing individualised assessments of young people around their criminogenic risk and needs and then be assisting the development of individualised plans, or diversion plans, for those young people, which will be on a shared case-planning basis with our partner agencies—health, police and legal services—where we will be doing some co-location back and forward with them.

Education is a key partner and will be co-locating in Katherine and Palmerston. Other places we are looking at what the model will best be on the ground.

I will give some examples. You also spoke about community consultation. They have had consultation, to date, with 98 stakeholders in Darwin, 131 in Palmerston, 30 in Katherine, 33 in Tennant Creek, and 29 in Nhulunbuy. That is 321 in total. They have a communication plan and strategy. Their initial phase was focusing on stakeholder consultation and co-design.

In addition to that they have been engaging very strongly with Danila Dilba; the detention centre, where they obviously have a key client group; the various diversion programs; the re-engagement or alternative education centres; the various shire and town councils—and this is across the Territory; the high schools. They have also been involved in local issues. For example, they had a key role in Nhulunbuy's volatile substance abuse outbreak. Callistemon House, the Smith Family and Katherine High are all specifically for Katherine.

They have been involved in outreach during peak periods in Alice Springs on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights with other partners, and that has been expected as well.

Ms NELSON: Just one last thing with the youth outreach workers program. I just heard that the consultation and community organisations you are consulting with and the NGOs—are there strategies in place also to be consulting with the Making Justice Work program and in Katherine, for example, the youth justice reinvestment working group?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes. One of the things we did last week was have a very high-level meeting with the minister's office, senior executive of Territory Families and some key NGOs from peak bodies such as Making Justice Work, APONT, and NTCOSS. That was because we have had some feedback from the NGO sector that, as a department, we need to improve some of the co-design processes. This is a new thing for the department. It is probably a 180-degree policy change from how the previous government ran government in terms of not really consulting with anyone.

This is a real change for the department. We brought in Rob Hulls from Victoria from the RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice to really provide some support and guidance for us on how to do this co-design. I met with members of the peak bodies for the youth sector yesterday in Parliament House for Darwin and Paris, which are Palmerston and Darwin based. There are still some concerns to make sure we are hearing from the frontline sector and not just management level about how those workers on the ground work together.

One of the things we are trying to do is reform a live system that is under a great deal of stress and scrutiny at the moment. As minister, I am very committed to speaking to as many people as possible. I am looking forward to July because I will go to Tennant Creek and Katherine for the shows, and one of the things I will be doing is catching up with the workers on the ground. As a minister it is really important for me to continue those conversations to hear from the NGO sector where they have not been as happy, and they give that feedback to the department.

Overall, I think people are very pleased with the direction we are going in. I sent out a very extensive communique to the sector in the last couple of weeks. It gives really strong information around our policy direction. We are continuing to do this work, acknowledging that it is a 180-degree policy change for the department. We are very committed to this and moving forward.

Ms UIBO: Minister, going back to bail accommodation and looking at separation for genders, what sort of support services are there for any transgender youth offenders? How do you support those people if there is accommodation or if there is detention involved?

Ms WAKEFIELD: It is clearly a significant issue and one I am personally passionate about. One of the things I did as the CEO of the Alice Springs Women's Shelter was to ensure it was a safe place for transgender women to access, and it is an ongoing issue. We probably need to do some further work on that and one of the reasons why we have refocused the women's policy and men's policy to a gender equity area is to acknowledge that gender is a really fluid identity for some people; it is not a binary notion for many people. We need to make sure everyone who accesses our services is safe, and that is something we will continue to work on.

I think limited infrastructure impacts our ability to provide a good service to any child in our care. We really have significant limitations, but it is something I am more than happy to take on as part of our agenda of moving forward.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.4.

Output 1.5 – Domestic Violence

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.5, Domestic Violence. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Yes, Madam Chair. I have some questions for this output. The domestic and family violence budget for 2017–18 shows an increase of \$4.9m on the previous financial year's budget with the current trends showing that women and children accessing crisis accommodation also increasing.

We have talked about the national plan to reduce violence against women and children, the federal government plan. Minister, can you clarify what the federal government's contribution financially is to helping address the domestic and family violence issues in the Northern Territory, which is one of the highest in Australia?

Ms WAKEFIELD: First of all I would like to acknowledge Danyelle Jarvis, who has joined us at the table and has had oversight in this area. There are significant challenges in the domestic and family violence area, particularly in the crisis accommodation area, and it has been a passion of ours.

One of the things that has been of concern is that the federal government significantly contributes to the running and costs of our crisis accommodation centres under the national partnership around housing, and this is something that has just been renegotiated. We have only another 12 months funding from the sums of the federal government. This has been an ongoing situation for quite a period of time and it is something we will continue to negotiate with the federal government around adequately supporting those services as well.

I know the women's sector has done it pretty hard in terms of being adequately funded to provide the level of service and also excessive demands. One of the things we have done in this budget is providing the \$6m for the Alice Springs Women's Shelter; it is one of the biggest and busiest women's shelters in Australia. The demand for those services outstrips what they can provide and with a new building they will be able to provide more service and a more sustainable service as well.

We are continuing to do more work. One of the anomalies of domestic violence is that it sits under the homelessness agenda. Minister McCarthy also has responsibility for negotiating with the federal government through Housing. There is a bit of an anomaly in the way that is split up; domestic violence and service delivery are sitting under us.

We will continue to work closely with Minister McCarthy, and he has been very supportive and a strong advocate for homelessness services in the Northern Territory with the federal government. In terms of the other funding you talked about, there has been a \$2.3m reduction in the Australian Government funding, some of that is a hangover from the intervention in Alice Springs Transformation Plan, which was kind of a follow through. There is \$1.2m in that, which has finalised the funding for the Alice Springs integrated response to family violence.

As we know the previous Labor government funded, initially, the integrated response model in Alice Springs, which is where the response in the Northern Territory was developed, very heavily influenced by the South Australian model. There was a specific working group and group of bureaucrats who worked on that plan. That has now been joined into the broader integrated response that was rolled out across the Northern Territory under the previous government.

There was also a \$1m reduction for the Domestic And Family Violence Reduction Strategy, as well as a \$100 000 in funding for the finalisation of frontline domestic and family services. So, there was a slight reduction there, but with our additional funding—because again, once we got into government, we discovered that the previous government had not made any further provision for \$6.6m worth of funding which was funding the outreach services to remote communities, the integrated response meetings, the family safety planning ...

Ms NELSON: It absolutely defies logic.

Ms WAKEFIELD: A range of really important programs. We were able to find that additional money. We will now sit down and review the domestic violence strategy. This will be as part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children. We have signed on to that national plan across several governments now. We are now onto the third plan. We need to realign our strategy to meet the

national goals. They are to do with sexual violence, Indigenous women's access to services, service choice and a range of other priorities we need to realign the current DV strategy into. Then in next year's budget, we will be looking at a much better position.

I also just received a note that reminds me that we also have \$5.2m in the NTRAI funding for women's safe houses. Remote safe houses are funded differently to the urban safe houses which are funded under the homeless strategy. The remote safe houses are funded under federal government money which is separate again. We need to make sure we are aligning our policy with federal government policy so we are getting good outcomes and good value for government dollars.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, did you have a question?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I have a couple of questions. Minister, you mentioned women's safe houses and shelters in remote communities. I know it is difficult in terms of funding. I believe we will be looking at a process of holistic wellbeing and those support services. What services are accessible in remote communities currently for women and men facing domestic and family violence? I have a follow-up question as well.

Ms WAKEFIELD: I am more than happy to read through some of the places that have funding. There are currently 28 women's safe houses and shelters across the Northern Territory. As I said, they are funded under slightly buckets.

We have 12 women's safe houses which are located in remote Aboriginal communities and are operated by Territory Families. Those are the safe houses that were primarily put there through the intervention, as I mentioned before when the Member for Nhulunbuy asked.

We have some non-government organisation partners operating eight regional women's shelters. They include the Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs women's shelters. We also have non-government organisation partners operating eight women's safe houses in remote locations. For instance, the Yuendumu safe house has been operating, Ali Curung and Elliott as well. Yes, I have visited those safe houses. Some of those are funded through the Barkly Regional Council and a range of other providers.

We have a range of services and different models. One of the things we really need to look at and we will be progressing in the next 12 months is that we have a couple of different funding streams. That means there are a couple of different models in place. We need to look at if they are tailored properly for the NT and how we can make those services sustainable.

Some services are heavily accessed and others that are not. There may be barriers to some women accessing those services. We need to do that work to make sure we get the right model, not just infrastructure in place.

Ms UIBO: The follow-up question is in regard to Gunbalanya, or Oenpelli, and what ongoing services or funding will they be supported by.

Ms WAKEFIELD: I know you have met with the department around specific issues in your electorate. One thing we have not got quite right is the service model to remote communities. We know women in remote communities are particularly susceptible, especially in communities with no easy access to police or clinics. There are a range of things that put women in remote communities at risk. In small communities there may be family from both sides and a whole range of complications.

We continue to look at best ways to deliver services to remote communities. In Central Australia there is an outreach program. NPY Women's Council has delivered a remote outreach program to a range of areas. We are using the opportunity with our commitment to Galiwinku to look at the model and not just the infrastructure, although we have put significant money into infrastructure. We are taking the opportunity to look at services like Gove around supporting support for them.

In terms of other specific communities we need to have that model. It will give us a sense of what that will cost and how we will better roll those issues out. We need to work closely with Northern Territory police in this area. We have a Police Commissioner who is committed to this as an issue.

I do not know if the CE has any specifics around the particular communities.

Mr DAVIES: If it is okay with you, Member for Arnhem, I might ask Danyelle to respond to this given she is the responsible officer.

Ms JARVIS: We have historically funded the Gunbalanya safe house via an NGO service provider. There have been challenges in terms of consistency in service delivery, which is partly what we want to address as part of the review of the new framework. We need to have funding models in place for our remote safe houses that are sustainable and allow better responsiveness to the community need. Gunbalanya is one of the safe houses we are looking at.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Ms NELSON: Sexual assault of women in the Northern Territory is the highest in Australia and much of it goes unreported. The federal government has cut funding to the 1800RESPECT crisis line. They are privatising it. How does the NT Government plan to address this national crisis line being cut?

Ms WAKEFIELD: That is a service I know well. There was always concern about the national roll-out of that number and access for women in remote communities. The previous tenders of that program spend a lot of time in the Northern Territory trying to work out ways of doing it better.

My understanding is it will continue to provide the bit that has been privatised, the triage part of the service. You may get a whole range of people ringing up about an immediate or historic issue, or wanting advice about how to support a friend. The triage issue is being re-funded. Territorians will still have access to that national service. It will go to a more specialised service once they are triaged. We will see how that will work moving forward.

We have sexual assault services delivered through response services delivered through the Department of Health and they will continue to work in the current—my understanding from the Minister for Health is that they are continuing on. The Minister for Health and I are passionate about making sure we have those responsive services that can respond when a woman does report a sexual assault.

The reality is it is probably the most underreported crime; certainly the international literature would suggest so. My experience of delivering services frontline in the Northern Territory would also suggest that we have a significant issue with under reporting of sexual violence.

Often women may report a physical assault but not a sexual assault. It is something that I raised very early and gave my CEO some direction around wanting to make sure we were very proactive around a sexual assault and sexual violence framework around the organisation that lined up with our domestic violence reduction framework. That work has started and will continue. Whenever we are talking about domestic violence we need to include sexual violence in that conversation and make sure that people feel that they can access services where they can, and if they access a service it will be comfortable in how to deliver.

We have more work to do in this area. Once we do set up a system we may see a significant rise in reports if we can get this right, but we certainly need to tackle it and I am personally passionate about tackling it.

Ms NELSON: My concern is that it will need a triage, exactly as you have explained; it will go in a triage-type system when you initially call and it is a deterrent for women to be calling in when they have experience sexual assault.

Ms WAKEFIELD: I had discussions at the conference last week with a number of people from different jurisdictions, particularly South Australia but also with Our Watch and ANROWS, which is the national research organisation, about how that conversation was progressing. There is some significant advocacy happening with the federal government from those specialist organisations, and I will continue to monitor through the women's services who accesses that service, so we will see how that is going.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.5 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Output 2.1 – Gender Equity

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Community Engagement Programs, Output 2.1, Gender Equity. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: It might seem a bit obvious, but I will ask the question. Why is it important to have an Office of Gender Equity and Diversity, and how do you see men's policy fitting in with this strategy? If we are talking about gender equity we have to talk about men as well.

Ms WAKEFIELD: Absolutely. I think one thing that is often missed in the gender equity conversation is that it is about improving life for men as well. We know that to achieve gender equity we need to make sure that men are also supported to not be restricted by rigid gender roles. The way we will have better social outcomes—and the places that have reduced things like domestic and family violence have done so by making sure men have access to paternity leave, and by really acknowledging the important role that fathers play in our community.

That also gives women the opportunity to return to work earlier so they do not have such a significant career gap and gaps in their superannuation. That is an example of how if we are working towards equity for men and women together we can get better community outcomes. That is why we have decided to include men's and women's policy. There are still very separate streams of men and women's policy, but it is overarched with a gender equity social inclusion policy framework.

Ms NELSON: There has been a focus recently on increasing the gender balance and executive positions throughout government, community boards and committees. Can you please explain what the minister for women ...

Ms WAKEFIELD: I was very proud to be part of the announcement of this government before the election around a 50-50 goal of gender equity. I was also very proud to stand up just after I was made a minister and be clear that in our very first decision as a government we made the first female majority Cabinet in the history of Australia. We have continued that. We are committed to that as a government.

When we started to work through this policy we felt that it probably did not sit correctly in Territory Families, and we have passed responsibility for that policy output to the Department of the Chief Minister because it oversees so many of the boards and has a role in looking at who goes onto those boards, and application processes. We felt it would be much more strategic and effective to have responsibility for that election commitment, with the support of Territory Families and Women's Policy Unit as well, and our gender equity framework which we will be developing. That responsibility now sits with the Department of the Chief Minister. I think it shows our commitment to achieving the goals we have set.

Ms NELSON: Is domestic violence victim leave also sitting with the Department of the Chief Minister?

Ms WAKEFIELD: That is sitting with Minister McCarthy in his portfolio of Public Employment. We would be providing any advice that the department that they would need about how that looks, and assessment and training processes might go through. I have had conversations with the responsible officers in his office around how that might go, as well as making sure we are linking up with the NGO sector on this issue. It is not just a government issue.

Ms NELSON: I have one more question. Are you able to provide some information on the grants and scholarships under the Office of Gender Equity and Diversity?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I am. We have a range of grants under the gender equity policy, which in 2016 had a budget of \$132 000. That includes grants and scholarships.

We will continue this program into 2017–18 with around \$138 000. This morning I signed some congratulations letters to three women who had received scholarships for study. It was great to see the diversity of study that was being undertaken by those women from nursing right through a whole range other things. It is something we are passionate about and will continue to support.

We also do general grants programs. Member for Katherine, I know you attended many events on International Women's Day in Katherine. There was a range of exciting events around that time which were funded through a special grants process we have to celebrate women through that time.

Is there any other information you would like on that?

Ms NELSON: These grants and scholarships are available not just to women, is that correct?

Ms WAKEFIELD: They go to organisations as well that may do a range of diverse gender—we have given grants in the past to organisations that support people with diverse gender identity. We also have a range of other services. Most of the events are open to men and women.

Madam CHAIR: Any further questions on this output?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Social Inclusion

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.2, Social Inclusion. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Minister, can you elaborate on what support the government provides for multicultural communities in the Northern Territory?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I am very proud to have multicultural affairs as part of my ministerial responsibilities. It is the area where I have met the most amazing Territorians, people who are committed to this place. They have made the choice to be here and part of our future. We need to celebrate that diversity and what our diverse cultures bring us as a community in terms of strength and our sense of community.

I have attended many events through different community groups, and we fund those. I was incredibly pleased to attend the Harmony Soiree this year at the Darwin Waterfront. That was an extraordinary event, watching the water lantern procession from the Thai community, through to meeting Indian dancers, one of whose grandmothers had stitched the traditional costumes. There were a couple of generations of family dancing together.

We cannot underestimate the importance of those community events. One thing that is clear to me at those events is that supporting young people and having a strong and positive identity of their cultural heritage is a protective factor in regard to making sure young people feel confident and can contribute to our community.

That is an important concept that spreads across my portfolio areas. We are able, in these types of activities, to share the things people contribute to as well as the importance of celebrating women from a range of backgrounds. We are very pleased to have this as an important part of our agenda.

We have also provided a range of facility grants through our immediate works programs and the grants program. This is about making sure multicultural groups are able to upgrade their facility, which enables them to run those types of activities. This ranges from fences to shade sails and security screens.

We also have what is called the Charles See Kee Leadership Scholarship. That is about supporting students who have resettled in Australia as humanitarian refugees. It is very important to acknowledge the challenges kids may have coming from a different background and who may have a history of trauma, who are in a new place where they may not feel that they fit in either cultural identity.

I was pleased to go to the MyNT—Multicultural Youth NT—celebration of 10 years as an organisation. That shows what a vibrant group of new leaders we have coming through the multicultural community.

I met recently with the Melaleuca Refugee Centre, which we provide with funding to support families with child protection issues and parenting styles. When people come to a new community there is often a barrier, which is a big concern for migrant communities. They are an important partner with Territory Families not only in the multicultural space, but in the child protection space.

We are doing a range of things in this area. I feel fortunate to be the minister responsible for this area.

Ms NELSON: I think it is great, in light of the federal government's announcement that it will be changing the Australian citizenship laws, making it more difficult. It is raising concerns with the multicultural community in the Northern Territory. I like to hear that we are providing that support.

Ms WAKEFIELD: That issue was raised by my multicultural advisory council, which had its first meeting about a month ago. They are very concerned about that; they are particularly concerned about the implications for remote Northern Territory. There is particularly some concern about in Central Australia the federal government moving English lessons to an online process rather than a face-to-face process. We are in the middle of doing some advocacy around a range of these issues to really highlight to the federal

government the impact and the specific impact on the Northern Territory and our workforce around some of the changes.

I do not think it is just specific changes, there is a cumulative effect of many of the changes we will have a poor outcome for the Northern Territory. In terms of a flexible workforce and our population policy, making the Northern Territory a welcoming place and one that people want to come to is a really important part of our population strategy.

Alice Springs is a great example. The multicultural changes in Alice Springs in the last 10 years have been incredible and have done nothing but bring positives to our town, so we need to continue that growth and supporting those new and emerging communities.

One thing I have said very clearly to the multicultural community as minister is that I am not interested in just turning up for the nice photo opportunity, I want to actually talk about the real and difficult issues they are facing to settle into the community and making sure that, as a government, we are providing the support they need to be productive and important parts of our community.

Ms NELSON: It definitely applies to communities like Katherine as well where we have a very diverse community. Katherine was founded by Russian peanut farmers and the Chinese immigrants who came in and helped build the rail, so these supports are very important.

Multicultural events are supported by the government, can you detail how much money is actually allocated for multicultural events?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will pass that over to the CEO.

Mr DAVIES: In terms of the total funding pool that is available, payments as at March 2017 came to \$1 726 480. In terms of multicultural grants in round one, \$839 000 was approved; in round two there was \$110 000 approved, which made a total of \$957 000 in grants. In amongst it there were some quick response grants, which are small amounts where an organisation or individual might need some support to attend an event or run a function.

There were 31 Harmony grants allocated to a total of \$29 950; multicultural facilities grants, which the minister just referred to, across the 2016–17 year was \$773 000; and there was the Charles See Kee Leadership Scholarship of \$14 000, which meant the total payments that were being made by 31 March was about \$1.7m, a substantial contribution.

Ms NELSON: Still in this output of social inclusion, how does having a Youth Round Table benefit the Territory?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I am very pleased to speak to this and I am very pleased to be the minister responsible for the Youth Round Table. I think we have a group of exceptional young people this year. I have been very pleased to work with them. I suppose because youth issues are so front and centre of many of the conversations we are having in the Northern Territory around youth detention and youth justice—I also think what is happening is that we are often talking about youth only in negative terms and not necessarily celebrating the breadth and amazing things that many young people are doing in the Northern Territory. That is something we need to watch as a community, that we are not always viewing youth through a negative lens. We need to acknowledge the vast majority of young people getting on with their lives and contributing to our community in many ways.

I have met with them twice in formal meetings. I have set them question about changing the conversation around young people in the Northern Territory and had fantastic responses back. I will continue to consult with them as issues come up. I want to consult with them on the outcomes of the Royal Commission and their thoughts on that.

Those advisory committees, not just the young people's round table but seniors and multicultural, give me as a minister the opportunity to hear strong feedback from people who represent their community and living the issues we are making decisions about to give guidance around policy.

I have been fortunate to catch up with many young people in their own communities. For instance, the two fantastic Katherine members, Phoebe Hooper and Leah Sharp, are impressive young women. When we did a community Cabinet in Katherine I invited them to attend meetings with me so they would get a sense

of what I do as a minister. It provided examples of how leadership might happen. I invited them to barbecues and introduced them to the Chief Minister.

When I went to Nhulunbuy I met with Patrick Walker and Molly Graham in their school and asked them how they were going with their project. We had a good conversation about that. Other Darwin members I see regularly at youth functions in the Northern Territory—when I go to communities where these members are I am also giving them opportunities to have access to me so they can bring up a range of issue they may have.

It brings a lot to me as a minister in terms of access for young people to have an input. We have a diverse group of young people this year. It is not just your high-achieving, middle class kids this year. We have a very diverse range.

I was able to catch up in Utopia with Isaiah. He was showing off his work and what he was doing for his community. It has been really important. Poor old Kelvin at Gunbalanya; we had a photo shoot with all the aunties jumping in and out. It shows that we, as a government, support young people and understand not every young person is doing the wrong thing. We need to do more of this.

As a department we do not consult with young people. We talk about consulting with NGOs and a whole range of stakeholders. Our most important stakeholders are children and we have not done a great job of doing that. It is something I am keen to make sure we do differently. This is a good start.

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

That concludes consideration of Output 2.2 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – SENIORS AND CARERS **Output 3.1 – Seniors and Carers**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, Seniors and Carers, Output 3.1, Seniors and Carers. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: I will be asking you two questions in regard to this output. The first is in regard to pensioners in the bush. How will they be impacted by the new concession scheme?

Ms WAKEFIELD: One of the most interesting bits of analysis we did early on, when we were starting to look at how the system is currently working, was a postcode analysis. It was quite shocking how few senior Territorians who were born and bred first nations people are accessing this service on remote communities. There is very poor uptake on remote communities.

There is probably been a range of barriers to that. One of them is that intrastate travel has not been allowed under the rules. That is something we are looking at as part of the consultation. As I said to the Member for Namatjira, in power assistance—because often remote people are on card systems or different power systems, they do not necessarily get access to the power and water rebate. That has also been a barrier. Also, when people have accessed services they might come to town and maybe access it for the glasses because the optometrist does it for them. But they are not necessarily getting the benefit or choice around the use of that concession.

This is something that is of concern to us. Whatever system we design to move forward, we want to ensure it is equitable and fairly spread across the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister. To follow up a bit more, is the government considering provisions for hardship with the pensioner scheme in the Northern Territory?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes, that is one of the things we are discussing. Wherever we put a line we will have impact and we need to make sure we minimise the impact on Territorians. We know some people have high usage with power and water. One of the things we have done is get Power and Water to review why those properties have such a high usage. Is there a specific reason? It is so we can be very clear about why people have high levels of power and water and we are not then completely disadvantaging anyone.

We will have a process—and we need to talk about the design of this—about how we then make sure there is a transition period or a range of other things that will support people in particular circumstances. Again, that is part of the process of consultation to make sure we capture all of those issues.

Of concern to me is the issue of women living in single households who may not have access to super and people who are renting as opposed to homeowners. We need to make sure we are acknowledging those groups as having different levels of assets and flexibility around support. We will work through this.

One of our advantages in this space is that we are quite a small jurisdiction and we are talking about quite a small number of people. We can actually be modelling quite sensitively about the impacts on individuals when we are working through this process.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I have a question for you in relation to seniors and carers. Can you provide an update about the fraud investigation related to travel concessions under the NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme? Are there other ways the scheme has been defrauded or exploited?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes, we have had a fraud investigation into several aspects. Some of them are still before the court so we need to be a little sensitive about that. Since 2013, when there was a complaint from a member of the public who alerted police to the investigation of alleged fraud with the travel concessions, 16 travel agents have been referred to Northern Territory Police for their dealings in the scheme in administering travel concessions to seniors. Six cases of fraud have been identified to date and one person has been gaoled for this crime.

In 2015–16, Flight Centre voluntarily repaid \$2.4m to the government after its own internal investigations. That shows the extent of the ability for this system to be defrauded.

Whatever we do, we need to make sure that whatever we design moving forward cannot be so easily defrauded.

I also mentioned before that we have referred to the Ombudsman's Office reviewing the spectacle concessions, because there has been a significant increase in access to the spectacle aspect of the scheme. We are concerned that there is potential for profiteering in this area. We have referred that for external investigation.

Madam CHAIR: Could you please advise how many people currently access the scheme, and whether or not the access is currently equitable for all eligible senior Territorians?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I have already touched on the equity of the scheme.

In this financial year up to 31 March 2017, 18 582 pensioners and carers have access to concessions through the Pensioners and Carers Scheme.

There is quite a significant difference in the rates that people access. The top 25% of users receive the majority of the funds. Homeowners have abilities to access garbage rebates and a range of other rebates whereas someone renting cannot. There is quite a spread. You might just have people who just access for their glasses or their rego and do not access any other concessions.

We have a huge spread even though there are 18 000 people who have accessed it. Some people are getting over \$10 000 back, some people are getting under \$100. We need to make sure that the access is more equitable.

There is also a variation that may not stay stable in terms of the way people access. People may access a one-off expense; it is not consistent throughout the months. Whilst I have given you a 31 March update, it may be quite different in the annual report. I will be able to give a much more accurate report when we do the scrutiny of the annual reports, which is the advantage of doing it then. What can happen through the year is that we get a run of people claiming their travel towards the end. It is one of those schemes that can be quite variable unless you are looking over a 12-month period and comparing annual report to annual report.

Mr PAECH: In the current system that we operate in, how do you regulate whether me as a senior, as an example, am not using my concession card to be paying for someone else? I use the instance that I am senior I have a partner who is a senior. The concession you would be using would be for the one household. In the current process is there the opportunity for someone to be expanding that to pay for other people?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I will pass that to Nicole Hurwood, who is the person responsible for that area.

Ms HURWOOD: In relation to it being a very operational question in relation to the process we use to administer the scheme, I will pass it on to the Chief Financial Officer who oversees the administration side.

Mr PAECH: I probably have not done a good job of articulating what I was actually asking for.

Ms CHARLES: The way that we regulate the access to the scheme with Power and Water, for example, is through the name the power account is in. That is where the concession gets applied. In relation to travel, we require documentation to show that the member who is registered is the person who has travelled. It is the same with spectacles. The provider keeps documentation so we can ascertain who has received the benefit.

In all circumstances like this, documentation is as good as the honesty of the person and the provider, so in certain circumstances it is possible that somebody has defrauded the system.

Mr PAECH: In the event that the concession for rates with the municipal council—obviously their rates are constantly fluctuating, does the percentage a senior is able to claim fluctuate as well.

Ms WAKEFIELD: I think that is one of the other problems with the scheme. Some things are indexed to go with cost of living, other things are not. It is a long-term scheme that has had bits added on to it by different governments and it is all very inconsistent. One part might get indexed and another part will not. The Motor Vehicle Registry has not been indexed so the benefit of that is a percentage of that concession has lessened over time because it has not been indexed.

A range of issues have been raised around that, and that is one of the things we will be dealing with in the reform.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 3.1 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Output 4.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Corporate and Governance, Output 4.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

Ms NELSON: Could you please explain the increase in the budget from \$253.5m in the 2016–17 budget to \$287m in the 2017–18 budget.

Ms WAKEFIELD: The 2016–17 budget was \$253.5m and increased to \$276.9m in the estimate, an increase of \$23.4m. The 2017–18 budget was \$287m, an increase of \$33.5m on the 2016 budget, and a \$10.1m increase on the 2016–17 estimate.

The \$23.4m increase in 2016 related predominantly to the \$23.2m increase in Northern Territory funding, including \$15m for out-of-home care, which we talked about previously around the growing expenses, and youth detention demand presses, which we also discussed; \$3m for the Pensioner and Carer Concessions; \$1.8m for youth outreach and re-engagement teams; a \$200 000 increase in external funding representing the transfer of the Australian Juvenile Justice Administrators program to the Northern Territory.

The \$10.1m increase from the 2016–17 estimate to the 2017–18 budget related predominately to the \$13m net additional Northern Territory funding. The \$2.7m reduction in the Australian Government funding mainly related to the finalisation of the domestic violence programs, such as the Alice Springs Transformation Plan and frontline family domestic family violence program—also due to the Mobile Child Protection Team program, which is now ceased under the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory—also the \$200 000 reduction in the transfer of the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrations Program to Victoria.

Ms NELSON: Out of that budget how much has the agency spent to date on marketing and advertising expenditure, not counting the recruitment?

Ms WAKEFIELD: As of 31 March 2017 the total estimate for advertising and marketing was \$104 000. This has increased from \$55 000 last year as a result of the formation of Territory Families and the inclusion of

Youth Affairs, Seniors, Multicultural Affairs, Women's Policy and Men's Policy into Territory Families. All of those outputs have regular advertising for Youth Round Table and those types of ads.

As Territory Families is now responsible for Youth Affairs, Seniors, Multicultural Affairs, Men's Policy and Women's Policy the agency has an important role in promotion social inclusion, equity for all Territorians.

As of 31 March 2017, marketing and advertising for social inclusion initiative expenditure was \$68 000. That includes important events like National Youth Week, Harmony Day and International Women's Day. A total of \$15 000 has been invested into the attraction, recruitment and retention of foster and kinship carers to play a pivotal role in the support of vulnerable children in the Northern Territory. Additional projects which make up the balance of the \$104 000 include the national partnership with the NAPCAN, the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect for Child Protection Week, which was \$2000; and information provision at regional and rural shows for the promotion and services to support advertising through the agency—\$8000.

That is essential work and I am looking forward to attending the shows. We will have lots of questions around a range of things, particularly senior concessions. We think that will be a great opportunity to talk to a range of people about the range of reforms. We have other minor ad hoc advertising events and promotional costs at \$11 000.

Ms NELSON: Thank you, minister. You have walked into a system and a ministerial portfolio in a department that was a bit of a mess, to put it bluntly. I can understand the increase in marketing costs and advertising to promote the new-look department.

Mr PAECH: What is your department's approach on social media in terms of advertising and communicating your overall message?

Ms WAKEFIELD: It certainly has become a bigger part of all our lives, social media. I might pass that on to the CEO to discuss what our strategies will be.

Mr DAVIES: We are in the process of appointing a new Director of Communications and we are working to improve our communications unit and our online capacity in relation to social media. Given some of the material we are managing and some of the interactions we manage, we have to be careful about that. The front face of the organisation in a social media context is very important.

In terms of accessing our IT systems, the people who are using it the most are seniors. They are going in and having a look.

We are getting a lot of interactions around foster care as well. Not so much for kinship care, but certainly foster care, where people come in, look at allowances and make a decision about whether or not they want to proceed.

I think the whole social media space is a work in progress. We have a lot of work to do here, but we need to do it carefully and make sure we are doing it within the context of the Northern Territory Government agencies agendas as well. We have got a communications overlay there and we need to ensure that we are working within the rules.

Mr PAECH: Mr Davies, I am taking away from your conversation that in terms of a public relations position; that intention is clear. I am interested to know if there has been any conversation, because quite often social media becomes a place where people do not record or register something with police. Do you anticipate that might be a mechanism where reports will come through social media and need to be followed up?

Mr DAVIES: That is a good question. My response, to be frank, is that it is a work in progress.

Mr PAECH: I am satisfied with that; I just wanted to confirm.

Mr DAVIES: When you think about child protection and statutory reporting obligations and so on, we would need to be really careful. We have just had an issue in Alice Springs with some material that ended up in the Alice Springs recycling facility that should not have gone there. One breach in that regard is one too many. We need to be very careful in this space.

In terms of the front face of the organisation in our engagement with families, we want to make sure that whatever we put up is as user friendly as possible, particularly around our grants programs, the seniors area, multicultural affairs and youth. We have got a lot of work to do.

Ms NELSON: Just following up on that, how does Territory Families receive the complaints and feedback on its services from clients, including directly from children and young people?

Ms WAKEFIELD: I think one thing that has been interesting to me coming into this role—I have had multiple meetings with foster carers around their concerns with the department. Many people in my electorate come and see me, and other electorate officers have foster carers coming in and raising complaints frequently, and that has been a really important mechanism to inform the reform and my decision-making as a minister.

We will continue to do that, and we are looking at ways that we can, through the roll-out of the foster carer rights document that we release. There will be further consultations on that and I will be attending some of those as the minister as well as the senior consultations, making sure that we are hearing as directly from people as possible.

I think the concern is that we are probably not hearing from the families of children who have been removed. They are not accessing the service and they are not necessarily confident enough to come and see their local member of parliament. I am very aware of that as minister. We are not consistently hearing from the children who are in care. I have had some kids in care make appointments with me, which has been fantastic.

I have had people who have been out of care come and meet with me, but it is a very small group of people that have the confidence to do that. That is something we are aware that we need to do more work on. The design will be very important around confidentiality and making sure it is a clear and transparent process for staff as well, so there is a natural justice aspect to it.

I also think we need to develop further whatever complaints are processed. There is one in place, but we also need to make sure we are strengthening it to acknowledge the power difference between staff and vulnerable families, particularly where we are talking families who may not have English as a first language or have a whole lot of other things that make access to mainstream services really hard.

I think the Royal Commission will make some recommendations about independent oversight. We have been working closely with the Children's Commissioner to make sure we have a frank, honest and robust relationship with her that is also collaborative as well as making sure we have good lines of communication with her, and we will continue to do that but I also believe we may have further reform in this area.

Ms WAKEFIELD: The chief executive officer said he would like to give some further information about the level of complaints.

Ms NELSON: Yes, that would be great.

Mr DAVIES: We have a dedicated complaints unit that responds to complaints received from external parties in more complex complaint matters. Up until 31 March, Territory Families had received 217 formal complaints about its services and the breakdown of that is 200 complaints about child protection in out-of-home care services, including 44 that were referred to us by the Children's Commissioner. The Children's Commissioner often received complaints and refers them back to us, and she becomes the avenue for doing that.

There were 11 youth justice complaints were referred to us by the Children's Commissioner and six formal complaints related to the pensioner concession scheme. There has been an increase in the number of complaints referred to Territory Families by the Children's Commissioner; in the 2015–16 full year there were 41 complaints, and up until March we have received 44 from her this year.

We are also in the process of preparing for a second national survey of children in out-of-home care in late 2017, and it will be interesting to see what data comes out of that. The minister does make a point—I have come from another very big agency in Education. One of the things that surprised me about going into this area, and I often talk to my staff about this, is the low level of complaints about our service delivery that come in directly from vulnerable families. There are many more complaints that I was dealing with in another agency than what come to us. They are coming formally through the Children's Commissioner.

Whether we could give more voice to families who are receiving our services and more voice to the children in out-of-home care—some of it will be complaints, but there will also be good news stories. That voice is still a challenge for us.

Ms NELSON: You touched on this slightly, Mr Davies. That was to do with the incident in Alice Springs and the filing cabinet that was taken from the office. What steps is the department taking to mitigate that? That is a pretty big security breach.

Ms WAKEFIELD: That is something we take very seriously. As a social worker, the importance of confidentiality, particularly in small towns, is something I am committed to, particularly around sensitive issues. This is completely unacceptable. That is why we took so seriously the review process and made sure we had an external review, as well as being completely transparent and releasing all of that information and supporting the people involved.

I will let the CEO talk in more detail.

Mr DAVIES: I said on the radio in an interview last night that any breach of information like this is one too many. There were 46 people directly affected, but 33 in the file on a range of issues ranging from child protection and court orders to other matters.

The initial internal review referenced 12 filing cabinets. We know that three definitely got to the Alice Springs waste disposal site. The other nine have been located and are in our facilities in the offices in Alice Springs. We do not want this to happen again.

Regarding the recommendations of the report, we have had a set of recommendations that came from both the internal investigation and then some recommendations from the external investigation that was conducted by the Solicitor for the NT. We engaged very early with the Information Commissioner because she may receive complaints about this. I am in the process of writing to all of the people in these files who have been affected. We recovered all the information that was in those filing cabinets.

In making sure this does not happen again, we will be making sure that in any other office relocations every piece of confidential filing data is recorded, properly labelled and properly supervised so a contractor cannot inadvertently pick up a filing cabinet, as happened this time, and take it away by mistake.

I have communicated to all of the staff in our organisation earlier on and again tomorrow, about the importance of record keeping and TRIMing files and making sure that information is managed appropriately to ensure the integrity and privacy of our Territory Families records. I have made that very clear to staff.

We are conducting onsite audit reviews to make sure we have identified all client records that are in offices to ensure they are not on desk and they are properly filed and managed. These are hard copy files, of course.

We are also making sure we are archiving client records that are no longer required and making sure they are going to Iron Mountain, where they can be properly stored. The internal investigation recommended that this was an appropriate process.

We are in the process of making sure we have good recruitment action around Territory Families' records management systems. Given we are a new agency we are bringing in youth justice information, information about domestic violence, we have the PenCon scheme and we have child protection. We have to bring it all together in one system and all areas contain highly confidential and sensitive records.

We are comfortable with the recommendations. This has been posted on our website around the follow-up we have undertaken in relation to the eight internal recommendations given to us and the further recommendations by the external reviewer. We are complete in all areas bar one in progress, which is the current records management strategy in place. To appropriately archive records we must continue to ensure records no longer required are located in a suitable TRIM file.

That is going in across all our agencies and offices in Territory Families. I cannot say that is completed. It is progress; we are working through it to make sure it is done.

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

That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Shared Service Received

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.2, Shared Service Received. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.2 and Output Group 4.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

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

Ms UIBO: I am interested in the total amount of staff working for Territory Families. Of that total amount how many identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Making sure we have a strong Aboriginal workforce is a priority to the agency. We need staff who are skilled, understand the communities we are working in and the diversity of nations across the Northern Territory. We must have specialists in different areas and not assuming a blanket of any Aboriginal worker could walk into any community and do the work. We need to be culturally sensitive to our workforce.

It is something we are deeply committed to. We still need to make improvements. It will be particularly essential making sure we have a workforce that is regionalised. That will mean more Aboriginal people working on the ground. We have already started with our regional family support workers.

If we are to tackle the lack of access to kinship care issues, we have to make sure we have strong advice and the right people to talk to in the community, people who have an understanding of a complex kinship system. That will be making sure we have a strong local workforce to provide that advice to the statutory workers.

I will pass over to Nicole to give exact figures.

MS HURWOOD: Our total workforce is 786.96 full-time equivalent paid staff. Of that, 172 staff are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. That comprises 22% [on 8 August 2015 the minister advised that the number stated at the hearing was incorrect and the correct figure was 19%] of our total workforce.

Ms UIBO: Further to that, it might be something you have to take on notice, of that 172 ATSI staff, how many are in senior management roles?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Can we take that on notice please?

Ms UIBO: Sure.

Ms WAKEFIELD: It is an important question. There was a lot of support within the organisation to make sure Aboriginal staff members had the opportunity to move into the professional stream. That is work I am keen to continue. We need to make sure we have diversity at all levels of our organisation.

Question on Notice No 9.2

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

Ms UIBO: Of the 172 Territory Families staff that are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, how many of those staff are in senior management roles?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that question on notice?

Ms WAKEFIELD: Yes, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: The question from the Member for Arnhem to the minister has been allocated the number 9.2.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of all output groups relating to Territory Families. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the minister for attending and the officers who provided advice to the minister today. I would also like to acknowledge and thank all the public servants who assisted with your preparation to appear today, minister.

The committee will now take a short break before we reconvene in five minutes to move on to consider activities, performance, practice and financial management of the Power and Water Corporation.

The committee suspended.

POWER AND WATER CORPORATION

Madam CHAIR: I welcome Mr Langoulant, Chair of the Power and Water Corporation board. Could you please introduce yourself and the officers accompanying you today.

Mr LANGOULANT: I am John Langoulant, and I am the Board Chair of the Power and Water Corporation. To my left is Michael Thomson, who is the Chief Executive of the corporation, and to his left is Neil Siford, who is the Chief Financial Officer.

Madam CHAIR: Mr Langoulant, I will invite you to make a brief opening statement and I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then move on to consider policy questions regarding the corporation's 2017–18 Statement of Corporate Intent. I will invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister.

Mr Langoulant, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of the Power and Water Corporation?

Mr LANGOULANT: Thank you, Madam Chair, for your welcome to me and the members of the corporation appearing before you today. We do this with great pleasure because we think this process is valuable.

As you probably know, I am a very recent appointee as the chair of the corporation. In fact, it is as fresh as yesterday. This is my second day on the job. You will probably, therefore, give me a bit of tolerance and understand that I am not as across all the details of the issues impacting the corporation as I will be in 12 months' time when I appear here again.

That said, I have done a lot of preparatory work to take on this role. The reading and briefings I have received—I have been in the Territory for the past week receiving those—have been extensive. I have had a very good start to understanding the issues.

When I reflect back on the last appearance of my predecessor, Mr Alan Tregilgas, and members of the corporation—where the corporation was sitting at the time, putting together new strategic direction for the entity, identifying a range of issues that he and the board had identified were for the corporation to address—it is fair to say there has been a great deal of progress. From the briefings I have received from the chief executive, the chief financial officer and other officers of the corporation over the last few days, I am encouraged by where the organisation is tracking.

I do not want to go into too much detail because on my second day it is probably unwise of me to go too far that way. The CE, I am sure, will supplement my comments and talk to you further about where the organisation is tracking.

One area I am extremely encouraged on is the work of the financial team in the organisation. The organisation has had, over the past two financial years, qualified accounts from the audit process. A lot of work has been done to address why those qualifications were given, and we are getting very close to the point where we can expect we will move past that point. From my perspective and the board's, that is a priority for us.

I think some solid work has been done and we are on a pretty solid ground to have the finances in good working order. I will pass over to Michael Thomson, the Chief Executive, and he can supplement my comments and give you more detail. Then we will be happy to take questions.

Mr THOMSON: Madam Chair, I will reinforce some of those comments. We have spent a lot of time over the last 12 months working over our financial systems, and we now have confidence in the numbers we are producing. That has been a major challenge.

I also note that we have improved our internal governance around our Investment Review Committee's decisions, and that has been a major milestone and step forward.

I have recently, this week and last week, been to Alice Springs and Katherine, with Tennant Creek and Darwin to go, rolling out our corporate plan, which is our vision for the next four years. It takes into account our Statement of Corporate Intent and beyond—communicating that throughout the organisation.

That is exciting for us because it deals with some key focus areas. First and foremost is safety and how we improve some of our safety going forward; that is a key focus area. We have some other key focus areas as well which go to some of the operational performance where we need to take on some best practice and move forward in that direction, so we are looking at that.

We are putting the customer at the centre of what we are doing, so we are looking at our communications channels with customers, how we can provide them with the information that they need to make choices about energy usage in their households. We also have a significant program where we are going to upgrade our poor IT systems because some of the issues we have had in the past around producing the financial numbers are that our asset systems were not aligned with our financial management systems.

We have moved beyond that, but it is still quite manual and intensive in the process, therefore there is risk in that process. We need to renew some of our IT systems. With the roll-out of smart meters and where we are going in the future we need to have the back office systems to enable us to capture and process that information.

We have some initiatives around safety, leadership training, customers and improving our financial performance as well so I am quite excited about that and I will probably leave my opening comments with that for the time being.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Statement of Corporate Intent 2017–18

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider questions relating to the Power and Water Corporation's 2017–18 Statement of Corporate Intent. Are there any questions, including questions from the public?

Mr PAECH: I have a few questions from members of the public, which I will take the opportunity to proceed forward with now. Following that I have a few questions of my own which I would like to ask. The first question I have is from Pauline Cass, and it reads as follows.

I commend the Power and Water Corporation on its Northern Territory Solar Energy Transformation Program, SETuP. Has a cost-benefit analysis been conducted on installing storage batteries to enable these communities to become totally solar powered with diesel generators used only as a backup?

Mr THOMSON: We are very excited about our solar SETuP program. That is a program that is jointly funded by the Northern Territory Government and ARENA. We are actually rolling out a number of solar diesel hybrid sites at communities so we are about to finish our first 10 of those sites, which will actually displace about 15% of diesel at each of those sites. As well as being cleaner and greener it has economic savings for Territory.

We are hoping to very shortly launch the next 20 of those sites where, again, we are trying to displace diesel and become greener in communities. We also have our Adelaide and Daly River battery program, where we are looking to displace 50% diesel, and that very much relies on solar providing most of the power during the day and battery storage for that shoulder period and peaks. That is a leading project which we are getting a lot of other utilities in from other states to have a look at. Our plan going forward, after we finished that pilot, is to start moving to increase the batteries that are deployed to remote sites.

We are excited about that; we are on the journey, but the technology is not 100% there yet to do that efficiently. We are certainly leading from a utility perspective in what we are doing in that space. That is recognised by ARENA, and while we are talking at an energy conference down in Melbourne, at which we

are presenting the solar SETuP to other utilities and getting their interest in what we are doing in the Territory.

Mr PAECH: The next three questions I have are from a member of the community, Mr Walsh. What is Power and Water's position on the role renewable energy has as a primary source of energy in the Northern Territory?

Mr THOMSON: Again, we are quite excited by the move to renewables and we are certainly supportive of moving in that direction. We have been an active player on the renewables taskforce that has been happening and we have provided some input into that taskforce.

What we are trying to encourage at the moment is looking at the larger scale grid energy, how we can get the ancillary services or the security in the system to allow us to introduce more renewables in there and keep the system security and the reliability. I am very happy, if the committee likes, if we call up Malcolm Conway, who is here and is leading that, as he can provide more detail.

Mr CONWAY: We are involved in the three major parts as well as providing information for the renewable energy expert panel. The PWC has been doing some extensive work on the transition to renewable energy and forecasts that by 2020 the rooftop solar capacity in the Darwin–Katherine network will increase to 53 megawatts. That system peaks at 294 megawatts at its best on a couple of days a year, but it averages about 200 megawatts. That is a considerable increase and we will continue to increase once we are able to provide opportunities for a number of large scale solar proponents that are looking to install systems in the Darwin-Katherine network.

We are totally committed to supporting the government in its pursuance of this 50% energy target by the year 2030. To that end, we are associated with the department of Energy, Department of the Chief Minister and working with Treasury as well in those programs.

Most importantly, we are looking at supporting the establishment of regulatory frameworks to enable the most optimal and cost efficient generation overall and technology mix that meets customer's requirements for secure electricity supply. It is no good putting this stuff in if it is not there all the time or we do not have the ability to supply our customers 24 hours a day.

Mr PAECH: Following on from that. Can Power and Water provide evidence that it is on track to achieve the government's 50% target?

Mr CONWAY: The 50% target is by the year 2030, and again, as Michael alluded to earlier, we are actively engaged in facilitating and directing changes and rules in the system that will allow for a greater proliferation of both small and large scale renewable installations. We are working on power networks, system control, and Treasury is working on a number of different schemes.

Currently, renewable energy is approximately 4% of total electricity consumption by PWC grids. In the communities we have responsibility for generation and we have spoken about the solar SETuP. That will take the total renewable energy capacity from 57 megawatts to 67 megawatts within those grids.

Looking to the future the setup at Daly River which, in technical details, has a two megawatt hour battery to provide and top up energy from one megawatt solar cells that are being installed with the target to reduce diesel fuel by 50%, which is a significant reduction. The system has been designed to meet 100% of its needs during the daylight hours, so the one megawatt's peak demand is at about 700 kilowatt hours in the Daly River community. That is a significant installation.

We have also been working on a number of strategies to allow increasing levels of what is termed 'disruptive technologies'. Our system is very fragile. We can all remember probably about three years ago the extent of the fragility and the numerous outages that were occurring. We are engaged in making sure all the protection schemes will be right to facilitate those new technologies and not inhibit the introduction of especially the major proponents of solar energy in the near future. It will not take long once we have that sorted out before that target is quickly achieved.

Mr PAECH: That is the completion of questions from members of the public. I just have a few questions now possibly directed to the CEO. Investment in sewerage infrastructure has been increased in the budget to \$5.4m. Are you able to provide us with a bit of insight on what improvements this can lead to for Power and Water customers?

Mr THOMSON: Yes, if it is okay with the committee, I will get John Pudney to talk us through that.

Mr PUDNEY: This year we have a number of capital works programs that will provide benefit in the waste water area. One of our largest projects is the inlet works at the infrastructure Leanyer Sanderson treatment plant. This is one of our high priorities within environmental risk sites. It is the first stage of many upgrades at the Leanyer Sanderson treatment plant. The inlet works is about filtering and taking out a range of fine materials—I do not think we need to go into the detail. It will provide significant benefit. It will also allow us to then to work on the further enhancements within the existing ponds and to look at future treatment options.

That Leanyer Sanderson, which takes the whole of the northern suburbs effluent, is a major site and major investment. It has been there 40 years and this is the first time we are able to take a big step forward in that 40 years. We will see some performance improvements and some environmental improvements.

Also, there is an odour control unit built into that which will provide some level of benefit as well to the surrounding suburbs. Having said that, any pond system will generate a small amount of odour.

I point out that we have a small amount of works in Alice Springs to finish off. It is a significant milestone in the Alice Springs treatment plant just outside Alice Springs. Our milestone is about achieving almost 100% no discharge into the Ilparpa Swamp. Some people may remember that during rainfall events in Alice Springs in the past ...

Mr PAECH: Yes, very familiar with the area.

Mr PUDNEY: ... we discharged into the Ilparpa Swamp and sometimes there was some flows of storm water with a small mixture of effluent. I am very pleased to say that the final works that are currently under way now will see almost no flows unless there is some major storm, like a one-in-a-hundred-year storm.

There are other minor capital works programs associated with waste water. In the regions is the Borroloola fencing program and some other minor treatment upgrades. Our major project of approximately \$15m investment is at Leanyer Sanderson.

Mr PAECH: The budget for remote operations capital infrastructure increased by \$40m from last year, doubling the budget. Can you outline what is behind this increase and how it is going to improve the lives of people living in the bush?

Mr THOMSON: We have a lot of ageing assets in the bush. There is a replacement program where we are trying to replace a lot of that aging infrastructure. As well as that we are preparing to support the housing program going forward as well. We are doing a lot of work on upgrading sewerage ponds out there, putting in new water systems, getting some dual water reticulation in communities where water is scarce and we are also trying to secure some of those future water supplies for water-constrained communities.

We are not the funding agency for that. We are responsible for delivering the program of works.

Mr PAECH: On the topic of water, your agency or corporation is currently working with the government on identifying alternative water sources for communities such as Yuendumu and Mount Liebig?

Mr THOMSON: Yes, we are, and if you would like more detail I am happy to call up David, who is our general manager for the Indigenous remote communities.

Mr PAECH: I have one or two questions which I want to ask first, which may require John to be here.

Can you talk about the importance of your plans to design, procure, construct and commission new metering assets? I am looking at what transformation or innovation will be happening.

Mr THOMSON: We see smart meters, whether water or power, to be a key enabler for infrastructure going forward. John may have more to say on the water meters. By getting the water smart meters into communities and Darwin, we are able to detect leaks so we can preserve water. It is a precious commodity, and we do not have to drill so much.

It brings in our CapEx program so we do not have to spend as much securing new water and it allows us to defer potentially future water sources and supplies. You would have also seen we have done some advertising around checking leaks around Darwin. We are finding about one in eight households has leaks.

We are saving consumers and Territorians on average about \$800 per household where the leaks are identified.

What that does is bring down the total water demand. If we have to build a dam in the future it moves out so that is a benefit to the whole community in terms of less infrastructure spend.

Mr PAECH: I am curious what benefits will come with the commissioning of the Wickham Point INPEX natural gas line in terms of bringing jobs and energy security.

Mr THOMSON: I will defer to Antoni Murphy, who is our General Manager for Gas.

Mr MURPHY: In terms of the infrastructure that is likely to have to support emergency arrangements, but it is more the Northern Gas Pipeline, and that is where you will see a lot of job creation around the Tennant Creek area with construction with Jemena building the pipeline. That is a project that Power and Water has helped to underwrite.

We are supplying a company on the east coast, because it is going to connect to the east coast, and it will open opportunities to sell our gas on that market. There will be jobs created in the development of that pipeline.

Mr PAECH: I might come back to the CEO. I am interested if you can outline how and if revenues are expected to evolve.

Mr THOMSON: Certainly. We have arrangements on the gas supply where we take a certain amount of gas on a gas take-or-pay arrangement and to the extent that we do not use that gas, it sits there until we can sell it or we use it. The more customers we can generate, the better it is in terms of growing our revenue. We also have arrangements where at a certain point, when we have sold a certain amount of volume, we then move into half-price gas, which then allows us to increase our revenues and our profitability even more by being able to sell a certain amount of gas at half the price.

Again, in the Territory we have well-priced gas, and the northern pipeline will allow us to move that gas to Mount Isa where there is demand for gas through the industry and power station there. That pipeline will give us a major market, at least in Mount Isa, and there is further work to be done about pipelines or transport to the east coast, but certainly to Mount Isa. We see that as a key way to move our gas, which we have.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, I believe you have time for one more question.

Mr PAECH: Good, because I have one more to go. How are your financial metrics expected to change over the forecast horizon? I am talking about the return on equity or the return on assets.

Mr THOMSON: I will hand over to our very capable CFO.

Mr SIFORD: That is good. I turn to the SCI document, which is a public document, and we set out in a lot of detail a number of key financial metrics, and we have included more and more relevant metrics compared to prior years. In terms of key measures that we look at, such as return on capital employed, the cash flow generated by our operations, the ratios of our profits to our interests that we have to pay on government borrowings, we see a steady improvement forecast through the SCI period. This is both through an evolution of revenue that includes gas, but also with water and electricity prices increasing broadly at CPI.

There is also a big focus on controlling the costs in the business and finding a balance with the levers available to us, and the balance between essential services provision and making a sustainable return to government. When we put that all together through the planning process, which was a bottom-up planning process that was different in prior years, we see that steady improvement in metrics through the SCI period, and in the outer years of the plan we are forecast to make a small dividend return to government.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions?

Mr PAECH: No further questions. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Madam CHAIR: That now concludes this session. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for appearing before the committee today. The committee will take a short break before we return to consider the Jacana Energy Corporation. Thank you all.

The committee suspended.

JACANA ENERGY

Madam CHAIR: I welcome Ms Clare Milikins, Deputy Chair of the Jacana Energy Board. Ms Milikins, please introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Ms MILIKINS: I wish to offer my apologies for Mr Noel Faulkner, who is Chair of the Jacana Energy GOC. He is unable to attend these hearings today.

With me is Victor Browner, Chief Executive Officer of Jacana; Danny Moore, Executive Manager Sales and Strategy; and Michael Hoare, Chief Financial Officer.

Madam CHAIR: Ms Milikins, I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then move on to consider policy questions regarding the corporation's 2017–18 Statement of Corporate Intent. I will then invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by the shadow.

Ms Milikins, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of Jacana Energy?

Ms MILIKINS: This year, 2016–17, is Jacana Energy's third year of operation as an independent government-owned corporation and retailer. This is our third Statement of Corporate Intent. Jacana Energy, this year, expects to exceed its Earnings Before Interest and Tax, EBIT, target that we set in the 2016–17 Statement of Corporate Intent, as we did in 2015–16.

We have invested a lot of energy in improving our greater service to our customers and introduced a lot of measures to help customers avoid disconnection. It is a competitive electricity market with a number of separate players in the market, and Jacana Energy is in a competitive environment. In the commercial market, where most of the competition exists, we have performed above the expectations. Jacana Energy has also performed exceptionally well in the sector-wide employment survey, achieving an employment engagement score of 76%.

Jacana Energy's cost to serve remains one of our main challenges. This is the cost that we can control in terms of the value that we add to the cost to serve a customer. We are challenged because we have a relatively small number of customers compared to other jurisdictions. We have a number of initiatives aimed at tackling this cost to serve, including introducing electronic billing so that we are not relying on postal services, an online portal to provide customers with information about their account and self-service opportunities, and bill smoothing to help avoid the shock of large and seasonal bills which we experience in the Territory.

We are also working on how we can improve the way we support our customers who are experiencing financial hardship. We have a number of specific challenges: the direct cost of supply exceeds our revenue, thus the need for a community service obligation; we can only influence around 23% of our revenue and 3% of our costs; and whilst retail prices compare favourably to other jurisdictions, consumption in the Territory is high, meaning that people experience very large electricity bills.

The renewable energy sphere is also one of the challenges we have to bring in, and we are excited about doing so. We welcome questions from the committee on our SCI and this introductory statement.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you very much. Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Mr PAECH: I just want to confirm, when you are talking about the electronic notifications, is that the wonderful text message that reminds you your bill is due?

Ms MILIKINS: That is the text message. You will also receive SMS messages if you are overdue and are in danger of disconnection.

Mr PAECH: I have not been in danger of disconnection.

Statement of Corporate Intent 2017-18

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider questions relating to Jacana Energy's 2017–18 Statement of Corporate Intent. Are there any questions, including questions from the public?

Ms NELSON: I do not have any questions from the public, but I have a few questions, if I may. Jacana Energy is a small agency, correct? How many employees are there?

Ms MILIKINS: Yes, we are a small entity.

Mr BROWNER: We currently have about 58 full-time employees.

Ms NELSON: Out of the 58 full-time employees, how many are considered to be front line?

Mr BROWNER: By front line, are you talking about customer service front line?

Ms NELSON: Yes.

Mr BROWNER: That would be our call centre. We have people manning phones in our customer call centre; we have about 34. That would include call centre and credit services as well.

Ms NELSON: So 34 frontline employees?

Mr BROWNER: Out of about 58, so the bulk of our team.

Ms NELSON: Out of the 58 employees you have at Jacana, how many identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Mr BROWNER: Do we have that breakdown, Michael?

Ms MILIKINS: Madam Chair, I am just going to pass that question across to Michael Hoare.

Mr HOARE: The number that we have is three, which represents about 5% of our total staff.

Ms NELSON: What policies or strategies do you have in place to increase that number?

Mr HOARE: We are currently looking at a program, which is not fully developed at the moment, but that is one of the things that we have in our plan for the next 12 months for how we will improve that percentage moving forward.

Ms NELSON: Under your second strategic objective, can you explain what policies you have in place or are planning to implement to protect vulnerable customers?

Ms MILIKINS: Jacana Energy offers customers experiencing financial hardship support through long-term payment plans. They are able to go on short-term payment plans and then extend those out for longer term over six months. Short term is up to three weeks and then longer term extends out so customers are able to spread that out.

We also provide payment vouchers externally through a number of organisations, such as Somerville, St Vincent de Paul, CatholicCare, Salvation Army and Anglicare of \$35 000 to provide e-vouchers to their customers. All those vouchers have been used this year.

We are investing significant effort into looking at a better approach to hardship management that provides more education to customers and helps them out in the longer term.

Mr PAECH: Many years ago, before the structural separation occurred, residents could have a monitoring device that would tell them when they were using their peak power loads. Is that something that Jacana Energy works to do or does it still remain a responsibility of Power and Water?

Mr MOORE: The technology you are talking about there is reliant on meter capability and communications with that meter. The metering is the responsibility of Power and Water Corporation. That is something that we are working collaboratively with them on around the future roadmap there and how we can bring some of those tools that help customers manage their consumption and therefore their bills.

Mr PAECH: Thank you for clarifying. Just for the record, Jacana Energy's area of power is in urban centres and they are for industrial businesses?

Mr MOORE: That is correct. In addition we also service what we call the minor centres on the Stuart Highway, places like Ti Tree, Elliott et cetera. So, we retail in those centres. We do not retail in the remote Indigenous communities, they remain with Power and Water under the Indigenous Essential Services charity. We also supply in Yulara and Kings Canyon.

Ms NELSON: You spoke briefly about your funding, your independent government-owned agency, is this correct?

Ms MILIKINS: Yes, we are a government-owned corporation.

Ms NELSON: Are you totally self-funded?

Ms MILIKINS: No. We have a community service obligation and our cost of inputs, our electricity and network costs exceed our revenue. The Territory, as you are aware, operates on a uniform tariffs system where everybody pays the same for their electricity, essentially in that urban sphere or right across the board. As a result, that means there is a shortfall. So, we receive a community service obligation for that shortfall.

Ms NELSON: Under your four strategic objectives, can you talk about how you are minimising the costs? Can you explain a bit about that, to serve while improving the customer experience with the introduction of a new billing system? Keeping in mind you are a small agency of 58, what are you doing to improve the customer experience?

Ms MILIKINS: Customer experience is very important to Jacana Energy because we do operate in a competitive environment; there are competitors out there, and the other retailers have opportunities to access the community service obligation as well. If we are not effective with our customers then we will not have customers anymore.

Territorians are some of the highest consumers of electricity across Australia, and by helping customers build an understanding of how they use their electricity and their consumption through providing more informative bills we aim to help them manage those costs.

With our new retail operating system it is easier to understand bills with additional information, including benchmarking against other households so you can understand where you have areas to improve. We have the option coming in with our new system to provide bill smoothing. As you are aware, we have peak periods of electricity consumption in the Territory during the Wet Season, when it is excessively hot. As a result we tend to have the bill shock period in January/February, after Christmas. I think probably all of us that have lived here a period of time understand that.

For some people that is very difficult to manage, so with our new system we are looking at the ability to provide estimated consumption across the period—provide people the ability to pay that on a monthly basis, and thus reduce those hits at the difficult times of year. Currently our system does not allow that but the new retail operating system will.

We want to make it easier for customers to deal with us. Everyone is looking at online and electronic billing nowadays, and that is where we are going with the new system, simplifying the new payment process and avoiding payment errors, which are another big issue for us currently, and providing self-service options through an online portal with phone automation, providing customers with easy access to their bills and bill history through their account, and easier methods of making changes to your account.

Our cost to serve is one of our biggest challenges. With only around 80 000 customers it will always be a challenge. We will never hit the economies of scale that other jurisdictions hit. But we are looking at ways to use the digital capability to reduce those costs, such as avoiding postage and printing and invoice delivery delay, thus avoiding bad debts.

We are looking at better servicing products that will benefit higher customer retention and therefore reduce costs per customer. Costs per customer go up if you have to connect, disconnect and change accounts.

We are making sure our system conforms to national standards so we can eliminate the risks of having to change again as the electricity market evolves in the Territory. That is the primary focus of the retail

operating system. It has been a long time in the design; we have invested a lot of effort into it and we are really excited for when it comes online.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Mr PAECH: I am interested in Jacana Energy. Do you set the commercial tariffs for the power consumption for commercial businesses?

Mr BROWNER: The commercial and industrial customers, above 750 megawatt hours per annum—we set the rates with those customers, so it is a competitive market. We negotiate those tariffs with our customers in that space.

Mr PAECH: In regard to someone living in a community such as Alice Springs on a town camp, if they were to move to a power card system—is that Jacana or Power and Water?

Mr BROWNER: We have prepayment meters in the areas of our jurisdiction. Alice Springs is one of those areas. That would be one of our customers on a prepayment meter.

Mr PAECH: When a customer buys a power card, it is essentially Jacana Energy receiving the revenue?

Mr BROWNER: If it is in our jurisdiction. Power and Water also have prepayment meters in their remote communities, so it does not necessarily follow that the revenue flows to us from anyone paying via power card.

Mr PAECH: If someone applies for hardship, what is the period of time or is it an individually negotiated process? If I am late on my power bill and want to avoid disconnection and want to do a payment plan, what plans are on offer?

Mr BROWNER: In the future power plants will look remarkably like mobile phone towers. But that is a conversation for another time.

We have a process for people struggling to pay their bills. We urge all people struggling to pay their bills to communicate with us. Our preference is to keep people continuing to pay part of the bill, as opposed to disconnecting customers. It is not in our interest commercially and does not sit with us philosophically in regard to our values.

It is on a case-by-case basis, but we have a structured program for ensuring that customers do engage with us before we disconnect. We go to great lengths to make sure we communicate with customers before disconnecting. To give you some stats on payment plans—last financial year, 2015-16, we offered about 15 000 payment plans throughout the year.

Mr PAECH: Of 88 000?

Mr BROWNER: Yes. In this financial year we are offering about 22 000, so predictably, as part of the economic cycle we are experiencing in the Northern Territory and elsewhere in Australia, we are seeing an increased number of customers who have to be put on those plans.

Mr PAECH: What are the figures for connection, disconnection and reconnection? How much am I expected to pay if I want to connect to Jacana, if I am disconnected because I have not paid and want to reconnect?

Mr BROWNER: I will see if we have those numbers on hand. They are published on our website.

Mr PAECH: I will save you the trouble and look there. I have your website up right now, so I can look.

Mr BROWNER: It is that kind of self-service we are trying to promote.

Ms UIBO: What sorts of tariffs are placed on late payments for a power bill?

Mr MOORE: There is no tariff penalty on a late payment. The tariff is uniform across the Territory and is applied the same way; however, if you are disconnected then reconnected there are some additional fees involved.

Madam CHAIR: I am looking at switching over to prepaid because I will require some bill smoothing. What would be the process and what costs would I be out of pocket for?

Mr BROWNER: There is a fee associated with installing a prepaid meter. I understand that fee is in the order of \$500 to \$800 for a meter install. One of the complexities is that Power and Water, which has the responsibility for installing the meter, is struggling with finding enough prepayment meters of the old style, so it is looking at new meters for installing as prepayment meters. They are what we would call advanced or smart meters.

Whether the fee is still \$500 going forward I am not sure. The tariff you are charged for use of power will be a bit higher than a normal residential tariff, because included in that tariff is bundled as a fixed component. Most households will get a fixed daily charge and a variable charge, but a prepaid meter you blend the fixed component into. It is a slightly higher variable charge.

Mr MOORE: As the person responsible for marketing the organisation, I pick up on the latter part of your question on bill smoothing. There will be no charges involved to sign up for that. They will need you to make regular payments when it comes in, so it would almost replicate the same structure as a prepayment meter.

Madam CHAIR: That now concludes this session. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for appearing before us today. The committee will now take a short break before considering the outputs related to Territory Generation.

The committee suspended.

TERRITORY GENERATION

Madam CHAIR: I would like to welcome Mr David De Silva, Chair of the Territory Generation Board. Mr De Silva, please introduce the officers accompanying you this evening.

Mr DE SILVA: To my left is Mr Tim Duignan, the CEO of Territory Generation, and to my right is Mr Steve Bartlett, who is the CFO of Territory Generation. I would also like to welcome members of our executive team who are sitting behind us: Mr Andrew Kneebone and Rebecca Mills, both very valued members of our team.

Madam CHAIR: Mr De Silva, I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then move on to consider policy questions regarding the corporation's 2017–18 Statement of Corporate Intent. I will invite the shadow minister to ask the questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by shadow minister.

Mr De Silva would you like to make an opening statement regarding Territory Generation?

Mr DE SILVA: It gives me great pleasure to be here representing the organisation and to provide you with an update on Territory Generation's activities over the past 12 months, including the recent release of the 2017–18 Statement of Corporate Intent. I am not sure if the committee has seen the Statement of Corporate Intent. If you would like, I can hand out hard copies of the document for you, if it will be of any assistance you.

Before I proceed into the opening statement I would like to say I am very humbled to lead an organisation that is innovative and totally engaged in its role in providing electricity generation to Northern Territorians. It starts with my board members: Ms Leanne Bond, who is the Deputy Chair; Mr Jon Hubbard; and Mr John Tourish, who joined us last year.

We have gone through a very exciting, whirlwind 12 months and that has been a reflection on things that are happening not just here in the Northern Territory, but right across the country and globally. I have to acknowledge the great input from the employees of Territory Generation, who have excelled in helping us achieve our vision to be the trusted and respected employer and electricity generation business of choice.

It is with some pride that I say our vision to the business as the business of choice is becoming increasingly important, and when I reflect on projections of where we said we would be—we are there and the energy industry is heading there very quickly.

We are sitting here today in the immediate context of the eyes of the nation following delivery of the Finkel report which has just come out nationally, and we are waiting for the report from the renewables energy expert panel here in the Northern Territory. We have submitted a submission to that panel.

Renewable energy strategies have been delivered across other jurisdictions. The global movement is moving to meet the Paris Agreement, and we are all well aware of the difficulties facing South Australia and other jurisdictions due to efforts to meet these targets.

Finally, I will mention Territory Generation's in-depth analysis of many of these issues, including our own yet-to-be-released renewables strategy, as well as our final guiding report, which has been provided to the renewables panel, as I mentioned previously.

These are indeed global issues and this has been reflected in many of the questions we have heard asked earlier this week in this committee. Indeed, much of the work being done by Territory Generation is concentrated on robust modelling for what our future renewables target might look like.

Our modelling is up to date and is as advanced as any in any other jurisdiction. If I can be so bold, and without pre-empting any reports that are to be published, I will offer the observation that our modelling might be right on the money, because the outcomes and trends that we have reported on are very similar to what has been reported in the Finkel report. The only thing is that we were first. Otherwise, we have captured the move to renewables in our 2017–18 SCI and that represents the final stage within the first three-year reporting period that was outlined at our inception three years ago.

The SCI reaffirms Territory Generation's journey towards the achievement of the vision that commenced at those embryonic stages. The key drivers of change occurring in the external business landscape not only include the moves towards the government's renewables target of 50% by 2030, but the impending development of the new wholesale electricity market, significantly reducing forecast demands in all regions due to increased penetration of rooftop and industrial commercial solar installations, as well as the utility scale new entry.

These factors combined continue to pose a significant threat to our business and its commercial performance. The electricity industry is undergoing significant and rapid global change, and this has been recognised by both the Chief Minister and the Treasurer earlier this week. The combination of the size of the market, the competition factor together with rapid change within the industry and technology are all paying a part in directly affecting T Gen's performance and future.

All the current data suggests that this will occur within a very short time frame, possibly as early as 2021. I will come back to that in due course.

In response, T Gen must continue to become more efficient so that we are competitive and withstand the threat posed by destruction of technology as well as any future competitors, secure our future and take control of our own destiny, keep up with the rapid moves globally towards renewable energy future and provide an adequate financial return for our shareholder.

The need to change is not driven solely by competition. T-Gen recognises its responsibilities to our stakeholders—that is, our shareholders, customers and the community—to produce electricity as efficiently and reliably as possible. In doing so our focus is about getting the balance right by replacing existing ageing machinery and technology with new, state-of-the-art, world-first renewables and ensuring adherence to the three key principles of reliability, cost and sustainability.

One of the key challenges we have made enormous progress on is our approach towards a new operating model in the majority of our sites and the incredible benefits this will provide our organisation for the future. This will become increasingly evident towards the end of this year, and the expectations will shift towards potential growth opportunities in the years 2018 onwards as the new operating model starts to take shape. By the end of 2017 there will be significant upgrades to our asset fleet, particularly in the southern region, which will be complete, and the new remote operations centre will come online for all T Gen sites.

The culmination of these significant projects means that, in effect, this SCI heralds the end of what we have termed the old world operating model and the active transition to a more contemporary model. Part of this includes the transition to renewables.

Much of the change that is afoot globally cannot be stopped. We are a rollercoaster ride and it is moving quickly. Our effort needs to be focused on transitioning T Gen, particularly our employees on that journey, adhering to our key values and principles, namely, focus, integrity, respect, safety and team work. There is no doubt that of all of these, we place safety as the highest priority and importance, and we have introduced sweeping changes that have the ultimate goal of addressing these issues.

Our safety record in regard to lost time injury is one to be envied. During the first week of May, Channel Island and Weddell workers got together to celebrate the milestone of 1000 days lost time injury free. It is an extraordinary achievement.

Aside from safety one of the key operational performance indicators ...

Madam CHAIR: Can I intervene there. Do you have much more?

Mr DE SILVA: Not much more at all.

Madam CHAIR: There are a couple of questions so I might cease it there and we will get into the questions.

Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Statement of Corporate Intent 2017–18

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider questions relating to Territory Generation's 2017–18 Statement of Corporate Intent. Are there any related questions, including questions from the public?

Ms UIBO: I hold some questions from the public. There are three questions from Mr Christopher Walsh. What is TGen's position on the role renewable energy has as a primary source of energy in the Northern Territory.

Mr DE SILVA: I will hand over to our CEO, Mr Duignan, on this question. I can say we have an advanced plan in place. We are in the process of announcing that we will have a battery system in place in Alice Springs, which is very exciting.

Mr DUIGNAN: In mid-June 2016 we had developed an alternative and renewable energy strategy for Territory Generation to establish a vision for us for the transition towards a renewable future.

That vision we set with the Board and some of the key stakeholders, particularly in Alice Springs was that the majority of T-Gen's baseload electricity supply in each of its existing markets will be from renewable energy sources by 2030, which is a very big target considering it is focused on baseline electricity requirements and not capacity.

The renewable and alternative energy strategy established the vision to 2030 and beyond. It provides a road map for the adoption and integration of renewable and alternative energy strategies and is a very important strategic focus area for us.

One key thing for Territory Generation is over the next 10 to 15 years a significant part of our existing portfolio comes to end of life. In the vicinity of 200 megawatts of capacity comes to end of life. There are some significant questions to be answered over the coming years on how we replace that and what technologies we use. For the Territory it provides a significant opportunity in the movement towards renewables in all the centres we service in the Northern Territory to achieve that 50% renewables by 2030.

As David alluded to, we are very excited that we have just received approval from our shareholding minister to proceed with the battery energy storage system in Alice Springs. This will be a five megawatt system that will be capable of supplying energy for up to 40 minutes into that grid. It provides two things: stability in the network so the reliability and supply security for Alice Springs will be greatly improved with the installation of that technology; but more importantly, it enables more renewable energy sources to be implemented in the Alice Springs grid.

Alice Springs has been very successful with the uptake of renewable energy in the form of solar generation and has achieved about 40% penetration against the average demand across the year in Alice Springs. It is a great effort. The problem with that—the system controller earlier alluded to the fact it brings some supply security and stability issues with the intermittency of that renewable source. This battery system will reset the level back to zero so much more or doubling up of the solar into Alice Springs will be able to be achieved over the coming years.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, the second question from Mr Walsh. What initiatives has T-Gen undertaken in the renewal space since September 2016?

Mr DE SILVA: Since that time, T-Gen has lodged a final submission to the renewable energy expert panel; that was 9 June 2017. We recognise that we are coming from a reliance on fossil fuels in the form of natural gas and diesel, and we consider that to be a transition fuel to get us to the renewables. Once again, I will pass over to our CEO for elaboration on that point.

Mr DUIGNAN: I think a couple of the initiatives I have outlined, particularly the battery storage system, have been a big advance towards that renewable transition. The two power stations that we are currently either upgrading or enhancing, being Owen Springs Power Station in Alice Springs and the Tennant Creek power station—both of those projects will help to transition to renewable energy and support more solar power into those communities moving forward.

We have looked at a number of different technologies and, as David alluded to with regard to our submission to the renewable energy panel, we have looked at many different ways to actual transition the Darwin–Katherine regions to more renewables. The Darwin–Katherine region offers a number of challenges, largely through the Wet Season, where it becomes very cloudy and we have long periods of rain, which disrupts the production of solar power. To overcome that we have to look to different technologies and storage systems to enable us to fully achieve the target set by the government for the 50% renewables by 2030. We have done a lot of modelling around that and the costs associated with the transition of the Northern Territory renewables future, particularly around hitting that target in 2030.

A key thing that has shown up in that modelling—I think the Chief Minister alluded to this—is that doing nothing is not an option. It will not organically get there on its own. There needs to be a managed transition to get to the 50% renewables by 2030. Our modelling indicates about 30% to 32% of the energy would be served by renewable energy by 2030 if we just took a business as usual approach. We are very focused on planning for that future to achieve the goals that the government has set, and they are clearly on our horizon as the targets to meet.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, the third and final question from the public with Mr Christopher Walsh. Please provide evidence that T-Gen is on track to achieve the government's target. That is what you were just talking about, so I think it is safe to say we have answered that one.

Mr PAECH: Is wind a possible source for the Top End? I am only thinking that because of cyclones; there is a lot of wind there. I am sure it is far more complex than that.

Mr DUIGNAN: Thanks for that question. Onshore wind is not a great resource in the Darwin–Katherine region. There is a reasonable wind resource down around Tennant Creek across the Barkly, but one of the big advances in wind technology is floating wind turbines, if you like. Using the same technology as they deploy for oil rigs in the North Sea is having turbines floating in the sea anchored to the ground. These become very cost effective to install. The work for us in the Darwin–Katherine region is to look at that offshore just out of sight from Darwin so we do not impede the visual amenity of the Darwin Harbour. I believe there is probably a reasonable resource there.

Mr DE SILVA: Clearly our focus has been on solar. That is because we have so much sun and the Central Australian experience is that, particularly in the Tennant–Katherine region, there is more sun than anywhere else in the country, so we put a lot of focus into that, more so than any other form of renewable.

Ms UIBO: Madam Chair, that concludes the questions from the public, but I have some further questions.

With reference to your KRA on the environment in terms of planned work, what plans does Territory Generation have to limit CO₂ emissions and improve the environment?

Mr DUIGNAN: With regard to our installation of new generation in at Owen Springs Power Station at Alice Springs and the Tennant Creek upgrade that we are currently doing, that will have significant impacts on

the CO₂ emissions out of those two regions, somewhere in the order of 15% to 25% reduction in the emissions through the vastly improved efficiency out of those new machines.

Just to give you a bit of an idea of the improvement in efficiency, the existing equipment runs at about 29% efficiency in Alice Springs. These machines will run at over 40% efficiency. That equates to a massive reduction in CO₂ emissions. You do not have to burn as much fuel to get the power out, effectively, therefore your CO₂ emission is well down.

As I have stated in the previous questions, we have a very big focus on renewable energy to reduce that carbon footprint. We have focused a program within Territory Generation to meeting sustainability targets that have been set and our first sustainability report will be published this year. That very much sets those targets around CO₂ and programs around reducing our emissions and other environmental footprint items.

Ms UIBO: Regarding internal processes with T-Gen, how will your remote operations centre help improve service delivery and reduce operating expenditure?

Mr DE SILVA: We are establishing the remote operations centre at Berrimah and all members of the committee are welcome to visit us when it becomes operational which will be in a few weeks' time. It is quite an exciting project that we have embarked on this year. It will operate all of the major power stations in the Northern Territory that T-Gen has jurisdiction over, Alice Springs, Yulara, Katherine, Tennant Creek and, of course, the Darwin–Katherine region.

It will centralise the despatch operation and monitoring of all of our assets, but we will also have backup location unmanned at Owen Springs for use during emergencies such as cyclones and the like that threaten the Top End. We will be able to move the lot down to central Australia.

It is a great opportunity for the Territory and we are looking at spring-boarding off that to provide it to other future customers in due course.

Ms UIBO: In regard to customer satisfaction, considering you have so few customers, how can you measure their satisfaction accurately and what are your plans to improve customer satisfaction?

Mr DE SILVA: We have just released our first customer satisfaction survey to each of the retailers in the market that we provide power to. The purpose of the survey is to identify opportunities and improve how we structure our product and services.

Ms UIBO: In regard to workplace safety, what does T-Gen have planned to improve safety in its operational work sites?

Mr DE SILVA: This is one area we have moved a long way from where we were three years ago. We are implementing, at present, upgraded integrated induction training and a permit to work system. As well as a new incident management system, a new safety improvement forum has been established for employees to improve our safety systems.

A new switched on safety leadership and coaching program has been implemented to improve capability of frontline supervisors and managers.

Mr DUIGNAN: I think the thousand-day LTI-free record over the past three years stands as a good indicator of our focus on safety. We have not always gotten it right, but we are working with our employees and the ETU as a stakeholder in our business. Our employee representative is paramount to us and we encourage their participation with us on our sites as another set of eyes on the safety aspect of our business.

Ms UIBO: How are your financial metrics expected to change over the forecast horizon, such as return on equity and return on assets?

Mr BARTLETT: In regard to our future forecast, we are a commercial organisation, so we are subject to competition. I am happy to share the details of our metrics with the committee in confidence.

Having said that we are dependent on at least two key factors for our future metrics. One is the Roadmap to Renewable which is being developed and will be handed down in due course through the expert panel. The other is one of our key inputs, that is, the gas supply. At the moment we have a short-term gas supply arrangement with PWC which expires on 30 June 2018.

We are currently in negotiations with Power and Water for the long-term gas supply agreement. That has a huge bearing on what our future financial position will be. Where we sit right now, based on the assumptions we have made within our SCI, we see our financial metrics improving over the course of this SCI period towards the stated key result areas we are attempting to achieve in relation to return on equity and other key metrics.

Madam CHAIR: I see our time has reached its end, so that concludes this session. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for appearing before us today.

That now concludes the committee's public hearing process on the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2017–18, and the Statements of Corporate Intent for the Power and Water Corporation, Jacana Energy and Territory Generation.

I remind officers that all answers to questions taken on notice must be given to the First Clerk Assistant by 13 July 2017.

On behalf of the committee, I extend my thanks to the ministers, board chairs and officials that appeared before the committee. I also take this opportunity to place on the public record my appreciation of the assistance provided by agency staff. I also thank the members of this committee and other members who participated in the hearings for the work they have put in, and for the overall manner in which these public hearings have been conducted.

Thank you also to the Legislative Assembly staff, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the whole process ran smoothly.

I now formally close these public hearings of the Estimates Committee.

The committee concluded.
