

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.03 am.

## MINISTER MOSS' PORTFOLIOS

### ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

#### Report No 1 – Department of Environment and Natural Resources 2017 Report

**Madam CHAIR:** I welcome you and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you this morning.

**Ms MOSS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Today I am joined by Chief Executive Jo Townsend. We are also supported by her executive team. I will let you know who is available here for questions this morning: Mrs Vicki Highland on my right, Corporate Services; Mr Paul Purdon, Environment Protection; Dr Alaric Fisher, Flora and Fauna Division; Ms Collene Bremmer, Bushfires NT; Mr Luis da Rocha, Rangelands; and Mr Simon Cruickshank in Water Resources. They will also be available as we move through the annual report to answer questions you may have.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

I would like to acknowledge that we gather this morning on the land of the Larrakeyah people and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

Minister, I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to both your statement and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources annual report.

**Ms MOSS:** Madam Chair, I will start by acknowledging that there are a couple of other annual reports that have been tabled that are complementary to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources annual report—the annual report of the NTEPA and the *Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Act*.

The government has been very clear in our focus on the environment in making sure we protect and preserve it and its role as part of a really healthy and strong economy in the Northern Territory.

This is a commitment that has been underpinned by a focus on environmental reform, which I am very pleased the department has been working exceptionally hard on. Our focus on community involvement in water allocation including the provision of strategic Aboriginal water reserves, transparent science based water licencing decisions, and the effect of regulation of mining and petroleum activities.

I would like to acknowledge and take the opportunity today to thank Jo and her team and the department for the work that they do. The very critical environmental protection and advice they provide as well as that natural resource assessment, monitoring and land management advice on services that ensure the conservation and sustainable use of resources across the Northern Territory.

The work of the department is to also provide services and programs to mitigate threats posed by wild fire, pests and weeds and is crucial to the effective management of our resources and protection to the environment and the community across the Northern Territory. We have certainly seen that this year in the incredible work of Bushfires NT and their volunteers.

The department was formed on 12 September 2016 and comprises of the former Department of Land, Resource and Management outputs with those of the environment group of the former Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment.

Some highlights and overview of what the department has achieved over the 12 months to 30 June 2017, include the introduction of the new *Bushfires Management Act*, which provided contemporary legislation to support our volunteer fire fighters and more robust planning framework. It involved the establishment of water advisory committees and water allocation planning activities across the Northern Territory.

In February there was the launch of the Water Licence Decision Portal. The department has been conducting flood monitoring and mapping to assist in land planning decisions and disaster management planning. There was the revision of the five-year management plan for the salt water crocodile in the Northern Territory. Completion of action plans for priority threatened species; the commencement of the implementation of the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program; publishing soil and land suitability mapping, identifying around 120°000 hectares of arable land on Aboriginal pastoral and Crown land; the finalisation of weed management plans for the Athel Pine and grader grass; undertaking rangeland monitoring activities on 63 of 224 pastoral leases;

and the department also advises on environmental policy as well as environmental approvals; undertaking environmental impact assessment and compliance activities.

It also provides services to the NTEPA having an important assessment role in proposed developments and ensuring those developments proceed with appropriate environmental mitigation. The activities of the NTEPA are detailed in the independent annual report, which was also tabled in November sittings and the important work of the NTEPA is led by its Chair, which during the year saw the appointment of Dr Paul Vogel, and any questions pertaining to the independent board of the NTEPA can be answered here by Mr Paul Purdon.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Dr Vogel and members of the NTEPA, which over the year undertook a range of activities supported by staff from the department including the finalisation of the environmental assessment reports for the Jemena Northern Gas Pipeline; Project Sea Dragon Stage 1 resumed Grow-out Facility; the core breeding centre and broodstock maturation stations for Sea Dragon; assessment of 26 notices of intent to determine if the projects required assessment under the *Environmental Assessment Act*; the issuing of 26 environment protection licences and approvals; responding to 879 pollution reports and providing around \$560,000 in grants to 20 organisations for projects to reduce environmental harm and promote sustainable behaviour.

They also implemented reforms to the Container Deposit Scheme introduced during the year. The *Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Act 2016–17* annual report was also tabled in the most recent sittings and highlighted that Territorians continue to support the Container Deposit Scheme with over 90 million containers collected over the year, which is the highest recorded to date. That is a fantastic achievement. The department will continue to provide that important advice and support.

Over coming months the department will be really busy with many activities from further work with our water advisory committees to see the finalisation of those water allocation plans, the implementation of the recommendations of the independent inquiry into water licences Independent Inquiry into Water Licences, the awarding of the ranger capital grants and land management conservation grants, public consultation on the coastal marine management strategy, the release of a draft Northern Territory carbon strategy, and the launch of the Mapping the Future program which will identify natural resource information to support regional development decisions.

That is at the same time as undertaking that major reform work through the development of a new environmental approval and management legislation and making amendments to both the *Water Act* and the *Pastoral Land Act*.

Since its inception the department has been focussed on those priorities and a number of commitments have been completed or well progressed. I welcome the opportunity to speak this morning on the annual report and the amazing work of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much, minister. I will now open up the committee for questions on both your statement and the annual report. Who would like to commence?

**Mr PAECH:** I want to turn your attention to page 19 where it talks about future legislative priorities. The second paragraph talks about the environmental regulatory reform. Are you able to give me an update of where you are at with that volume of work and what the timelines and process are for that?

**Ms MOSS:** This is a key commitment for us. Making sure that we have a robust environmental regulatory system in the Northern Territory is something that the department has been working very hard on. I acknowledge that Karen Avery is here.

Officers from within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources have been working alongside other agencies like the Department of Primary Industry and Resources on this significant body of work to make sure we can have a robust system in the Northern Territory that provides certainty to the protection of the environment and to industry as well.

During the reporting period we established an environmental reform program which will deliver those comprehensive reforms to the regulatory system. We will be amending the NTEPA to clarify the role, functions and responsibilities of the NTEPA. That is something we have been working through. It is a significant body of work. That is about improving accountability both to government and the community.

We will be reforming the *Environmental Assessment Act*, creating a fully-functioning *Environmental Protection Act* in the Territory, which will build on the *Waste Management Pollution Control Act*. We have

agreed to do that in two stages. The first stage is the reforms to the environmental impact assessment process and introducing the new environmental approval which will include minor amendments to the NTEPA. Stage two will address the waste legislation and development of the *Environmental Protection Act* which will commence later this year.

It is a significant body of work that the department is undertaking. There has already been the release of a discussion paper and some significant consultation with both the community and local environment groups. We will continue to make sure they are part of the process as we develop.

**Mr PAECH:** You mentioned the NTEPA. Has there been a conversation with them for recommendations that they believe could strengthen the role of their organisation and the role of reporting and accountability to government?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. I have met with the NTEPA board, as has the department, on a number of occasions. There is a very good relationship with the NTEPA. We have sought their feedback and will continue to, on how we can strengthen their role and make sure we support the strong work they do as an independent board.

**Mr PAECH:** Thank you.

**Mr MILLS:** The questions I am asking are on behalf of our colleague, Mr Wood, who is delayed. These are his questions, if there are supplementary questions you have of me I will do the best I can. I will read what he has written: I acknowledge what you said in your statement that the amount of recycling has increased but has the EPA looked at strategies to increase the recycling rates of containers, especially in rural and remote areas?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Blain, the Member for Nelson is across the NTEPA annual report and the Container Deposit Scheme annual report, but there is a range of work that the government does in partnership with non-government organisations that are focused on recycling. One of those organisations is, of course, Keep Australia Beautiful, they work on Tidy Towns and recycling programs.

We acknowledge that one of the challenges with the Container Deposit Scheme is how we can make sure regional areas can be involved in that. There are ongoing discussions that I have with local governments as I travel around, but I might pass over to Paul.

**Mr PURDON:** Paul Purdon, Executive Director Environment Protection. I head the environment division that supports the EPA in its administration of the Container Deposit Scheme. The overall response is that we are constantly trying to grow the scheme and the growth really needs to be out in the regions.

We are trying to do that in a number of ways. One is through our Environment Grants Program which has provided—I cannot remember the figure, we have it somewhere in our briefing—funds to communities, community groups and organisations out in the regions to establish our infrastructure to support container deposits, whether that is collection points and associated infrastructure or assistance with transport to and from regional centres with containers. That is one way the EPA, through their department, is supporting the scheme.

We also have a review of the scheme under way. That is a statutory review of the scheme, which has just kicked off. We have Ernst & Young conducting that review. One of the key aspects of the review will be providing advice to us based on input from a range of stakeholders on how we can expand the scheme further and what the things are we can do to improve that coverage across the Territory.

That review is due to be finalised about March next year and we are looking forward to that.

**Mr MILLS:** I would guess that Mr Wood would ask now: if you are making money available to organisations that are remote and that you are embarking on a review, can you tell me how those two activities are being—how you are engaging those that will be affected by such decisions, and how those who have the greatest interest in the decisions that may be made are involved in that process.

**Mr PURDON:** The reviewers have a fairly—we are developing a list now, but it is a fairly comprehensive list of organisations that they will be contacted through that review. For example, schools that either have or may wish to be involved in the scheme will be consulted as part of the review.

They will be consulting widely to get the information we need to help join those two dots.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. To assist us members of the Assembly, could you make available, question on notice, those organisations that you have identified as being important in this process?

**Ms MOSS:** Absolutely. Equally if there are stakeholders that the Member for Nelson or yourself think should be part of that process, or anybody, please feel free to be part of the process as well, we encourage that.

I also wanted to touch on what Paul talked about regarding the Environment grant.

**Mr MILLS:** That was my second one. If I may ...

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#### Question on Notice No 9.1

**Madam CHAIR:** I might just pop this question on notice. Member for Blain, can I ask you to clearly state that question for the record, please?

**Mr MILLS:** Can you provide to the committee, which organisations have been identified as being useful to the process of the review?

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

**Ms MOSS:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The number allocated is 9.1.

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**Mr PAECH:** Madam Chair, can I ask a question? Mr Mills, to further the container recycling ...

**Mr MILLS:** I have one other. There was indication of an amount of money that will be available. I am not sure whether it is necessary for it to be a question on notice. Can you reveal how much that amount is and how it will be managed?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Blain, the environment grants were provided in the 2016–17 year were to the value of \$1m. There were eight infrastructure grants provided that were relevant to the CDS, and they come to a total of \$139 852, which excludes GST. Those environment grants will be available again for community groups for a range of different activities—they are not just for recycling activities—in the next financial year.

We can take on notice if you would like more detail about ...

**Mr MILLS:** I believe that would be sufficient. Mr Wood can chase you up if he needs more.

**Ms MOSS:** I am sure he will.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much, minister. I move to the Member for Namatjira.

**Mr PAECH:** Minister, following on from the conversation that has just occurred, could you walk me through the process of what would happen in the instance that a remote Aboriginal community or outstation had an opportunity to recycle, but do not necessarily have the capacity to do so? Is there a process within the department by which someone goes out there, looks at what needs to be done and engages an organisation like Envirobank to start that process? Obviously, smaller communities and outstations do not have access to waste management resources and infrastructure that larger communities have.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Namatjira, again, it is a distinct focus of ours moving forward, particularly through the five-year review. We all acknowledge we can improve and make a big difference across our regional and remote areas. That is a distinct challenge due to things like population and proximity to deposit points across the Territory. It is something we continue to be committed to.

We are working with groups like Territory Natural Resource Management on a range of community activities. Through other non-government organisations and those environment grants we have been able to support some of those activities. To use an example, Territory Natural Resource Management has supported things like the boomerang bags we are seeing and a range of projects within schools across the Northern Territory. We work in partnership with them in a range of ways.

I will see if Paul would like to talk a bit more about that review process, but also how the department is working at the moment to help facilitate some of that work.

**Mr PURDON:** There is no formal process but it is very much an informal communication when the opportunity arises. We do quite a bit of work with regional councils on waste issues on a range of fronts. We have discussions about how we can improve resource recovery, litter or whatever within communities and promote the Environment Grants Program through that.

We are often contacted by regional councils or groups seeking advice on how they can be engaged. That is probably the most common way we are able to share information and put groups on the right track in terms of how we can support them, what they need to know, what they need to do and how they can potentially access funding to support their goals.

**Madam CHAIR:** Any further questions?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, certainly.

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, Member for Blain, I acknowledge the Member for Nhulunbuy. Thank you for joining us this morning.

**Mr MILLS:** Once again, a question from Mr Wood. Has the EPA had any discussions with New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia to endeavour to get containers in all states and the Territory having the same deposit, making it more efficient?

**Ms MOSS:** It is fantastic—we were recently at the Environment ministers' meeting. South Australia has had this system for quite some time, as have we. To see other jurisdictions looking at container deposit schemes and their set-up—the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has had ongoing discussions with the South Australian Government for a long time on consistencies between schemes, providing valuable feedback through those consultation processes as other jurisdictions move to set up the scheme.

There is this wide acknowledgement that we will have better outcomes nationally if we can take a consistent approach to these issues. The department has been working strongly with officials from other jurisdictions on the establishment of those schemes.

**Mr PURDON:** Formally and informally through working groups—formal submissions to New South Wales and Queensland, discussion papers et cetera, and informally through working groups those jurisdictions have set up. One technical example of how we are working together—because of the introduction of the New South Wales scheme and the need to change the labelling on containers so it accommodated Queensland and New South Wales, we are now preparing revised regulations for the Northern Territory act so it can accommodate a national label rather than a Northern Territory/South Australia label.

**Ms MOSS:** The plastic bag ban is a similar example where we have seen Queensland move towards changes in the last 12 months. That is another process the department has been involved in. Where we can share knowledge, we have been.

**Mr MILLS:** Once again from Mr Wood: on page 22 in your annual report you show a picture of an automatic deposit machine. These were originally to be set up in shopping centres and at CDU. Are any operating in the Territory, and if not, why not?

**Ms MOSS:** We will take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.2

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain, can you restate your question for the record.

**Mr MILLS:** On page 22 in your annual report you show a picture of an automatic deposit machine. These were originally to be set up in shopping centres and at CDU. Are any operating in the Territory, and if not, why not?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, that question on notice has been allocated the number 9.2.

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**Mr GUYULA:** Good morning, minister. I am happy to read about the work being done with elders and custodians to conserve bicultural knowledge in the Territory. Can you tell me a bit about this project? Will it extend to other parts of the NT?

**Ms MOSS:** I invite Dr Fisher to the table so he can give you some information. He will be happy to share some information about this great project. We value the work we do with traditional owners through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Parks and Wildlife and the Department of Tourism and Culture in regard to land management.

**Mr FISHER:** In answering this I need to acknowledge one of my staff, Glenn Wightman, who has worked tirelessly on this area for the past 30-odd years. He runs a program where, on invitation from traditional owners and communities, he works with a particular clan group, language group, to work particularly with old people out on country to record their knowledge of the plants and animals, their uses and the language names associated with them.

That is recorded, and with the permission of the custodians the information is being published in a series of books. There are about 35 of them. That is documented quite a high percentage—I cannot give you the exact figures of the language groups in the northern half of the Territory.

Glen is continuing to work. At the moment he is working with groups around the Elliott area, Ngukurr and in the Gulf. He works with groups that invite him to do that work. He is particularly targeting languages where unfortunately there are very few speakers still alive, particularly to capture that knowledge and document it in a permanent form.

**Mr GUYULA:** Thank you. I have one more question. I support the ranger programs and all the good work they do. I am also interested to know where you are working directly with elders who are maintaining their country by living on homelands. Are there any other programs and resources assisting them directly with care of their country? Burning off by walking on country, weed management, protecting waterways, patrolling illegal fishing areas et cetera in order to pass on this valuable knowledge from one generation to the next and keep that knowledge on the country?

**Ms MOSS:** I think Dr Fisher just highlighted a great example of some of the work that is happening across the department. Just to touch on the ranger programs, that is a very good mechanism for us to be able to support that work on country. We continue to progress through the grants program so we can support those ranger groups in the work that they do.

We have an advisory group that has been set up with representatives from across the Northern Territory to help guide that work.

I will give another example. It is work that the department is doing at many levels. Another example that I was talking with one of our staff members about recently, is the work that happening in Limmen National Park on the rock art sites in recording the incredible rock art. Some of our national parks in the Northern Territory are working with traditional owners in making sure the knowledge and stories are recorded and that we record the sites so important to traditional owners across the Northern Territory.

There are many examples across the department. Are there others you want to talk about?

**Mr FISHER:** Maybe if I could highlight a couple of others. It is true that the focus for much of our work is through the ranger groups because they are organised structures with programs to manage fire, weeds and ferals which is our core business. We assist them with that.

In a lot of other ways and often in more informal ways, we work with traditional owners on country. For example, we offer a lot of support to Indigenous protected areas and the managers of those protected areas. My staff sit on a number of the steering committees for those. We provide input into the management plans for those areas. Often that is in a highly consultative way with the senior traditional owners for those areas.

Another productive program we have been able to run for the past few years with external funding from the Commonwealth government is to work with communities to protect some key waterholes or to restore key waterholes in the desert.

Those waterholes are almost always of immense cultural value, as well as very important as a biological resource. Many of them have been seriously degraded by the impacts of feral animals and weeds. We have worked with senior traditional owners to start a restoration program at several of those waterholes, which in

some cases involves digging out a decade's worth of dead camels, for example, out of the waterholes and restoring stream flows. Even within the space of a year, the recovery has been quite obvious and the owners get quite emotional about seeing the country come back to life. That has been a very gratifying program to be involved in.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes. What I am trying to get at—it is about looking after the country, walking on it, living season-by-season in certain areas that our old people live on, cared for country and the country cared for it, and lived on bush tucker, season-by-season, going to other places. When you get towards the end of the year, they had done the whole cycle, done it properly looking after it, at the same time teaching young people. It would be good if there was any support—it might come into education later—and resources in teaching young leaders to carry on the job of maintaining resources, about flora and fauna and about looking after burn-offs and maintaining country on land. I want to keep that knowledge going.

**Ms MOSS:** Absolutely, Member for Nhulunbuy, as do we. It is vital and the work you are talking about is incredibly important for remote Territorians. To give some other examples, we focus in the fire, weed and feral work on our areas of highest value, whether it is cultural or natural value, across the Territory and work with relevant groups to make sure those areas are protected. The department is working with a range of groups in your region to make sure that happens as well.

I also wanted to touch on that, at a community level in Central Australia around the Todd River, the department has fire management—established a working group there with a range of different stakeholders. If you have some ideas or there are ways in which the department can help with some of that work, please, by all means, put people in touch with the department because it is often working with a range of different groups to support the important work you talk about. We need to ensure that young Territorians coming through have that opportunity to learn about caring for country.

**Mr GUYULA:** That is all, thank you.

**Mr MILLS:** Another question from Mr Wood. You mentioned the Kalkarindji Container Deposit Scheme. He says it is on page 23 or 25. A grant was provided to the Victoria Daly Regional Council for a can-crushing machine. Did the community receive payment for the containers based on each container or on the weight of the aluminium? Please do not ask me a supplementary question.

**Ms MOSS:** Can you talk us through that a bit more, Member for Blain? Can we take that one on notice?

**Mr MILLS:** That is quite reasonable.

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### Question on Notice No 9.3

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain, can I ask you to repeat the question for the record, please?

**Mr MILLS:** You mentioned the Kalkarindji container deposit scheme on page 23 or 25. It says a grant was provided to the Victoria Daly Regional Council for a can-crushing machine. Did the community receive payment for the containers based on each container or on the weight of the aluminium?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, are you happy to accept that question?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, I am.

**Madam CHAIR:** That question has been allocated the number 9.3.

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**Mr MILLS:** A further question. The EPA, under Dr Bill Freeland, intended to do a study of the cattle holding yards at Noonamah. Could you say if this study has been completed, what were the results of the study and if there was no study, why did it not happen?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Blain, we will take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 9.4**

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain, I will ask you to repeat that question, thank you.

**Mr MILLS:** The EPA, under Bill Freeland, intended to do a study of the cattle holding yards at Noonamah. Can you say if the study has been completed? What were the results of the study, and if there was no study, why did it not happen?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept that question.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 9.4.

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**Mr MILLS:** The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics is constructing drainage works at the headworks at Mitchell Creek. These drainage works area associated with the Palmerston hospital. Has the EPA inspected these works to see if they are detrimental to Mitchell Creek? For example, flooding downstream, pollution siltation, destruction of natural riparian vegetation, as well as the impacts of the construction drains in the Wet Season.

**Mr PURDON:** I have to take on notice whether they have inspected that site. We have a very broad regime of monitoring construction sites across the greater Darwin region, and around this time of year we are conscious of looking for erosion in control measures and how the incoming Wet Season will impact on creeks such as Mitchell Creek.

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**Question on Notice No 9.5**

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain, I will ask you to repeat that question, please.

**Mr MILLS:** The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics is constructing drainage works at the headworks at Mitchell Creek. These drainage works area associated with the Palmerston hospital. Has the EPA inspected these works to see if they are detrimental to Mitchell Creek?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, are you happy to accept the question?

**Ms MOSS:** I am.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 9.5.

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**Mr MILLS:** Your annual report mentions the prosecution of a company, Breakthrough NQ Pty Ltd, for burying uncategoryed waste at Humpty Doo. What was the outcome of the prosecution, has the site been fully remediated, and have you had any other cases of illegal dumping in the rural area?

**Mr PURDON:** The outcome of the prosecution was that the site needs to be fully remediated. I need to check and get an update on whether it has at this stage. I assume it has, but I need to confirm.

In terms of broader dumping across the rural area, this is an increasing issue for the EPA, not just the Darwin rural area but broadly across the Territory. We are receiving an increasing number of reports from the community about illegal dumping of waste.

We are not only responding to that in regard to the reports coming in, but preparing a broader strategy in waste management/dumping so we can address it on a range of fronts, not only from a prosecution approach but how to better educate the community and industry on how they should manage their land and what is not acceptable in regard to management of waste.

**Mr MILLS:** What is your capacity to respond to a report of illegal dumping? What resources do you have available to respond to a call from a community?

**Mr PURDON:** Do you want quantity or a general qualitative response?

**Mr MILLS:** How do you respond?

**Mr PURDON:** We would normally receive a call through our pollution hotline and then allocate an officer to respond. The response will be triaged depending on the range of other priorities we have in terms of pollution incidents that have been reported.

We get people out on site as soon as possible. Illegal dumping is often on Crown land, so we take someone with us from DIPL as the Crown land managers. We will inspect and see what we can find. In the case of illegal dumping, it is challenging to find the evidence that points to where the waste has come from. That is why the Breakthrough case Mr Wood referred to was such a unique case for us in that it was on someone's private property and we had very good information coming through from someone close to that operation, who helped us in getting the evidence we needed.

Generally, illegal dumping—and I think everyone sees it in the rural area—is very challenging to pursue, other than to find out it is there and hopefully get DIPL, for example, involved in trying to clean something up.

**Mr MILLS:** What role does the department play in the remediation? Can you walk through those steps for us please?

**Mr PURDON:** The remediation—well, there are two different roles. If you are looking at a case such as the Breakthrough case, where there is a court ordered remediation, we will advise the company doing the remediation and the company that was offending, of our expectations of that. We will set the outcomes that need to be achieved and how that needs to go about.

Remediation, more generally, if is on Crown land, again, we will be working with DIPL on what we expect. We do not do the work but provide the technical advice for the outcomes, from an environmental point of view, that we would like to see.

**Mr MILLS:** Minister, could you give a brief summary of your role in the PFAS issue that affects Katherine and some areas around Darwin RAAF base. Where does your area of responsibility start, considering the RAAF comes under Commonwealth control?

**Ms MOSS:** Thank you, Member for Blain. This is a really important question. It is a very complex and difficult issue we are dealing with, not only in this jurisdiction, but across this country as people are very aware. We know this is impacting the people of Katherine. I have been involved in this process—the department has been involved in this process for quite some time.

So there was a release of the report by the Department of Health in 2016 regarding Ludmilla and testing of certain types of aquatic life there. We have been involved in the interagency working group, which is co-chaired between the NTEPA and the Department of Health. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has been playing an active role in that in assisting where we can with things like testing of bores.

It is an issue I have been raising with my federal colleagues. Through the meeting of Environment ministers I have been raising this issue as well as raising the issue that does not strictly fall under my portfolio, the access for Katherine residents to blood testing and health counselling that I know the Member for Katherine, Minister for Health and the Chief Minister have been pushing very strongly for, as well as better access to infrastructure in Katherine.

The important thing is that we all have a role to play in this as far as government agencies go, which is why we have the working group in place. The NTEPA is part of a national working group on this, a national framework, and we have been actively participating in that process. The work is ongoing and we are, as a department, very committed to supporting the response to PFAS.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** There are two main areas where the department would be involved in the PFAS issue. One would be through the environment division and the work it does to support the NTEPA. That is around providing the technical advice and also requiring developments on potentially PFAS-contaminated land to do what they need to do to be compliant.

The other area we have been involved with is to do some fairly broad scale testing of water and bores and surface water areas, really to confirm the way PFAS might be travelling through the waterways. That

information is shared with the Department of Defence, which has primary responsibility for doing the more technical assessment.

We have done that so we can provide them guidance on the way we believe that PFAS is travelling through the water table and to help them design their own monitoring scheme.

We will continue to do some of that testing. We obviously cannot do the sort of testing that Defence needs to do and we see that as their responsibility.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It is my turn to ask the Member for Nelson's questions. Page 28, Flora and Fauna. Has the department received the results of research by Charles Darwin University on mangrove dieback in the Gulf of Carpentaria?

**Ms MOSS:** Thank you, Member for Araluen on behalf of the Member for Nelson. The mangrove dieback was an issue that was of great concern to us and to Territorians. Providing that grant to Charles Darwin University was something we did very quickly coming into government because we value that work.

Charles Darwin University were working through a process to try and leverage some more funds from that grant from the ARC and that is still in process. They have been doing an incredible amount of work on that particular issue and we will keep people posted on how that progresses.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Page 32, Rangelands. How does the department manage and monitor the pastoral estate? What kind of interaction and consultation occurs with leaseholders? There are a few questions he has in this section, but I will start with that.

**Ms MOSS:** We might switch over up here if there are a few questions on this area, Member for Araluen.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes, on Rangelands.

**Ms MOSS:** This is again a really important area of work under the department and we have our Pastoral Land Board, which is an important board for the department and an important point of reference for us with industry as well. The department also undertakes a lot of conversation and ongoing consultation with peak bodies like the NT Cattlemen's Association. They represented on our bushfires council for example, because a lot of the issues that come up go across some of those industries.

I might let you talk more about that if you want.

**Mr DA ROCHA:** As the minister has stated, the role of the Rangeland monitoring branch is to support the work of the Pastoral Land Board. The way they ensure the pastoral land is upheld, or in the condition it is required to under their lease agreement is we undertake our rotational four to five year visiting or inspection of each pastoral lease and that is reported back the Pastoral Land Board. They have a set of conditions by which they need to maintain the land as part of the lease and we report back to the board on the condition of that lease.

This year's program was very successful. The staff were able to visit 63 properties, or 63 leases which is the most the department has ever been able to achieve. What that means for the department is that prior to 2013, the department had a backlog where we were not able to visit that site within a four to five year period. What we can report today is that as of next year, we are commencing the repeat cycle. So we are being able to catch up.

Generally, we try and have our teams monitor between 45–50 properties in the last three years. They have gone from 53 last year to 63 this year.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Thirty-three land clearing applications were assessed in 2016–17, the report says this reflects strong growth and investment in the agricultural and horticultural industries. Can the number of applications be defined by locality?

**Mr DA ROCHA:** I can table that if that is easier?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes. Is it quite a list or do you want to read it on?

**Mr DA ROCHA:** I can. They are broken up in to the clearing in unzoned and pastoral, so 23 of those pertain to unzoned, which is horticulture agriculture. Ten of those on the unzoned portion were related to gas pipeline

or solar farms, eight were horticulture, one was improved pasture and one was for a sport and recreation facility. The other ten pertain to pastoral land clearing and they were for Project Sea Dragon, the trial for agriculture ponds, improved pasture, there was a second one for the Aquaculture Grow-out Facility and the remainder were for improved pasture.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Araluen, just to clarify you were also looking for that grouped by region?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Can the number of applications be defined by locality?

**Mr°DA°ROCHA:** I can.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** If it does not take too long, yes.

**Mr°DA°ROCHA:** I have under property name. We have Legune; Larizona; Mount Ringwood; Banjo; Tipperary; Legune, which was the second aquaculture; Maryfield; Gilnockie; and Koolpinyah—that is for the pastoral estate. Do you want me to go through list of unzone.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No, that should be fine.

**Ms MOSS:** We can provide that for the Member for Nelson.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Why was additional funding directed to soil site testing? Note 679 soil sites tested compared to 500 projected. The note says this is due to additional funding being available. Why was additional funding directed to soil site testing?

**Mr°DA°ROCHA:** That was to do with the—we are terming it Mapping the Future—but our land and water suitability across the Territory. It is to do with the land and water suitability program, which is a four-year commitment by government to undertake soil testing or land suitability for potential development—whether that be agriculture, horticulture—across the Territory to open new markets, in essence. There is a concerted effort by my Lands branch to do a body of this work.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Araluen, Mapping the Future is a really important program that we are investing in. We can all acknowledge that from an investment perspective but from understanding our natural resources better so we can manage them more sustainably in to the future. It is something we are very focused on and the work that will come out of this will be really positive for all of us understanding best land use across the Territory and how we can protect that better.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The next set of questions is about water resources. Can the department provide usage statistics for the Water Licence Decision Portal?

**Ms MOSS:** Sorry, Member for Araluen, can you repeat the question?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Can the department provide usage statistics for the Water Licence Decision Portal? There are a few questions under this section.

**Ms MOSS:** In terms of access to the Water Licence Decision Portal, there have been 221 users who have accessed that portal, 105 of those were non-government members.

The Water Licencing decision Portal has got a range of information on it. It has all of our water allocation plan areas, members of different water advisory committees, licence decisions and the factors that were considered in those licence decisions and a range of other things interesting to those who are looking for information about water decisions.

It is a more transparent system. It means people can see the status of different applications and different water allocation zones. We are glad to see people are accessing that resource.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Is there evidence that education programs and an increasing focus on ground water usage in the rural area is working?

**Ms MOSS:** I think the answer is yes. It is evidence by the number of applications we have received since the removal of the exemption in June 2016. We have had around 250 licence applications in the Darwin rural area.

I acknowledge that the Members for Daly, Goyder and Nelson have all had information through their electorate offices. The department has been undertaking a range of community consultation and information sessions through public meetings, advertisements and radio. There was the installation of signs that people are quite familiar with that show the ground water levels. Yes, there has been a very good conversation. People are very engaged in it. The water advisory committees have been very supportive of measures.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** For a long time, the Water Resources Division did not do a lot of community education. There were not well-functioning or established water advisory committees. While we do not have a formal program of evaluation or even a formal program of education, there is a much stronger commitment within the agency to work with the community on their values on water, but also to inform, share and communicate what we know about water resources so we all share some responsibility for their effective use.

We will not know for some time, but the work we are doing in terms of educating people is relatively low-cost. It is an important component that we have not been doing well for some time.

**Ms MOSS:** If I can add there, the department has been running (inaudible) central, which has been an area where members of the public can ask questions that pertain to their specific circumstances. They had over 200 people come through and have taken that to community meetings and pop-ups in shopping centres and a whole range of different things as well.

This department is not the only department working on education for water use. As Jo said, it has been positive.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Can the department provide usage statistics for the interactive web application Darwin Rural Area Groundwater Watch?

**Ms MOSS:** We might take that one on notice. I am assuming the Member for Nelson is talking about the number of people accessing the website?

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#### Question on Notice No 9.6

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes. The question is: can the department provide usage statistics for the interactive web application Darwin Rural Area Groundwater Watch?

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you. Minister are you happy to accept that question on notice?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, I am.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question on notice has been allocated the number 9.6.

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**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The next set of questions is about Bushfires NT. How many wildfire incidents in 2016–17 were the result of arson?

**Ms MOSS:** I will introduce Collene Bremmer from Bushfires NT who is very knowledgeable about bushfires across the Territory. If you have that information, Collene, that would be great.

**Ms BREMMER:** I do not have exactly which ones were arson. It is a difficult question to answer. Fires are lit in a number of ways, and arson being a malicious type of offence, I probably cannot answer that one.

**Mr PAECH:** Pages 17 and 18 of the annual report talk about bushfires—I am speaking from the perspective of where the Member for Araluen and I come from, there is a large fuel load around. In the wake of heading into a bad fire season in Central Australia, are you able to give us an indication of how the government has progressed or improved the management of bushfires?

**Ms BREMMER:** As I said in my opening statement, the work of Bushfires NT and its volunteers is appreciated by us all. It has been a big season across the Territory. We recently had an appreciation day for our volunteers and it was lovely to be part of that. I acknowledge on behalf of us all that we appreciate all their hard work.

The commencement of the new *Bushfires Management Act* has been in place for around 12 months now. By June this year we had more than 300 volunteers and fire wardens authorised under those new arrangements. That is really positive.

One thing I have discussed with the Bushfires Council is how we can increase recruitment of bushfires volunteers and get more people involved. A lot of people have been involved in our fire brigades for many years, decades in some cases, and it is important that we continue their good work.

Volunteers with Bushfires NT now have protection from liability for fire management actions taken under good faith, which is an improvement to the legislation. There is a new Bushfires Council, which is made up of a number of stakeholders from land councils, Cattlemen's, Environment and a range of others. They have been selected and appointed from across the region to help us to keep improving our bushfires management and responses.

A bushfire management planning framework has been established; there is a Territory-wide, whole-of-community fire management network; collaboration with other jurisdictions on fire management; and the number of pre-and post-planning forums across the NT has been increased. This ties strongly into other work of the department, such as weed management.

Gamba grass is a huge challenge in bushfire season, so maintaining those resources in compliance and enforcement of gamba management across the Territory has been a significant focus of the department. There is extensive mitigation work, and reducing the fuel load is one.

We are finalising regional bushfire plans across five regional bushfire committees at the moment, and are undertaking a lot of work between departments and ranger groups. The work we are doing to support our ranger groups through the capital grants and other grants programs, will assist them in their weed and fire management plans.

**Mr PAECH:** When you talk about assisting them, does that take into account—I suppose this question is general and can relate to bushfires in general. To what extent are community members of remote Aboriginal communities able to practise traditional methods of clearing the country?

**Ms MOSS:** I can speak of an example. It happens in partnership between Parks and Wildlife and the Jawoyn rangers where there is a partnership on a fire abatement project that involves traditional fire management strategies with modern science. In many ways, Member for Namatjira, there are ranger groups, in particular, across our remote regions that are doing what can be considered world-leading work in fire management.

There is a lot we can share jurisdictionally, also internationally, about fire management in collaboration with traditional owners and ranger groups. The Departments of Environment and Natural Resources and Tourism and Culture are both really proud of that work. The Aboriginal carbon unit, when established, will also be helpful in helping us to continue to provide good environment policy settings to support that fantastic work that is happening.

If you look at East Arnhem, for example, where the Warddeken rangers are doing incredible fire management work. They are presenting at conferences all over the place, and quite rightly so. Their work should be celebrated.

**Mr PAECH:** Minister, you just mentioned the carbon unit. When is that expected to be operational?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Namatjira, the unit is established but we are working through the strategy at the moment, which we expect will be launched early next year. There has been considerable work done, as I have talked about, with stakeholders on this and a range of other policy areas, but particularly around the carbon unit and our carbon abatement support.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any further questions? Member for Araluen?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** A few more. What plans do Bushfires NT have in place to deal with extreme weather conditions? A broad question.

**Ms BREMMER:** Yes it is. There are obviously a number of strategies, depending on which part of the Northern Territory you refer to. Coming out of the Top End fire season, we were prepared for an intense fire season on the back of a very good Wet Season. We had the most planning Bushfires NT have ever undertaken, with the new legislation.

Bushfire brigades were very well prepared to do mitigation strategies to reduce the fire threat, especially in the Top End. In late May, early June, we saw unprecedented wildfires spread across at a time when only

20% mitigation had been able to be undertaken. Probably by around late August, the further 80% of mitigation that was to be taken was done by wildfire as opposed to mitigation.

Even though we had the plans in place, we had weather conditions that we were not prepared for, but were prepared for a wildfire season. We had put in place things like surge capacity from Alice Springs utilising the volunteer brigades from Central Australia which came up. We turned over about six times. We brought staff in from other regions, Katherine, Tennant Creek, as well as Alice Springs, to augment our Top End staff.

We were putting out information—public education for residents—about the increasing threat and the fire weather conditions. On reflections from the Top End, further work is being put in place for preparing residents and volunteer brigades and the rest of the community for the next Top End fire season.

For Central Australia our regional staff have been doing immense work with land holders in relation to preparing for what we expect, again, to be a severe fire season. Obviously you have had some rain, so that has held us off.

We have moved equipment to Central Australia from the Top End in readiness for it. We would reciprocate the volunteer as well as staffing capacity in Central Australia if need be.

We have just moved our focus from the Top End to Central Australia.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Page 39 notes amendments to the *Bushfires Management Act* in November 2016 that:

*Changes to land use and fire management methods and the significant expansion of rural residential development has increased the risk of bushfire.*

Does Bushfires NT have any specific plans for bushfire management in rural residential developments and for new subdivisions?

**Ms BREMMER:** Yes. We have been working very closely with the other division in the department, the Weeds Management Branch in preparing for things like firebreak inspections where we have known blocks that might have large infestations of gamba. We are working hand-in-hand with our local brigades, land holders, the Weeds Management Branch and putting in place strategies to try to reduce the fire threat.

We also comment on plans for subdivisions and concerns if we think that there are potentially any increased threats from fire.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The next set of questions is on the environment, page 40 of the annual report. These questions are from the Member for Nelson. They are not my questions, particularly this one because it relates to an organisation in my community.

Why has \$100 000 been provided to the Arid Lands Environment Centre rather than to an arid lands program run by the Environment Centre Northern Territory or the Environmental Defenders Office? Is the Arid Lands Environment Centre based elsewhere? Note the Environment Centre NT has received the first payment of \$100 000. The Environmental Defenders Office has received \$50 000.

The question is why has ALEC in Alice Springs been provided with \$100 000 rather than it going to another organisation. Does that make sense?

**Ms MOSS:** I understand what the question is. However it is important to note that there were a number of organisations, as you have recognised, that lost funding under the former government.

ECNT, the Environmental Defenders Office and Arid Lands, recognised peak environmental groups across the Territory that do important policy work, have received funding for the work they do across the Territory to make sure they continue to have a voice in policy development across the Territory.

They undertake a huge amount of work on a range of different topics. I think the work that Arid Lands do in Central Australia is particularly important. However, while I do understand the question, the Environment Centre and the Environmental Defenders Office have also received funding to support those policy positions in their important organisations.

I do not know whether the Member for Nelson would like to clarify. I am happy to have a discussion with him.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** We might leave that one. How are applications for licences to discharge waste water assessed?

**Ms MOSS:** I might ask Ms Townsend or Mr Purdon to run you through that process.

**Mr PURDON:** An application for a waste discharge license, which is an application under the *Water Act*, is assessed against certain criteria set out in the *Water Act* itself. Those criteria from a waste water discharge point of view are aimed at trying to understand what the impact of that discharge might be on the receiving water and anyone using that water.

We assess applications against those criteria based on information provided to us by the applicant. We consult with other parts of the agency, including the water resources division. We consult with key stakeholders, external to government if we need to. We rely on national water quality guidelines to establish standards for waste water discharge and information the department already has, in terms of baseline water quality within different waterways, such as Darwin Harbour.

Pulling all of that together, we put an assessment and a recommendation of recommended licence to the controller of water which is Jo, who will then determine whether that licence can be issued based on the assessment in front of her.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The next question is pertaining to page 55, the cabomba eradication. The report notes that so far, through the use of the herbicide called SHARK, there have been very limited impacts on non-targeted plants, fish or animals at cabomba application sites.

What are these very limited impacts?

**Ms MOSS:** Again, we might do a little swap at the table. I think the story about containing cabomba is a very good one and I commend the work of our weeds division within the department for their continued work (inaudible) on management of weeds like cabomba. There are some very interesting names for herbicides, I am learning—and weeds.

The work the department has been doing in controlling cabomba so that it does not have some of the very significant impacts that it can have on our water supply has been commendable.

**Mr DA ROCHA:** The reference to offsite impacts with SHARK is that we went down a path last year of starting a new herbicide: SHARK. It was new to us in that we had never used it. It was about reporting back on those impacts. The way we applied SHARK was also different to previous chemicals. The new methodology was to use long booms and allow it to penetrate down the bottom of the waterway. It was previously done on the surface.

We worked alongside the EPA reporting on the impacts of that chemical. What we found after the first year of using SHARK is that because the offsite impacts were minimal—I will just go back a moment.

The first year we used SHARK as a precautionary measure, a bund wall was established to ensure you did not have downstream impacts. What our results showed us from our monitoring and working with the EPA and the results is that because the offsite, or off-target impact was very low, that bund wall was no longer required. That is what it is making reference to in the report.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Thank you for that. I do not have any more questions for this annual report.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Member for Araluen.

Member for Namatjira?

**Mr PAECH:** Minister, I am wanting to turn your attention to pages 28 and 29. Could you elaborate on what the government has done to improve the management of the Territory's coastal and marine environment?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, Member for Namatjira. This has been important work that the department has been doing around our coastal and marine environment. One of the main commitments we made going in to the election was on the establishment of a coastal and marine management strategy.

I am really pleased with how that is progressing and with the feedback we are receiving from stakeholders who were involved in our partnership group.

A partnership group was established with non-government and government representatives. They have been working together alongside a facilitator who worked on the Great Barrier Reef plan on what our strategy will look like so that we are all on the same page and everybody has some ownership of improving the monitoring, health, and management of our coastal and marine environments.

I expect that will go public comment early in 2018, which will be a fantastic opportunity to go out to the broader NT community.

We have re-established the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee. It has met a number of times. It includes a number of stakeholders with different perspectives on Darwin Harbour—having that as an important natural asset that is also important to the Territory culturally, socially and ...

**Ms NELSON:** That was an earthquake.

**Ms MOSS:** There you go; I did not even feel it.

I talked a bit earlier about the grant provided to CDU for the mangrove research, and they hope to leverage that for some more funding to continue that important research.

The five-year management plan for the saltwater crocodile in the Territory is also being revised.

We completed the marine megafauna strategic plan 2017–21, which is about identifying threats to our megafauna, and where our critical marine habitat areas are and how we can manage them.

We have completed a major project which assessed the conservation status of all species of coastal dolphins. There has been some incredible work done by good people across the department on those habitat areas. There has been a workshop with Aboriginal sea ranger groups to share the results of that project. I am looking forward to getting that strategy to the community because we recognise this is something Territorians want to be part of and have a say in. The protection of our coastline is on all our minds.

**Mr PAECH:** If you turn to page 30 and go to the second dot point, it says:

*Commenced the implementation of the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, including the development of comprehensive Guidelines to support the first call for applications in August 2017.*

Can you update the committee on where we are at with that process and the number of ranger groups that have been engaged to date?

**Ms MOSS:** That important commitment goes to the heart of supporting those ranger groups and the valuable work they do in fire, weed and feral pest management across the Territory. They all have very different needs and take on mammoth work and are under-resourced to do so. That is what our grants programs are focused on.

Importantly, we have had an Aboriginal Land Management Advisory Group established during this period to provide us with advice on the development of those guidelines and how we can implement those programs to maximise benefit across the Territory.

They developed those comprehensive guidelines. There was extensive consultation with Aboriginal organisations across the Territory. I am happy to take that on notice if you would like to know who was involved in that, as I do not have that in front of me. It has been a fantastic process to date.

I have been talking to ranger groups across the regions about not only the grants but the changes to the Parks and Wildlife legislation on enforcement and compliance and how we can assist them in that work.

As you could imagine, there are lots of applications for both those programs, especially for capital grants. The department, alongside the advisory group, is assessing those applications. I imagine that over the next few weeks we will be letting ranger groups know who has been successful in that round. Then encouraging people to look next year as well.

**Mr PAECH:** You are confident that this round will be exhausted in terms of° ...

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. I am absolutely confident that this round will be exhausted. It was oversubscribed, Member for Namatjira. Interest has been high, which is great. It is testament to the need but also testament to the engagement done by the department that groups have been well aware that the program was opening and available. Yes, it has been oversubscribed and we will certainly be looking to encourage people to apply again next year.

The Land Management Conservation Fund is probably a more complex piece. A number of ranger groups applied for multi-year programs to do some really innovative and different projects. That will be a slightly different, probably a harder application process in terms of assessment, but I expect people will know by the end year.

We will definitely encourage those who are not successful in round one to continue to have a look at that program in future years that can support their work, but also other ways in which the department can support the great work they are doing. I think it is going to encourage some great partnerships and we are already seeing great partnerships between different ranger groups, but I think this is an opportunity to encourage that.

**Mr PAECH:** The Member for Nelson had a question about ALEC in Alice Springs, the Arid Lands Environment Centre and the Environmental Defenders Offices—has there been any changes or how you perceive we are able to strengthen the relationship that they are able to be involved in the decision-making processes more often?

**Ms MOSS:** One of the things that is very clear is we have a number of consultation processes that are happening now or starting into the New Year. Our environment groups across the Northern Territory play a really valuable role in that. They also have an active role through the EPA processes and looking at the development applications that come through the NTEPA. They are involved in a very large number of conversations and policy discussions about environmental decisions across the Territory. As we go through the environmental regulatory reform process, again we are going to want to make sure we are getting all of those perspectives and that it is a really informed process with great engagement from the communities.

We recognise the role they are playing across the Northern Territory and their role in holding us to account on those decisions. There are a number of groups that had lost funding and were struggling to do the important work they have done for many years. The Arid Lands Environment Centre receives \$100°000 per annum; the Environment Centre Northern Territory has \$100°000 per annum; the Environmental Defenders Office, \$50°000 per annum; and also the Australian Marine Conservation Society, who are play a very important role in our conversations around the coastal marine management strategy, get \$30°000 per annum.

There are five-year funding agreements in place with those organisations to allow them to employ those policy officers to give them some consistency and certainty around the important work that they do. We will continue to engage with them on things like coastal marine management strategy, the Environmental Regulatory Reform through the EPA advisory groups, the partnership group and other mechanisms in place in the department.

**Mr PAECH:** What has the government done to increase the transparency of water licence allocations and decisions?

**Ms MOSS:** A very important area of focus for government. We have touched on some of these things this morning. The Water Licence Decision Portal was launched in February. That has been a significant milestone in greater transparency of water allocation decisions and licensing and giving that information to Territorians so they can very clearly see where the allocation areas are and the decision being made. That information is all available on the department's website. It has the volume of water allocated and water users within those plan areas. There is all documentation available relevant to issuing the grant of licences through that portal as well.

There have also been a number of water advisory committees that have been reinstated and established over the 2016–17 year and beyond. They provide invaluable advice on the development of the water allocation plans that are produced through the department and a range of other issues relating to water. That is about reinstating the community voice back into water allocation plans as well. We have a number of really experienced stakeholders on those water advisory committees across the Territory.

We have now finalised our Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves policy and that will now be added into those water allocation plans, as well as an allocation of the consumptive pool. In early 2018 we will be making those changes about adding the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves' beneficial use under the *Water Act* ...

**Mr PAECH:** Minister, when you talk about adding the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves to the water reserve plan, does that become publicly available information?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. Our water allocation plans are publicly available.

**Mr PAECH:** A commercial business may be able to see that an Indigenous group has a water reserve, therefore they may be able to enter into an arrangement or partnership with the Aboriginal nation?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. The information will be available as to who those licence holders are. The water portal, obviously, helps with that. That information is all available so people can—that water is available for trade arrangements too.

**Mr PAECH:** Thank you. Wonderful.

**Ms MOSS:** I will also add, if I can, on the original question. Last weekend we released the results of the water licence review. There has been a huge amount of work done by the department's Water Resources Division. About 50% of the recommendations of that review are already complete. There is a significant amount of work occurring in the department.

We will also be looking at broader changes to the *Water Act*. It will be a significant body of work. We will still make those legislation changes to the *Water Act* we had committed to about mining and petroleum activities and additional Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves to the beneficial uses under the act. We will be looking to have a more robust, consistent framework that is more in line with the contemporary practice and policy the department is implementing.

**Mr PAECH:** Great, thank you. Can I ask another question? I am off water now, I am going to weeds. Could you give me a brief outline or update on the efforts being made by the department on—I will say this wrong. Is it gamba?

**Ms MOSS:** Gamba grass.

**Ms NELSON:** It is not as fun as the other one.

**Ms MOSS:** Cabomba? We have some fun ones.

Yes, I can, Member for Namatjira. As I said, gamba in particular, is a significant threat in terms of our fire risk across the Northern Territory. That and cabomba are two of the most destructive weeds we have to manage in the Territory. The Weeds division has very knowledgeable, passionate people I have been pleased to meet as I have gone around the Territory. There are different weeds of concern, depending on region, but gamba is one that is a concern across the Territory.

There was additional ongoing funding in the budget of \$300 000 per year to reduce the risk of gamba. That has moved into the compliance and enforcement stage. The department was on the show circuit talking about the herbicide that is available to assist with management. The department does a huge amount of work with landowners regarding the management on their own land, which is the responsibility of landowners. That is a challenge. I think the community is well aware of their responsibilities in terms of managing, particularly gamba.

There were more than 60 properties that had compliance attention. The department does that compliance, enforcement and inspection work with landholders.

It continues to be a challenge but lots of people are working on it. We have moved on to another stage. It is important that everybody is taking their responsibility for gamba and other weeds on their land.

**Mr PAECH:** In the event that gamba is located, identified on a rural or agricultural property and the owner chooses to ignore the issues from the department, what is the course of action?

**Ms MOSS:** We have moved into a compliance and enforcement stage of the gamba program. We will talk you through the process of what might happen if that is the case. I think it is a positive thing that we have moved into it.

The education has been a long-term piece for the department. Now it is important that we make it clear that you have serious responsibilities around gamba.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** I will be very quick. The department has, for a long time, been providing education to landowners regarding their responsibilities to control gamba on their properties. That has been augmented by the availability of free herbicide and spray equipment. In recent years we continued to do that but have moved into increased compliance and inspections.

Last year we did 480 roadside inspections and issued 38 orders. We had a fairly good response to orders. We issued two infringement notices which we have not done before. This year, to date, we have so far undertaken 1142 roadside inspections.

We get a lot of concern directed to us. We get a lot of landowners who are concerned about their neighbours are doing. Sometimes those neighbours are government agencies. We are also working very closely across government to make sure that the Northern Territory Government is also a responsible landowner.

The additional resourcing we have from government shores up gamba as a program. It is illegal to not control gamba on your property and we will pursue that under the *Weeds Management Act* if we have to. We will continue to do education of course and provide the resources that the community needs to control it.

**Mr PAECH:** The last question I want to ask is whether Mexican poppy is considered a weed? It grows in the Todd River in Alice Springs.

**Ms MOSS:** I am very impressed with your identification skills. If it is okay can I take that one on notice and we will check whether it is a classified weed and get that information for you.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.7

**Madam CHAIR:** I will ask you to repeat your question for the record please.

**Mr PAECH:** Could you please confirm if Mexican poppy is classified as a weed?

**Ms MOSS:** Can you give me the scientific name?

**Mr PAECH:** No.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** I do not have anything to say about Mexican poppy, but we routinely take any inquiry from the community about something unusual they have found on their property and will identify it through our herbarium. Most recently we went all the way to DNA testing. We would absolutely encourage people that, if you are unsure about what it is and it looks like one of the pictures, send us a photo, give us a call and we will make sure we identify it for you.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will take that question on notice allocate that number 9.7.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 9.7

**Ms MOSS:** Madam Chair, I think we actually have the answer.

**Mr Da ROCHA:** We do. Mexican poppy is a declared class B and class C in the Territory.

**Mr PAECH:** I will find out for myself what B and C are.

**Ms MOSS:** We will give you some more information.

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**Mr PAECH:** Ms Townsend, in your summary, what is the department's classification of a bad weed?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Is that a trick?

**Mr PAECH:** I will rephrase the question. What is the department's classification of a noxious weed that the department would take action on eradicating?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** There is a whole process.

**Mr Da ROCHA:** Yes, there is a process. Whether the weed is of national significance depends on its class and where it falls. With regard to prosecution action, there are a number of steps before we get to that.

I go back to the gamba scenario the minister was talking about. We will provide the landowner or proponent the opportunity—we will work with them on trying to eradicate that before we get to that stage.

They are issued orders which, in essence, is 'you must manage this', and we will go back to inspect how it is progressing. At the same time, depending on the type of weed and how difficult it may be to eradicate, we will work closely with them.

We had some examples last year of *Sagittaria* that had a lot of media attention. Our department works hand-in-hand with landowners to remove it.

**Ms NELSON:** *Sagittaria* was actually sold at retail ...

**Mr Da ROCHA:** Correct. Subsequently we found it in other ponds, and worked with those landowners to remove it.

**Ms NELSON:** Is that information readily available on your website? It would be interesting to read up on that.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, the information on classified weeds and our processes are available on the website. My departmental staff would be happy to sit down with you and answer any of your questions. As I have said, they are very knowledgeable and are doing incredible work. Ensuring we are managing weeds across the Territory has to be a focus to maintain water quality through to fire management, so we would be happy to point you in the right direction for that information.

**Ms NELSON:** In Katherine, and everywhere else in the NT, we go through the neem weed management program. Every year I hear the same thing from different people. 'The neem tree is so lovely and provides shade. It is not a weed in Queensland, so why is it a weed here?'

**Ms MOSS:** That is a challenge. There are some weeds that are quite attractive to people to plant them on their land for different reasons. We are happy to support any members by getting that information out, especially what is relevant to your communities.

**Madam CHAIR:** Does the committee have any final questions for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources?

That concludes consideration of report number one.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 9.2

**Ms MOSS:** Madam Chair, I have some answers to the Member for Nelson's questions, if you are happy for me to put them on the record now.

The first question was in relation to the reverse vending machine, on page 21 of the annual report. The picture of the new machine is at the new depot Revive-Recycling, trading as iReturn.

iReturn operates a drive-in depot but has two reverse vending machines inside the depot. There is also a reverse vending machine at Charles Darwin University. It is run by Envirobank Recycling. In addition they run a mobile unit which also provides services to Wagait Beach and Jabiru.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 9.1**

**Ms MOSS:** Initial key stakeholders to be interviewed before the end of the year are the Waste Recycling Industry Association of the Northern Territory; the local government authority of the Northern Territory; Alice Springs Town Council; each of the four container deposit scheme coordinators, which are Envirobank Australia, can recycling trading as Statewide Recycling, NT Coordinator, Marine Stores; and each of the depot operations. There are eight operators that run the 11 depots: Envirobank Recycling, Bevcon Recycling, NT Recycling Solutions, iReturn, Territory Can Man, M T Bins, Bagnall Agencies and Elliott Mechanical, and Darrin's Rubbish Removal.

Those are the people who will be engaged before the end of the year. I am happy to provide information about the broader plan for the Member for Nelson, Member for Blain.

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**Mr PURDON:** Sorry, minister, could I add to that? That is the initial consultation prior to Christmas. Part of the intention of that is to try to gauge from those groups who else should be consulted post-Christmas.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, I thought there was ...

**Mr PURDON:** Another step to that.

**Mr MILLS:** ... (inaudible) a next level.

**Mr PURDON:** Yes, that is right. We will have an Internet-based survey for the general public to participate in as well.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. After Christmas, obviously, the regional government councils and non-government organisation. We know organisations like Down Syndrome NT which is running social enterprises related to the container deposit scheme also need to be part of that process too.

**Mr MILLS:** Can I add to that (inaudible)?

**Ms MOSS:** Of course.

**Mr MILLS:** Local members of the Assembly.

**Ms MOSS:** Absolutely happy to, Member for Blain.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 9.4**

**Ms MOSS:** The question was about the EPA report on the cattle holding yard study. The assessment report 78 in relation to the cattle holding yard study was completed in March 2016. That will be available online.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 9.5**

**Ms MOSS:** This was the Palmerston hospital site. There have been three inspections this year at the site, which was a general inspection and then specifically on erosion and sediment control measures that took place in February, August and November 2017.

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**Mr MILLS:** That is good. Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister, for those responses. That concludes consideration of report number one.

### **Report No 2 – Environment Protection Authority Report 2017 Report**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider report number two, Environment Protection Authority. Does the committee have any questions for the minister? No? That concludes consideration of report number two.

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

### **ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY Report No 3 – Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority 2017 Report**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now move on to consider the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority report.

Minister, I will 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:** Madam Chair, I am joined today by the Chief Executive Officer Dr Benedict Scambary, Director of Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer, Mr Alan Buckingham, and Director of Policy and Governance, Mr Matthew Dean.

Happy for me to make an opening statement?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Ms MOSS:** The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority is a statutory body established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* in 1989. It provides a really important regulatory function to preserve the cultural values in the Northern Territory whilst maintaining a balance with the economic and social aspirations of all Territorians.

Sacred site clearance was provided for a range of projects within the 2016–17 financial year including the Sea Dragon hatchery and breeding and maturation centres in Bynoe Harbour and at Charles Point and detailed work on the overall project Sea Dragon authority certificate which has since been issued.

This was a project that was an example of partnership and collaboration between private business, the authority and the Northern Land Council and established a new best practice in sacred site protection and land use negotiation, which the authority believes will serve as a model for dealing with major projects in the Northern Territory for years to come. They do an incredible job in terms of these projects in the Territory:

- Nightcliff to Rapid Creek foreshore seawall stabilisation project construction
- on-going maintenance to infrastructure at Alyangula Police Station
- construction at the Darwin Waterfront development of a hotel and residential apartments
- upgrades and repairs to remote schools at Wooliana and Corella Creek
- works to boat ramps and nearby facilities at Dundee Beach and Shady Camp
- Alice Springs township travel network signage and wayfinding plan
- upgrade to Surprise Creek campground area within Litchfield National Park
- the installation of the helipad for CareFlight access within Litchfield National Park
- repair, upgrade and maintenance to roads within Nitmiluk National Park
- construction, development and upgrades of walking tracks, shelters, campgrounds and associated facilities within Judbarra Gregory National Park
- a number of major road upgrades to improve access in remote areas.

In 2016–17 the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority received 184 applications for authority certificates, 579 requests for information and 37 requests from Aboriginal custodians to have sacred sites registered.

In the same period the Authority issued 157 authority certificates which is a significant decrease from the previous financial year, 2015–16 where 242 authority certificates were issued.

During the same period the authority reduced its average timeframe to issue those authority certificates from 114 in 2015–16 to 90 days in 2016–17.

In 2016–17 a total of 55 applications for authority certificates were withdrawn by the applicant before being completed. This is consistent with the year before which was 51 applications withdrawn.

There have been no certificates refused in the current reporting period. Furthermore, the authority recorded 234 sacred sites in 2016–17 and registered 26 sites, bringing the total of registered sites to 2071 and the total number of sites documented by the Authority to 13 086.

I would like to put on the record my thanks to the board members for AAPA, the advisory group members for their work and perspectives throughout the year.

I am happy to take questions on the annual report.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will open up to the committee for questions.

**Ms UIBO:** On page 57, in regards to the financial report 2015–16, I am interested in the first paragraph which talks about the income. I am wondering what the miscellaneous income is made up of.

**Dr SCAMBARY:** The authority has an appropriation from the Northern Territory Government. It also receives income from the sale of its services, the cost recovery that we do for authority certificates. The DCIS free of charge element is all about computers and those services.

The miscellaneous income is to do with other elements of the act such as the conference provisions of the act where we charge for conferences and those sorts of services.

I am also corrected that the statutory functions of the authority—one of them being to provide information about sacred sites—we levied charges for register inspections which largely return to Northern Territory Treasury.

**Ms UIBO:** Thank you, Dr Scambary.

Minister, the other question I had in regards to this report, on page 61, the total equity has increased by \$292 000 to \$2.57m. I am wondering what the plans from our path forward are to use that equity, or to hold that equity.

**Mr BUCKINGHAM:** At the moment we are undergoing a renewal of some of our IT systems that are up to 30 years old and are using reserves for that. That is only a relatively small amount, but because we are a separate authority, it is good to have reserves and be in a sound financial position, as you can see we are.

**Ms UIBO:** Thank you. Madam Chair, I have one suggestion about the report, which is presented very well. But just in regards to the photos, if you could label the people from left to right. There are few that jump in and out, so you think you are looking at one person, just the fact that I know some people in the photo, so I know who is who. If I could make that suggestion for your future report, that would make it a lot clearer for the readers.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your feedback, Member for Arnhem.

Are there any questions in regards to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority Report? That concludes consideration of report number three. Thank you very much for your time today.

The committee will take a quick five-minute break and when we resume, we will ask questions and consider the Department of Tourism and Culture Report. Thank you.

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The committee suspended.

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## TOURISM AND CULTURE

**Madam°CHAIR:** Thank you and welcome back, minister. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and if you would like to make an opening statement.

**Ms MOSS:** Today I am joined by Mr Alastair Shields, Chief Executive Officer and Ms Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Tourism and Culture. Also available here this morning is Andrew Hopper, Acting Director Chief Executive Officer; Susan Kirkman, Executive Director for Infrastructure and Corporate Services; and Sam Burke, General Manager, Darwin Waterfront Corporation.

Because I also have a number other annual reports that are relevant to the Department of Tourism and Culture for reasons of statutory authorities contained within our department. The other annual reports available through this process include the Tourism NT annual report, the Heritage Council of the Northern Territory annual report and the Darwin Waterfront Corporation annual report.

This is the first annual report that has been produced for the Department of Tourism and Culture because it was formed in September 2016 to bring together former departments of Tourism NT, Arts and Museums, Sports and Recreation, the Parks and Wildlife Commission—bringing those all together as one agency but also with NT Major Events Company and Darwin Waterfront Corporation also forming part of this agency.

These are all key areas of government that have traditionally worked very closely and cohesively together that are about creating a vibrant and exciting place for people to live and work but also that are vital to attracting people to the Northern Territory—have a huge economic contribution and in terms of the services that they provide and also the jobs that these sectors create.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the department for their incredible work over the 2016–17 year and to have the opportunity to share some of those achievements with you.

The heritage branch ensures that key historic places across the Territory are maintained and preserved to ensure all Territorians can celebrate in our rich history. Some of those key achievements for the 2016–17 year included the commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin in February 2017, which was part of the Territory Remembers program and the successful expedition to the *Sanyo Maru* to recover 77 archaeological relics which was more than people were expecting to get from that expedition—it was very exciting.

Tourism is a key economic driver in the Territory. It pumps over \$2bn into the economy every year and provides employment either directly or indirectly to over 17°000 Territory amounting to 12% of our workforce.

More holiday makers came to the Territory last financial year. It was slightly offset by a drop in INPEX workers flying in as the project moves in to its next stage. The Territory government is acutely aware of this challenge going forward and we have a strong focus on attracting more visitors to the Territory, investing in new tourism products and new visitor markets.

Some of the key achievements across tourism have included commencing the China Ready and Accelerator accredited program to accelerate adaption of tourism product for the Chinese market. At the end of June 2017 there were 19 tourism operators that had achieved business Level 1 Accreditation under the China Ready program, which is really fantastic and great feedback received through that program.

We had the biggest cruise ship to visit Australia here in Darwin, which was the *Ovation of the Seas*—that was in February 2017 and it carried 4000 passengers and crew members. The French cruise ship, *L’Austral*, announced that it would berth in Darwin for 2017 and 2018 during the cruise season which has now commenced.

There were significant consultation on the Hermannsburg Visitor Experience Master Plan and there will be an action plan in response to that release before the end of the year.

The department and local tourism operators participated in ITB in Berlin, which is one of the biggest tourism gatherings that occur across the world—a really good opportunity for us to engage with our key markets and the NT Central European Roadshow from 8 to 15 March 2017 with 15 operators participating.

We hosted the Australian Tourism Awards in February 2017 with over 740 people attending from across Australia, in which the Northern Territory collected two gold, two silver and three bronze awards, including a hall of fame for Voyages' Ayers Rock Resort.

We are continuing to invest in the Territory's art and cultural assets in our cities, towns, regional centres and remote communities, because they attract visitors here, provide a boost to the economy, create local and ongoing jobs in both the cultural and arts sector and in tourism.

Key achievements included:

- the establishment of the steering committee for the new iconic National Indigenous Art Gallery, with experts providing options and recommendation on the development, construction, establishment and operations of the new centre
- Nganampa Development Corporation was engaged to undertake preliminary consultation for the iconic National Indigenous Cultural Centre in Alice Springs
- the planning work was done for the regional stimulus grants attached to the arts trail, that is about linking our community art galleries, museums and keeping places across the Territory
- the roll out and successful grant recipients with about 30 projects supported so far
- planning was well underway during this period for Live Darwin and Live Alice Mparntwe Programs aimed at revitalising our city centres, they are now showcasing and celebrating our local artists and bringing more people into our CBDs, so it has been a great program
- within this period work was well underway in planning for the Alcoota megafauna display in the Todd Mall, progressing well with the date for opening in mid-2018
- the first Portrait of a Senior Territorian Art Award was developed and delivered in Alice Springs in April 2017

In the area of sport and recreation, we have commenced significant investment in sporting facilities, including:

- construction commencing on the new \$16m tennis centre
- plans developed for the fast-tracked \$18m netball stadium at Marrara
- \$25m to create a home for rugby league at Warren Park including holding the Have Your Say processes
- the 2016 Alice Springs Masters Games which attracted 3827 athletes to Central Australia.

Visitor numbers to our major parks and reserves increased for the third consecutive year and a number of major projects were completed, including:

- partnering with the Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation to develop and implement the Nitmiluk National Park carbon farming project that we have talked about this morning
- an Aboriginal rock and art and cultural site project in Limmen National Park, which we also touched on this morning
- launched the Connected Communities Vision for Northern Territory Public Libraries 2017–2023, which provides an outcome-based framework to guide our strategic development and funding arrangements for the public library sector, which is a changing sector and one that is evolving in line with community needs
- a filming permit and financial support was granted for Sweet Country Films to produce a feature film on Central Australia—Sweet Country won another award this week, with Warwick Thornton being Territory's own, as the director for that film which is winning awards around the world.

We also know that Territorians want to experience major events here at home. It makes it a great place to live, but also makes it a great place to stay and to encourage people to visit.

During the 2016–17 financial year, the department successfully delivered a number of major events including Territory Day celebrations and BASSINTHEGRASS that has been running now for 15 years. We also supported 24 community events including Greek Glenti, Garma Festival, Songkran Thai water festival, Territory Taste, the Italian Festival, the Beer Can Regatta, Katherine Junk festival, and the Desert Harmony Festival just to name a few across the Territory.

We will continue to work closely with industry to improve and grow opportunities in the Tourism and Culture space and ensure that more local businesses and communities benefit from what is an increasingly important sector in the Territory and I am happy to take questions acknowledging there are a number of areas we can go into today.

#### **Report No 4 – Department of Tourism and Culture 2017 Report**

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I welcome Gerry Wood, the Member for Nelson, to the hearings, as well as Tony Sievers, the Member for Brennan.

I will now open it up to the committee to ask questions of Minister Moss's opening statement and the Department of Tourism and Culture annual report.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** In the report the appendix is full of—it contains a big list of all the organisations you fund. How many do you fund, and what is the total, as well as the percentage of your budget that goes to other organisations?

**Ms MOSS:** We do fund a number of non-government organisations, many of which are peak sporting bodies, arts organisations—a lot of these non-government organisations are running events and festivals across the Territory, which is a significant part of what the department does.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** With such a large number of organisations being funded, and a huge amount of money going out, this mega department spends a lot of time acquitting those funds, making sure they meet the target, and that you are getting value for money. Can you explain how you do that? It must be an enormous task involving a large number of staff.

**Ms MOSS:** Talking about the process for allocating and acquitting grants application processes ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It is a huge amount of taxpayer money going out to hundreds of organisations. How do you keep track of it, make sure it is targeted and we are getting bang for buck?

**Ms MOSS:** There are a number of grants programs within the department under the divisions of sport and rec, arts and museums—we know you have the information on who we fund. Those grants programs have been running for some time. They are not new programs, and a significant number of them are arrangements that have been in place for some time.

In terms of bringing the department together, we are looking at how we can streamline this process and make sure we have more of those shared services, for example shared corporate services, so we can make these processes more efficient.

There are a number of grants programs, for example the funding to MotorSports NT. They undertake a number of infrastructure projects, as well as some other programs. There are acquittal processes for each of those programs, but we are looking at ways we can make that more efficient.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Do you want to take that on notice? The total cost, the percentage of your budget that goes out to grants?

**Ms MOSS:** Ms Frankenfeld can answer part of that question, if that helps, and then we can take the rest on notice.

**Ms FRANKENFELD:** In 2016–17 we paid out \$104m in grants. I do not know how many numbers, we can through in the annual report and count all the people we funded, but they are all listed in the appendix if you want to know.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It is for the public's information, so I think it is of interest. It is a huge amount of money.

**Ms FRANKENFELD:** (inaudible) funded is in the annual report appendix. We have listed the \$104m and every single person (inaudible).

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** For the sake of the public hearing, though, I think it is good to get the total and the number of organisations that receive money from your department. It gives a global view of what you do, which is important ...

**Ms MOSS:** Absolutely.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** ...for Territorians to get a good perspective of how this mega department functions now. You are dishing out a lot of money to a lot of people. It is important to understand how you account for all that money going in so many different directions. It is a huge responsibility. I am sure you are aware of that more than anyone.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, it is a huge responsibility. As I stated in my opening statement, it is across a number of industries that we are working towards a shared goal and vision.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Can I put those questions on notice so we do not get them lost or are you answering them now?

**Ms MOSS:** I am happy to put them ...

**Madam CHAIR:** What we will do, I will take the question on notice and we will list it and if the minister is able to get the information back to us before the end of her session we can table those on the record as well.

Member for Araluen, I will ask you to state your question.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Now that we know that \$104m of grants disseminated by this department, how many organisations have received that money in 2016–17?

**Ms MOSS:** We can answer that question. It is on page 67 of the annual report. That is 261 organisations, peak sporting bodies and regional tourism offices that were supported in 2016–17 period. This is all public, and the people who have been funded is public. It is in the annual report that was tabled in parliament and is freely available on the government website.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any other questions you would like to place on record?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It was the total cost, who they go to and if you could explain the process you use to acquit and make sure those funds are spent in a responsible way.

**Ms MOSS:** As I have stated previously and I am happy to provide more information if you want more information. There are a number of different grants processes across the department.

For example, we have the stimulus grants for the arts trails and a number of people who come together from tourism, heritage and, of course, an arts and cultural perspective to assess those grants. That program works in a completely different way, for example, than screen industry grants program for good reason. You want to make sure they are well-targeted and that the money is spent in line with priorities for both government and growth of the industry.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The question is, if you give me \$100 000 to assist in my tourism operation how do you know I am spending the money in the way that is intended? How do you measure it?

They are finished now but the tourism infrastructure fund disseminated a lot of information and funds to a lot of different organisations. The question that has been put to me by people within my community is how does government know that it is being spent in the way that was intended? How do you measure that?

**Ms MOSS:** I understand what you are asking. In terms of things like the tourism infrastructure grants, the Department of Tourism and Culture monitors the money that was part of that particular grants process for instance. That was a process that had started before the new government came in on that particular grant process. It is my focus for grants programs going forward, particularly around things like tourism infrastructure that the infrastructure we are investing in—we can make sure we have the lens over it to see how it is improving the visitor experience, how we can prove that, and how it is attracting more visitors to a region. That is important for us.

I will over to Mr Shields to talk a little more broadly about the grants program.

**Mr MILLS:** Before doing so—I think we are on the same page, and this may assist.

Going through the annual report I was surprised to see the types of projects that were invested in. For example, building an art gallery or extending a caravan park, building a pontoon, installing a water pipe, upgrading a vessel. Quite large amounts of money, so I assume that each one of those requests had attached to it a commitment or an explanation of how this is going to increase visitor numbers. It is in that zone.

Is there a report available on how they lived up to the expectations and did the investment bear fruit that is measurable? There would have been an aspirational pitch in these. Did it deliver? How do we find that out?

**Mr PAECH:** I am thinking along the same lines. How do you measure whether it is successful or not now and into the future? Is the return on investment worth it?

**Ms MOSS:** We are all on the same page and we want to make sure that those grants for tourism are delivering on those things. We are talking specifically now about the Tourism infrastructure accelerator program. That is the one where we are talking about some specific Infrastructure support for a range of tourism operations across the Territory ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** But you can extrapolate it across all the grants ...

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, all the grants.

**Ms MOSS:** You can, yes. There is an acquittal process for all of those grants. If you want information specifically on the acquittal process for a specific grants program, I can provide that to you today.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Maybe use the tourism infrastructure fund as an example. How are those funds being acquitted?

**Mr MILLS:** That is concrete, yes.

**Ms MOSS:** Can you talk through that?

**Mr SHIELDS:** Thank you, Members for Blain and Araluen for the questions ...

**Mr MILLS:** The gentleman up the end there, too.

**Mr SHIELDS:** Yes, the Member for Namatjira. Thank you.

As chief executive officer, I take very seriously the need to acquit properly for all government taxpayer money used for grants. Because of that, each grant has a grant agreement, which will have in it milestones and acquittal processes. It will not necessarily be the same for each type of grant program, but each of them will have a program, milestones and acquittals.

In the case of the infrastructure grants, they tended to be to build a certain thing, often with some input or contribution from the tourism operator or the owner of the premises. Part of the acquittal was to ensure that the infrastructure that had money provided towards it was built to a scale and size agreed at the beginning.

**Mr MILLS:** In a final analysis, are those reports available to only the minister, or can it be made available to the Public Accounts Committee?

**Mr SHIELDS:** In general terms, acquittals are not normally made public. I imagine it is the kind of inquiry the Public Account Committee could make and look at particular ones ...

**Mr MILLS:** I might flag that as something to take to the Public Accounts Committee, because it is of great interest. Did the building of the water pipe increase deliver? Did more tourists come as a result of that? If you built a cage for animals, did that mean more tourists came?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Blain, for this government, our focus has been on making sure we are improving tourism product, but we are focused on projects that will have broader-reaching benefit, like the art gallery,

the cultural centre and keeping places across—it is a different structure to the program that was started under the former government. We need to make sure we are measuring those outcomes absolutely and explicitly.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, because it is easy to say, ‘yes, the money was spent’. But ‘did it produce a result?’ is the more important question. Thank you.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** How much was spent on the tourism infrastructure fund over the two, three years it operated? Do you have that figure?

**Ms MOSS:** I believe we do, Member for Araluen. Just give me a moment.

**Mr MILLS:** Was it \$3.5m?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Well, that was just that year.

**Mr MILLS:** Oh, I see.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes, it went for a few years. Is that correct? Two or three?

**Ms MOSS:** The infrastructure grants went for two years, I think. I will see if we have it here.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** That would be of interest.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, okay. On page 54, it was a \$5m tourism infrastructure development fund over a two-year period. That was commenced in 2015.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Your government made a pre-election commitment to keep that going and you did not; you changed your mind on that. That was documented ...

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Araluen, we made a commitment to investing in tourism product across the Northern Territory ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No, you made a commitment ...

**Ms MOSS:** ... and we are certainly doing that ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You made a commitment to keep the tourism infrastructure fund going now.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Araluen, we have talked about, on many occasions that the focus for us is making sure we are investing in tourism product and experiences across the Northern Territory. That tourism infrastructure—you can see in our investments in things like the art gallery, the cultural centre, the planned museum at Myilly Point, the redevelopment of State Square are really important destination building projects that ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Going back to the tourism infrastructure fund though. You committed to continue that when you were in opposition. Why did you change your mind?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Araluen, we have a focus on major infrastructure projects in tourism that support our arts and cultural sector, tourism sector and across our regions. That is apparent in the investments we are making clear progress on and in which we are involving experts.

These projects are about driving visitation to the Territory and it is about dispersal out of our major centres through the regions in the Northern Territory as well—we are spreading that benefit for more Territorians.

I think it is very clear that it needs to be the focus of the government to continue to drive demand, and continue to promote the Territory as a destination that people want to come and visit. That is why we are focusing on the projects that we are. The ones that will bring a greater amount of benefit in terms of driving visitation.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Moving on to the National Indigenous Art Gallery in Alice Springs—there has been a lot of concern and consternation about that fact that there has not been any consultation done within the local tourism industry on anything to do with the art gallery and that has been confirmed at regular points throughout the last 12 to 15 months, since the steering committee was put together. Why are you not

consulting with the local tourism industry about what will be one of the major game-changing tourism projects for Alice Springs, possibly in this decade?

**Ms MOSS:** We have. They have been part of this process. Tourism Central Australia—the Chief Minister and I attended their AGM—I cannot remember what month it was, but it was some time ago—we attended their AGM. We talked about a number projects, of course, this being one but was pre the last budget. This has been an ongoing conversation with organisations like Tourism Central Australia, the peak body in Central Australia, who have also met with the steering committee and who I have spoken to, personally, a number of times about this project and I know that the department has as well.

We have now embarked on the Have Your Say process so we can commence that community consultation. There is a significant amount of planning work that has to go in to a project of this size and significance and are really pleased to have the steering committee on board. They have had a number of presentations from and presentations to different organisations in Alice Springs and more broadly, of which Tourism Central Australia have been one. Our Tourism NT Board of Commissioners are another group of really prominent tourism stakeholders that we have been keeping informed of these projects as they progress as well.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Your story does not fit very well with what I am being told and what is being talked about in the media in Alice Springs. I have spoken to numerous members of TCA in preparation for this session today who say that you have talked about consulting with the tourism industry in Alice Springs and that you will consult, but it actually has not come to what they would regard as a consultation process. Yes, you have met with them and you said you would consult, but in terms of them being a part of the process of planning for this National Indigenous Art Gallery—the general consensus is it has not happened yet.

That includes media done by the chairperson of TCA—I have heard her on radio several times saying there has not been any consultation done with the tourism industry. I guess it comes down to a definition of what consultation is. Have you asked them to give ideas—given them the same opportunity as the steering committee to have input in to what the gallery might look like, where it might be, the details around it? When you say you have consulted with them, what do you mean, what have you asked them for feedback on?

**Ms MOSS:** As I have just outlined, TCA have met with the steering committee. One of our co-chair people Phillip Watkins lives in Central Australia has also had a number of discussions with a whole range of stakeholders. TCA have met with the steering committee. These are conversations I have had and I know the CEO, Alistair Shields, has had with executive members of TCA who represent the tourism industry in Central Australia.

They have put forward things they would like to see at the art gallery, so we are very aware.

**Ms NELSON:** Sorry to interrupt. I was wondering if I could ask your CEO to go through the steps of what the department has done to consult with the local stakeholders?

**Ms MOSS:** If I can, before I hand over to Alistair for that question, I think it is important to note that we established a steering committee that we said we would have on board for around six months to do a report to government. They are experts in their field including tourism nationally, and arts and culture, and they would give us some preliminary advice around things like governance, collections and curation. What we are talking about here is the creation of a project that we want to be the premier Indigenous art gallery in this country. That requires a lot of specialised knowledge and skills.

A project like this does not come out of the ground overnight and we need to make sure we do planning work and have something to take out to the community to discuss with them. I think it is an important point. You do have to have something to go out and discuss with the community and stakeholders. Throughout that process the steering committee have met with a number of stakeholders.

We have just launched the Have Your Say community consultation process. I have written to local Aboriginal organisations and we are talking to them about how we can ensure that people who do not have access to the pop-up or the Have Your Say website can also ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** That closes tomorrow.

**Ms MOSS:** I know, I am very aware ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** So it has not just started it is concluding tomorrow.

**Ms MOSS:** It has been open for about a ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Three weeks?

**Ms MOSS:** It has been open ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** A month?

**Ms MOSS:** ... over the course of this month and the engagement has been really positive. We acknowledge there are people who will not be able to access the Have Your Say through the online portal or through the pop-ups that have been happening in Yeperenye Shopping Centre and other conversations.

We have written to Aboriginal organisations just to make sure we can facilitate that process. We are embarking on a period of consultation.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you minister. Just interjecting at that point. Can I ask committee members to be very wary and not talk over one another especially when the minister is trying to deliver a response? I am trying to hear and I am finding it very difficult.

**Ms NELSON:** Just before the CEO responds I want to make a comment. Because I have not had the experience you have had Member for Araluen in Katherine, the minister's office has definitely been very engaging and attentive to the tourism stakeholders in Katherine.

I have gone out of my way as well to coordinate industry catch-ups and that sort of thing, so I am a bit confused and I am hoping the CEO of the department can maybe shed some light on the different approach. There is a different approach from Darwin, Katherine to Alice Springs. Certainly Alice Springs is feeling that the department has not been as attentive so if you could elaborate on that it would be great.

**Mr SHIELDS:** As the CEO, I get to Alice Springs pretty often and make it a point, whenever I can, getting in touch with the CEO of Tourism Central Australia and seeking to meet with him to hear what some of his issues might be, not only on this project but more broadly about tourism.

I have been a presenter at Tourism Central Australia meetings. Other Tourism NT staff members attend and present at various TCA meetings. It is their AGM tonight and Tony Quarmby, our new Head of Marketing will be there to talk to members and the committee about upcoming marketing plans, what is happening in that space and hear concerns and questions.

We seek to engage with them on a regular basis. I am a member of the steering committee for the National Indigenous Art Gallery and on that, I have been keen to make sure we engage as have other members more broadly.

There have been a couple of issues with the steering committee. We are looking at a national entity. There are some issues, as the minister mentioned, about governance arrangements, how it will be structured, what the collection policy will be, and obviously location has been a big issue. Location is out for Have Your Say at the moment. Dale McIver the chair of Tourism Central Australia is on the Tourism NT board.

Minister, you presented and discussed at the last Tourism NT Board in Alice Springs and brought their attention to the Have Your Say process, and encouraged organisations like TCA to put in a response, which I understand they have.

In my discussions with TCA, some of the issues they have raised about the National Indigenous Art Gallery are really important, practical operational issues that have not yet been discussed in the steering committee. Things like parking, and what other facilities should be part of the building, are really important parts of this structure and entity, but we are not at the point of discussing those yet.

I have engaged with Tourism Central Australia about those issues and heard their concerns. And I believe there will be an appropriate time for those issues to be fed into the process. It is a bit difficult, for example, to talk about the car parking requirements when we are still having the Have Your Say process on whether the site should be in the city or in the West MacDonnells. Once that is determined we can have a sensible discussion about parking and other facilities.

**Ms NELSON:** It is a huge investment from the government and I am excited about it. I support the iconic arts trail and am probably the biggest champion you will find to promote it. Do you have engagement strategies in place with stakeholders in Alice Springs?

**Ms MOSS:** Absolutely.

**Ms NELSON:** Are you able to share what those strategies are?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** That would be great.

**Ms MOSS:** Have Your Say is a big part of that. As you have highlighted, Member for Araluen, it is concluding today. There has been community feedback through that process, the pop-ups in Yeperenye Shopping Centre and the online portal directly to departmental officers. There have been a number of presentations and meetings between the steering committee and local stakeholders.

I meet individually with operators in Alice Springs—I did just before the Brolgas the other weekend—to talk about these projects and hear their views on this project and other issues they want to chat about.

The next focus for us is getting invitations out to organisations so we can start to engage with people who might not be able to access the Have Your Say process to make sure they have the opportunity to have a say.

We have a member of the department who will have meetings with people and facilitate that process for people who may not be able to access Have Your Say. But this is just the beginning. We are having a conversation at the moment about one aspect of this project. At the end of the day, the building and the site are two important components of this project. What will be equally, if not more, important is the stories we tell about that institution. That is a whole other body of work which is very specialised. We are getting on with that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** As a local member of parliament, I do not know if you fully understand how important this project is to just about every person who lives in Alice Springs. It cannot be underestimated.

**Ms MOSS:** I absolutely do.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** People want to be involved. If you think you have done enough community consultation that is a huge worry. Can I ask another question?

**Ms MOSS:** Before we move on, I want the opportunity to respond to your comment. We understand this is a game-changing project for Alice Springs. That is why we are investing a significant amount of money into it.

I have, at no point, said that this is enough consultation. I have said repeatedly that it is early days, and this is the beginning of the consultation on this incredibly important project.

This is something we need to do thoughtfully and carefully. We were not going to run out, two months into government, without a plan, a concept or an idea of anything. We want to make sure this is a thoughtful, respectful process. We have just started our community consultation. We are going out to Aboriginal organisations. This is just the beginning.

What we are talking about here is a project that, if you look at other similar projects both nationally and internationally, these are projects that take a significant length of time. Often a lot of work, years' worth of work, has often been done before you even get to the point where we are ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Most of us know that, minister. We are not silly; we are aware of this.

**Ms MOSS:** I know, Member for Araluen.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Most of us have been around a bit longer than you have, too. We are a bit wise ...

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Araluen ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Can I just call us to order? I have asked people to very mindful of not talking over one another. I actually cannot follow proceedings at the moment. I will close that down, Member for Araluen, we

are not here for comments we are here to review the 2016–17 annual report for the Department of Tourism and Culture.

Are there any further questions?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have another question.

**Madam CHAIR:** I have a question from the Member for Brennan from the side, thank you.

**Mr SIEVERS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Member for Araluen, I am a big fan of Alice Springs as we all know, I have played a lot of sport down there. Mountain bike riding is big in Alice Springs as well, so I would like to ask the minister what progress has been made against the master plan for mountain bike riding.

**Ms MOSS:** Thank you, Member for Brennan. The Mountain Biking Master Plan was released in July 2016 and the significant priorities in terms of not only new trails across the Northern Territory, but rejuvenating all existing trails and redevelopment of existing trails as well. I think that is a significant investment in terms of Alice Springs, where it is a growing market, but also here in the Top End.

In Casuarina Coastal Reserve and around Lee Point there has been a significant amount of work to improve tracks.

The Department of Tourism and Culture has provided \$10 000 worth of marketing support for two major mountain biking events in Alice Springs. One was Lasseters Easter in the Alice in April 2017 and the Redback Stage Race in August 2017. I was at the Easter in the Alice, it was great to see participants not only from the Territory, which of course makes up a significant portion of the riders, but nationally and internationally as well. People certainly travel to experience unique mountain bike tracks.

We have a number of priorities going forward, extending and connecting the sign-posted Alice Springs Trail Network including the Westside trails, Telegraph Station Historical Reserve and Eastside is a really important one. The rangers there will tell you about how much their visitation has increased in the Telegraph Station. In Alice Springs we have seen a bit of business associated with the mountain biking that has popped up. It will be an area of distinct growth and we will continue to focus on priority actions through the Mountain Biking Master Plan.

There will also be developments in Litchfield, Nitmiluk National Park—I know the Member for Nelson is passionate about mountain biking. The bike trails as well, which we will continue to talk about.

**Mr WOOD:** The rail trail.

**Ms MOSS:** The rail trail. Yes, there is lots of work happening on the Mountain Biking Master Plan, Member for Brennan and we have just put out tenders for new trail development in Alice Springs as well and are looking forward to that continuing.

Flow Mountain Bike is a significant organisation that promotes mountain biking trails and the mountain-biking lifestyle if you will, across the country and they did some work around Easter in the Alice too. They travelled down, took a lot of footage and put together a package about the Alice Springs trails and that gets seen by thousands of people, so it will have a really positive effect on that market.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister.

Member for Blain, do you have any questions for the Department of Tourism and Culture Report?

**Mr MILLS:** Mr Wood?

**Mr WOOD:** I was just going to ask a question to follow up on the mountain bike trail. Have you done any advanced work on the possibility of opening up the North Australia Railway line to Adelaide River from Noonamah here?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, we are working through the priorities within the Mountain Biking Master Plan. I am happy to continue discussions with you about the rail trail as well.

**Mr WOOD:** Where does it sit in the priorities?

**Ms MOSS:** I am not sure. We might have to take on notice where it is sitting in terms of the current priority list through the master plan, if that is okay? We will that back to you regarding exploring that idea.

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**Question on Notice No 9.8**

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, can I get you to repeat your question for the record please?

**Mr WOOD:** Could you tell us where, on your list of priorities, is the project to build a mountain bike trail along the old North Australia Railway line from Noonamah to Adelaide River?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, are you happy to accept that question?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question on notice has been allocated the number 9.8

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**Mr MILLS:** I have questions. A lot of our focus has been on product and making sure people who come here have a good time and so on. Being aware in the region that Indonesia, for example, has a strategy in place to increase tourism by 20 000 000 by 2020 and East Timor from 55 000 to 200 000. Those in East Timor believe it will, in fact, be greater than that. So, there is a lot of movement coming into our region.

I note the international figures for the Territory are not showing great growth. When we talk about becoming China Ready, we see that the number of Chinese going to Bali, for example, has increased by 43% in the last year, set to outstrip Australia. What does China Ready mean for the Northern Territory? Do Chinese want to come to the Northern Territory? What work is being done on that?

It is easy to say and we all think yes, but my understanding of the Chinese interest—I and others need to be convinced that we are investing well and are pitching this strategy correctly. What does China Ready mean and does China have an interest in the Northern Territory and our products?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Blain, that is an important question. The Chinese market is one that every jurisdiction is actively trying to attract. I have been to China on two occasions. I will be heading back over there for the final year of the China-Australia Year of Tourism.

Yes, there is an interest in the Northern Territory. We have seen that—even though we are coming off a smaller number of international travellers from China—increase. If you just ...

**Mr MILLS:** To be more specific. That is broadly speaking. What are Chinese tourists interested in, in the Northern Territory?

**Ms MOSS:** Obviously, there is a range of reasons why people are visiting the Northern Territory, but in our Chinese markets there is definitely an interest in things like big open spaces, our natural environment and those sorts of experiences that are in abundance in the Northern Territory and not necessarily experiences that ...

**Mr MILLS:** How is that quantified?

**Ms MOSS:** How is it quantified?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, because it is easy to spend money on these things. I see some of the grants that go towards that, but how is that measured?

**Ms MOSS:** This has not been done in isolation. There is a lot of work done looking at the Chinese market, both at a Tourism NT level, but also at a Tourism Australia level. We have many conversations with Tourism Australia, which undertakes significant market research in terms of different markets, of which China is one.

The China Ready, an accredited program, is about helping to get those tourism businesses ready and pivoted towards that market in terms of what it is that Chinese visitors are looking for when they come ...

**Mr MILLS:** That is essential.

**Ms MOSS:** It is, yes.

**Mr MILLS:** In my observations, even in Indonesia, I see them wanting to go to the shops and the restaurants. I do not see them climbing the mountain. They are travelling in groups—I see this in Jakarta and all through Indonesia—and sticking to the developed areas and the cultural sites. I do not quite see that in the Territory, so I am interested to see what you have come up with in terms of what they want and are looking for in the Northern Territory.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. I will hand over to Alastair in a moment, but I appreciate your comments, Member for Blain, and am happy to have a longer conversation on this. Making sure our cafes and restaurants et cetera are prepared for providing the service that people expect ...

**Mr MILLS:** The worst thing would be to be prepared and they did not turn up. That is what I am concerned about.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, but numbers are increasing. But I will hand over to Alistair to make a comment.

**Mr MILLS:** Are they? Chinese numbers are increasing?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes.

**Mr MILLS:** I am very interested in how many Chinese tourists are coming to the Northern Territory.

**Ms MOSS:** If you look in the Tourism NT annual report for the division, you will see the case study on the Chinese market.

**Mr MILLS:** I missed that.

**Ms MOSS:** On page 27. The case study states the visitation by this important market was up 49% year-on-year to 18 000. While we are operating on smaller numbers than other jurisdictions, that is a significant jump.

We are also recognised by Ctrip—the Northern Territory won an award last year, which was Best Potential Destination. There have been a number of families that have come through the Northern Territory by Chinese tourism operators.

**Mr MILLS:** What page is it on?

**Ms MOSS:** Sorry, it is in the specific Tourism NT annual report, on page 27.

**Ms MOSS:** Another campaign we have been running in the annual report—we have a partnership with Lily Ji, a famous Chinese actress. She has come here to film a number of small series that go out to millions of people in China.

**Mr MILLS:** Let us have a longer conversation about that later. For free, I would say if Indonesia is aiming and investing—with Australian assistance to master plan 20 million tourists heading east, and East Timor is increasing from 50 000 to 200 000 in the next five or 10 years, those tourists moving in that direction could easily come here. They may not be Chinese. Who are those tourists? They are the ones I think we should be focusing on and identifying.

**Ms MOSS:** It is not the only international market the department is focused on. There is a distinct focus on growing our share of the Chinese market.

**Mr MILLS:** Who is travelling east? They are the adventure tourists who are looking for more.

**Ms MOSS:** And we have that in spades, like with our mountain biking plan and other things are imperative to that.

**Mr MILLS:** We will have a longer conversation about that. The other thing is the Territory Wildlife Park, which I am particularly interested in. There is this notion that we are able to invest in it because it produces a result that is of 'unidentified social benefit'. I think we need to be clear about that, because it runs at a loss and costs a significant amount of money to keep going.

It has value, but I think we need to be clear about that value which is not strictly commercial. A lot of operators put their own skin in their own game, with some assistance, and they want to see the pie increase but do not want to be in competition with Territory Wildlife Park. We need to be clear about the non-commercial benefit. Can you explain what that benefit is so we have some balance and can justify expenditure of public money on what is supposed to be a commercial operation?

**Ms MOSS:** I take your point on this 100%. The Territory Wildlife Park is important from a tourism perspective as a tourism product, but it is also a vital part of the community. It is a vital resource in terms of education and conservation outcomes in the Northern Territory.

There are a number of benefits that come from the park that are not purely commercial, as you said. A number of programs have been running through the Territory Wildlife Park, Artists-in-the-Park is one. There has been significant work between the arts sector and the park, especially with things like threatened species and raising awareness, the Crochet Coral Reef Project everyone is familiar with—with the crocheted reef and the education piece—Croc HQ and Be Wise croc campaign and the work that the Territory Wildlife Park has been putting into programs like that..

They have also been doing community programs with things like work with mums and kids coming along to participate in activities in the park during the week. Those sorts of things can be difficult to quantify in terms of dollar value conversation but are all really important things that the Territory Wildlife Park delivers on a day-to-day basis.

**Mr MILLS:** Do you think there could be more work done on quantifying those elements?

**Ms MOSS:** Absolutely, Member for Blain. That is why we are investing in the strategic plan for the park.

**Mr MILLS:** Is that a critical part of it?

**Ms MOSS:** It has to be. We have to be looking at the benefit of the park from all angles and how we can make sure that that is more sustainable into the future.

**Mr MILLS:** I notice here that there is a master plan and a revamped website being developed. Are they happening at the same time?

**Ms MOSS:** There is increased marketing occurring around the Territory Wildlife Park, trying to increase those visitation numbers but the strategic plan will be occurring (inaudible) ...

**Mr MILLS:** How much additional is being put towards marketing?

**Ms MOSS:** I will find the break down for you. We have put \$350°000 into it in the last budget, which was a combination of the strategic planning process, exploring the transport link and connection and that marketing piece, but I will find the break down for you.

**Mr MILLS:** Is it all contained in that \$350°000?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, but if you want a further break down we can get that for you.

**Mr MILLS:** That is enough. I can follow up with that later.

**Mr WOOD:** You just mentioned exploring the transport link. Is that to do with—hopefully the completion of the Litchfield Loop Road?

**Ms MOSS:** The transport link, in the context of the Territory Wildlife Park, is a significant challenge for the park that there is no public transport link out there and that is something that we are exploring through that process—how we can better connect to it, particularly for visitors to Darwin—how we are improving that link. We are exploring that. It is a complex piece of work as you know.

**Mr WOOD:** But would also help locals with a public bus service.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** The other thing is the Litchfield Loop Road—it is due to be completed, hopefully by the end of next year.

**Mr SHIELDS:** We certainly see that as an opportunity for the Territory Wildlife Park because then it could be on people's visitation on the way in or out of Litchfield Park.

**Mr WOOD:** It has always been at a dead end to some extent.

**Mr SHIELDS:** Absolutely. We think it will be a substantial benefit to the park.

**Ms MOSS:** And work with DIPL through that project. They have been talking to tourism operators in that region about the possibilities from the road.

**Mr MILLS:** Where are we at with the master plan? When do we get a chance to see it?

**Ms MOSS:** We imagine there will be a chance to see the master plan early in 2018.

**Mr MILLS:** Do you mean completed? What stage are we at with the master plan?

**Ms MOSS:** There will be a consultation process on that and I will send that information to you, Member for Blain, but we are engaging someone to do that master plan process and then we will go out and do the consultation with the community.

**Mr MILLS:** It has not commenced yet? Have you described the terms of reference for the master plan?

**Mr SHIELDS:** Yes, I can talk about that a little. We have gone to market and are finalising the procurement processes for that now and are looking for someone to do up a 10-year master plan for the park. It is going to identify commercial partnerships and will also look at the economic benefit more broadly and we are looking to turn it in to a world class tourism attraction. The idea of the exploring the commercial partnerships is to try to find some financial way of underpinning the viability of the park so that it is not necessarily in a model that has ongoing losses year-on-year.

**Mr MILLS:** Would Charles Darwin University, with research be one body considered?

**Mr SHIELDS:** I have not been involved in the procurement process but it was a tender.

**Mr MILLS:** No, I mean about a commercial partner.

**Mr SHIELDS:** Absolutely.

**Mr MILLS:** I note that research is talked about but how solid is that research? You would assume that a university with that solid research background would want to be involved as a commercial partner, and draw in research funds.

**Mr SHIELDS:** There is certainly quite a lot of research that happens at the park that is not necessarily seen by the casual visitor, so there may well be opportunities there.

**Mr MILLS:** How much has gone towards this master plan?

**Ms MOSS:** \$150 000 towards the master plan process.

**Mr MILLS:** When is it likely to be completed?

**Ms MOSS:** We will go through the community consultation process. We are looking at the first quarter of 2018.

We do need to go out and consult and would be happy to involve you as part of that process, Member for Blain, if you are interested, and Member for Nelson I am sure you will be too.

**Mr WOOD:** I would be interested because there is an application at the moment which you may be interested in. Two blocks away from the Wildlife Park where the prawn farm is—and you would have known there was an attempt to bring people to Wildlife Park via the harbour. There is an application now before the Development Consent Authority to bring people to the prawn farm to do fishing.

They are looking at having a car park, bringing some boats into that area. This is not very far away from the Wildlife Park. I am not asking you to comment on whether it is a good idea, but I thought I would raise it with you that it may be worth seeing whether a partnership could occur there.

It is only recently that I have seen it.

**Mr MILLS:** I just have one more question. It is not related to the Territory Wildlife Park, it is SilkAir.

I cannot find it but I wrote a note on a yellow sticky piece of paper. What is the financial relationship between the Territory government and SilkAir? There seems to be some kind of contribution to do with marketing—Silkair \$200 000 cooperation something. My pen ran out.

**Ms MOSS:** I might invite Mr Hopper to the table as well for conversations relating to this. We have cooperative marketing partnerships with a range of different tourism stakeholders.

**Mr HOPPER:** That is in effect, the answer.

Cooperative marketing activities happen with a number of different airlines, international or domestic generally targeted at certain times of year or for certain purposes to make sure we can maximise the use of that service.

**Mr MILLS:** Would it be contained somewhere in here, a description of each of those arrangements with each of those airlines.

**Mr HOPPER:** There are examples in the Tourism NT annual report of those different co-op marketing activities. The challenge we have with those activities is they are of a commercial-in-confidence nature because of the way we do them and the rates we get.

If we were to share that publicly, one airline would see what we are doing with another airline and airlines do not tend to like to see that information made public.

**Mr MILLS:** I would assume that there is an arrangement with Philippine Airlines, SilkAir, Jetstar—all of the ones that are coming here.

**Mr HOPPER:** Absolutely. These co-op marketing activities work to build awareness of the destination as a place to come to and these activities are to try and drive conversion.

**Mr MILLS:** What is the global figure?

**Ms MOSS:** For cooperative marketing activity? Could we take that on notice?

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#### Question on Notice No 9.9

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain, I will ask you to repeat your question for the record please.

**Mr MILLS:** I think I will add a little bit more if I may. The list of airlines and the global figure for cooperative marketing campaigns.

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

**Ms MOSS:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The number allocated to the Member for Blain's question is 9.9.

**Mr MILLS:** Does that include airlines that are being enticed to come here?

**Mr HOPPER:** No, because those monies have not been realised yet. We have not had to expend them in co-op marketing.

To clarify your question, that global figure would relate to what we are doing right now with those airlines to fill flights that are occurring.

**Mr MILLS:** Those that are occurring. If you are in discussions with some that you would like to come, are you able to make commitments of that type to those airlines and have they been made?

**Mr HOPPER:** As part of conversations with airlines that we might be trying to encourage to have direct services here, we talk to them about monies put toward co-op marketing activities to show that we would be committed to helping them realise their service. Ultimately, it is no good having an airline fly for 12 months or two years; we need them to commit and stay.

**Mr MILLS:** How does that work? What parameters do you have in those negotiations to make those kinds of offers?

**Mr HOPPER:** A lot of it is market tested, so we understand what we do in other areas. We have a very close working relationship with groups like NT Airports. We work closely with them and they have a good understanding of airline operations and activities.

It is a multifaceted view of how we arrive at that figure. It is not a perfect science by any stretch. Equally, we do not know what happens in other jurisdictions. We try to gather as much information as we can, but we need to appreciate that some of that information might not be overly accurate if it is coming from other jurisdictions. It is a conversation in a number of areas.

**Mr MILLS:** I understand.

**Mr SHIELDS:** We also talked to Tourism Australia, the national tourism body, and they look at overall benefits to Australia as a whole. They will sometimes contribute to a potential joint cooperative marketing arrangement.

**Mr WOOD:** We have a mixed bag of questions here.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is it still on the Department of Tourism and Culture's annual report?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes. I will try to keep to some logic. We are talking about parks. The previous government was looking at developing our parks, such as the rope park at Howard Springs and the Katherine Gorge walkout over the edge. I have on one of those in Capilano in Vancouver. Believe it or not, it is very popular.

Does the government have a project or program for developing the parks similar to what the previous government was trying to do? If it decided to drop those ideas of attracting more people to the parks by bringing forward development that could attract more people ...

**Ms MOSS:** It is still a focus for government, bringing Parks and Wildlife into the Department of Tourism and Culture. Strengthening those conversations about activities in parks—we have sport and rec there as well—is a priority of mine.

If I can just talk about the Howard Springs Nature Park for a moment. Trees Adventure is looking to open at the start of the 2018 Dry Season. It received a grant from Tourism NT that is continuing to progress. We have a number of visitor management plans. The Litchfield National Park one was tabled. I think you were part of that process, Member for Nelson.

We continue to work to those plans to realise some of those aspirations on parks. We are seeing increased numbers across most of our parks and reserves across the Northern Territory, and want to continue to support it in a way that is balanced with the aspirations of traditional owners and the conservation of those parks and reserves.

It is still a priority, but if there is any particular park or project you are interested in, we are happy to get that information.

With the Nitmiluk project, we are not progressing the skywalk idea, but we have committed \$10m to infrastructure within that park, with about \$2.5m going into immediate works, like the jetty where the boat is. Over the period of the next few years, realising some of the aspirations of the Jawoyn Association and its board—opening up new areas and experiences within Nitmiluk National Park.

We are working closely with Jawoyn on the visitor experience plan and will continue that.

**Mr WOOD:** I do not think we do enough to attract people to the parks. I have asked this in estimates before, but is it possible to get a full list of visitors to every park in the Northern Territory over the last five years?

**Ms MOSS:** Over the last five?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, because I recall having asked the same question some years ago. There was, in most part, a reduction in visitors. I presume part of the reason the previous government was trying to up the number of visitors or upgrade some of the national parks was to try to increase the number of visitors to those parks.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, yes, I am happy to take that on notice. There is a comparison—I was trying to find the page, but it is in our annual report. There is a year-on-year comparison. But I note you are asking for five years and ...

**Mr WOOD:** We need to see which parks are going well and which are not. You look after a large number of parks.

**Ms MOSS:** Okay. We are having a look at the 2015–16 annual report where all the numbers are. We can pull that together.

**Mr WOOD:** Is that for each park?

**Ms MOSS:** That was for the top visitor parks.

**Mr WOOD:** No, we need it ...

**Ms MOSS:** Understood.

**Mr WOOD:** ... because you have small parks like Leaning Tree and bigger parks like—I have forgotten the Aboriginal names—Gregory National Park and Keep River. Some of those parks were not doing well. You include Casuarina Coastal Reserve, which can bump numbers up quite considerably.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, there may not be counters in all of the parks ...

**Mr WOOD:** That is true.

**Ms MOSS:** There is a list that looks over the last three financial years on page 81, but I will have a look at whether we can provide a more fulsome list for you and have a look at the last few years.

**Mr WOOD:** I have seen the department give us a fulsome list—there is nearly every park. It is important ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, we will take that as a question on notice.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, we will take it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.10

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, repeat the question for the record please.

**Mr WOOD:** Could you provide details of visitor numbers to all reserves and parks over the last five years please? I take into account that you may not have counters on some of them.

**Ms MOSS:** We can let you know where that is the case, Member for Nelson ...

**Mr WOOD:** You probably do not have one on Leaning Tree Lagoon.

**Ms MOSS:** I accept the question.

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister will table that as a question on notice with the number 9.10.

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**Ms MOSS:** I will also add while we are talking about encouraging more activity on parks, Kakadu is an important part of this conversation, particularly for local tourism operators in the Top End. It is not a park that is managed by the NT Government, it is managed by the federal government.

We are continuing to advocate strongly to the federal government about things like sealing of roads and working with the management committee, the board and traditional owners on how we can extend the season in Kakadu and allow people to continue to have amazing experiences there. It is one of our greatest natural assets in the Top End and it needs investment. We are acutely aware of that.

**Madam CHAIR:** Committee, I give a reminder that we have 35 minutes left with minister Moss and we have four remaining reports, if you want to keep that in mind when asking questions.

Are there any more questions regarding the Department of Tourism and Culture annual report?

**Mr WOOD:** That includes sport, does it not?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, it does.

**A member** interjecting.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, I have. I am aware of the time. There is a review of the Aboriginal ranger program. Is that correct?

**Ms MOSS:** No, there is consultation occurring regarding the legislation which is about—yes, I guess you could say it is a review of the legislation, but it is about how we can recognise the role of Aboriginal rangers in the current Parks and Wildlife legislation and how we can work better with them to support their enforcement and compliance activities on country.

**Mr WOOD:** Is that a document others can look at, besides ...

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. There is a discussion paper on our website. I will send that to you, Member for Nelson, so you can have a look. The department has already been talking to ranger groups about it, but we now have the formal discussion paper out. If there is anyone you think we need to consult with, we are very happy to hear from you. We will send it to you today, Member for Nelson.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I believe we have a question from the Member for Brennan.

**Mr SIEVERS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Moving on from Parks and Wildlife and activity in those areas, I want to move into Sport and Recreation, if that is okay.

We have a lot of sport in the Northern Territory and it is going well. What I am interested to see what we are doing in sport and women in sport. How are we going in attracting more women into sport?

**Ms MOSS:** The greater attraction of women and girls into sport in the Territory is a priority for me. It is something that many women have talked to me about and as a government we are making some changes and investments around this particular area of policy.

We doubled the investment in the Adelaide Crows. That had a number of Territory women in it. A significant proportion of the Adelaide Crows women's players were Territory women. Being able to support that team and demonstrate that pathway to Territory women and girls in AFL and more broadly in sport is a very good investment and something we have seen.

Nationally that reignited passion for investing in those pathways for women and girls which is great.

The \$10m from the NT Government, we are doing it jointly with the federal government, in the netball centre was fast-tracked. We have gone through the Have Your Say process for that. It is obviously a sport where participation by women is exceptionally high.

We are investing in our remote sporting infrastructure. We will make sure that we have better facilities for women and girls in terms of that infrastructure as well.

The women in sport programme supported 18 sporting groups that received \$106 694 between them over the financial year. It is about delivering programs for women, purchasing fit-for-purpose equipment.

We also put out the expression of interest recently for the women in sport advisory committee. We have had a fantastic response to that. I am working my way through those applications so that we can get a strong advisory committee of women and girls across the Territory, and people with an interest in growth in women's participation so we can make sure that our policies and infrastructure programs cater for growing female participation as we should.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you minister. I will throw back to the Member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Madam Chair, what happened to the athletic track that was proposed for Alice Springs? If Alice Springs do not want it would you mind spending the money at Freds Pass for rural athletics, which gets, when you consider the rural area is the same population roughly as Alice Springs, bugger all compared to what Alice Springs gets? If they do not want the athletics track can we have it?

**Ms MOSS:** The athletics track is a project now in the mix for the community consultation process in Alice Springs. We did talk to the Alice Springs Town Council about sporting priorities, that particular project and Centralian Middle School.

We have made a decision in collaboration around having a look at what the priorities for sporting infrastructure are in Alice Springs. That has gone out with that \$6.2m investment in infrastructure in Alice Springs as part of the Have Your Say process. There have been many conversations with the sporting community in Central Australia about those projects put forward.

The process closes today. We will see what comes out of that community consultation process.

**Mr WOOD:** I might ask our rural athletic club to have their say, too.

You also have sports vouchers that are given out every year. What is the percentage of sports vouchers that do not get used and what happens to them? Can people keep them for the next year or the year after?

**Ms MOSS:** What was the first half of your question Member for Nelson?

**Mr WOOD:** You have sports vouchers and a percentage of those sports vouchers do not get redeemed. What happens to those and can they get recycled for the next year?

**Ms MOSS:** The sports vouchers do not get recycled for the next year necessarily. They have an expiry date on them.

**Mr WOOD:** What percentage do not get redeemed?

**Ms MOSS:** I will take that on notice and give that to you. We can give some information around that. In 2016–17, the total budget being \$6m for the Sports Vouchers program—in the urban area it was \$3,484,461 expended, in remote it was just over \$1.5m expended and within the Learn to Swim it was \$374,200 which was up on the year before. That brings it to a total of \$5,438,315 but we will work through the percentage—just over 9%, based on those numbers.

**Mr WOOD:** What happens to the money? Does it go back in to the budget or is it perhaps reallocated to some sporting club that may need a little assistance?

**Ms MOSS:** It does get reinvested back in to sports programs. There are growing pressures, as you can imagine, on the department around that and we try to support as many different clubs and activities and events as we can, so yes it does get reinvested.

**Mr WOOD:** It is a big help. I was looking at the price of junior cricket, I think it is about \$175.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes, the sports vouchers definitely go a long way to helping families and it is always good to see them being redeemed by Territory families to help with those activities.

**Mr WOOD:** I do raise Freds Pass a bit because it is as big as Marrara yet it gets very little assistance from the government. It had a \$3m grant in the last government, which was more by accident than design because they did not put it in the budget. They realised it might be a good idea before an election to give some money. Also the previous government did allocate \$3m that was taken away.

Is there any chance that the government will consider giving at least a certain amount of money per year to Freds Pass Reserve? It is as big as Marrara yet it gets very little assistance except for spot community grants. This year, thankfully, the soccer people, who are one of the biggest groups in our area, have toilets after being there for 10 years.

We do not seem to get any encouragement from the Northern Territory Government in that area. Is there any consideration given to given that reserve a set amount of money per year—like you would for Marrara?

**Ms MOSS:** I know you are aware that we are doing a review in terms of the show grounds infrastructure and how we are supporting grounds from that perspective. But through all of our programs we are keen to make sure that there is good support, not only in our urban centres but regionally and rurally as well. There are a number of programs available to support infrastructure and activities and events across the Territory and they are assessed according to those grants programs.

**Mr WOOD:** What would be the annual amount of money that government pays to keep Marrara going?

**Ms MOSS:** I would have to get that figure for you. In terms of ongoing operational costs of running Marrara° ...

**Mr WOOD:** That is all I am asking for at the moment. Everybody can apply for capital. Freds Pass—we are 25°000 people that is why I see all the money going to Alice Springs and I am not against Alice Springs—I go to the Masters and I enjoy all the facilities—but if you compared Alice Springs and you compared Darwin with what Litchfield gets, Litchfield has not even got a swimming pool yet.

It is very small bickies that that community gets from the government. It seems to be a no man's land. You do better if you are a remote community. I note you have remote funding—you have Wagait—it is closer to Darwin than Freds Pass is and yet they got quite a nice grant. You also have Coomalie, which I would not call remote. I am not saying they should not get the money but in other words, somehow, Litchfield is in no man's land there.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.11

**Madam°CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, we will place your question on notice. Can I ask you to repeat for the record?

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, could you give us the operational funding for Marrara over the last financial year?

**Madam°CHAIR:** Is it the entire Marrara Sporting Complex? Minister, are you happy to take that on notice?

**Ms MOSS:** Yes. I am.

**Madam°CHAIR:** The number we are allocating for the Member for Nelson's question is 9.11.

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**Mr WOOD:** I have two other questions on sport. One is badminton. Will they ever get a permanent home they can use for international and national championships? At the present time they rent a building in Winnellie and that fine, but it is not a building that could be used for, I believe, state or international championships if they ever wanted to.

Has there been any move by the government to look at a home for them? They were kicked out of Sports House when the government decided to develop that area. You might remember they had a little protest out here with a small badminton court. They are still looking for a home. I did not know whether the government has considered looking at that facility in the future, at least.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, I am very aware of the advocacy from badminton, as you can imagine. They do a very good job advocating for their sport, as do many other clubs. We have to consider these proposals and this advocacy in the context of the broader priorities across government and the sporting sector.

I understand they are in conversations with others. It is certainly something that is on our radar. Construction is occurring on the tennis centre, we will have the home for rugby league at Warren Park and the netball centre. Those are our priorities at the moment. I also acknowledge that there is a range of sports that will also be involved in the Arafura Games. There are many lenses we need to put over this in ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, minister, to interject. I have just noticed that we do not have a quorum of our Estimates Committee because our committee members have pretty much vacated. It is just the Member for Arnhem and me. I will put proceedings on hold.

Sorry, Member for Nelson, I just clicked.

**Mr WOOD:** Do we not have three?

**Madam CHAIR:** No, we have two. Proxies are not eligible committee members.

**Mr WOOD:** No, I am on the reserve bench, not guests.

**Madam CHAIR:** My apologies, please resume, minister.

**Ms MOSS:** I do not think I had anything to add, to be honest.

**Mr SIEVERS:** Member for Nelson, before we move off, I have a few question on Sports Vouchers, if that is all right, before you move down that other direction?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes.

**Mr SIEVERS:** Minister, what is the uptake of the Sports Vouchers? Have Sports Vouchers increased or decreased over the years, particularly in remote areas? What is the uptake and how do we monitor whether they are delivering those sorts of services the Sports Vouchers are for?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Brennan, it is an important scheme, as we have all talked about. We want to ensure we see increasing redemption of that. It is, obviously, not just about sport. You can now also redeem them with other eligible registered organisations for activities such as arts activities. They help Territory families deal with the cost of those extracurricular activities and make it a fairer playing field for people as well.

Regarding urban area, in 2016–17—I think I put the amount on the record earlier of \$3 484 461 provided in vouchers, which is an increase of 3% on the previous year, which is really positive. In remote areas, for the 2016–17 year it was \$1 581 653 provided for activities and programs, which is up 5.5% on the year before, which again is really positive.

As a department, we need to make sure we are continuing to work with those sporting providers to ensure that outside of the urban areas we are providing a good range of opportunities for people to engage in sports external to the school environment.

In terms of the whole program, it is up 3.7% on the year before, as an average across the entire program, which is really positive.

We get feedback from regional councils, as they are very important stakeholders, on how the program is working. It provides opportunities, not only Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs, but right throughout the Northern Territory.

**Madam CHAIR:** Anything else?

**Mr WOOD:** I have just seen the time, so I will leave my question. I just need a bit of clarification, where are you heading now?

**Madam CHAIR:** Wherever you would like. If you have any further questions, otherwise we have got four other reports.

**Mr WOOD:** I notice the Waterfront is here.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you have any that you like to table as questions on notice so that we can get responses to you?

**Mr WOOD:** It might be too broad, but I will ask it and just see. There is a mention of the Active Recreation Policy in the annual report. What concerns me is, are we going overall ground again? If we do not know how to be active by now, Darwin City Council has programs. I am sure there is a recreation program for remote communities. Do we need a policy? Can we use an old policy? I would hate to use the words contemporise

or modernise, which are the in words these days, but is there a need to spend money on an active recreation policy?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, I think it is really important that we make sure that we have a strong active recreation policy. It is certainly something that is being looked at in terms of national conversations on a National Sports plan.

**Mr WOOD:** Can we borrow theirs? To save money?

**Ms MOSS:** We are definitely working with them to make sure that we are aligning to those national priorities as well. It is an area that requires focus from all jurisdictions and we all have a responsibility to that. I acknowledge it is not like no work has ever been done before in the history of the world. There definitely has been some good work done and it is not about reinventing the wheel, but it is about making sure that we are including new learning and new perspectives into what is a modern strategy.

**Mr WOOD:** Walking in the morning does not require new learning. It just requires that you get up early and walk. So I just think sometimes we spend money on a lot of nearly academic things. We have more gyms in Darwin over the last 10 years than have ever existed before. We have so many sporting clubs. I just came from a doctor's surgery today and they have all the health things up there for everyone, how to exercise and do all that. I just wonder, do we actually end up spending money—a bit more like window dressing than actually achieving anything.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, unfortunately not everyone is going for a walk in the morning. And across this country, we have a growing challenge with obesity. We have a growing challenge in terms of getting kids health and active.

**Mr WOOD:** That might be more about eating.

**Ms MOSS:** But also, if we look at the Northern Territory context and chronic disease in remote communities, this is really important work. I absolutely think it is really important work. But I do take your point and there are number of people in our community who are in engaged in organised sport. There are range of people in our communities who will out for a jog in the morning, walk the dog, but there are also specific challenges across the Northern Territory. I mean, that is not the case for everyone and we face really specific health challenges. So we do need to do this work, I think.

**Mr WOOD:** It could be, ban this for certain hours of the day, and then you might get people to do something else.

**Ms MOSS:** I will take that as a compliment.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have just got one question.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Prior to the August 2016 election, the Chief Minister promised to contribute \$500 000 to the Finke Desert Race master plan, including improvements to the finishing straight, rainwater tanks, a multipurpose shed and improved lighting facilities. I just wondered if and when that will be honoured?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Araluen, I will just get the MotorSports breakdown so I can let you know where that one is up to.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It was in a press release on 12 July 2016. Commitment to MotorSports in the Northern Territory.

**Ms MOSS:** Okay, so we do have it as—the master plan and infrastructure—upgrades on for this financial year.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Alright. It is in the budget, ready to go? Great.

**Ms MOSS:** Yes.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Are there any final questions in regards to the Department of Tourism and Culture report? No?

**Mr WOOD:** I just want to ask a question about the Waterfront, does that include ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, we can get to that one. So this is outside of this report.

**Mr WOOD:** It is outside of this report?

**Madam CHAIR:** I have got the Darwin Waterfront Corporation, it has its own annual report.

**Mr WOOD:** Another annual report?

**Madam CHAIR:** So we will close off. We have got four to go. We will close off consideration of this report. Thank you very much, and we will move to report number five: Heritage Council 2017 report. Does the committee have any questions in relation to that report?

**Mr WOOD:** I want to ask a question about the Waterfront.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, we can get to that. That is outside of this report.

**Mr WOOD:** It is outside of this report?

**Madam CHAIR:** I have got the Darwin Waterfront as having its own annual report. So we will close off consideration of this report thank you.

#### **Report No 5 – Heritage Council 2017 Report**

**Madam CHAIR:** We will move to report number five, Heritage Commission. Does the committee have any questions in relation to that report?

**Mr WOOD:** I would just like to thank the heritage people for changing the name of Strauss Cricket Ground to Strauss Cricket Ground. They it called Noonamah Cricket Ground so they have agreed to call it the Strauss Cricket Ground. I appreciate that.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for that acknowledgment Member for Nelson.

#### **Report No 6 – Darwin Waterfront Corporation 2017 Report**

**Ms MOSS:** I will invite up Mr Sam Burke.

**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome Sam, thank you for joining us. I will ask the committee to ask their questions.

**Mr WOOD:** My basic question is when do you think the Waterfront may be returned to the Darwin City Council or is that not something that is in the foreseeable future?

**Ms MOSS:** I am very aware of the conversations that have been happening in the community about Darwin Waterfront and Darwin City Council. I recognise and acknowledge that much of that has come from people's desire to vote in things like council elections and be part of that process.

The Waterfront Corporation is part of the Department of Tourism and Culture and we continue to plan and operate as such.

**Mr WOOD:** The department is not the local government. It is just a department. The question really was, when is it going to leave the department and move back to what you might call normality? It really is a nothing. People who live there are stateless to a point. When would they expect to become part of Darwin City Council?

**Ms MOSS:** Darwin Waterfront Corporation takes on many of the roles and functions that the council would ordinarily undertake and works in partnership to deliver those services to residents at the Waterfront Corporation.

There is no resolution in terms of Darwin City Council taking over the Waterfront. It is not a plan.

**Mr WOOD:** The residents of the Waterfront pay taxes without representation. I have heard that somewhere before. Boston Tea Party? Those people do not have any direct say in the running of the Waterfront.

**Ms MOSS:** What I might do, Member for Nelson, is hand over to Mr Sam Burke. The residents are involved in decision-making on the Waterfront and are an important part of the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. Mr Burke can talk more about how they actively engage with the residents there.

**Mr BURKE:** I am general manager of the corporation. I have heard the comment about taxation without representation before. Obviously Boston Tea Party was upset about the United Kingdom taxing them without a seat in the UK parliament.

This is different because the Northern Territory government is the entity that taxes Waterfront residents and obviously the Member for Port Darwin and the Port Darwin electorate covers the Waterfront so residents do vote in the elections that tax them.

The corporation has various stakeholder groups that get together at least four times a year to discuss all the activities. It is a small population and we consult widely on whatever we plan on doing.

When it comes to the city of Darwin the original masterplan for the waterfront was 1440 residential dwellings. That has substantially changed. The rate base is substantially less than that so the economics of a handover are totally different. The Waterfront has now become, at least in my opinion, the face of Darwin for many tourists and is a modern and fresh area for us.

We have got to be careful about maintaining that and making sure the economics make sense.

**Mr WOOD:** The Monaco of the Darwin Peninsula.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, there are an increased number—and I know you are very aware of this—of events that happen at the Darwin Waterfront for the Darwin community. It is a much-loved part of Darwin. It has a significant retail and hospitality component to it. As Sam has said, it is very complex. But the Darwin Waterfront is a fantastic asset in Darwin, in not only how we are attracting and catering for people who visit, but a vital part of liveability in the Territory. It has provided a lot of different things, from the wave pool to the lagoon and the Convention Centre that we could not previously offer.

**Mr WOOD:** What concerns me is that when it was originally rejected by Darwin City Council —because that land was controlled by Darwin City Council in the first place; that was the industrial area of Darwin, to some extent—I envisaged that you would hand it back in conjunction to the Darwin City Council when it got to a certain sustainability, if I can call it that.

What has happened to the future development plans of the area? You have the six-star—whatever six-star means; I have no idea—hotel planned for there. There were beautiful master plans done. Where are we at with coming towards that sustainability, so if it is completed would possibly give Darwin City Council an opportunity to take back that land?

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Nelson, we can talk through the plans from the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. They continue to improve the Darwin Waterfront and add and move through those plans. Sam, would you talk a bit more about the plans ahead?

**Mr BURKE:** Member for Nelson, when the Darwin City Council resolved to not take over the Waterfront, the resolution said it would not consider it again until the year 2020. That was on the basis of that 1440 master plan. We are now moving towards a much more tourism-focused development, particularly on Fort Hill sites. Again, that comes with less rates than the residential development.

Essentially, the planning scheme that was adopted in accordance with the original TOGA master plan is—so far as I am aware—being maintained. The hotel will be developed in accordance with that. Then, between the hotel and the developed part of the precinct are some option sites yet to be planned, but they hold that CB zoning.

Essentially, government took the decision that instead of it being medium to high-density residential development, it would now be more tourism focus.

**Mr WOOD:** If Darwin City Council is, therefore, unlikely to take it over, is the Darwin Waterfront subsidised? If so, by how much? Who subsidises it?

**Mr BURKE:** There are two parts to that. In relation to the city council taking it over—just to speak about whether or not it is unique—the fact that it is an unincorporated area is not that unique. There are a number of those in the Northern Territory ...

**Mr WOOD:** We are trying to get them incorporated.

**Mr BURKE:** It is a common practice down south around the country to have these zones for the purposes of fast-tracking development and having planning processes with the state. So, what we are working through at the moment with the executives at city council is what the issue is we are trying to address.

If it is voting rights, there are a number of examples where that can be addressed—for example, Southbank Corporation rates almost the same way as the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. The residents there can vote. Similarly, if you look at some of our Navy and Defence bases, the council does not have jurisdiction within them, but residents inside there are able to vote. That is one way of addressing it.

Insofar as taking over the Waterfront from a funding perspective, the vast majority of our funding goes towards the Convention Centre. On the last round of consideration of the city council taking over the Waterfront, their costs were 300% more than what it costs the Darwin Waterfront Corporation to maintain and develop that precinct. There is a lot of work involved in working out how a council, with its overheads and structures, could viably take over the Waterfront, versus a corporation that can be more flexible in the way it operates.

**Mr WOOD:** Could be a good argument to get rid of local government.

**Mr BURKE:** Also, more importantly, the costs that have been said in the public domain about what it costs the corporation need to be looked carefully.

For example it is been said that the board of the corporation costs \$2m a year. It cost \$157 000 per year. It is not this great vacuum of funding. In fact most of the costs are for the capital and concession deed costs for the Convention Centre, which is a vital business tourism asset for the Northern Territory.

**Ms MOSS:** If I can, Member for Nelson, I think it is going to become even more so, the six-star hotel that you referred to will provide service to a market that we do not necessarily cater to particularly well. I think it will be fantastic in terms of our approach to the Chinese market and other international visitors.

For the convention centre, I talked in my opening statement about the challenge around INPEX numbers. We are very aware of that. We are working on a business attraction strategy and what is going on at the Darwin Waterfront, by way of following up on those leads. Those business events are going to become more important for us in trying to attract more international conferences to Darwin in particular.

It was just to add to Sam's point about this being a tourism asset as well. It is incredibly important to us going forward.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you minister. I am just aware that I have one final question from the Member for Arnhem in regards to the Waterfront Corporation.

**Ms UIBO:** I am going to slip two in if I can. I will start with the one.

I found the report interesting in regards to no obvious celebration or recognition of the Larrakia whose land the Waterfront Precinct is sitting on. The only part in the report in regards to heritage refers to the World War II fuel storage tunnels.

I am interested whether the corporation has any partnerships with the Larrakia Nation or the Larrakia Development Corporation, or any plans to partner with them?

**Mr BURKE:** We are very cognisant of the fact that there is a number of sacred sites within the Waterfront Precinct and we have quite strong ties with Larrakia elders that currently speak for the Larrakia of that area.

A good first example is our driverless bus initiative—when we said how we were going to bring this technology to the Waterfront but tie it to the historical origins. The bus has been wrapped with a story that was designed

by a Larrakia elder, I think that would be how you describe him, and that has gone nationally around the country showing the Waterfront.

When it comes to partnering, the Goyder Park opening had a number of sensitivities for Larrakia. We are looking at a number of areas with the heritage division when it comes to Hughes Avenue and Jervois Park that has both sacred site trees and springs. There is of course Stokes Hill, which is a significant sacred site. There are a number of discussions going on around that area. It is probably too early to talk in any detail about it but certainly Larrakia Development are talking about it, we are cognisant of it, and there is probably a lot to come.

**Ms MOSS:** That is ongoing. There is also the public art aspect of Darwin Waterfront Corporation. I would see the redevelopment of State Square and how that plays into the connection to the Waterfront as well as an opportunity for us to tell some of those stories better across that entire ...

**Ms UIBO:** It would be nice to acknowledge that if there is that work. I know that not all of it is public that can be acknowledged but acknowledge that there is a partnership and those conversation are happening. I did not find any reference in the report.

**Ms NELSON:** Is there a strategy in place to connect the Darwin Waterfront to the iconic arts trail and the NT museum because there seems to be a bit of a disconnect.

**Ms MOSS:** Member for Katherine, part of that broader vision for Darwin city around the redevelopment of State Square, the museum at Myilly Point and the Waterfront—we have to create a better linkage through the Darwin CBD. The Chief Minister is very cognisant of that, and as a government we are all cognisant of how we create that flow through the CBD.

We have just put some money into heritage works at Fannie Bay Gaol. From East Point to the Waterfront there are some incredible assets, from the museum to the gaol, botanic gardens, Waterfront, State Square, and we have to be able to tell that story and connect those better. That is what we are trying to do through the projects we are investing in.

**Madam CHAIR:** On that note, the time is 12 pm, so we will close our session with Minister Moss.

That concludes consideration of all reports relating to Tourism and Culture. On behalf of the committee I thank you, minister, for appearing today, and all the officers who accompanied you.

I also thank the Department of Corporate and Information Services, who prepared for their appearance today and were unable to make it onto the agenda.

The committee will now break for lunch until 12.30 pm, when we will reconvene to question Madam Speaker.

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The committee suspended.

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## MADAM SPEAKER'S PORTFOLIO

### DEPARTMENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY Report No 1 – Department of the Legislative Assembly 2017 Report

**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome, Madam Speaker. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. I note that while the administrative arrangements order put responsibility for the Department of the Legislative Assembly with the Chief Minister, by convention Madam Speaker administers the department, so she will now answer questions relating to the department's annual report.

Madam Speaker, I welcome you and invite you to introduce the officials with accompanying you today.

**Madam SPEAKER:** On my left is the Clerk, Michael Tatham; on my right is the Deputy Clerk, Marianne Conaty; and on my far left is the Chief Financial Officer, Diem Tang.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to both your statement and the annual report from committee members.

**Madam SPEAKER:** I have no opening statement.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will now open it up to the committee for questions.

**Ms LAMBLEY:** I just have one question. In the back of the Department of the Chief Minister's annual report, there is a list of all the ministerial expenses under each minister. I am wondering, equivalent to that what are the costs associated with the Independents? What are their expenditure in terms of admin and staffing—the money that has been allocated?

**Madam SPEAKER:** The two Independents who were paid for by the government, the money that was allocated—it is two staff members, an SAO1 and AO7 positions. Funding of \$318 144 was approved by Cabinet for the 12-month period. That effectively pays their salaries. Any other costs incurred with the job have been absorbed by the department. For example, chairs, tables, computers.

**Ms LAMBLEY:** For the five Independents, that is the allocation for admin?

**Madam SPEAKER:** For research.

**Ms LAMBLEY:** There is no other expenses associated with the Independents?

**Madam SPEAKER:** No.

**Ms LAMBLEY:** Not including our wages ...

**Madam SPEAKER:** And cups of tea during sittings and that kind of stuff. So it is \$318 144.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Are there any further questions?

**Mr MILLS:** Madam Speaker, this question is related to catering contracts.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Karen Sheldon Catering. Her contract is up for renewal. It was renewed this financial year. I will refer to Mr Clerk.

**THE CLERK:** The contract with Karen Sheldon Catering is a contract that has traditionally been out to tender. The only tenderer has been Karen Sheldon for the actual contract, and it is for the use of the dining room kitchens on level four and the exclusive use of the cafe. There is a licence agreement, and they pay about \$10 000 a year, if I recall correctly, for the use of the cafe. They are allowed to use the kitchen upstairs for training purposes as part of the deal. They have exclusive rights to cater for the period of the contract.

**Madam SPEAKER:** That is for all functions in Parliament House and meetings have to go through that catering company, even if it is a private function they cannot bring in their own refreshments or food. What goes on in the ministerial suites upstairs is out of that jurisdiction. So if they have a function in their offices or on the balconies, that has nothing to do with the catering contract; that is entirely up to the executive arm of government.

**Mr MILLS:** Is there a set commercial rate for someone having a function here, per head?

**Madam SPEAKER:** Yes, or do you mean ...

If you have a function—just say the Independents got together and we wanted to book a place here, and we were required to make use of the contractor, Karen Sheldon, is there a published rate per head?

**Madam SPEAKER:** No, we do not have that. That is something you would talk to Karen Sheldon's business about. When people have had wedding receptions here, the family deals with the caterers specifically, and that is their commercial business. In the functions manual there are set rates for hire of rooms and equipment, which we then benchmark against commercial rates.

We are very cautious to make sure Parliament House and its services and facilities are not undermining the commercial market. That is reviewed on an annual basis to make sure those rooms and functions are in sync with the commercial market. Anything specifically commercial with a function—if the Independents wanted a function put on by the catering contractor—you deal with them directly.

**Mr MILLS:** What about the hiring of the great hall? Is there a set rate for that?

**Madam SPEAKER:** There is, but the Main Hall is restricted to government functions sponsored by a minister. It is not available for public hire.

**Mr MILLS:** If a minister is to use it is there a cost?

**Madam SPEAKER:** No, not for the Main Hall.

**The CLERK:** There are costs allocated to each other venue.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Commercial people can use every other facility, but not the Main Hall. It is not an exception. The Main Hall is sometimes for things like the Borella Ride and Portrait of a Senior Territorian. It has to be something reasonably exceptional. We have been asked in the past to house paintings or special art in the Main Hall and we generally say no because of the lumens and the ultraviolet light coming in, as well as the curating. It sets a precedent that is not sustainable.

Functions in the Main Hall are usually sponsored by a minister or the Chief Minister. For example, the main dinner when the Indonesian Prime Minister visited. That was in the Main Hall.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Would you like a copy of the functions manual?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, why not.

**Madam SPEAKER:** We will organise that.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. If a minister is to sponsor an event, there is no charge?

**Madam SPEAKER:** No, not to use the facility.

**Mr MILLS:** The cost of catering then ...

**Madam SPEAKER:** Is borne by the minister's office.

**Ms UIBO:** On page 24, Comprehensive Operating Statement—can you please elaborate on the employee expenses for 2017. It is broken down in 2016; I assume that is the six months for each of those years to make the financial year.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Could you please repeat that.

**Ms UIBO:** On page 24, under employee expenses, there is a breakdown between the year 2017 and the year 2016. It shows \$17.8m and \$15.9m. I am wondering if that is for six months of each of those years to make a whole financial year.

**Madam SPEAKER:** I will ask the Chief Financial Officer, Diem, to explain.

**Ms TANG:** In the employee expenses for the financial year 2016–17 compared to 2015–16, the difference is predominantly due to the cost of the general election. It is payout costs for the outgoing members and electorate officers, hence the difference.

**Madam SPEAKER:** As you know, there were a few members who had payouts from the last general election.

**Madam CHAIR:** Does the committee have any further questions of Madam Speaker?

That finalises consideration of the Department of the Legislative Assembly's annual report. Thank you for your time, Madam Speaker, and your accompanying guests.

The committee will take a break until 1 pm, when we will resume and ask questions of the Department of Education's annual report.

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The committee suspended.

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## MINISTER LAWLER'S PORTFOLIO

### EDUCATION

#### Report No 1 – Department of Education 2017 Report

**Madam°CHAIR:** Welcome, Minister Lawler, to this afternoon's estimates hearings, where we will be looking at the Department of Education annual report. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you, then I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then open up questions to the committee on both your statement and the annual report.

**Ms LAWLER:** On my left I have Vicki Baylis, Chief Executive Office; beside her is Brett Roach, Chief Financial Officer; Marion Guppy, Deputy Chief Executive School Education; and Jasmin Aldenhoven, Executive Director Corporate Services. There are a number of people behind us as well who may take a seat as need be.

**Madam°CHAIR:** Do you have an opening statement?

**Ms LAWLER:** I do and I look forward to being able to put some really positive stories on the public record.

Quality education services are the foundation for the positive, social and economic participation of Territorians. This government is committed to providing all children in the Northern Territory with access to high quality services from birth to the end of their schooling so that our young Territorians can become confident and capable global citizens.

There are 190 schools in the Northern Territory providing education for over 45°000 students in government and non-government schools. In addition, 23 government homeland learning centres are operating this year. Out of the 153 government schools in the Territory 73% are located in remote and very remote areas with 46% of government school students enrolled in these schools.

Government school students are supported by a workforce of over 4200 full-time equivalent employees with 41% of employees located in remote and very remote workplaces. School-based employees make up 87% of the workforce, including over 2500 teachers. At 14% the Department of Education's proportion of Aboriginal employees is higher than the overall Northern Territory Government percentage.

This annual report is for the financial year 2016–17. Data in relation to school enrolment, attendance and assessment is reported for the 2016 school year. To clarify that and to be really upfront—schools work on calendar years so their budget is on calendar years. The data for all of their attendance measures are on calendar years but we are talking to the 2016–17 annual report.

Our government understands the importance of investing in early childhood education and providing a great start for children. Improving the quality of early childhood education and care services across the Territory remains a priority for the Department of Education.

In 2016–17, quality ratings for all education and care services in meeting or exceeding the national quality standard increased by 20 percentage points from 39% at 30 June 2016 to 59% on 30 June 2017. An additional 10 new Families as First Teachers programs sites were established, eight in remote and two in urban areas, taking the total to 32 sites by the end of semester one this year.

The Northern Territory preschool curriculum was implemented in all government preschools. During 2016–17 we continued to invest in programs and initiatives that we know are making a difference for every child so they can all be successful learners.

Key achievements included:

- \$489m in 2017 school resourcing to provide quality programs including an additional \$20m to provide extra teachers and classroom resources.
- Visible learning continued to be implemented in all government schools. Explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy where students are actively involved in their own learning also continue to be delivered in remote and very remote Territory government schools.

- Delivery of a suite of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, STEM, events to increase student engagement in STEM and digital literacy professional learning events, workshops and online courses for teachers to provide them with the teaching skills to better engage students in STEM, including coding.
- Better support in education for children with additional needs continued to be provided through a range of programs, including children with high support education needs in the Palmerston rural areas now having access to a special education facility with the completion of the \$19.55m Forrest Parade School.
- Supporting students with additional needs, scholarships were also awarded to 20 Northern Territory teachers, 15 from government schools and five from non-government schools to support teachers to complete a graduate Certificate of Education (Special Education).
- An early learning intervention hub in Darwin was established, the Mimik-ga Centre, delivering two autism spectrum disorder intervention programs, a FaFT program and a positive learning service.
- The Malak Re-engagement Centre was extended to provide engagement services for young people in Palmerston through an outreach program.
- The Healthy Life Creative Life program was created in Tennant Creek providing alternative education pathways for middle and senior students who are at risk of disengagement.
- A range of flexible senior years options including part-time senior secondary schooling options, access to vocational education, training and employment pathways in schools were provided.
- In 2016, 922 students completed the Northern Territory Certificate of Education, including 156 Aboriginal students, representing the largest cohort to date and 1379 students achieved one or more VET competencies and there were also 906 students who completed a Certificate I, II or III qualification, which is also the largest cohort to date.
- New learning environments were created or enhanced for NT students with 86 infrastructure projects completed or progressed. This included the completion of the \$20.03m Dawurr Regional Boarding Facility collocated at Nhulunbuy High School, providing up to 40 places for Aboriginal students to access quality secondary education closer to their homes.

The development of effective numeracy and English literacy skills is crucial to lifelong learning and productive participation in society. The 2016 NAPLAN results confirmed that there is much work to be done to improve student attainment of these skills. However, the six-year cohort gains from 2010–16 achieved by Northern Territory students in their NAPLAN scores have been stronger compared to performance nationally for three of the four NAPLAN domains with the exception of the writing domain which was on par with the rest of Australia.

A range of measures undertaken by the department will continue to drive student performance, including:

- targeted professional learning for our teachers
- a focus on improved teaching and learning strategies based on effective data analysis
- the implementation of programs designed to engage students and improve student outcomes.

If students are to benefit from enhanced education programs, they need to attend school regularly, with evidence showing that when students attend more than three days a week their achievement improves substantially with each additional day.

Despite significant investment by successive governments school attendance, particularly for Aboriginal students, remains low. This government will continue to invest in initiatives that support children to engage in schooling, including strengthening partnerships with families, communities, schools and government agencies and providing services that reduce barriers to attendance.

The non-government education sector is an important part of the Northern Territory education system and the Department of Education works closely with the non-government sector to provide choices to Territory families and students.

In 2016, direct support of \$229.3m was provided to non-government schools, which included \$165.9m in Commonwealth government funding, \$61.8m in Northern Territory government funding and \$1.6m in grants paid to families with children attending non-government schools.

In addition since 30 June 2017 key achievements include:

- completion of the review of the global school budget funding model to ensure it is equitable, transparent and meets student need
- commencement of work for 45 government and 10 non-government schools with each school receiving \$300 000 under the Building Better Schools initiative
- commencement of a further autism spectrum disorder intervention program in Palmerston
- the implementation of the Healthy Life Creative Life program in Katherine with the commencement of engagement programs for our at risk students.

We are continuing to deliver an education system that is innovative, fair and equitable for all students, resources schools based on the needs of the students and ensures every classroom has a quality teacher, every school has exceptional leaders and communities have strong ownership and involvement in the children's schooling and provides quality educational services for every child in the Territory regardless of where they live, to enable every Territory child to achieve to their full potential.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I will now open up to the committee for questions in regards to the Department of Education annual report.

Member for Blain.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you minister. This is a question that I suppose has troubled me and I think it might trouble you too, minister. That is, we have had a number of hearings, but one in particular spoke with great—as a glowing achievement, was equity in the workplace. That was the Police, Fire and Emergency Services. They were celebrating that they had achieved fifty-fifty and that there had been some measures put in place to achieve that as though that, in itself, is an achievement when the objective is policing, putting out fires, and emergency services.

In education it is delivering measurable education outcomes to young people. What is the view of the department regarding equity—having more males teaching in the classroom? If equity is the grand objective, would that not be troubling to have so many females but not enough males in the classroom? And should that be something of high priority, to find mechanisms to improve that as the Police, Fire and Emergency Services have managed to do?

**Ms LAWLER:** Absolutely it is a complex issue in education and one that is not new. Teaching has probably been a very strong female workplace for as long as I can remember. I have had at least 30 years in education.

There are a couple of things I would like to say. First up, it would be wonderful to see more males in the teaching profession. My son-in-law is a teacher at Jingili Primary School, a wonderful school in the Northern Territory. He is in the minority in that school. I think there is only one other male in that school.

But also, it is around the complexities around recruiting males into teaching. There has been a lot of pressure on male teachers. There has been the Royal Commission into sexual abuse of children, which has made the spotlight on the issue around males in schools even more at the forefront. Male teachers do, I think, feel uncomfortable, especially in the primary school years. There is often that view that they have to be extra vigilant about not being in classrooms with females by themselves, not finding themselves in those situations.

All of that said, yes, I would love to see more males putting up their hand to do teaching. It is a reasonably well paid job. It is not on the same par as some other jobs that males may participate in, such as law or the police force when you look at overtime and that sort of thing.

It is also about having quality teachers in every classroom. You could be male and be a very average teacher. You could be female and be exceptional. I think most principals would then be ticking the box to take the exceptional female rather than the average male.

That said, some of the figures I have just been handed—at the moment about 22.6% of the teaching force in the Northern Territory are male.

**Mr MILLS:** That is at primary and secondary?

**Ms LAWLER:** That is at primary and secondary. I think if we pulled that data apart there would be probably more in the secondary than primary. So, about a quarter are male.

To answer your question, it is more of a community issue as well. It would be wonderful for males to see it as a profession of choice and that they put up their hand and really want to do it. I think it is seen as a hard career now, probably along with nursing as well, and that is across the population. I say it is not as sexy as being a media and a comms person, or being in IT. A few of those original foundation professions like teaching and nursing find it harder to attract quality people. The federal government is looking at some changes in entry levels for university.

That was a bit of a long-winded answer, Member for Blain. It is a national issue. Yes, I would love to see more males to be attracted to teaching. It is not just us, as a community, say, 'It is a great job, jump in, enjoy yourself. You can have a wonderful career in education'. It is not one that will change overnight; it is one that takes a lot of community views to change.

**Mr MILLS:** The point of the question was—and you are probably well aware—that, say in the fire service, for example, they did not just aspire to it and say, 'Wouldn't that be nice if they came?' They embarked on some proactive measures and the example you have just provided that if a really good female teacher presented and a mediocre male presented, you would choose the female.

**Ms LAWLER:** I think principals would choose.

**Mr MILLS:** Indeed. That is what I am saying, but the situation being proactive in the fire service—that was not the case. Gender became a significant determiner, so that overrode some of those concerns. A selection was weighted strongly in favour of the female. As a result: celebration; it is equity.

Is there any proactive measure you can describe that will assist a male in choosing the teaching profession because it is important for the young males in the classroom? What measures are possible? The fire service and police have done it. What could we do in education?

**Ms LAWLER:** It is about having quality teachers and really great graduates going into teaching. It is about the community supporting that. I do not think there needs to be a campaign. It is about making sure we get our top graduates going into teaching, making sure it is seen as a wonderful profession. It is about the grounding needed for that.

That said, it takes a special person to be a teacher. You have to actually want to do the job. That is something we might talk more about later. There is a churn in teaching. We see a number of teachers drop out. Sometimes people go into the profession not understanding what it requires.

To me, it would not just be about wanting more males; it is about wanting more people who want to be in teaching and make a difference, who have the right temperament and know how to engage kids.

I am in no hurry to put out a campaign or a number. It is more about promoting education as a whole, having wonderful people step into education.

I will pass over to the CE and she can add to this conversation.

**Ms BAYLIS:** In addition to what the minister has said, our processes are always about quality. Where Police, Fire and Emergency Services have had criteria in their processes of recruitment and selection that put in place physical restraints and criteria, that is not what the teaching workforce has. It is about your ability to participate more fully as a teacher.

The other area we are spending time and work on is the early years. The minister recently released the Early Years, Rewarding Careers guide. In the early childhood sector, the predominance of females from the beginning stages of schooling, and prior to schooling, is where we need to do some further work.

Two things are happening. One is recruitment into our Early Years, Rewarding Careers strategy to be able to profile the men we already have and the types of jobs you might consider in the workforce beyond being a classroom teacher so that we have a gender balance across our workforce. If we can get to a classroom—but to understand there are other pathways that support learning.

The second area is to retain the workforce we have, as the minister said. Those are the strategies we are working on at this point in time. The conversation is occurring nationally about what we do to attract the right mix and blend of people to the education profession so we have that balance not only in gender, but race and cultural backgrounds as well.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain, if I could just interject. I welcome the Member for Nhulunbuy to the hearings this afternoon.

**Mr MILLS:** It could be a long conversation that would take us all the way through, and I will not go on forever. However, when you talk about police and firefighters, it was a physical—that is the nature of the task. In terms of education, the need for male presence is, arguably, very important.

You talked about the need for community support—I note Mr Monaghan down the back. He is a male teacher. I was a male primary teacher. Would it be a suggestion, then, to have some kind of campaign or promotion of males who have taught in primary schools to be celebrated for their service—that it is okay.

I know many males who work, particularly in primary schools, find it difficult but they know it is important. To have some kind of backup or endorsement, as we have with the other gender issues like, ‘Here is a woman who is a mechanic; isn’t that wonderful?’ Well, here is a male who is a teacher. Isn’t that wonderful? As a community we celebrate that, rather than allow it to go silent and we are having to defend it ourselves.

Maybe that is one thing that could be done to try to at least celebrate what we have.

**Ms LAWLER:** As I said, it could be one we can look into ...

**Mr MILLS:** Could you look into it?

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes, yes. There is a Teach in the Territory website. I am pretty sure there would be some males on that promoting teaching in the Territory. We could make sure there are additional males on that. I will put forward my son-in-law who is a brilliant young male teacher ...

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. I am happy to stand up as a veteran and say I reckon it is good too.

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes, that is right. There are other opportunities. To me, it is ...

**Mr MILLS:** I am sure Mark would be as well.

**Ms LAWLER:** He is now working for Engineers Australia, so he is not in education. That is the trouble.

**Mr MILLS:** That is right.

**Ms LAWLER:** They all leave.

But we know that. It is a broader societal issue of males feeling comfortable in classrooms with young children. But that said, there are some amazingly brilliant – I was just thinking at Gunbalanya there is an early childhood or preschool teacher who is male who is just fantastic. There are lots of examples.

**Mr MILLS:** I urge that a spotlight be shone on it because my interest is what goes on in the streets and in our community. Most of the problems we have are young lads in need of a male presence for some guidance. At least strengthening the community’s respect for males who are teaching in the system might be a good place to start. We see it when there is gender imbalance on the female side, but we do not seem to see it when it is on the male side.

**Ms LAWLER:** As I said, Member for Blain, this has been an issue for a long time. It is about how you make it a profession of choice. There are issues around a whole heap of things. Anyway, happy to move on from that one.

**Mr MILLS:** I will recover from that because I have it off my chest. I know my colleagues here have questions. I have other questions, but I will let it flow for a bit.

**Mr GUYULA:** The boarding school in Nhulunbuy had 34 students at the end of Semester 1. How many of these students still reside there now?

**Ms LAWLER:** Thank you, Member for Nhulunbuy, for the question. When I came in as Minister for Education, the build for the Dawurr boarding facility was already under way. I was fortunate in June/July this year to open that facility. That is the first foray for government into a standalone build. It was funded in partnership with the Australian government.

It is a new experience for the Northern Territory for have that standalone boarding facility. It can accommodate about 40 students.

I will throw to the deputy chief executive. She can talk more about the students who are there now. The annual report talks about that facility being able to have up to 40 students in stage 1. But the deputy chief executive can talk more about what that facility is up to.

**Ms GUPPY:** Thank you, Member for Nhulunbuy, for your question. As you pointed out, at the time of the publication of the annual report, there were 34 students in residence in the facility. The enrolments for next year currently stand at 36 for 2018, made up of 19 male and 17 female students for the start of 2018.

At the moment, there has been a decline recently in regard to the number of students in residence. There is a range of reasons for that. There have unfortunately been deaths in community for some of the students who have been attending the facility. They have returned home for cultural reasons.

In addition one of the students, on a happier note, has completed their Year 12 studies and so has returned to community because their school year is complete.

There have been circumstances in the lives of young people and their families that have meant that some have returned to community for periods of time. Some of those for lengthy periods of time.

We are looking forward to some of those students returning in 2018. As I say the number currently confirmed for next year are 36.

**Mr GUYULA:** I would like to clarify something here. We have cultural differences. I do not look people in the eye when we are talking so I know it is the other way around here, but when I am looking away on the paper or something I am concentrating on you. I am not ignoring at all.

The next question is I understand that families from Croker Island and Waruwi Island have been flown into Nhulunbuy to look at the boarding school facilities. How many students from outside North East Arnhem Land do you anticipate will be at the boarding school next year?

**Ms LAWLER:** I will pass over to the deputy chief executive to answer that question. One of the things that, even though that facility is built in Nhulunbuy it has always been about attracting secondary students that will benefit from attending Nhulunbuy High School. It is about having a broad reach of suitable students that are very interested in attending and going on to secondary education.

I will pass now to the deputy chief executive who can provide exact details around specific students.

**Ms GUPPY:** Of the students who are confirmed for enrolment for 2018 there are two males from Maningrida; one male and one female from Galiwinku; one male and two females from Groote Eylandt; one male from Yirrkala; three males from Ski Beach; three males and three females from Banyalla; one female from Gapuwiyak; Dhalinybuy one male, four females; Croker Island four males, one female; Waruwi four males, one female; Donydji, two males, one female; making a total of 19 males and 17 females.

**Mr GUYULA:** How many Yolngu staff do you have working at the boarding school?

**Ms LAWLER:** Again, I will pass to the deputy chief executive to provide some details if she has that information about the number of Indigenous staff there. I do know when I was there for the opening—I recently have been to Nhulunbuy, there is a home liaison person who was a young Indigenous male who was doing some great work around activities for the boys that were there.

**Ms GUPPY:** I do not have that specific information on hand. I will take that question on notice and get the information for you.

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**Question on Notice No 11.1**

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you. Member for Nhulunbuy, can I ask you to restate your question for the record please?

**Mr GUYULA:** How many Yolngu staff do you have working at the boarding school?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, are you happy to accept that question?

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, the question has allocated has allocated the number 11.1.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Nhulunbuy, any further questions?

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes. The report states that consultations are under way in several communities to help schools determine the approach to teaching literacy and numeracy. What are the options being provided by the department to these schools?

**Ms LAWLER:** Thank you very much, Member for Nhulunbuy. This is a bit of a broad ranging response. There are multiple layers when we talk about schools being able to have greater autonomy, but to be able to decide about some of the programs that they deliver.

First up, I know—if we are talking about schools in your electorate—there are schools that choose to a formal bilingual program. So, we see that at Yirkala School, they will teach literacy and numeracy through using a bilingual approach to the students' learning, and they do a formal step bilingual program there.

But then, schools also—under the previous government, there was a strong emphasis on direct instruction, which as a method also to teach literacy and also numeracy in some schools. But there has been some new work being done by the department around explicit teaching and it is a program that we use LANE, so Literacy and Numeracy Essentials.

And schools have been consulting with their communities, asking what program that they would like to utilise in their school system. I was out on Groote Eylandt recently and they were talking to me about what they wanted to use.

But the evidence shows that when there is some really explicit—we use that word—really tight teaching of literacy and numeracy, we start to see results for the students, rather than it being broad and general. And so, schools are having the opportunity to have discussions with their community about the methods that they use, the way that they deliver the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

I will pass to our chief executive, Vicki Baylis to talk some more about the details of which communities.

**Ms BAYLIS:** Thank you Member for Nhulunbuy for the question. Member for Nhulunbuy, the consultation has occurred in the existing schools that were delivering direct instruction, and of that there were 19 schools across the Northern Territory who were in consultation around whether they would continue with that particular methodology, or whether they would be looking to introduce the Literacy and Numeracy Essentials.

Of those 19 schools, eight have chosen to continue with direct instruction, some of them parts of it and some of them for all of it, so that they have worked out, in talking with their communities, which bits of the curriculum were working for their students and what particular phase in the primary school it was having the most impact.

The consultation required the principal to share the data on these students' learning and their progress, and also talked around the investment of time. It also sought feedback from families regarding what they were hearing from these students around their participation and engagement.

Those schools who are not doing the bilingual approach or not continuing with the direct instruction, will implement the Literacy and Numeracy Essentials and that is supported by regional coaches and centralised

professional learning. And it is a very explicit program that provides access to phonics, it provides access to very clear reading programs and it provides teaches and support staff with particular training, so that they understand where a student is in their learning. And it has got a very strong, English as an additional language, learner focus, so that we have a very clear emphasis on making sure that students' prime knowledge is built upon and is strengthened from that basis in the teaching.

**Mr MILLS:** It is a follow up on what you have just described, Ms Baylis. It is that issue of—I indicated I have been involved in education for a number of years before this career. But I am hearing the same as I have heard before, and that is the changing of programs and the changing of approaches. Always, the next one is an improvement on the previous one. But that seems to have been going on for a long time.

It worries me a little, as I have done a tour of the schools here a few years ago and I found that they were the favourite newest approaches in language. 'This school has adopted that; we used to do this, now we are doing this and this'. What is the collateral cost when you shift from one to another? How do we manage the desire for change with a commitment to a core practice and support for that?

It worries me that there is something lost when we move from one to another, and it seems to have been going on forever and we lost something, probably more than we gain.

**Ms LAWLER:** I will respond to that. My response may be political. I have come in as the Education minister and said exactly that. I do not want any silver bullets because there are no silver bullets in education. After 32 years in education I have, probably like you, Member for Blain, seen many silver bullets that have come in and been offered over the years.

My clear direction with the department and the CE has consulted extensively with stakeholders and teachers, and has worked on a new strategic plan. The real emphasis on that is about having outstanding teachers in every classroom, having wonderful principals and school leadership, and engagement with the community.

To me, they are the three cornerstones we need to see in education, rather than trying to pluck another program off a shelf, another resource that will be the Holy Grail. As I said, they come and go, and you understand that. You put a lot of effort into those and then they disappear.

That was one of the issues I felt with Direct Instruction. Often those programs are highly resource intensive for professional learning, particularly in the Northern Territory. I use the example, if you are a teacher at Robinson River and all the creeks are up and you have to come into Darwin or Alice Springs for professional development, it will probably cost about \$4000 to charter a plane to get that teacher out.

The delivery of professional development around these programs is very expensive. It is about quality teaching in those classrooms. What the chief executive was talking about, literacy and numeracy is essential, is just exactly that. It is explicit teaching, good teaching of literacy and numeracy. It is about what you need to be doing to achieve outcomes in literacy and numeracy. It is not some gimmicky flashcards or videos or electronic whiteboards or anything like that. It is just—what all the research shows—really good teaching.

That is the direction I am pushing the department in. These things could have multiple layers, but how do we get great teachers in every one of our classrooms, who have really clear knowledge about how to teach a kid to read, how to spell, grammar and punctuation, really thorough understanding of learning theory to be able to do that, rather than finding some new amazing Jolly Phonics program or something else.

I agree with you, Member for Blain. It is not about chopping and changing programs. It is about recruitment, support for teachers, retaining teachers and developing the teachers we have.

**Mr MILLS:** I think, in addition to that, it is being consistent and choosing to stick with the one and make that work rather than saying, 'Let's abandon that.' And then you have some person with a strong personality who comes from a New South Wales school and says, 'This is the best thing since sliced bread', and persuades everybody to abandon—the school council and the like.

To get some detail on this, could I ask a question on notice? Could you provide for me, all early childhood classes across the Northern Territory, all Territory government schools, and what program is being used in early childhood to teach reading? What methods are being used in all of those schools?

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes, we can take that one on notice—Vicky can answer it. I would like to add, one of the things that is worrying is when the federal government get influenced by somebody who has a program—we see

that as well in the Northern Territory where the federal government comes in and says, 'have we got a program for you, this will make a difference to outcomes'.

One of the worrying ones that has just been pushed through is the assessment of Year 1 phonics test across Australia—I argued at the Education Council against that. We already have a phonics assessment in the Northern Territory. The assessment program that we have for phonics is better than the UK assessment that the federal government is trying to push down on us. It is at times, not just some teacher that comes from New South Wales—because when they dangle \$16m–\$20m ...

**Mr MILLS:** I know—there are many factors and the political one is of interest to you but I know there is plenty of causes to this it is just our commitment to the cause of teaching kids to read in a conservative consistent manner.

**Ms LAWLER:** I will pass on to Vicki Baylis, but as I said, the one around reading is an interesting space

**Ms°BAYLIS:** Member for Blain, in every government preschool there is a preschool curriculum that has been implemented. We were in a co-design process with our preschool teachers and the uptake of all of that has meant that all government preschools are implementing that. It has a very clear process around the teaching of literacy and numeracy in the preschool and that flows through to our primary schools.

That package and material is readily available and we have a number of non-government schools and interstate schools that have sourced that material for their own use. We also have number of early childhood education and care providers who are offering a preschool program that are sourcing that material for their use.

In our primary schools in 2018, the 82 remote schools will be implementing literacy and numeracy essentials, and as I said, there will be eight who will continue to implement direct instruction as the pedagogical approach to the teaching of literacy and or numeracy.

Then the mainstream urban schools have a range of programs—and I would need to take exactly on notice what those are—but we have been very focused that this needs to be implemented and aligned to the Australian curriculum and we need to be able to stay the distance.

We know that we have a workforce turnover and we need to ensure that as teachers come in they are not bringing the new good ideas—this is the way we do business in the Territory—which is why the preschool curriculum has been created and designed and implemented and that is where the literacy and numeracy essentials is also a very keen focus. We have been working with that to streamline that and to make sure the professional learning is responsive and the direct instruction is one other choice and one other strategy for some of our schools but does not meet all of our schools and requirements in the way they would like to go ahead and teach.

**Mr MILLS:** Is that ones that you are able to provide on notice? Could I request a briefing on LANE?

**Ms°BAYLIS:** I am more than happy to share with you, it is really exciting

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#### Question on Notice No 11.2

**Madam°CHAIR:** Member for Blain, I will ask you to ask the question that you would like to be taken on notice for the record, please.

**Mr MILLS:** What approaches are being used in the primary schools to teach literacy?

**Madam°CHAIR:** Minister, are you happy to accept the question?

**Ms LAWLER:** Thank you, Chair, I will accept that question.

**Madam°CHAIR:** We have allocated the number 11.2.

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

**Mr GUYULA:** As I understand, the department has developed the LANE program over the last two years. I know I am always talking about the bilingual education program but I know these schools are struggling to provide a well-resourced program. They need more Yolngu trained teachers, strong teaching team and more regional and Darwin-based support. Will the Darwin base position principal coordinator bilingual program continue next year?

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes. Upfront I can say that the bilingual coordinator that was appointed in 2015 will continue in 2018. Currently as we know—and I think I have talked to you more about this in the past—that there are nine Northern Territory Government schools that are bilingual schools. Those schools are Maningrida, Shepherdson, Millingimbi, Numbulwar, Yirrkala, Lajamanu, Areyonga, Willowra and Yuendumu.

On those bilingual education programs there is about \$3.2m that goes into those schools. On top of the funding every school gets in the Northern Territory, those bilingual schools get \$3.2m more across the board to be able to fund programs.

There are an additional five teachers, nine assistant teachers and 15 literacy and language workers in those nine bilingual schools.

One of the nice things we did as a government in April was launch the Keeping Indigenous Language and Cultures Strong plan, which talks about what schools can do in the areas of Indigenous language and culture. If they want a language revitalisation program, a language maintenance program, a formal bilingual program or to teach an Indigenous language—which is the case in Central Australia—there are all those options as well as the curriculum being upgraded.

I will pass to the Deputy CE to give some more detail, but I agree with you that a lot of our teachers, particularly Yolngu, are aging; they are getting old and tired. We need more young people, like the Member for Blain said about wanting more male teachers, we need more Indigenous students to take up teaching if we are to have quality bilingual programs into the future.

**Ms BAYLIS:** There are three other things I think you will be interested in being aware of. In 2018 we will have published—to support Keeping Indigenous Language and Cultures Strong—very clear curriculum maps for our schools to be able to help them in their teaching. This is being co-designed and developed in collaboration with our existing in offering bilingual programs and staff in schools across the Northern Territory who are interested in language maintenance. They have been working very closely with centralised staff.

Of the schools that are bilingual in 2017, three of them have been working with the Literacy and Numeracy Essentials program, LANE, to see if it aligns with the teaching of English as well as first language. They are finding that to be a successful way of working.

In response to the minister's last point, is about growing more of our own staff from Aboriginal backgrounds across the Northern Territory. The department will offer scholarships to support increasing the number of young and experienced people who want to progress their career to become teachers over the next few years. We have a very dedicated process around that. It meets the election commitments of this government to have 500 more police, nurses and teachers in the workforce who are Aboriginal.

**Ms LAWLER:** I will tell a quick story. I went with the Member for Arnhem to Ngukurr School. They want to revitalise language in their community, so they will have Wubuy and not just Kriol taught in the school. The school community has come on board; that is what they want. They have asked for some resources to be able to do that.

That will be wonderful for the people of Ngukurr to have their children learning a revitalised language that has been lost in that community.

**Mr GUYULA:** In East Arnhem Land, it is the same as Ngukurr. In different clans we would want to educate our children in their own language, such as Gumatj, Rirratjingu, Dhalwangu, Djambarrpuynu and other clans who want to learn on country and go through bilingual education learning their own languages as well. An addition to that.

**Ms LAWLER:** One of the initiatives of this government was for community-led schools, and schools having greater autonomy around the things they want to happen in their communities.

That said, pretty much every classroom in remote schools has an Indigenous assistant teacher. Pretty much everywhere I have travelled, I have seen language and culture being taught in those classrooms and

Indigenous language, wherever you are, being spoken in those schools as well as concepts being discussed. Children's behaviour being managed by the assistant teachers in the classroom as well. It can be explicit teaching of language as well, but there are plenty of language and culture in all of our remote schools, that is for sure.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 11.1**

**Ms LAWLER:** I have an answer to the Dawurr Boarding School question on notice 1.1

There are three females Yolngu staff at the moment and a fourth one starting in February. There are two staff, one male and one female, Indigenous staff at the boarding facility.

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**Mr GUYULA:** Thank you. We are all very concerned about the attendance issues in remote schools. Could you outline what the department's understanding is of the reason for poor student engagement with education?

**Ms LAWLER:** Member for Nhulunbuy, that is a very broad question. I could talk a lot and probably it is useful to also get your perspective on those things.

The reasons are many and varied. The deputy chief executive talked about the cultural issues and the impact on attendance when there are funerals and deaths in the community. I should back up a little. When we look at our attendance data for our non-Indigenous children, the average attendance is about 90%. For our Indigenous students across the board, it is about 69%. But then, when you drill down to specific schools, it can be very low. One of the schools, Galiwinku in your electorate, has very low attendance at the moment.

The reasons for that are many and varied. Sometimes it is about cultural commitments for families. If there are deaths—and sometimes there are numerous deaths. I saw that this year at Ntaria, Hermannsburg. They have had some terrible suicides. That then impacts on the community. The children then do not come to school for quite a number of weeks at times. That drops the attendance down. So, there are reasons around cultural issues.

There are then reasons when families come into town. Sometimes, a family from Arnhem Land might need one of their children, or one of the family members might have some substantial health issues and have to go to Royal Darwin Hospital. It might not be something that can be treated in Nhulunbuy, and if the family has to go to Royal Darwin Hospital, then the children's education is disrupted and they are not at school.

The other one is children are sometimes sick. In remote communities there are issues around otitis media. Hearing problems—glue ear and problems like that. Often, it is also the wellbeing of the child. If they are not feeling well or too sick to go to school. They might have boils or other sores, scabies and other things that impact on them going to school.

There are so many reasons why children do not go to school. The Education Department and our principals work very hard to get students to school, but it is not simple. As we say, if it was simple, we would have fixed it a long time ago.

Sometimes, it is also about children feeling uncomfortable, anxious or worried at school. There are so many reasons why children do not go to school. There is not an easy answer to that.

I will pass to the deputy chief executive School Education, because one of her jobs is to work with her regional directors on how we improve our attendance measures.

**Ms GUPPY:** Thank you for the question, member for Nhulunbuy. Absolutely we share your concern and recognise the importance of working to continue to grow the level of attendance of our students. We recognise that that is the foundational step required for children to be able to grow their learning.

Our Education NT strategy has engagement up front, as the very first goal of the strategy, because we know we need the engagement to be able to get the growth in the children's learning so they are achieving and that is what we are about.

We also recognise totally that to get that engagement we have to have a strong partnership with family, community, industry and with the individual student. We are working proactively to build those relationships

and see the move to the connection with community decision-making being a key feature of how we continue to work to grow the engagement and attendance of our children.

I know that all of you, as local members, are actively engaged and connected to the schools within your electorates and you would be aware of the range of local strategies employed in the schools within your electorates to encourage strong patterns of attendance. That includes community events and reward programs and other engagement programs.

When we look at attendance, the particular measure that we want to pay special attention to, Member for Nhulunbuy, is children attending four or more days, because we recognise that it is when the child is attending regularly at that level, we see the most growth in their learning, so we need to target that.

Part of our strategy has been to go out and set targets with our school communities and we particularly, looking forward into 2018, want schools to look at those children who are attending three days and work to get them to four days. That will make such a difference.

We also have, as another part of our goal, the level of participation in our FaFT program, because we recognise that if we can establish those patterns of attendance when children are very young it is so much better for their schooling achievement and growth. It is to get the pattern, the habit if you will, of attendance at school.

In terms of our data, four or more days per week continues to remain relatively consistent with 64.7% attending in 2015 to 64% in 2016. Term 1 2017 reflects an increased rate to 67%, while term 2 shows 63%. There is slight differences in the figures, but they are relatively statistically consistent.

Unfortunately, our Aboriginal attendance rates are significantly lower, I understand the motivation for your question. In term 1 2017, Aboriginal students attended school 69% of the time, compared to 90% for non-Aboriginal students. That is a large differential there. In term 2, the attendance rates dropped slightly to 64.1% for Aboriginal students compared to 88% for non-Aboriginal students.

I want to underscore the importance of families. Families are vital in supporting children to attend regularly. They are our most important partner.

We also have a critical partner in the Australian government in jointly funding initiatives through the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment Strategy and other national agreements. I want to revisit the fact that the department will provide greater support for school principals to improve local decision making and engagement through the community-led schools initiative. I think that offers us real opportunity to work together to address what we have identified and what you have identified as a very important issue.

**Mr GUYULA:** If I can add or make a comment on that one, just to add on something about like you said, it is a broad area and it includes ceremonies, funerals and attendance of students sometimes fluctuates every now and again when there are funerals. If we can bear in mind that a ceremony or a funeral can be some kind of education through cultural education as well.

Some homelands do it. Mapuru homeland just south of Elcho have been doing this. When a family or a whole school go to a funeral at Gapuwiyak, Ramingining or Milingimbi they send a teacher with them who goes through ceremonies of how the system of ceremony works, law and education as well.

**Ms LAWLER:** I agree. I remember a few years ago there were some Year 12 students at Gapuwiyak. They did the same thing. The Member for Arnhem is nodding because she knows this story too. They mapped and wrote about their experiences.

In our western system it is about having evidence of learning so they were able to document and write down what they had learned and what they had been doing. They used it as part of their community studies so they can pass their Year 12. I agree there are opportunities to be able to do those things.

**Mr GUYULA:** Again on attendance, I would like to link this to bilingual education. I have mentioned this report before. According to a United Nations report fixing the broken promise of education for all they identified that 58 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2012 across the world.

They also identified that one of the key reasons that children do not attend school is because the language of instruction is not their own language.

Are you familiar with this report? There is no mention of bilingual education in your annual report. Has the program been abandoned?

**Ms LAWLER:** As I said earlier on the bilingual program has not been abandoned. I think I mentioned there was an extra about \$3.2m that goes into those nine bilingual schools which is probably the greatest funding boost into a group of schools for any one program in our system. It has been for a very long time.

I need to reiterate that every one of our remote schools, even though there are non-Indigenous teachers that are teaching in classrooms there are always local Indigenous people in our schools. It does not matter where you go, whether you are out at Alpururulam, on the border of Queensland, all the way over to Lajamanu, all the way north to Milikapiti or all the way south down to Titjikala, there are always Indigenous people in our classrooms. They are teacher assistants and they are always speaking languages to the students. So whether it is about, it is time to go out, it is time to have lunch, whether it is behaviour issues, whether it is explaining activities for the students.

I think sometimes people from down south—and this has been an issue for a long time—think that, there is a white teacher in the classroom and they are not learning any language. That is not true. All of our schools in our remotes, even if they have a non-Indigenous teacher teaching the classroom, there will be plenty of indigenous staff in the classrooms in the schools.

I think every classroom I have ever been into in the Northern Territory in remote community, there is at least one, sometimes two or three, even more Indigenous people in the classroom helping out, working with the teacher, working in partnership with the teacher. Some of those are Department of Education employees, but some of them are also school council employees.

When we look at the number of Indigenous people in education, we have I think the largest number, percentage wise, Indigenous employees in the Northern Territory, but it does not count school council employees, because they are paid for by school council. So we have lots of Indigenous people in our schools, working with our kids, making our kids feel very comfortable in our schools.

I do not think, and I can ask the Member for Arnhem here as well, I do not think there would be any classroom that you would go into that you would not find Indigenous people in, in our remote schools. There are strong voice, strong Indigenous voices in our schools. I think sometimes people from down south think that, because we are not doing formal bilingual education in some of remote schools that means those children are not learning language.

I can assure you, even if they are not a formal bilingual program, most of our remotes would be doing a language and culture program, so their kids would still be learning about languages they would still be doing a whole heap of activities.

On page 35 of our annual report, there is information there about keeping Indigenous language and culture strong and it talks about the—actually I should talk about that one too, the Certificate II in Applied Languages. The Alice Springs Centre is providing students with the opportunity to become translators, so they can undertake a Certificate II in Applied Languages and they are doing that in Arrernte as well as Alawa language and the Warlpiri languages as well.

So I think it is mistaken view, and it is a bit of an old view that this government does not support bilingual. And absolutely, and I know that the CE, myself, we absolutely support kids learning language and culture, having language and culture activities in our schools.

But do you know what, that is not just in our remote schools with large Indigenous population, they are the things that we want to see in our urban schools as well. If you are in Northern Territory in Darwin or Alice Springs, you should have the opportunity to be able to do language and cultural activities in languages that are central to that community. So if you are in Central Australia, to be able to do that in Arrernte, if you are in Tenant Creek or Nhulunbuy or wherever, those classrooms should have strong language and culture, because that is what the Territory is about.

I will pass to the chief executive to add to that conversation.

**Ms BAYLIS:** Member for Nhulunbuy, yes we are aware of that report because our central coordinating people in the agency are very familiar with this and it is definitely part of the background that has informed our curriculum, for the languages and cultures curriculums, so we needed to identify multiple ways that different school communities could participate.

Some of our school communities have been very clear that they do want the language of instruction to be in English, others are clear that they want, particularly in that early childhood area, capacity for it to be in first language, or to be both English and first language so there is a mix and a range across the Northern Territory about what we are doing.

In our early childhood space, our family liaison officers in FaFT, very much in the zero to four space, are there to help with the mums, grandmas and the aunties in first language, to be able to introduce the learning games and to be able to structure the conversation around the concepts for learning, as well as the developmental, brain development process that goes on for kids at that age, so that we have strong mums and bubs coming through into our primary years of schooling.

**Ms LAWLER:** I would like to add, Member for Nhulunbuy—and all of our attendance data is on the Education website—there has been no evidence that bilingual schools do better in getting kids to school unfortunately. We would like that to be the case and if it was the case that would be a wonderful thing.

It does not matter if you are in Millingimbi, Areyonga, Yirrkala, Yuendumu, the attendance data for those bilingual schools continues to be very similar to the schools that are not bilingual.

Having a bilingual school has not made and does not make a difference to improving attendance. Because as we say, the issues of attendance are much broader than just the school. Sven Silburn at Menzies' latest research shows the impact of housing on attendance. If you are in an overcrowded house, it is more likely to impact on your attendance rather than things to do with school.

Some of the things you have talked about that impact on kids' attendance are things like overcrowded housing, ceremonies, funerals, parents or family members who are sick meaning you are having to leave your community. It is not just about bilingual, it is a whole heap of things that mean kids are not going to school.

**Mr GUYULA:** Again on attendance, I have been meeting with your office to discuss the projected cuts every single Indigenous community in my region. Schools in this region have faced cuts every single year. They get smaller and smaller with less visiting teachers and less Yolngu teachers, but there are not less children in the community, there are more.

Can you tell me what funding formula is applied to these schools? Please give me the complicated version now. I can take some time to understand it later.

**Ms LAWLER:** Okay, thank you Member for Nhulunbuy. It is complicated, but the first and foremost thing I need to say is the Labor government has put more money into education.

We saw considerable cuts to education over the four years of the CLP government. Our government has put an additional \$20m into school budgets. That is the starting point.

The second thing is—I have asked and it was one of our election commitments—to do a review of the global school budgets. Schools have a bucket of money that they get to employ their teaching staff to organise how many teachers they have and how they use those teachers.

We have done a review of that and the report is about to be released. That report, as well as the work we have been doing for the last 12 months since we have come into government is about making sure schools are funded based on need. The needs of the students are how they are funded.

It is not about me choosing favourite schools and giving more money, otherwise schools in my electorate might get more money. It is about a computer program, basically, that divides up the money we have allocated for education based on the student needs.

So a child at Yirrkala School, or Millingimbi School—the principal is able to put that information into a database and it goes on a whole heap of factors. It talks about whether they are Indigenous or not, have any additional needs like special assistance to support their learning, whether English is a second or third additional language for them. All of those factors go into this computer database and then it allocates an amount per student of money for that child.

What then has to happen, is that we look at the number of children going to school in that community. Again, that is the complicated part. What the computer does, is look at the two highest amounts of attendance, or

when they are attending the school the most in the 10-week term, and uses that to come up with a way fund the school.

It is not based on any favouritism or giving kids more, it is based on the fact that this is the money, we put more money into that pool, and then allocating those dollars out. If there are schools in the Nhulunbuy electorate that are getting less money it is because those students are not at the school. It is based as close as we can get, to a needs-based formula.

I am always keen to lobby my Cabinet colleagues to put more money into education so we have a bigger pool of dollars. In 2018 it will be about \$500m going to schools' budgets.

Sometimes, though, when I hear from people saying this school has lost money or has none, I look at their bank account details and sometimes they have a couple of million dollars there. It is then about how the principal is working with the school community to identify how they want to spend the money they have. It might be about employing someone who will engage the kids in the community—if you are saying there are lots of kids in that community, what will it do to get those kids to school? Can we put in a music or physical education program, or additional teachers who will get those kids to school—and then it will push the numbers and get more money next year.

The government has put in more money per student.

**Ms BAYLIS:** We have been in a process over the last three years where we have been adjusting to a needs-based model. We have needed to be able to transition the funding model for some of our schools. Some were moving up in their entitlement and others were coming into balance with the rest of the schools because there had previously not been a transparent process about how money was allocated to various schools.

For schools in the Nhulunbuy electorate, each one will have a slightly different story. The minister mentioned students' attendance, but it is also about the number of students in the community, so schools will fluctuate based on that.

I am happy to go through that will you in more detail on a school-by-school basis if that is helpful and talk to you about each of your schools. I happy to do that after estimates or in community, so if you are visiting a school we could be with you so we all have a shared understanding. I am happy for me or the regional director to listen to the concerns being expressed to you so that we keep learning together.

**Ms LAWLER:** That is one of the key things for our government; we want to put more money into schools and education because it is so important. It is about making sure we get kids to school, and that when they get to school the programs keep the kids wanting to be there.

I talk about having great teachers in the school. That is about having teachers who connect with the community, making the school central to everything in the community.

The offer from the chief executive was genuine. She can organise some of her staff to go with you to talk to some of your schools that might have some concerns and clarify things. As she said, there are so many variables. There is a bucket of money and it gets divided up, but we have put more money into that bucket; we just need to make sure that is clear.

**Mr GUYULA:** Combined, all the schools in my region will lose millions next year. Where do these funds go?

**Ms LAWLER:** There is a component of money, which is about \$500m. The money is there. The computer then looks at how many students, what those student needs are—around the makeup of all the students in the Northern Territory—and then divides it. It might be that the amount to educate a child is about, let us say, \$14 000 per child. It will go up depending on whether they are Indigenous, if they have special needs—all of those things. That amount of money then is reallocated somewhere else because that is what the bucket is. It might be that Warruwi School's student numbers go up and it has more students who have disabilities or more children overall. They all get more money. The money is in a bucket and is shifted around.

I will pass to the Executive Director of Corporate Services, Jasmin Aldenhoven, who will talk more about it.

The amount of money stays there and is spread out from there.

**Ms ALDENHOVEN:** Good afternoon. In the global school budget, schools receive a one-line budget comprised of a number of components. Every year, schools and principals are advised of what their budget is based on a number of factors that go into it—as has been explained before.

There is one element called the fixed school operating budget. That is a component of the budget that is used for essential services, including electricity, water, property maintenance and urgent minor repairs. There is another component called targeted funding. That is where there might be a specific targeted amount for programs. Special needs annexes and centres of excellence are targeted programs. The third component is that variable component of the budget, which is all about the needs of the students in schools. That component includes the cost for teachers, administration staff, salaries and other operational costs relating to those students.

The global school budget, overall, has those three components, but it is underpinned by that student need. That is the most significant part of the amount that makes up the budget. The factors that formula takes into account is a stage of schooling—whether the student is a primary or senior student. If the student is remote, they get more. An Indigenous Aboriginal student gets another loading. A low SES student gets another loading. A remote Indigenous, low SES student will get the maximum funding available within that needs-based model.

**Ms LAWLER:** Madam Chair, I will table as fact sheet we have on global school budgets. It shows the percentages and figures there. That might be the weightings for Aboriginality and things like that. That might make it a little clearer.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much, minister. Yes, we will table that document.

**Ms LAWLER:** The document is available on the website. For other people listening in to us here, it is on the website. It is complex, but the money is there and is shared in a fair way across the schools in the Territory.

**Mr GUYULA:** Another question. You said a school loses funds because there has not been enough children attending. That year might be a year that is not doing well and they are attending funerals and other things that take families away from a community. But next year it might be a steady community where you get more students back in again. Do they get a chance to next year get more funding back? It is something I ...

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes, if the numbers go up and the students are attending they get additional money. That is why all schools are pushing hard to make sure their kids are attending.

It was interesting the other day. I had a student write to me. She was at one of the secondary schools and they had a clause in their graduation saying unless you attended 90% you would not be able to attend the graduation.

All schools, our town schools as well, are working hard to make sure they get their children to attend. That is because they know that they are going to get a quality education. That is what it is about. How do we get children to attend school?

In our remote communities it is exactly the same. If you are not attending 90% of the time it will impact on your education.

We have undertaken a review of global school budgets and we are looking at a whole heap of things, particularly around low levels of attendance, and then students coming the following year.

It is true. Attendance at funerals and ceremonies does not impact on effective enrolment. When teachers mark the rolls they can identify why the student is not at school. If it is for funerals, ceremony or sick, it still counts for as a notified absence. That does not impact on their figures.

It is also about parents telling the school about where they are going and what is happening.

**Mr GUYULA:** There is no mention in the annual report of supporting remote schools to deliver an ESL program. Could you advise if this program still exists and what Darwin-based and regional supports are in place to assist schools?

**Ms LAWLER:** I will pass to the chief executive to talk about English as a second language.

One of the things I would also like to mention is that when our teachers start in our system we have a very strong orientation for them and then an induction.

The chief executive can talk more about that.

**Ms BAYLIS:** There are two central agency officers who support the English as an additional language learners across the Northern Territory. They provide coordination across the Northern Territory. In each of the regions the consultants we have who provide the curriculum and teaching and learning support have training in English as an additional language learners. Our literacy and numeracy essentials team also have a strong focus around ESL.

We have a number of people who are there to be able to provide that support.

Schools also receive funding to be able to support that—there are more fact sheets than you can imagine. This is such an important area for us in the Northern Territory because we know that about 40% of our students arrive in schools with English as not their first language, not only in our very remote context but also in our urban contexts where we have a whole range of other language speakers who come to school.

For us in 2017 we have about \$4.7m that goes in as additional support beyond the normal budget process to support the learning of students for whom English is an additional language.

In our centres for Intensive English Units in the urban settings we have the centrally-based of two ESL consultants and one administration officer, so three in total. We then have the additional bilingual coordinator who provides the support for our bilingual schools in the central agency.

For regional support it is through their curriculum, and teaching and learning consultants. They have a strong process to be able to work with the schools to analyse the students' progress against the ESL standards and to help that.

Across that, in the global school budgets there is about \$5.8m that goes directly to schools to assist them with students whose first language is not English. That helps them in their mainstream settings. That would be all of the schools in your electorate would receive additional dollars because English is not the students' first language.

**Mr GUYULA:** As I understand, there are no special education units in indigenous communities. How does our school qualify for a special education unit? How do students qualify for funding?

**Ms LAWLER:** Students are assessed—there are guidance officers, child psychologists that come out from one of the regional centres—so in Nhulunbuy there would be those people there that would then travel out to those communities to be able to do a formal assessment of that child and then they would be putting in place additional programs or additional resources and support for those children.

It is based on the numbers of students—whether there is a unit that will be set up in that centre—it is about assessing that child. Then there is a special ed assistance funding—we call it SES funding, special ed support funding—for those children to get additional money to be able to employ somebody. In a remote community you might employ somebody then to sit down and work with that child one-on-one to assist them with their learning needs. I will pass to the chief executive to provide some clarity.

**Ms BAYLIS:** Member for Nhulunbuy, that is a very good question. It is one where at this point in time, in March 2017 in the Northern Territory, we have 638 students who are accessing education services through specialist schools and centres. You are right, in the very remote context we do not have a special education school or centre at this point in time.

The five dedicated specialist schools are in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs and then we have a number of special education units or annexes or programs that are based throughout the Northern Territory attached to larger schools.

For those students, as the Minister said, who are in mainstream schools like the schools are in your electorate, there is a process where the school identifies with the family and seeks the diagnosis or the additional curriculum information around what do they need for adjustment.

We know that in the Northern Territory we need to have a framework for supporting all students. To that end we have commissioned some work to look at the students with additional need framework and during the

beginning of 2018 we have a team looking at all of the work we currently do in the Northern Territory. The principals and community members I have been listening to, and the Minister has been listening to, have said very clearly to us, that we do not have this quite right yet, and asked us to have a good look at this. That will help inform what we do to support students in to the future from 2019 around the range of programs.

As the chief executive I am concerned that we build destinations and we are never going to be able to meet the need of all students if we do not have a clear view around how we cater for the full range of learners in every one of our locations.

At this point in time, our practice and policies are okay, but they are not sufficient. We need to have somebody else come in and look at it with us to help us hold a mirror up to what we are doing, and going—what else could we do within the fixed budget and the finite resources that we have to be able to be responsive to students everywhere.

If I go to one of your electorate schools that is really grappling with this issue at the moment, and that is at Millingimbi, it is a case of—what do I do with these really high needs kids to give them the best opportunity to access a reasonable curriculum. That is what we do not have a policy position for or a guideline or a framework about. This is what I am sure, the team will tell us we need to put in place and offer us some very strong suggestions.

I am happy for you to talk further with that team if you would like to provide some input but I know we will have them out and about across a range of our schools, particularly across the very remote areas to be listening to the challenges but also the opportunities, particularly as NDIS rolls out about how we can work together to best respond to the range of needs for our students.

**Madam CHAIR:** On that note I will call a five-minute break and then we will come back to review the rest of the education annual report.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome back. We will now continue to ask questions in regards to the Department of Education annual report.

Member for Blain, do you have any questions?

**Mr MILLS:** I do have some questions, thank you. Thank you for the discussion we had earlier about gender equity and the percentage of males in the system; primary and secondary was provided. Could I have that for secondary and primary?

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes. I will just check with one of the HR people to see if they have a breakdown for primary and secondary.

The other one that somebody mentioned to me when we were having our break was that there are other males in schools. One of the great programs we have is the Clontarf program—I was in Alice Springs recently when it had its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

I think schools do it quite well, not necessarily all of the males have to be classroom teachers, they can be in other areas of the school. Schools can target inclusion support assistance, special ed assistance and programs like Clontarf also provide those opportunities to have male role models in classrooms.

I am just checking with—we will take that one on notice.

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### Question on Notice No 11.3

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain, could I get you to repeat your question, please?

**Mr MILLS:** A breakdown of teaching personnel by gender in primary and secondary schools.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, you are happy to accept that question?

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will allocate that number 11.3

**Mr MILLS:** I noted earlier you said it was about 25% males. That is what we have on the front bench here.

**Ms LAWLER:** It is good to see that females are in the top echelons.

**Mr MILLS:** I will not be happy until we see fifty-fifty on the front bench.

**Ms LAWLER:** I am just trying to think. In the history of education, we have probably only had two female chief executives in at least the last 40, 50 years, so congratulations to Vicki Baylis on being the second female chief executive.

**Mr MILLS:** Congratulations. I will not go any further with any of this. We should have a drink afterwards. We could have a good talk about this. Stress leave. I have taken an interest over time, as all of us with the health of our—the pressures on the teaching cohort. What are levels of stress leave across the Territory, divided up into urban and remote? How many days total, taken out on stress leave globally? And how many individuals does that represent, and would that be able to be provided—this school year and last school year?

**Ms LAWLER:** Thank you Member for Blain for that question. It is one about—well, principal and teacher wellbeing is something that is very close to my heart and one that I am very concerned about as well, having worked in schools for a long time.

One of the things that I am very proud of is about the Principal Wellbeing Framework. So for World Teachers' Day this year, I announced a wellbeing framework for our principals. There has been about 12 months of work that has gone into that, the Principals Association working with the department's HR people to come up with a framework around how do we actually make sure our principals healthy?

And when we talk about healthy it is not just about physical health, because that is probably the easier one—eating healthy and you know, doing some exercise—but it is also about that mental health, the social health, the emotional health—all of those five dimensions of health are vital for our principals to make sure that they are taking time to continue to look after themselves.

And the analogy we use is a bit like the announcement to put on an oxygen mask and when the plane is about to depressurise it says, put on the oxygen mask before you help your children, and that is the analogy we use for principals. The principals need to make sure they are well, when you talk about stress, it is a position where it can be a highly stressful job, there are lots of pressures on our principals, the pressures from above, from the department, but then you also have families, you have the worries around the children that are in the school.

So there are so many pressures on our principals, and so principal wellbeing is something, as I have said, that has been at the forefront of the work that we are doing. Our Principal Wellbeing Framework was very well received by our principals but also the Secondary Principals Association just happened to have a meeting in Darwin that week, and other state principals were amazed and gave huge accolades for our work that we have done on that.

So it is about the principal wellbeing, the flow-on effect then is for the principals to work with their teachers and so the same principles—P-L-E-S—that apply to the principals, we need to then see them working with their own staff on those things, those five dimensions of health. How you actually support your teachers to make sure that they are looking after their wellbeing, their mental health, their physical health, that they are taking time catch up with friends and are looking after their wellbeing, because it does have such a huge impact on the work that they do in the classrooms.

In a minute I will pass to our Executive Director of Corporate Services to talk about those figures around stress.

But as I have said the other issue in the Territory is in our remote communities. Just how isolated that work can be at times. Often it is the broader issues that impact on those teachers in those workplaces. It is a job that is 24/7 when you are in a remote community. You are living in a teacher house. It is not your own home, it is an education home. You have your neighbours, which are usually other teachers. It is all of those factors

that impact on your wellbeing, and as I have said, it does make it a difficult profession at times, particularly for our remotes.

But it is one of those, I guess, key platforms for me, that concerns me, is how do we actually make a principal a job of choice? That people want to be principals, because they know they are getting well looked after by the department, that they are valued, and I think that is most thing around their wellbeing.

But I will pass to the Executive Director Corporate Services. She can talk particularly about stress, but I know that that area of work has many layers to it, it is not just about stress.

**Ms ALDENHOVEN:** Just in relation to your question ...

**Ms LAWLER:** Jasmine, do you want to say the page number? Because that (inaudible) graph.

**Ms ALDENHOVEN:** Yes. What I am referencing at the moment is page 108 of the annual report and the information that I do have in relation to stress leave, I do not have information around days et cetera, I do have information around the number of incidents that have been reported through our work, health and safety system.

For the year we have 16. That is in a category called Mental Factors. Mental stress issues are when disorders result from a person experiencing mental stress or being exposed to mentally stressing situations. There are a number of categories in that subgroup. The information I have at the moment is that there are 16.

**Mr MILLS:** Sixteen days?

**Ms ALDENHOVEN:** Sixteen incidents that have been reported through our work health and safety system.

**Mr MILLS:** How many teachers are there?

**Ms LAWLER:** There are 2500 teachers and about 4000 employees.

**Mr MILLS:** That is in that category?

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes. That is on page 108. There are a number of factors such as environmental, chemical and substances and a number of others. The data is there for the number of employees reporting incidents from 2013 to June 2017.

**Mr MILLS:** Does it have what I asked?

**Ms BAYLIS:** No, it will not have 2017 data there, so we will need to take that part of the question on notice.

**Ms LAWLER:** It has until June 2017.

**Ms BAYLIS:** But it will not have the full year yet.

**Mr MILLS:** I will be patient. Thank you. That is probably what I am after. I will not trouble you as you have other things to do. I will wait for the next annual report and do my own comparison and check the one before.

Maybe it is contained in here, pull me up, I do not want to waste people's time—you have already told me how many teachers we have—how many were recruited at the beginning of this current school year? How many vacancies were there at the beginning and how many left during the course of the year? Basically, how many were recruited and how many left?

**Ms LAWLER:** I will past to the Executive Director Corporate Services, but about 120 teachers go through orientation at the beginning of each school year. That sometimes gets up to about 180. In the middle of the school year we do another orientation program, which is where we run the system. That is all about what forms to fill in, how you apply for leave, all that corporate information teachers need, including general information about curriculum. It is then up to schools to provide inductions in that setting as well.

In the middle of this year there were about 80 that had orientation. I am just talking while they find the right page. It is about orientation and induction provided by the department and specific school.

**Mr MILLS:** So that captures all those coming into the system?

**Ms BAYLIS:** Yes. If you turn to page 105 of your report, it will give you some comparative data that will give you a bit of an idea of the trend. The top line of table 24 gives an indication of the retention rate and the number of employees overall.

The other component we have to deal with is that while we can talk about this there is another factor at play, and that is teacher permanency. You would have heard some discussion on that. There is a piece of work we have started in the last month with OCPE and the Australian Education Union to increase the number of permanent teachers over the next 12 months, and reduce the number of fixed-period contracts.

We will always have fixed-period contracts because they backfill people who are on higher duties, long service leave or parental leave, but we need to be more focused on that.

**Mr MILLS:** How are we tracking with the average age of the teaching cohort?

While they are looking for that, I have a figure for you. There were 322 new commencements of teachers in 2016. There are about 2550 teachers and 322 new teachers in 2016. That would give you 30% which is the other side of the 69% over there.

**Mr MILLS:** How are we tracking with age?

**Ms BAYLIS:** The average age for the 2016–17 annual report is about 44-and-a-half years.

**Mr MILLS:** How is that going?

**Ms BAYLIS:** It has been very consistent over the last few years. In 2012–13 it was 43.9, and then we have been in the 44-and-a-half, 44.6, 44.3 over the last four or five years.

We are in that same age range of experienced teachers as well as bringing in teachers who are postgraduate or undergraduate teachers coming in for the first time.

**Ms LAWLER:** Some of us are above average.

**Mr MILLS:** A change of tack—that is called a trigger warning—how many schools were under lockdown for any period of time during this school year.

**Ms LAWLER:** I will talk generally and then can pass over to somebody to talk specifically.

A lockdown—and the name might imply something that is high level—but it is about schools having processes in place to keep children safe.

A lockdown in the Territory can be—and as I said it is great there are procedures in place. A lockdown in a Northern Territory school could be that a child is being disruptive, that a child has gone outside the classroom in a primary or even a secondary school and will not return to their classroom. It might be a child that is being aggressive towards an adult, using language. Some of our kids are like that for a variety of reasons.

Sometimes it might be that the child has a disability of some sort that escalates their behaviour. It might be a child that has experienced trauma. The noise of the classroom might exacerbate their anxiety. The school will then, or through the teachers, have a lockdown.

That might be, as the name suggests, simply locking the doors so that child cannot get into the classrooms and disrupt them.

The term lockdown has connotations of America and people with guns coming to disrupt schools and cause trouble which is also a useful thing. Hopefully we never ever experience that in Australia but it is making sure that schools do have those measures in place to manage those sorts of things.

A lockdown is a red alert for schools to have a mechanism to be able to keep all kids safe when there might be a child, or a number of children, disrupting the schools.

I will pass you to the chief executive.

**Ms BAYLIS:** We will need to take that question on notice. That is a school-based decision. When it is high-risk and high-impact, reasons for doing it all of this our schools alert us through a newsflash so we will be able to pull that material for you.

If it is practice and drill and a relatively minor thing, as the minister has described where it can be at times, that would not be information that would be held centrally. I will take that question on notice and come back to you.

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**Question on Notice No 11.4**

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Blain can I ask you to repeat your question for the record please.

**Mr MILLS:** How many schools were under lockdown for any period of time during this school year?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, are you happy to accept that question?

**Ms LAWLER:** I am happy to accept that question.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you. The question has been allocated the number 11.4.

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**Mr MILLS:** Just to reassure in case we are wanting to manage people and think that this information could be used for mischief—as this local member and I am sure any other local member—when you hear of such things happening in your local school you play an important role to be able to explain what is going on. Social media can amplify the greatest concerns.

Nonetheless and that aside, it is actually a useful measure irrespective of all the anxiety we may have around the term and its occurrence it is still a measure of something.

**Ms LAWLER:** I was thinking more should we be looking at the 2016 figure? This is the issue when you have schools that work on calendar years. Should the information we are talking about be from 2016 rather than 2017.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. To be fair. To keep it tidy, let us do it ...

**Ms LAWLER:** Well, then, next year we will make it the 2017 data.

**Mr MILLS:** We will be here next year.

**Ms LAWLER:** All the other things we talked about are supposed to be focused on data in the 2016 year. I said that in my introduction. This is the annual report for 2016–17, that is all.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, I understand. That is a fair call.

You have already provided an answer to a question I would have asked about protocols, procedures and so. I think I have enough on that.

Could you describe, minister, what is your government's position on the Safe Schools program?

**Ms LAWLER:** I have addressed this a couple of times in Question Time because I know the Member for Nelson has had some concerns about it.

In the Northern Territory, the compulsory document is the national curriculum. Underneath that document, schools can use a variety of resources to achieve the standards and teaching that needs to occur. Safe Schools resources are resources that schools can use to support the teaching of outcomes in the national curriculum.

That said, there are wonderful resources in the Safe Schools area—I think it is called the Student Wellbeing—in the student wellbeing area. In the Safe Schools material and resources available for schools to use, there is a range of very good resources about bullying, decision-making, peer pressure, drug education. As I said, there is a repository of some really strong resources.

From the department's and government's points of view, Safe Schools is a resource to support the teaching of anti-bullying behaviour.

I will pass to the deputy chief executive who can provide some more detail about the teaching and learning side.

**Mr MILLS:** With respect, my question was not what it is, but what is the position of the Territory government regarding Safe Schools.

**Ms LAWLER:** The position of the Northern Territory government is that Safe Schools is a great resource that schools can choose to use to support the teaching of a whole heap of things such as diversity, gender diversity in schools ...

**Mr MILLS:** No, I understand that. The position is that it is supported. Is it resourced?

**Ms LAWLER:** It is a resource. Safe Schools is a teaching resource. There was support for professional development of teachers. The Principals Australia Institute was providing professional development of teachers so they can have skills and abilities to deliver those resources. Those resources are online and are available for schools to use.

**Mr MILLS:** How is that position communicated to school councils?

**Ms LAWLER:** The principal of a school would be talking to their teachers about the resources they choose to use to deliver their programs.

I can pass to the deputy chief executive for any more detail about that.

**Mr MILLS:** That is right. I was wanting to get it clear. I think I understand the position of government. It is a little unclear how this is being communicated and the whole thing is working.

**Ms BAYLIS:** Let me add to that, Member for Blain. The initial introduction of the material was supported through the Principals Australia Institute where they ran quite specific and explicit professional learning for ...

**Mr MILLS:** Is that the Territory branch?

**Ms BAYLIS:** Yes. They ran programs for government and non-government schools across the Northern Territory. They also provided professional learning for the education consultants who work in our wellbeing area who are both centrally and regionally based because it links to our social and emotional learning curriculum, which is a universal. It also then provides tailored material that is readily available.

Principals were provided with information as well about the resource, and then the decision is taken at a school level in consultation with their school council or board as to the way they choose to engage with the material and the relevance and pertinence of the material for them.

**Mr MILLS:** That is clear. Thank you. I will stop now, even though there are many questions I could continue with. Out of respect for my long-suffering colleagues up there ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you. I will open it up to other committee members.

**Ms UIBO:** Thank you, Member for Blain. Thank you, minister, and your staff for attending the committee hearing today. I have a couple of questions and I will refer—I am an organised old teacher, I have them all labelled here. I will refer to the page numbers.

The first question I have is regarding page 32, with regard to Closing the Gap in educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

There was a consultancy firm engaged, ACIL Allen Consulting. How much did that consultancy cost the department? Has the evaluation report been produced, and if not, when will it be produced?

**Ms LAWLER:** As it is such a specific question, I will ask the chief executive to call on one of her staff who worked in that area to provide a response.

**Ms BAYLIS:** I would like our General Manager for the Indigenous Education Strategy to respond to that. The information contained in that report has been used to inform us on the second stage of that strategy, moving from design to delivery. These are critical pieces of information that will be able to inform us as to whether we are on track or not.

Tony Considine is our General Manager for Indigenous Education.

**Mr CONSIDINE:** In relation to your question, there are three parts to that evaluation. We have now received two parts of it and are waiting on the third. Each of those parts provides us information at a different point in time in terms of evaluation.

We can provide some information about where we are at that point in time, which is the second report.

**Ms UIBO:** How much has been spent on the consultancy?

**Mr CONSIDINE:** ACIL Allen Consulting, in 2017 we spent \$193 040. It is paid in components with the largest part of it coming at the final component, which we have not paid yet.

**Ms UIBO:** So that is three components?

**Mr CONSIDINE:** That is one of the components. That is what has been paid within the current financial year.

Would you like me to provide some information on what they told us in regard to evaluation or are you only interested only in the finances?

**Ms UIBO:** I just want to get this right. There are two components that have been completed?

**Mr CONSIDINE:** Yes.

**Ms UIBO:** Can you give us a brief outline of what has been provided so far, then there will obviously be a third one coming.

**Mr CONSIDINE:** The evaluation looks at the implementation of the 25 projects that make up the strategy. What they have told us is that up until the end of 2016—we received the report in April this year—we saw most schools involved in a range of action, the average being seven.

They have raised the issue in the early childhood area. They said it is still too early to draw full conclusions, but they are expecting significant growth. They said the foundations element—which is early childhood, and that covers until the beginning of primary school—is showing positive outcomes for schools, communities and school assessments, and the case studies indicated that.

In our essentials component, which covers our primary years, the long-term nature of change is implemented through the essential element, which means that evidence of student outcomes is still emerging. At this stage the implementation procedures and routines are embedded, baseline data is gathered, and schools are able to report small-scale effects on early implementation.

In element three, which is our pathways area, our boarding school at Nhulunbuy has opened. There have been early signs of effectiveness in provision of services to families, and our transition services continue to expand its activities in partnerships with schools—and assisted many students to make the transition to boarding.

In our engagement space, our engagement element is showing signs of impact across schools and community. A number are still in the initial stages because they are strategic and long-term. Attendance continues to be a challenge—I do not think there is any surprise in that one for us at present—and they are suggesting that our focus needs to be on the four days attendance a week, because we know that is where we get gains.

In the workforce area—actions under the workplace element take time to generate targeted impacts. Efforts to improve staff qualifications, recruitment are longer term initiatives, which may not produce immediate or even intermediate benefits.

Feedback received so far, however, indicates these actions are collectively establishing a strong foundation and a multifaceted approach from which the NT workforce can be developed and maintained. There is yet limited opportunity to observe this across schools.

That is a summation of what is quite a long report, but is the parts from the executive summary.

**Ms UIBO:** When is the third component due?

**Mr°CONSIDINE:** We expect to have that very shortly because it takes us to the end of 2017, which is the end of the first stage of the strategy.

**Ms UIBO:** You mentioned focussing on Aboriginal students with their four days of attendance during the week—on page 79, the estimated percentage for four days or more a week for Aboriginal students is estimated for 43%, however the actual is 36%. Can you talk to that and explain the variance, please?

**Ms LAWLER:** Probably goes to some of the questions that the Member for Nhulunbuy was discussing. Ideally we would like to see our Indigenous, our Aboriginal kids' attendance be up at 90%. That is where it absolutely needs to be if there is to be equity around those end results—kids staying at school, doing very well and getting to Year 12. The numbers are volatile, I must say, things can change and I do not need to tell you that, Member for Arnhem. As I said, I gave the example of Ntaria where they had, unfortunately terribly tragically, two youth suicides this year and then that has such an impact on the figures in schools.

Those targets have to be aspirational targets, they need to be there and that is something that all layers of the department are absolutely focused. Whether you are in a corporate area, a principal in a school, it is everybody's business to turn those figures around regarding attendance. Schools have those individual targets as well, schools have their strategic plans for what they are going to do to change those. People working in the attendance area have those case studies, those case workers, individual plans, working with kids and families to turn those figures around.

I will pass to the General Manager, Indigenous Education. Is there anything you can add regarding those attendance figures?

**Mr°CONSIDINE:** I think what we can observe, particularly in the first part of the year is very significant number of funerals and events that have contributed to this. We can see trends across the Territory, they are not consistent trends in every school so it is very difficult to understand one trend in a large school can then change a number across overall numbers of schools. Significant events that happen in community are probably our greatest contributing factor.

**Ms°BAYLIS:** Member for Arnhem, I would like to add a couple of other pieces because you might end up completely despairing that anything positive is happening in this space at times. I do want to go through the Indigenous education strategy. One of the unanticipated consequences is the growth in enrolment that we have had in our government schools through participating in the conversations with families around where the kids going and what are they doing for their secondary education.

While we have had that conversation with the intent of helping support families to make decisions about boarding, some of the families have chosen that. Many of the families have engaged in the conversation about their young people going on to complete their secondary.

The issue we have not cracked is the attendance, but we have grown our enrolment and that has particularly been in our secondary area across the Territory.

The other part I would like to highlight is that there are a number of strategies we have in place to work with families to reconnect them and re-engage students in attending school.

Our school attendance and truancy officers are active in the field, geographically located in regions and travel to each of the school locations. In the 2016–17 period that we are reporting on, those school attendance and truancy officers engaged with over 2209 families with their children about their attendance plans.

For some of those families, they were not able to follow through, so we issued 309 infringement notices because there has to be support along with consequences if you are not active in this.

What we have seen is a range of families who have chosen to work with their young people and access the support available with them where we have had 715 students engaged through using the school attendance

and truancy officers through the Northern Territory Government process of everyday counts. We also know that in a number of our school communities, we have the school enrolment and attendance measure which is federally funded and of that, 639 families and their children re-engaged with schooling. We still have not cracked the attendance, but we are getting a better connection there.

There are 466 families across the Territory who have re-engaged for different reasons. Sometimes that is other families picking up the support, sometimes it is in support with working with Territory Families, with Health, there are a range of reasons why this continues to shift.

There are positive signs in amongst of all this, it does not mean the work is done. It is not. We still need to continue to strengthen where we are and to be very narrow and very sharp in our focus, but it is in partnership that we will be able to shift this. It is not going to be something we can do on our own.

**Ms UIBO:** My next question comes from page 41 in regards to the Transition Support Unit. Down towards the bottom:

*14 Transition Support Unit excellence scholarships were rewarded to students to study at interstate boarding schools with a total of \$300 000 allocated in 2017.*

By my calculations, the amount \$300 000 divided by the 14 equates to \$21 428 per student. I am just wondering if these 14 excellent scholarships were divided equally or were they different amounts.

**Ms LAWLER:** Thank you very much, Member for Arnhem. One of the things I have very much focused on is that we give parents the choices and those opportunities that an urban parent has for their child's secondary education. There is an opportunity for a child to go to an interstate boarding school, so the parents may wish for that opportunity. Their child may attend a regional boarding facility which might be in Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs or Darwin, or may choose to be able to provide secondary education in their own communities. It has been about working with the department to make sure those options are there.

I will pass to the General Manager Indigenous Education, Tony Considine, because he will be able to give you specifics on those scholarships. I do like to emphasise, it is wonderful for kids and families to be able to have the opportunities and choices.

**Mr CONSIDINE:** The 14 scholarships referred to in there are not all at the same institution. They fund the gap between what ABSTUDY pays for students and what the school fees are.

Some of those scholarships are as low as \$6 000 a year and others are as high as \$25 000 a year, depending on where the student has applied through the scholarship process.

If we were to limit our scholarship process just to one institution we could not supply the choice to parents. Parents apply to us on merit for the kids for a scholarship. Those 14 range across a number of places. There are a number of students at Mt St Bernard College in Herberton, then going through a number of schools including Maroona in Victoria and St Peter's Lutheran in Brisbane are schools that we have scholarships in.

**Ms UIBO:** In your opening statement you said, and I quote 'every school has to have exceptional leaders'. Looking at page 55 and to page 105, talking about developing our people in the department, I am wondering what type of long-term strategies are there to make sure we have these exceptional leaders in terms of principals and senior staff in the school?

**Ms LAWLER:** Having worked in a school yourself, you know that if you have a principal who is very much focussed on teaching and learning, on pedagogy, we will see improvements in the kids' learning because it is all about making sure we get the best outcome for the students.

How do we do that? It is working with the community, making sure the school is an open and welcoming place for that. There are a couple of avenues in making sure you have quality principals. It is about developing our teachers. To me that starts way back when a teacher first comes in to our system.

You were out at Maningrida when we announced the mentoring and induction process for teachers. You need to make sure we support our teachers when they start their careers. How do we make sure that they want to stay in education?

Research shows those first two years of a teacher's career have a huge impact on the teacher they are going to become. To me, a quality principal is somebody who has been an outstanding teacher. If they know about teaching and learning—they have that relationship with kids, which is vital, then they can work on and develop to become a great leader in a school.

First and foremost we need to make sure we have those foundations in the early years of a teacher's career and then being able to provide opportunities for professional learning all the way through. Not just when, all of a sudden, we think that person should become a principal but it is about that support and that ongoing professional learning so they have a really strong foundation.

The analogy I use is, you do not want a principals' career to be based on a thin weed, it needs to be on a solid tree trunk. What is it we need our principals to have so they can be a great principal? There are practical things about understanding budgets, knowing how to apply and how to develop a strategic plan but it is also relationships, the work with parents and the community—to have that full package.

Regarding specific programs that the department has, I will pass to Ms Baylis to give some detail on those. To me it is important that we start early and carry on throughout a teacher's career to lead them into being great principals. It is not just something to start at the last minute.

**Ms BAYLIS:** Leadership is pivotal not only in our schools but in our corporate areas so that we are working together in partnership. In the 2016–17 report we have provided there are a number of leadership programs that were undertaken.

Tomorrow's School Leaders program was delivered through the Queensland Educational Leadership Institute for 25 participants. Those participants are early career principals. They may also have been assistant principals who aspire to become principals or high-performing senior teachers.

**Ms UIBO:** What was the name of the program?

**Ms BAYLIS:** It was called Tomorrow's School Leaders program. They are the ones who are very early in their career as a principal or are on the pathway and aspire to be a principal. Those 25 participants participated in a six-month program to be able to grow their knowledge and capability and to have some theoretical program behind their thinking, but they also participate in an action learning research project as part of that.

There is an Executive Development for Educational Leaders Program that was also provided and that was delivered to 10 of our high performing school principals and five corporate leaders in the 16–17 report. That program requires for each participant to take a major research project that is going to be able to work towards our improvement as an educational system, and they need to be able to apply that information to the broader outcomes that we are trying to achieve. It also was one that involved a benchmarking tour for them to China, and we had a number of academic professionals that were part of that program with those educators and corporate leaders.

There have been three leading teaching programs that we have run in education, with seven teachers participates in STEM-related leading teaching work. There have been three early childhood educators and two in Indigenous education, where those particular units of work lead to a Master of Education, international. So that was a really important part of growing our capability.

We also had a number of participants over the 2016–17 year, which had worked with OCPE through the Australian New Zealand School of Government courses, the ANZSOG course, and through the Queensland University of Technology. So OCPE offers a number of programs and we have had people participate in those programs and there were 22 of our leaders who were in that area. So some of that is centrally funded, some is co-funded between the program area and the business area, or the school, so that we continue to grow that capability.

And we have also, as you would be aware, the sleeper in amongst all this is called study leave. So that is one that is the biggest investment that we make across our very remotes where are eligible to undertake that. And that process is one where we do ask that people are studying something that is relevant to their professional context in which they will operate.

**Ms UIBO:** Thank you. I know the Member for Katherine has a question in regards to some numbers, but you have just mentioned study leave, Ms Baylis, which is pointed out at 105, page 105, and I did have a question on this. Because I know that is a great incentive for the department.

I have had concerns expressed to me by people within the electorate and within the education space about the department cracking down on the applications and the process. I just to make sure, for their benefit, because I know from experience that it is a really great initiative. It is something that people really look forward to when they are teaching in remote and regional centres, to be able to access that study leave. I understand that is an initiative, not necessarily an entitlement, but people do go out bush with that idea that they will a bit of a break to be able to have that professional development, that time away from the teaching space in order to be able to come back fresh and even better than before.

I just want to know what the processes are for study leave and what the department is doing to ensure that people are able to equitably access that initiative.

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes, it is important. As I have said, it is great incentive for our remote teachers in accumulating study leave points. There are 20 points to be able to have those options for study. I think the emphasis needs to be on study though, and that opportunity to actually better yourself and provide some professional learning. So if you are going to continue to be a classroom teacher or want to move into leadership opportunities, it does provide that time for you to be able to do that.

I will pass on to the chief executive, because if there is any cracking down, she would be one that would probably know about cracking down rather than me, because it is an operational matter. But I do know, like you, how valuable it is as an incentive to keep teachers staying in the bush for that little bit longer. But it does need to be focused on learning, because it is also public money that we are talking about here.

**Mr BAYLIS:** There has been, at times, refusal for study leave applications where a person who is eligible for study leave for a six-month period has decided their sum total of study is a three day course. And so there is a send back. You might wish to provide a bit more information or elaborate on what study you are undertaking for the six-month period that you are on paid study leave, to be able to demonstrate how that is going to be beneficial to you professionally and back to the organisation and the taxpayers of the Northern Territory.

There will be circumstances where, in those cases, the application does not provide sufficient rigor in the example submitted to be able to go—we can see the relationship between the work that you are doing and the return of that investment back into the profession.

There have been cases where we have had quite a number of applications that we have needed to prioritise to be able to look at schools, about the leave that is coming out. So that when we have a big intake coming in and out of the school and had applications come in where people put them in an advance, I understand that they are preparing and thinking forward. I acknowledge and appreciate that. But when we are trying to balance that with stability around our staffing profiles, we need to match and marry.

There are some of our larger remote schools where we have said that, at this point in time, you do not have the number of points yet. We are happy for you to resubmit when you have earned the points but we need to balance the movement in and out of schools along with the stability, and recognise the study leave that people have the opportunity to apply for.

We also know that we have a number of people who do not choose to apply for study leave in the Northern Territory. They see that as an opportunity but have yet to find the things that they want to undertake to be able to access that particular learning.

**Ms UIBO:** Just out of clarification, if a person is, like you said planning ahead and wanting to apply for their study leave ahead—actually, it would be the year that they get their points or the semester or the term that they get their points.

What is the department's preference in terms of when an application goes in; what is the expectation of how early you can put application in; and when an application, prior to the actual gaining of the points, will be accepted?

**Ms BAYLIS:** Custom and practice historically was, you could put it in in advance knowing that in the semester—and I might have 12 more months before I have actually accrued the number of points but I am getting in to be able to flag with you this is it is.

We have tightened that process where we really would rather you have earned the points to be able to then put the submission in. We are in discussion the AEU at the moment about that process to be able to determine

what is in the best interests of the school, what is in the best interest of the individual employee and how do we make this in the interest of students as well as the employee. We need to be able to do that one.

**Mr PAECH:** Member for Arnhem, can I ask a question? The only point I know about are demerit points, so just work me through, how do you earn the points, how many do you need?

**Ms UIBO:** And is there a budget for it?

**Ms BAYLIS:** Yes there is a budget. You earn points based on the geographical location for the number of years that you serve in. Some geographic areas you will two points, other you might get three.

**Mr PAECH:** A year?

**Ms BAYLIS:** And you accumulate them over a period of time over a semester so you can come to that level of entitlement. You are required to have 20 points to be able to submit or to be able to be eligible to take your study leave. You can take your study leave for a six-month pay period in which you are paid to undertake that study at your normal salary rate.

Or you may, in some circumstances, people apply to take it at half pay over a 12-month period. There are a number of ways that people choose to access that particular program. What we want to see is the return on investment for young people in the Northern Territory and this applies to your work.

Study leave is not just teachers, it can be our school leaders and our assistant teachers in that area. What we are looking at—if you go to page 187 of the annual report, that provides you with just a bit more information around the remote study leave eligibility and what that looks like.

**Ms LAWLER:** I will pass to the deputy chief executive, she wants to add something.

**Mrs GUPPY:** Member for Arnhem, if a person has submitted and are very close to having earned their 20 points, consideration can be given to giving approval in principal to the application pending the ...

**Ms UIBO:** The gaining of the points, yes.

**Ms GUPPY:** Yes, those points being gained. Part of the discussions we have been having is that it would be useful for us to consider moving to having twice-yearly consideration of applications ...

**Ms UIBO:** Oh, yes, rather than the one.

**Ms GUPPY:** Yes, exactly. That would allay the concern you have raised. That is something that is being discussed at the moment as part of making sure our process for study leave is really robust and strong. We want it to be transparent and it will not be a tick and flick. It will be real.

**Ms LAWLER:** It is for all government employees too, not just education. It is a considerable amount of money. When you look at the annual report, you can see that there is \$6.8m, which is a lot of money that goes towards that benefit for our remote employees. It needs to be managed very carefully.

**Ms NELSON:** Madam Chair, I have a question. We are talking about study leave and professional development. All of that leads into succession planning for assistant principals, principals and teachers and retention as well. It leads to retention of teachers in the Northern Territory.

Looking on page 97 of your annual report, you have the number of staff by classification group. The tables show there has been a decrease in many of the classifications. But two really caught my eye. The first one is the principal. It consistently shows every year that there has been a reduction in the number of principals.

**Ms LAWLER:** To clarify, there are teaching principals who are our principals in our small schools, as well as executive contract principals, who are the principals in the large schools.

One part of the equation is that the previous government—it is obviously political, but—made substantial cuts to our schools in the Northern Territory ...

**Ms NELSON:** It is as reflection.

**Ms LAWLER:** So, there were a heap of positions that were cut in schools. You can see the number of teachers decreased. You can see in the classroom teachers figures, there was a decrease from 2012–13 to 2015–16, as well as some of our teaching principals. There were large numbers—changes in the senior teachers, there were 620 down to 532. The senior teachers are the next layer up from a teacher. You might have a senior teacher in charge of a faculty or an area like early childhood or upper primary in a school. You can see the figures over those four years where there was a considerable drop in the numbers in schools.

**Ms NELSON:** You have to remind everyone we are scrutinising the 2016–17 annual reports which is based on the previous government's budget. This is a reflection about that budget. It is a reflection of the cuts that were made ...

**Ms BAYLIS:** You will notice, when we look at the 2016–17 part that there have been some slight changes. That will be the early impact of the additional funding schools received being able to make some difference.

I will also highlight for you that we are looking at the principal role and are thinking that what we will also find in that number over years—and will continue at different points. We may have principals who are on long-service leave, so you are recruiting behind. We may have principals who are on parental leave, so you are recruiting behind. They may be on study leave, so you are recruiting on—what you have in those numbers is not necessarily a reflection of the number of principals we have in front of schools on any given day. It is around the ebb and flow we experience in our workforce as part of the normal employment conditions that people work within.

**Ms NELSON:** On page 39 of your report, Healthy Life Creative Life—it is in the last paragraph of that page. I am a huge supporter of the flexible learning program. I have been pushing for it for a really long time in Katherine. I am hoping that you can give us an update on that.

**Ms LAWLER:** Member for Katherine, the Healthy Life Creative Life was an election commitment of ours. We committed \$8m first and foremost into kids with additional needs and challenging behaviours. Then, two separate \$1m amounts—\$1m to the Barkly and \$1m to Katherine, to re-engage kids in those regions that for a whole heap of reasons may not have been attending school regularly. We have opened the Juno centre in the Barkly, and I was fortunate enough to be there for the wonderful opening.

The one in Katherine has been slower. It has taken longer than I would have liked. The chief executive will tell you that I have been pushing that. But that has been for a number of reasons. It has been about finding the right site. It needs to be a site, when you talk about re-engaging kids—that is a place they want to go to. That is the lovely thing in the Barkly—the Juno site is a wonderful facility.

There has been some considerable work in finding the right site in Katherine. I will pass to the deputy chief executive to elaborate.

**Ms GUPPY:** Thank you, Member for Katherine. It is exciting, what is about to unfold in the flexible learning space in Katherine. I know people have been anxious to see it up and running. It is getting much closer. There has been a lot of work going on in the background in regard to scoping of what the program will be and what it might look like in terms of recruitment of staff but also, most importantly, about identification of a suitable venue. There has been some interim provision put in place.

If you would like I can outline.

**Ms NELSON:** Yes, please, definitely.

**Ms GUPPY:** A number of options were considered in regard to the actual physical location of the flexible learning centre. We had a site identified within Katherine that we were very happy with; however, through circumstances that changed in the circumstances of the owner of that property, we were not able to complete those arrangements. So we had to go back and look further to identify another space.

The redundant ambulance centre on Kintore Street was identified as being a really suitable location because it offers, importantly, both indoor and outdoor learning and therapeutic spaces, because we also want to be able to make sure we can draw in those other services that we know those particular students need.

We have reached agreement, the Department of Health, to be able to take possession of that facility, we have had our staff down there to look at minor modifications that will be necessary. We have toilet facilities that are being shipped in, if I can use that word. Just at the moment we are waiting on a change of use permit

for us to then be able to drive forward over these next weeks to ensure that come the new year we are able to move in there and begin to operate.

We know there is a need within the Katherine community. In the meantime, there is an arrangement where five disengaged young people are accessing a learning space in the new offices of the youth outreach and re-engagement team, the Territory Families team.

Likewise, when we move into the Kintore Street facility there will be a dedicated space for the youth outreach and re-engagement team to connect with those students.

**Ms UIBO:** It has to be a collaborative approach.

**Ms GUPPY:** Yes, it has to be, and it has to be across agencies. We are now looking to commence in the new year. The recruitment process of staff for the centre has been undertaken. There will be a team leader, two teaching staff, and two student mentors at the AO4 level to provide the service.

There is capacity for 30 students, which I think will make a huge difference for the community. The students are being identified for 2018 enrolment, and that is happened through referrals from NGOs and schools. There is some work being done on the engagement data for Katherine as a whole.

There will also be some vocational education and training offered to students—Certificate I and II in Functional Literacy and Certificate I in Access to Vocational Pathways. It is the pathway that is important, the 'what next'. It is not the flexible learning option and that is it.

The music curriculum will be provided through the NT School of Music, and the sport and outdoor education element of the program will be provided by the centre staff because they have been recruited with that in mind.

We need to think outside the township of Katherine and make sure those students in remote parts of the region have an opportunity through referral from service providers or their community school. We will be looking to accommodate some of those students for certain periods of time depending on the nature of their needs.

So, 2018 is an exciting time for flexible learning in Katherine.

**Ms LAWLER:** And hopefully Palmerston.

**Ms UIBO:** While we are talking about flexible learning and alternative education—regarding pages 38 and 39 of the annual report—how many alternative education sites in total exist across the Northern Territory?

**Ms LAWLER:** I will start from the centre. In Central Australia we have Edmund Rice, the St Joseph's flexi learning centre in Alice Springs. That was set up in about 2012. It is a non-government school, but the government provides \$700 000 to the school per year. It provides alternative education for the disengaged students in Alice Springs.

Centralian Senior College also has the Alice Outcomes program, which provides alternative education for senior secondary students. I talk about the four square walls, and it is about the boundaries of classrooms do not necessarily fit those children so sometimes an outreach program or an alternative program will keep them engaged.

Sometimes it might be that that child is highly anxious or might even have health issues around those sorts of things—that is in Alice Springs. In Tennant Creek we have Juno, Katherine we will soon have the alternative education provision—actually I need to go back to Alice Springs The other program is the KITES program, keeping Indigenous kids that are in town back at school—that is primary school kids. If, say a Yuendumu child's family are in Alice Springs for medical reasons or whatever other reasons, their children can then go to school in Alice Springs.

**Ms NELSON:** Alice Springs gets everything.

**Ms LAWLER:** I could say that at the time—I think I was the Executive Director in Alice Springs and realised there was an absolute need for alternative programs in Central Australia because there were a number of students that were wandering the streets and being disruptive. Sometimes the schools are not providing a quality education for those students, so how do we actually turn it around rather than just ignoring the issue.

I should mention that there are things such as Clontarf and STARS, which are programs to support kids to go to school.

In Darwin we have the Malak Re-Engagement Centre, which again was a program instigated in about 2012 and the Member for Karama, the Chair, understands that program knows that program very well, it is in her electorate. We have also had outreach or a program in Palmerston. Like Katherine, Palmerston will be setting up its own program.

I have said this before, 10 years ago, 15 years ago we would not have had these programs. Children could leave school at 15 and sometimes they left earlier than that and we did not provide a variety of programs that met student's needs. Students just dropped out, they went and worked with dad or got a trade or just left school. The reality now is that, even to be an auto mechanic, you need to have Year 12. It is a complicated computer program in that car, you cannot just drop out of school at 15 and think that you will be able to be a quality mechanic.

One of the important things for governments is, how we cater for these wide range of kids. Main stream school will cater for the large majority of kids that want to stay on, go to Year 12, do a trade. But there are a group of kids that are disengaged from schools—how do we actually provide a program for those children? I know the CE would like to elaborate a bit more—but there are formal programs but there are others.

**Ms°BAYLIS:** There is a couple of others that are really important. Besides the Clontarf program we also have our girls' programs as well to keep those girl connected and engaged because we really want to maintain the connection rather than grow all the flexible options.

We know in our family child centres one of the biggest impacts they have is around our young mums and being able to give them the opportunity to reconnect and stay connected to their learning while their babies are being cared for and that is another area where we know we have a number of supported programs that support our young mums and they continue.

We are also in discussion and negotiation in Arnhem with the Yothu Yindi Foundation about a bit of an alternative process in Arnhem to be able to cater for disengaged young people. The challenge in the Territory, of course, is the geography so it is in partnership with a range of people that we will need to be able to think about what it is we do and how we do this.

My primary concern as a CE is, what do we do in our schools to be able to make sure every young person has the best possibly opportunity to engage. I am also pragmatically realistic enough to know that is not always going to be the outcome, so what is it that we need to do and what it will take.

**Ms UIBO:** On page 99 the more Indigenous teachers' initiative—it was my understanding that this program was ceased in 2015. The last program participants went through, but I notice here in the report between 2016–17 the department supported six more Indigenous teachers initiative recipients, three on a fellowship program and three on a scholarship program. I am wondering, will that continue on next year?

**Ms BAYLIS:** We are looking to introduce the scholarships next year. We are looking to offer those instead of the more Indigenous teacher education initiative. It will have some similarities and comparisons. That intensive support needs to be there, but I have also asked for us to think about what we are doing once people have completed that program to ensure they are on a pathway to employment and we are looking to increase that permanency as well.

One of the areas in the more Indigenous teachers' education program was that it was done and we did not necessarily consistently follow through ...

**Ms UIBO:** Follow through with that support into employment.

**Ms BAYLIS:** We also know we have done a lot of this investment and people are now working in other parts of the country which was very good of us. There was a bit of, we needed to get a little tighter in the support and also the return we would like to see. That is our job to do that.

**Ms LAWLER:** Because I am the minister for all schools and all education, I will mention that the Catholic Education systems has Growing our Own, they call it a GOO program. They have a partnership with CDU and have Indigenous students doing their teacher training.

I was at St Francis Xavier Catholic School at Daly River recently where there were two students doing their teacher training. They study online, get support from a mentor there and can go into the school to become teachers at St Francis Xavier.

**Ms UIBO:** Minister, how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals do we have teaching in the Territory currently?

**Ms LAWLER:** I will have to pass to somebody else, but I know (inaudible) is the co-principal there, Esther is at Gunbalanya, Stephanie Blitner is at Angurugu ...

**Mr PAECH:** Finke community.

**Ms LAWLER:** Yes, Finke. Katherine Leo at Milikapiti. I will go and count, but probably about five or six Indigenous principals in our schools, off the top of my head.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. We will take that question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 11.5

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Arnhem, I will ask you to repeat for the record, please.

**Ms UIBO:** Minister, how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals are currently working in the Northern Territory?

**Ms LAWLER:** I will take that on notice.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will allocate that question 11.5.

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Thank you everybody. Thank you, Minister Lawler. That concludes our time for you this afternoon during our hearings. That concludes consideration of the Department of Education annual report.

**Ms LAWLER:** Thank you very much, Independents, for coming and thank you to the Education staff for all of their preparation. Who has the biggest folders? It must be Education.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much, everybody.

The committee will now take a short break until 4:30, when we will resume to ask questions of the Department of Territory Families 2017 annual report.

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The committee suspended.

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### MINISTER WAKEFIELD'S PORTFOLIO

#### TERRITORY FAMILIES

**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome minister and staff. Thank you for joining us for the last part of our estimates hearings of the annual reports this year.

I welcome you, minister, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you tonight.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Madam Chair, I am pleased to provide a short opening statement for Territory Families at this estimates hearing.

As the Minister for Territory Families, I was proud to table the first annual report for Territory Families on 17 October 2017. I made an associated comment in parliament on that day.

As I noted then, the creation of Territory Families was a critical step in this government's significant social policy reform agenda. This annual report shows the nature and scale of the reform that has been required to bring these portfolios together and align them to build an effective agency.

As it is a new department, the Territory Families annual report 2016–17 represents nine months of activity following the formation of Territory Families on 8 September 2016.

The vision for Territory Families is to empower children, families and our community to enable a safer and better future for all Territorians. The annual report outlines the significant steps taken to build a new agency focused on service, delivering systemic improvements to portfolios and programs for which we are responsible.

This has included establishing many of the foundations necessary to form a new agency, respond to the reviews into major past failings and deliver significant achievements made in that time.

I believe we have stabilised the agency and have a strong foundation to adequately address the challenges facing our agency, including the recommendations made by the Royal Commission.

Over the course of this first year Territory Families has achieved the passage of the Youth Justice Amendment Bill through Parliament separating youth justice from adult corrections; implemented a \$10.5m Fix and Make Safe works and compliance program over two years for both the youth detention facilities and recruited 25 more youth justice officers; invested \$18.2m annually into youth diversion for better youth justice outcomes, which included the recruitment of 39 youth outreach and re-engagement officers to provide through-care services for young people.

Additionally the funding is enabling 11 non-government organisations to deliver pre-court youth diversion services to deliver victim-offender conferences across the Northern Territory.

We have also designed and tendered for bail support accommodation, launched the foster and kinship carer charter of rights in partnership with Foster Carers Association of the Northern Territory. We have developed a strategic plan 2017–20, implemented a new organisational structure including the regionalisation of service delivery.

We have:

- started the process of working with the family and parenting support services to provide the expansion and improvement of services to families that need support, particularly in the early intervention space
- created two regional youth coordinator positions in Darwin and Alice Springs, co-located with the Chief Minister and regional executive directors
- consulted with more than 10 000 Territorians on the review of the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme and announced a reform to the scheme
- consulted on the design of the new domestic and family violence sexual violence reduction framework 2018–28. That will be launched on Monday
- invested \$1.75m of additional funding in after-hours youth services for at-risk kids as well as year-round universal evening and weekend activities for young people in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

In forming the new department and in delivering these reforms and improvements, Territory Families has worked diligently to ensure that the funds provided by government are allocated and spent wisely. In 2016–17 the Northern Territory Government recognised the challenges of the portfolios and increased funding to the department. Specifically the original 2016–17 budget of \$253.5m was increased to \$276.9m, an increase of \$23.4m.

This increase included new investments of \$12.8m for the rising costs of out-of-home care, a legacy issue and we have addressed the base costs which have not been adequately funded in the past, \$7.7m for youth justice including \$2.2m for more youth justice officers, \$1.8m for better youth justice outcomes and \$3.2m for the pensioner concession scheme.

I also would like to note that whilst these important improvements have been designed and implemented it is also relevant that the data within the Territory Families annual report shows that we have continued to have significant need and demand on the agency for child protection, youth justice and domestic violence services.

The report is transparent about the changes required in our system and is open about the reviews and audits conducted within Territory Families core business, and the financial expenditure and performance of each program.

During the nine months outlined in the annual report Territory staff have instigated and realised a range of reforms and programs which are driving meaningful change across the Territory.

I would also like to remind the members that this is in the environment of a Royal Commission into the protection and detention of children in the Northern Territory which has had an enormous impact on the department requiring the attention of some of our most experienced and skilled staff for a significant period of time.

I would like to take this opportunity again to publicly thank all staff. I will look forward to our next report to have the skill and experience of all those who were focussed on the Royal Commission now focussed on improving the outcomes for Territory children and families.

As the Minister for Territory Families, I am proud of the successes we have had in bringing together these challenging and complex portfolios. We know we have much to do, but today I want to recognise the staff I have with me: Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer; Nicole Hurwood, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Organisational Services; Kim Charles, Chief Financial Officer; and Luke Twyford, Executive Director of Strategy, Policy and Performance. We also have Brett Warren, General Manager Families and Regional Services; Sasha Robinson, Executive Director, Operational Support and Youth Justice; and Danyelle Jarvis, Senior Director, Programs and Engagement.

#### **Report No 1 – Department of Territory Families 2017 Report**

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I will now open up to the committee for questions in regard to your opening statement and Territory Families' annual report.

**Mr PAECH:** As you would be very much aware, my electorate is rural and remote. I am interested in whether your regional focus of the agency goes far enough, and are there plans to go further with your footprint?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Previously we felt that the agency was too Darwin focused. We needed to expand our footprint across the whole of the Territory, particularly in remote communities, and make sure we have staff who do not only fly in and out but are on the ground. We need to make sure we have the right people there so that when specialist staff need to attend the community for a complex child protection investigation, we have skilled people on the ground to support those workers in achieving a better outcome.

We are also very aware that the distribution of staffing was not based on caseload and needs. In Katherine there has been a shortage in recruitment, and caseloads have been higher in that region than others. We need to do more work on that, and we have started that process.

There are some ways we can do that smartly by working closely with the Department of Health, making sure our staff are linked in with clinics and education. We can do that in a more effective way than what has been done previously.

Your electorate is huge, and it is the furthest from Darwin, so we need to make sure there is a spread across the regions. The regional hubs of Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs have senior enough staff to make decisions about the more regional centres.

**Mr PAECH:** That is refreshing to hear. I note there has been a series of announcements of funding for regional services. How much funding was allocated to youth services in regional areas last year? Are you continuing that now and will there be an increase?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Something that has happened historically in the Northern Territory is that the NT Government has tended to fund services within the urban or regional centres, and the federal government has taken more responsibility for funding remote communities. There has been a bit of a split between the ways they are funded.

It was highlighted by the Royal Commission that there needs to be more coordination and shared vision between the Territory government's and the federal government's vision. In your electorate we give MacDonnell Regional Council a small amount of money for diversion, but the federal government gives them a significant amount of money to run their effective youth program, which is a really good program. It is

showing some great outcomes in terms of local employment and making sure young people have a career pathway. Some young leaders have come out of the youth program there and then have been employed and taken on a leadership role.

One of the things we want to do over the next 12 months about the recommendations and more coordination of that funding. We know we need to spend more money rather than just that diversion funding, but look at a more universal youth services deliver and how we do that effectively, particularly in remote areas. We have some really innovative services like MacDonnell Regional Council, but there is a range of other really great providers we can work with.

Our investment is mainly outside of Darwin and Alice Springs. We have investment in Tennant Creek and quite a bit of funding heading to East Arnhem. The government intends to end up funding more of the urban centres along with the federal government. That is an area of weakness we need to continue to work on.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Any further questions?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes. Thank you, minister, for your presentation and your response to the concerns that have been expressed, particularly about Palmerston. As an Independent member representing Palmerston, I use Palmerston, in some ways, as a microcosm of some broader issues.

You would be aware that there were two meetings at Palmerston. The community is deeply concerned about ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Which I attended.

**Mr MILLS:** No, I know. I appreciate your attendance and response to the community. The ongoing challenge is to channel that energy in a constructive and proactive way. Serena Dalton and a few of us work together to try to provide that level of grassroots coordination and connect the intent of a program to the community, because many of them are busy, concerned and simply worried.

One hot spot that comes up quite often is that we know there are kids at risk and kids in the justice system who are provided with accommodation in our community. That intersection between the provision of that care and a suburb and the rest of the neighbourhood causes an erosion of support. How that is being managed in that space troubles many people. That is a very real concern.

In fact, sitting here, I have just had something pop up on Facebook. I said, 'Funnily enough, I am sitting right in front of the minister at the moment' ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Nice tweeting.

**Mr MILLS:** No, It is not a tweet. I just happened to have it pop up—these things are magic—from someone in Moulden. What can you tell us about that? It is that connection between the goodwill of a community and good people getting really annoyed at a good house in a good neighbourhood being traumatised by provision of care of this kind.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** One of the things that has been very clear from the Royal Commission is that our system has not only let down the children who were involved in that system, it has let down the entire community. We know our youth justice and child protection systems are not providing the responses the community needs provided.

One of the things I have been surprised at since becoming minister is how committed our community is to wanting to do things differently. Across the community there is deep agreement that what we are doing is not working. As leaders, it is great that we have so much of a shared vision. We have agreed on many things in this space, Member for Blain.

I presume you are talking about an out-of-home care house?

**Mr MILLS:** As I am speaking there is a house in a suburb. It used to be in my electorate. It is not now but they come to me and talk to the other member as well. It is a nice neighbourhood, but it becomes a hot spot. You have police visiting the house, people coming and going. There seems to be parties ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** You are assuming it is an out-of-home care house run by Territory Families?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, people often do not even know what it is. They just know that ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** And that is another issue.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** For instance, we know that our out-of-home care system has needed more support. We know the kids who are coming into care often have much more complex needs. We have not been assessing and supporting our staff to manage those complex needs as much as we should. We also have not been communicating with the department. I have an out-of-home care house, not next door, but the next house down from my own. I know there are challenges. But I do not think we have done as well as we can around that communication.

One of the things we have done over the last 12 months is really look at an audit process because we have not necessarily—there was no audit process, when I became minister, to go out and check on houses and see how they were running. We now have that in place. I did a walk around Territory Families yesterday and they have just done their first lot of unannounced visits to make sure those houses are meeting the standards.

It is not only the standards for if it is an external provider; it is also about making sure we, as an agency, have care plans in place for that child and any issues that have been raised about that child. I am hoping that by putting in those standards and that accountability as well as more processes—I will get the CEO to speak to some of the processes around communication, around making sure neighbours understand ...

**Mr MILLS:** Sure, maybe we could just cut to the chase. As you are speaking I will make a suggestion. As a local member I get people coming to me. I do not know what the story is behind that house, who is running it, what is going on behind the scenes. So I then write a letter to the minister. Someone comes and talks to me. Then I go back and explain.

If these sites are already operating in someone's electorate, it would be good, I think, to be on the front foot so at least I know, so I can provide some explanation as that first point of call. Because I do not know; I just know there is a problem. Houston, we have a problem. Then it is complicated. Then as time goes by and the temperature goes up—wouldn't it be good if the local member knew, as a part of the communication strategy, exactly what was going on so at least we could be a more effective point of communication at those hotspots.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I am happy to look at processes around that, Member for Blain. I am happy to take this offline and talk to you about how you would like that run.

**Mr MILLS:** And I am not just speaking for me. I would assume any local member in any community.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I am happy to have a conversation with you. One of the things we also have done—we have been trialling some different ways on how we support the neighbourhood and how we make sure kids understand that they are living within a neighbourhood and there are consequences to their behaviour within that circumstance. We have done some mediation processes with neighbours in Palmerston. I might get the chief executive officer to speak about that.

**Mr DAVIES:** We have established that Darwin residential care providers—we are meeting with them quarterly. There are five providers assisting us to provide out-of-home care in residential premises. Usually they are rented houses in the suburbs. Some are in the rural area. But they are places where you can adequately house the staff required to supervise and also the children who are placed there.

One of the things we have found very early on in the piece, particularly in Palmerston, was that we had not briefed the neighbours about the situation. We had not—and I am talking here about the resicare providers themselves are now being asked to do that. We have had the youth outreach engagement officers going around checking with families in the immediate neighbourhood. In one instance in Alice Springs we worked very closely with a family who was quite distressed about a particular set of circumstances.

I think what you are proposing will also enable us, where there are issues that arise and people come into your office—if we can find out we can perhaps get in and nip things in the bud. But, these young people, as you know, come from circumstances where they do not always behave in the way—and this is the issue. It is the underlying issue. Then it is also their friends and their peers who may or may not turn up and cause some challenges.

So we are asking resicare providers to make sure they canvass neighbours about what the house will be utilised for, that where they are hearing complaints they let us know so we can intervene. It will not be a perfect world. In some cases, in extreme cases, where this has just become such a problem in the neighbourhood with a particular resicare place, we have relocated the service because people have gotten to the stage where it will impact on the service delivery and the young people in there, and it has been better to go and seek a new start.

**Mr MILLS:** I think you are heading in the right direction if we provide a more direct and proactive line of communication to—because the community is being asked—something being imposed upon them and if they are not being brought in respectfully, their response is going to be a negative one straight up, and it is harder then, to get them back from that.

So what I propose too, is that in the new year—there are good people out there who care about their community—to invite them to come together and you can come and have a talk to them about it. Do that sort of stuff offline not great big crime meetings where everyone is angry and all the headliners are there, just normal people who want to be informed about this. They need to be respectfully engaged. They might have some pushback because they do not understand, but we need to have that kind of social capital built, otherwise we are just running programs and we are probably not making the progress that we should.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Member for Blain, I think it is important to note that this is probably part of a broader culture change within the organisation around transparency, about being proactive, about problems rather than defensive. And certainly that has been how, I think as a new leadership team, we have all been very much wanting to engage not only with Aboriginal communities, with families, with carers as well. I think as an agency we have had much to do and we have started the process of a change culture.

**Mr MILLS:** Just one more thing, and it is probably not analysing the annual report, because the annual report is numbers, we are talking about community and the intent of programs and building community. I have noticed, and I am sure you have, is that behind a lot of the problems that we see socially is the lack of food. And it seems odd to me that a house is broken into—and I often ask what happened—and it is strange, they took the car and they stole food from the fridge.

And then starting to get closer to a lot of these families, we know that behind the scenes there is not a secure supply of food in the house. And that too, with my work with Foodbank—I am on the board there—and I have commenced a conversation and I just want to put this into play, that through the work of the YOREOs and that presence in Palmerston, and it may replicated in other places that there could be food. Because food is such a good point of contact, and through food you can start to build connections, so there is that provision available.

I know that Foodbank would like to be involved in a conversation about that, where discreetly there is the capacity to provide that basic need that may not even be articulated, but is there. And I think it really provides a very powerful point of contact so I am making that available formally. I believe, from all of my assessment of those who are families of offenders, who are close and as concerned as anybody, that this is a really critical issue. So that offer is available, I believe, from Foodbank, and if we can commence that conversation I think we could move quite quickly particularly in the Christmas period. Do that offline if we wish.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Can I say that we completely agree with you and one of the—looking through the information we have—is that over school holidays, where kids perhaps do not access to school breakfast programs, which are really common across the Territory and a really important thing.

That lack of access to food can increase the break-in rate. And one of the things that we have done particularly in the summer strategy in Alice Springs, is that we will have activities happening every day and every evening, but part of the expectation of the providers of those activities, is that food is provided so that there are ongoing opportunities for kids to access food through those activities. And that has been part of that strategy, making sure that there is access in those activities.

And I am sure that those providers would really welcome the support of Foodbank in that process.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, happy to. But I think we need to move fairly quickly on that. Because the spaces available where people can approach discreetly. And I am particularly thinking about families. Because at the home level, that is where it is missing, and that is the point of contact. So hopefully we can progress that quite rapidly.

The last thing I would like ask is—and it is probably programs I see in Palmerston, but I would assume this happens everywhere—is that programs can become almost institutionalised and the program itself becomes the galaxy, when it is actually in a broader context.

This is a clumsy way of saying it, but it could be that the operation has been a complete success but the patient has died. That means that everything seems to be working really well and we developed groupthink and we have spent the money and we have ticked the box and we can make the speeches to assure people. The point of connection, the cultural and behavioural change is not occurring.

A practical point is that sometimes programs are being operated which give you the opportunity to give a good speech but it stops at 4.21 pm, or the program closes at night because we do not want to pay overtime. I do not want to go much further than this, but I think we need to keep an eye on that. The object of the exercise is the people that are our concern and how we can providing care. We are finding cases where we are looking at the time schedule rather than the people that the resource is directed at. Sometimes activities are closing down when they should be open, at night.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Member for Blain you have picked an area of absolute passion for me. Because I

**Mr MILLS:** I need your mobile number and I will phone you from time to time ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Please do, I used to run a 24/7 NGO in Alice Springs and often over the Christmas period it was us, the hospital and the police open. That is a failure of contract management and a failure of planning.

That has been something we have been very clear about to the agency, to youth outreach workers. They are expected to work over Christmas because that is their period of high need.

**Mr MILLS:** Surely not at night though?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Yes, at night.

**Mr MILLS:** I am joking. That is when the community come along, and say where is the help?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** We have also been working with our NGO providers to make sure they are they are being flexible in the hours they are providing services.

With the summer strategy, spreading that out around looking at hours of operation to make sure we get the breadth of cover. We have provided that certainty.

We are also providing some support over that Christmas period with the youth outreach workers and the Territory Families workforce supporting NGOs where, in the past, if they have had a worker pull out at the last minute and recruiting is difficult in the Territory, particularly if you are in somewhere like Katherine or Tennant Creek, how do you cover that activity? We are trying to be much more flexible, as an agency, around that.

One of the things we are going to trial in Alice Springs this summer is that there will be child protection workers working past that 4.21 pm time which is another personal bugbear of mine. They are certainly going to be doing that, and rostered on to make sure they are not just on call—there will be an on-call service—but there will be workers in the office through the night until around 12 midnight or 1 am. It is quite late into the evening. It is to make sure we have workers there ready to go, not being disturbed and on a call out.

We know that we need to do more in this space and we will continue, through our contract negotiations, be clear that when services are delivered should be when the services are needed not when it is convenient for organisations.

**Mr MILLS:** I will not go on any longer other than to say what I have just heard you say.

You mentioned before 'cultural change'. That is in the broader community. It is also institutional cultural change. We are all involved in this. Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Nhulunbuy, do you have any questions?

**Mr GUYULA:** I do. Good afternoon, good evening. The Chief Minister suggested I ask this question here. I am interested in resources for youth diversion and youth management projects. Yolngu communities are

capable of providing these services themselves. We already do this but lack resources to engage our current numbers of youth who need to be re-engaged in Yolngu culture and law through ceremonies, teaching, discipline and hunting on country.

We do not want to see our children being taken away by Balanda law. We want authority to manage youths who are at risk. The NT Police, Fire and Emergency report states that NTPF will provide youth diversion and management for kids at risk of engaging in crime. Can you explain how this works? How are these diversion and management programs being implemented? Are they running in remote regions? How do they involve leaders and the community?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Member for Nhulunbuy, throughout the year we have had many conversations about child protection. I take this opportunity to publicly thank you for your generosity with your local knowledge ...

**Mr GUYULA:** Thank you too.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Your electorate is probably in a good position to take those first steps in making sure we are working closely with local communities, working in partnership and that Aboriginal leadership and voice leads the reform process we know we need to undertake.

In terms of diversion in remote communities, when we came to government last year there was a range of contracts already provided for youth diversion. Because the Royal Commission was in play and we knew it would make recommendations about that, one of the things we did was to continue those contracts until we can then make a plan, with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on board.

In your region, we give East Arnhem Regional Council \$140 000 to provide a range of local diversion activities. I might get someone to talk to the detail of those. We have also put some money on Groote Eylandt to deliver there. Those are delivered locally. However, we know we need to have more local leadership and senior people involved in that leadership.

One of the things that is happening well in your electorate is the child protection office in Nhulunbuy. It has a group of elders it consults with that take a leadership role in providing information to the team. It is valued and acted on. But we still have much more work to do in this area.

I have had positive feedback about the two youth outreach workers who are working in your electorate in Nhulunbuy, and have done a lot of work about the sniffing issues you have in your electorate, and have been very proactive in that space. It has shown that youth outreach workers are being used very differently in different places. That is one of the reasons why we set up a fairly flexible model. They are working quite closely in Nhulunbuy with the Department of Health and some of the organisations.

However, we know we need to move towards community-controlled, local-based diversion programs that are based on kids being on country, culture and having a strong identity.

When I met with you last week I made a commitment to come out early in the new year and spend some proper time with you to go through what you would like to see in your electorate. The leadership of Yolngu people in this area has been really strong, and we will continue to support that.

**Mr GUYULA:** Thank you. Is it possible to resource Yolngu leaders to provide these same services, for example, through the (inaudible) leadership groups we have been discussing, that I have discussed with you previously?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I think the Royal Commission has given us a really clear direction in that saying that we do need to have Aboriginal voices leading the conversation and we agree. Now we have the opportunities as part of delivering that reform process to do this in a meaningful way, not it a tick box way. I am passionate about making sure we make some meaningful change.

I know in my own area we have places like WYDAC, which you know is a very strong Warlpiri service but also that has developed over a long period of time so I think it is really important that we do the right development with communities at their pace—and that will be different in your electorate to the Member for Arnhem's and the Member for Namatjira that there are different places where we need to do the work differently and if we go for a local decision-making policy and flow it out into our youth reform we will have much better outcomes.

I am looking forward to not just sitting down with but also the other bush members and about what needs to happen in those local areas, as well as acknowledging what we need to do in the northern suburbs of Darwin is really different again.

**Mr GUYULA:** I note that East Arnhem Regional Council received funding for youth diversion program from 2015–17. Can you provide some details of this program, what do they do, how many Yolngu are employed, how does it connect with Yolngu leaders?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I am happy to take that on notice because it is a grant process to another organisation. I do not necessarily know the operational details of what they do. What our contract requires them to do is to make sure that they are sitting down with local clan leaders regularly about—we actually asked for a monthly basis—about the progress and issues with any young people—so it is proactive in identifying young people and making sure that there is the follow through with diversion.

There is also referrals to the Shepherdson College learning on country team as well as the (inaudible) discipline camp. Those are the things that are part of our contract. I am happy to get further information for you and perhaps when I do come out to Nhulunbuy we can visit the service together and have a conversation with them together.

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#### Question on Notice No 12.1

**Madam°CHAIR:** Member for Nhulunbuy, can I ask you to repeat your question again for the record please?

**Mr GUYULA:** I note that East Arnhem Regional Council received funding for a youth diversion program 2015–17. Can you provide some details of this program: what do they do, how many Yolngu are employed, how does it connect with Yolngu leaders?

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

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I am happy to accept the question.

**Madam°CHAIR:** We have allocated the question 12.1.

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**Madam°CHAIR:** Do you have any other questions, Member for Nhulunbuy?

**Mr GUYULA:** This might be a bit hard but I just want to put it on record and see if you can answer it for me. I notice that most child protection cases that are substantial are neglect cases. I am interested to know how many of these cases of neglect may be related to systemic issues and poverty. I have many members in my electorate on the waiting list for housing. Some of these people are grandparents living in severely overcrowded housing and wanting to have their own dwelling to create a better environment for their grandchildren.

I also note here that government policies to fine parents and suspend parents' Centrelink payments for non-attendance at school may contribute to the overall family's ability to provide care. Does the department collect data relating to systemic causes of neglect? What does the data show, and how can the department address these systemic issues as part of the preventative measures?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** We need to acknowledge those systemic drivers of what we face. Unless we are dealing with those systemic drivers we will never get a better outcome than what we are doing. That is why, as a government, we have been strongly focused on how we can make sure we respond to the needs of Territory children.

We have set up the subcommittee of Cabinet, and we have the Treasurer—the Minister for Children—as the chair of that. She convenes that meeting with me as Territory Families, Health, Education and Housing ministers. Unless we deal with each of those issues, we will never divert kids from the child protection system.

We need to acknowledge that often when issues of neglect are raised, the driver is poverty. It is also poor housing and issues with addiction and domestic and family violence. We know those are the drivers and we need to address that.

The Education minister spoke earlier about the biggest driver in attendance is housing. It is an issue we are working with. The investment that we have promised into remote housing will make a big difference to my portfolio. I do not think we often put those links together, but as a government we are committing to that.

We need to acknowledge that it is systemic disadvantage of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, who are overrepresented in every part of my portfolio. We need to acknowledge the drivers of that.

**Mr GUYULA:** That was my final question for estimates this year. I thank everyone for being so kind, giving me a hand and being helpful. This is the first year I came in. There have been ups and downs in finding my way around the place and getting to know it.

Maybe towards next year we will be able to work together and make better changes.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I look forward to that. Thank you.

**Mr GUYULA:** Thank you very much to all.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for your contributions to estimates hearings this week, Member for Nhulunbuy.

Are there any further questions?

**Ms NELSON:** I will start with page 19, table two—the number of children whose families are receiving ongoing case work. It is a steady increase; can you explain that?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Yes. That goes to some of the reform processes that we want to put in place.

**Ms NELSON:** Is that reform leading to that steady increase?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** No. Well, this year it has because we have placed focus on making sure we refer more to family and support services. Case management is generally being provided by family and support services.

I will get Luke to talk to the actual figures. This year, since the formation of Territory Families, more people have been referred to those services. We have also enabled those family support services to provide a more flexible service.

Up until recently there were strict guidelines about when they could and could not work with kids. If an investigation started on a sibling—they might be working with one child in the family and then an investigation would happen on a sibling—all case management services would have to cease, which is not productive.

We have also wanted to make sure the case work of Territory Families is much more nuanced and more focused in the long term, working with families and children.

That is going to be part of our reform. I would like to see that figure go up further, because the more work we are doing and the earlier we are doing it, the more we are referring.

**Ms NELSON:** I guess in this particular case, the higher the numbers the better. I am mindful of the fact that we are scrutinising annual reports from a budget that came from the previous government and we have come in and implemented changes. So I just wanted ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** We added to the budget because we knew we needed to. But we have been focused on increasing those early intervention services. It was pretty clear to us that that would be a recommendation of the Royal Commission. We knew that there was a lot of frustration within the sector regarding some of the barriers to them working with families productively.

To be honest, as an organisation we have not necessarily been open to working in partnership with the NGO sector as much as possible. That is something that, as a whole-of-government, we have been really passionate about working better with our NGO partners. As an agency, I think we are starting to see the beginning of that true partnership focusing on the needs of families rather than some sort of weird turf space.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Katherine, we have increased the number of children who have received support by 25% over the year, from 1515 to 2007. That is double the number receiving support in the year prior.

On top of that, there has been a marked increase in the number of multi-agency child safety coordinating meetings. During that time over 90 organisations have been involved in that. We are working on the design of improving the family and parenting support system. Strengthening family case workers are being—we are asking them to make sure they record the work they are doing much more accurately so we are getting a better record of the interventions and support we provide.

In addition, the government has allocated \$3m in 2017 to provide a significant improvement to the family support service system, including this commitment to a program that will enable us to offer a dual pathway for reports coming in so that we can offer family support early, before going to a full statutory investigating.

There is a lot of work going on in here. The big challenge for us is how, with the budget we have, we shift that work from statutory intervention, which we are still going to have to do, to the earlier intervention work.

We are getting very clear messages from Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal medical services and APO NT, that they want to be really engaged in that primary intervention end of supporting families. That has come through strongly with the Royal Commission report.

**Ms NELSON:** I have to say, the Territory Families annual report was a bit of a hard one for me to read through. You are an anomaly, I guess, because throughout all of the government agencies, you have had so many agencies merge into one.

I had to go through several previous annual reports from several years ago, like from 2012. My office looks like the parliamentary library right now, because I had to pull all of these—so it was a bit of hard one to go through.

I guess this is more of a comment than anything else. Was there an underestimation from the previous budget issued by the previous government? I am trying to paint the picture.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I think the extent of reform needed, in all of the portfolios we pulled together was probably somewhat underestimated. The extent of the reform and work needed to get the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme under control, the more we unpicked that, the more complex that became.

The same with the youth justice system. Even really simple things like, I know that in our evaluation of assets, the assets were halved in value because there had not been a process that was clear on that. It has been layer on layer of complexity.

There were two other things that were really difficult. The out-of-home care has never had a proper base of funding and that has been an ongoing issue so whilst the agency has never had a deficit, it has been made up because you have not had adequate staffing. There has been a really difficult balance and we were very clear that we wanted to start off with a base that was adequately funded so we could then move towards reforming our out-of-home care system. I think the same can be said for, and maybe there will be further work that needs to be done in our youth justice area, because it was part of a larger correctional service.

The economies of scale around service delivery of some of the specialist services, we need to work through how we do that. Again, the base of how many staff you need, the move towards eight hour shifts rather than 12 are the sorts of things we are now beginning to cost. Now we have the Royal Commission we have got a clearer line of sight on how we do that but the budget is challenging within our area and the demand keeps growing at the same time as well.

My favourite quote at the moment was from the Chief Minister on the Royal Commission, 'It is like changing a tyre on a car going 100km an hour'. We have demand coming in at all times as well as trying to manage the kids who are in our care at the moment and also having a reform process that prevents kids coming in but also provides them with a level of service if they do need to be brought into the system.

It is a complicated piece of work and it is not until you get in and pull these things apart that you see the extent of work. I have to say, the department has done an enormous amount of work this year with the Royal Commission on top of all of those reform processes over the last 12 months.

**Ms NELSON:** The other question I have is in regards to the number of cases and case management. The increase in cases is not matching up with the staff numbers. You did point out that is an issue we have experienced in the office in Katherine. I was wonder if you could elaborate a little on what your recruitment strategies are in regards to that?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Recruitment is a challenge across the Northern Territory and from my experience as an employer in Alice Springs, it is difficult to get staff, particularly in the regional areas. I know Katherine has had—across the board—some recruitment areas right across government and the NGO sector. We are committed to becoming an employer of choice and making sure people see our agency as the place to go if you want to work in youth and child protection, you come to the Northern Territory because the opportunities are there. To do that we need to invest in our frontline staff.

I think we have done a lot of work in that area in our youth justice area where there is a complete change of focus in the training in moving from a purely correctional model to a youth justice and youth specialist model. We will need to do the same with our child protection staff as we support them to become more skilled. The best solution to the problems we face is having as many skilled people on the frontline and able to do this really complicated work because the work is not straightforward. We also need to make sure we are building our Indigenous workforce as well to make sure people are employed in community and to make sure we have the right people. Did you have anything to add CO?

**Mr DAVIES:** Thanks minister. Member for Katherine, one of the areas we have a real challenge, without doubt, is Katherine and the Katherine region. That would not be news to you. What we are doing is having a really good look at how we can better support that regional office, both from Darwin but also in the sense of the conditions we employ people under. We are very keen to have a look at the way the education department employs its staff; it offers a set of conditions around housing as well that we do not currently offer. We have allowances that are built in to our workforce. The question is, are they enough?

Interestingly we were down to about 12 staff who were directly running caseloads for us. We are now back up to 18 but we have a turnover of staff through Christmas coming up. It is a focus area for us.

We think for Katherine there is a specific need. It is not as pronounced in Alice Springs, Darwin or Nhulunbuy interestingly. We have to do something better about Katherine about getting people and keeping them there. We are discussing this with Health and Education who have issues around workforce particularly in the early childhood sector.

We recognise this is a real challenge for us. One of the things we are doing is sending teams of people from Darwin to assist in the Katherine office, on a regular basis, but it is a challenge for us.

**Ms NELSON:** You are doing that until you are able to recruit permanent staff and get all of that in place, is that correct?

**Mr DAVIES:** That is what we are going to be doing.

**Ms NELSON:** That is reassuring because that is one of the issues that we have had in Katherine, the fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive out. Continuity is key in this particular area so I am really reassured to hear that.

**Mr PAECH:** I wanted to follow on. We were talking about the retention of staff within the department but I want to go a step further. As an agency, what are you doing for the retention and gaining of foster carers and kinship carers? That is quite an important part I see. I want to know what mechanisms are in place there to make that stronger.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Absolutely a priority area. I think in the first six months of me becoming the member for Brainting the most common person who walked through the door with a concern was foster or kinship carers. They were concerned that the support they had received had deteriorated significantly under the previous government. They were clear that they did not feel listened to, or supported by the department. It was an area that we needed to put urgent attention into, which we did.

We worked closely with Foster Care Association around a charter of rights for kinship carers and foster carers. That is about setting out the expectations of both the department and foster carers. The challenge of that is to make it a living document and to make sure that people are getting the support they need.

There are a couple of key times. It is about getting enough information when kids are placed in their care so they are getting enough information about that child's history so they can support that transition. There is also another time at that transition from primary school to high school which is a normal developmental stage where it is a difficult time for everybody, parents, kids and also in that caring situation.

I do not think we have given enough support to foster carers to manage those transition times when kids' behaviour is changing and perhaps being more challenging.

The other bit we need to do is be really making sure we are hearing the information they are giving us about that child. They are the ones with that child 24 hours. People have felt that that has not been listened to.

That said, we also need to know that our foster carers, in particular, are well-supported and prepared for when that child is going back to a kinship placement that they are supported through that process and involved in it so that it is as positive a process for the foster carers as it is for the child. We must take time in that transition.

If we do all of those things right and those people foster caring are saying to other people that this is a great experience, which is not necessarily the narrative at the moment, we know we will be able to recruit more.

The area we absolutely need to do better is around identifying kinship carers, appropriate kinship carers earlier in the process.

What has happened in the past is that we remove a child, then we start looking at the kinship carer. There has been some work about making sure we are doing that much earlier, so that if a child needs to be removed because of a crisis or something else, we have a clear plan in place already and we are not having to—which is an issue raised by the Member for Nhulunbuy throughout the year—remove a child from Nhulunbuy to Darwin to be placed in foster care and then identify a kinship carer on country. We have to go through all that process and the child is sitting in Darwin while we do that and is then sent back.

There is a range of things we know we need to do better and that is where we will need to work very closely with the Aboriginal-controlled organisations like Tangentyere—an organisation you know well—the only Aboriginal-controlled organisation running an out-of-home care service and doing a great job with it. We also need to be working closely with Aboriginal organisations on that kinship identification and support.

**Ms NELSON:** But there needs to be some policy work done in that area, as well, does there not? There are current policies we have that make it really difficult for kinship care to happen.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Yes, and some of those need to be stepped out. They are quite complex areas. One of the things that will happen this year is the Royal Commission into Sexual Abuse in Institutions will come down with further recommendations for working with children cards and further tightening that process. There is a risk that it will exclude even more kinship carers through that process. We will need to step through that balance between risk and safety—cultural safety versus other types of safety—really carefully. That is where we have to work closer with Aboriginal organisations to help us manage that risk and safety planning.

**Mr PAECH:** One of the complex issues and the nature of it in the environment we are talking about now is that, in order to have the kinship care, sometimes we might be looking at an option where we are putting them into a house that is severely overcrowded already. That is something we need to bear in mind in relationship with Housing.

I was having a conversation with a parliamentary colleague, the Member for Karama, a couple of weeks ago about when a child is taken into care and a kinship care or foster care model is found, one of the complex things is that kid remains a statistic of the department—do they not? Speaking from the perspective of an Aboriginal person, the statistics of my people being in care are horrific. What is the mechanism in place? That child is in care, but they are not in a crisis situation per se. I am curious about how long they remain a statistic of the department. How long are they used as a negative number being counted against Aboriginal people?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** While there is an order in place about that child, they will remain in the system.

Going back to your earlier comment about housing. One of the things I have been working closely with the Minister for Housing is how, with our Room to Breathe program and a few others, we look at supporting kinship carers to meet the requirements of the kinship care assessment. He and I are working closely together and that will be a really innovative way we can line up our investment into housing alongside making sure we have good change and policy sitting alongside each other.

**Ms NELSON:** I have a few more questions. On page 65 of the annual report, I noted that in the 2015–16 annual report it was noted that there were 622 members of staff in the department. I could not find that information in this annual report. Could you tell me how many people are employed?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I can indeed. I may get one of the department members who know this detail in and out to go with that. Nicole.

**Ms HURWOOD:** Territory Families has 830 full-time equivalent staff.

**Ms NELSON:** And that is because of the change? Okay. I am glad you gave me that number. I am looking at page 65, the workers' compensation claims on table 12. I am a bit concerned about the increase in new claims from 2015–16 to 2016–17.

**Ms HURWOOD:** That is also associated with the machinery of government changes. We have an additional cohort of staff.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** It is also important to note we inherited some work cover claims from the other organisations. That was part of the machinery of government changes as well.

**Ms NELSON:** Will that be applied to all the other tables in the annual report that show such a huge increase? For example, the incidents reported—being hit by objects has an increase of 10. Some of these numbers are a bit startling.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Yes. One of the goals is to reduce them in all areas. It is not just an increase. There has been a strong focus on worker safety within youth detention centres and making sure staff are skilled at de-escalating incidents without using physical force. When someone goes to restrain someone there is also a risk that the worker will injure themselves as well. It is not an ideal situation for anyone involved.

We have done a lot of work to make sure we have a physical environment that supports worker safety as well as making sure workers have the skills to de-escalate rather than putting themselves in a situation where they can get hurt.

**Ms NELSON:** On page 71, table 13, agency budget performance—the 2016–17 budget estimate was \$221 325, but the actual was only a \$570 difference. Considering all the issues that have come up with youth detention and youth justice ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** To have such a small margin is a very strong show of good leadership within the organisation. Our demand will continue to increase and we may not have the same circumstance in the next budget, but one of the things we have been clear about is that we need to make sure we achieve what we aim to within the Territory Families budget.

There are issues with the cost of the youth detention system and whatever model we go to will have cost implications. We will step through that in the budget process and you will get a much better sense of the true cost of our department in the next budget estimates process.

**Mr DAVIES:** When you look at what the budget estimate was and what we actually spent—when it is 0.2% of a variation—we were right on the ball with what government gave us and what we spent.

We made sure we did not waste any money. We made sure we got everything out the door we needed to, and we came within a very tight budget parameter. We were very happy with that.

The minister has made the point that this year, with the out-of-home care area in particular, we need to make sure we stay within these budget parameters as much as possible. As we build the services going forward, we are getting to the point where we understand what the real cost is and what our real budget will be going forward.

I was very pleased with this outcome. This is right on budget.

**Ms NELSON:** I am curious to see what the next year's budget or annual reports are going to look like, because as I said, this is an anomaly and having to try and pull old annual reports from so many different departments, it was really hard for me to get a good picture of what was going on and where the variances are.

I have a couple of more questions. I wanted to touch on the seniors and carers concession changes. Massive change. Disappointing to see it was not elaborated in this annual report. It would have been good to see the comparison from previous years to the 2016–17 budget.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I think you will find that, because it is starting on 1 July next year, we will be able to tell a much clearer story in the next annual report. The consultation has—as far as we know it is the biggest consultation that has ever occurred within the Northern Territory, certainly regarding the seniors concession and all of you today have extensive conversations with seniors in your communities on the importance of this concession scheme and the need to make sure it was a fair scheme.

Not only did we have the youth justice sector coming in with the Royal Commissioner, we had this coming into our department with significant police investigation at the same time as the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General having a look at the process.

There has been a high level of scrutiny over this system. I think the policy position we have come to as a government resolves many of the issues we have seen. By having a low income concession scheme that is focused on people on a low income, not only seniors, but those on a single parent benefit, disability or a carer's pension, all of those payments make them eligible for the concession scheme. Then have a separate scheme totally focused on seniors and about making sure seniors get recognised for not only the support they have given our community in the past, but continue to do.

As you would all know, every time you go to a voluntary club, they are seniors contributing to our community at an enormous rate.

Having the two schemes separate is a better policy decision and will mean we do not end up with the administrative type of chaos. It really was chaos that we have inherited in this program.

We have given ourselves a fair lead in so that we make sure we come up with a robust scheme. I met the new workers yesterday who are responsible for rolling that out. I gave them a quick shake of the hand and said thank you. That is going to be an enormous task in making sure we get that done in a way that is clearly communicated to our seniors.

**Mr PAECH:** Member for Katherine, do you mind if I ask a question?

**Ms NELSON:** Not at all.

**Mr PAECH:** Minister, how is the department working to tackle elder abuse?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** That was something that, through our conversations on the concession scheme, came up significantly in the last 12 months. Certainly when we were talking about a debit card, which was clearly rejected by the community. The seniors did not want it and one of the main issues was with regards to elder abuse.

We have done some work in this area, there is an element of elder abuse that is gendered, so often women are the victims of elder abuse, but there are specific things for elderly people making them more vulnerable to abuse.

As a community, we need to be providing that support in increasing the understanding of elder abuse within our community. One of the things we have done as a start, is to provide \$300 000 to the Darwin Legal Service to provide an information hotline. So if someone is worried about someone being abused—also people who are impacted by the abuse can contact and get legal advice.

That is a first step. It is something we need to do more work on, particularly in remote communities, we need to be supporting elders to live safely on community and making sure they are supported to contribute to the community, but also protected when necessary.

**Mr PAECH:** My electorate is probably the best bush electorate—it is home to the Owen Springs facility. It appears we spent a significant amount of money doing up Owen Springs—which I am grateful, it is a bit of infrastructure spending in Namatjira—and we upgraded some other works at Don Dale. We made a significant investment there and it appears that we are now—it is proposed that those facilities close—why was the money spent?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I am really happy to go through that and I might get the CEO to speak to the detail of what we have actually done. I have said this publically before—the first day I worked through the Don Dale and the Owen Springs facilities—I think you were actually there at the first time I went to the Owen Springs facility and saw my response to a completely inadequate facility that had children—that I as a Minister, am responsible for in the care.

It was clearly not meeting the needs that it had. In particular, the Owen Springs facility, we had really significant concerns for girls in that facility because it was so small—because there was not a really clear separate space, as well as a very small recreational space—we were very concerned about the safety of young women in that facility—and stopped girls being able to stay there because of that concern.

Those concerns were borne out in the Royal Commission, which did highlight the lack of facilities for girls. Again it is this thing around having to change a tyre on a car going 100 kilometres an hour, we know we need new facilities but we also have a need for children to be in detention where the court orders and where appropriate at this current time as well.

We need to make sure those facilities are as safe as possible. It is a duty of care issue and we have tried to make them, at the same time, as amenable to rehabilitation rather than a punitive sense. It has been a balance not wanting to spend another cent on those facilities but also needing to meet our duty of care as the kids are in care at the moment.

**Mr PAECH:** Following on from that, what funding has been put aside and what work has been done in Darwin and Alice Springs towards new justice accommodation and detention if it may be?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** We did put some money aside in the previous (inaudible) \$22m towards the replacement facility. We knew that was not going to be enough. We have spent some of that money on alternatives to detention with the bail accommodation and with the works we have had to do to those two facilities—I will get the CEO to give the detail there.

We have that \$22m which we are now using to do those things. As part of our response to the Royal Commission we said very clearly that we are putting \$50m on the table for infrastructure spend. That is not specifically going to just one of those facilities—there has been some media commentary which was misleading around the fact that this is not just for detention centres we are also looking at other youth training facilities and a range of other facilities to make sure we are getting as much flexibility in the future around support for youth justice facilities.

We are still waiting for the federal government to come back to us with what they will be contributing to this process. While the Royal Commission was going we did a range of work around identifying sites—and the federal government co-funded that project—we had a project officer who looked at a range of places that are more regional that also have access to the education facilities, the health facilities, all the things that need to wrap around to make this successful.

We have briefed the Senator for the Northern Territory about that process and we are awaiting some feedback from him because it was a co-funded project and we want to see what his thoughts are. We are well progressed in where we want to head. It is about working with our federal partners around making sure we step through.

Also in the Royal Commission there are some really clear recommendations that are the responsibility of the federal government. The CEO is heading to Canberra next week to sit down with his federal counterparts to make sure we are stepping through and understanding where the federal government sees their role in this reform process.

**Mr PAECH:** I do not want to pre-empt anything but when you say regional are you talking about somewhere between Alice Springs and a community.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** No, there is a couple of things we need to consider in terms of land tenure.

The other next step, and this is probably a step out we do know that we need to be supporting programs on country led by community. That was my response to the member for Nhulunbuy. There is probably a range of things we are looking at.

There are models like the Juno model in Tennant Creek which is working really well and providing education pathways for kids. We want to make sure that whatever we do in the detention space has a pathway out of that detention space and that we provide young people with a pathway back into education, employment and being a contributing member of our community.

Whatever we end up with it will be a mix of secure—because we need to acknowledge there is a community safety issue—we cannot be in denial about that but also too we need to provide those pathways out.

**Mr PAECH:** Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Any further questions?

**Ms NELSON:** I have a couple more questions and I am hoping that you will indulge me in this.

I noted that there is no longer an office of women's policy or men's policy and it is now combined into one. I was wondering if you could talk through why you did that?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** The office of gender equality and diversity. There are still men's policy officers and women's policy officers but the overarching framework is with gender equality because we know we need to have a broad picture. It is to make sure that, when we are talking about gender equality, we are clear we are not just saying it is women who need the support. We need to make sure that men are involved in that picture and that there is an understanding that unless we deal with one we are not going to fix the other.

The great example is about women's participation in the workforce. Unless we get increased numbers of men taking on parenting responsibility we are not going to improve the outcomes for women in terms of employment participation and making sure their super stays on par with their partner. There is a range of things we need and unless you pull one lever you cannot pull the other.

**Ms NELSON:** There will still be the two sub-offices under that banner?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** We are clear about that. There is some very exciting work coming up in the next 12 months, particularly some of the stuff to support men, particularly around the fathering issue. We are going to do some great work.

We also know that on Monday we are launching the domestic and family violence policy. Unless we challenge the gender stereotypes for both men and women at the same time, about what it is to be a strong man and a strong woman, we are not going to address the issues of domestic and family violence.

**Ms NELSON:** Thank you for providing that clarification. It is a lot more reassuring than what the name suggests.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Can I also say that we know many people—and I know you are a passionate advocate for people do not necessarily identify with a gender in a binary way—I wanted a department that had the capacity to include people who do not want to classify themselves either as a man, a woman or as transgender or questioning what that looks like. That was an important part of that diversity part of the ...

**Ms NELSON:** The concern for me was that we were going to dilute women's issues or men's issues would be diluted and they would lose that sole focus.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I assure you, Member for Katherine, that while I am the minister there will not be a relax on the focus on women.

**Ms NELSON:** Thank you.

**Mr PAECH:** While you are looking can I ask another question? Minister, I am mindful that as Territory Families you have a whole volume of sub-agencies and I just want to get a picture and highlight the multicultural groups. I am wondering if you could give us an indication to-date. We have moved into five-year funding agreements. Have any multicultural groups accessed that and what is the relationship of Territory Families providing funding or support to multicultural agencies or societies?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** It is a great question and I am very pleased I got this portfolio as part of the Territory Families portfolio. I have to say I have been made to feel very welcome by multicultural communities across the Northern Territory. We need to acknowledge that the Northern Territory is a changing place. It is a much more multicultural community than it was 10-15 years ago. I know you, member for Namatjira, have attended on my behalf India community functions in Alice Springs.

**Mr PAECH:** I would be happy to do it again.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** We have 3000 Indians in Alice Springs, people of Indian descent. That is a really major change to our community over quite a short period of time. I know in Katherine we need to make sure we are

clear that multiculturalism is not just seen as a Darwin issue; it is across the Territory. I do think there are some opportunities. One of the things we have been talking about is how do we sustain our multicultural groups to have access to some—there are specific halls in Darwin like the Italian Club and a range of others and other community groups want access to those halls as well to have their own functions. How do we do that in a sustainable way?

In Alice Springs we have funded the multicultural council of Central Australia to have a very open space in the Alice Springs Youth Centre where a lot of people are using that in a very general but welcoming way. It also gives them access to the youth services. There are a couple of things around that. We also need to be making sure we are not just turning up for the nice events.

This year we have had some significant issues that we have worked with our multicultural communities on, in terms of the federal government changes around citizenship and visas. We have done a lot of joint work on that and it has been really important to have those voices. I also think it is an area where we can move towards five-year funding. So far, our five-year funding bucket has been focussed mainly on—the toy libraries have mainly got those as well as COTA has just got a five-year funding agreement to help roll out and improve the Seniors Card.

We also need to move past—there are buckets of money the multicultural groups get, like some from the Community Benefit Fund and a range of others so I think there is a broad piece of work to do that. I think we also need to align our multicultural policy along with our trade and tourism policies that has been one of the tasks given to us by the Chief Minister. Also thinking about how we can use the contacts our community have to attract visitors and to extend trade as well. It is a very exciting portfolio.

I have an excellent multicultural advisory council full of really smart people who are committed to the Northern Territory but we have \$1.3m in grant payments going out and I think we can look at making those more sustainable so people can plan.

**Mr PAECH:** That is great. Minister, I wanted to ask and, I am happy to be told to wait until the next round of estimates, but with the proposal of same-sex adoption coming on—obviously that was consideration that was not in the previous budget—to look at the additional, if there is any—my question is, do you foresee there being any additional pressures on resourcing within the department or agencies around providing support in the future?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I do not know if it will be an enormous change. People wanting to adopt need to go through a fairly rigorous process. As I said in my second reading speech, we do have low numbers of children available for adoption because it is really important that adoption is when a parent voluntarily gives up a child. Very different to when the state may intervene and remove a child.

So low numbers, but mainly coming from overseas as well and as I was in the department yesterday, I met the team and they have just had—I think they are case managing 17 children who are either about adopted or they are doing that monitoring because there is a monitoring process for a period afterwards to make sure kids are settling in and everyone is coping well. That is a really exciting time, so we just need to keep stepping through that. If there is an increase on demand, we will deal with that and look at the resourcing then.

I hope there is, a big demand of loving families who want to adopt a child.

**Ms UIBO:** Madam Chair, I have a quick question for the minister—whilst Member for Namatjira is talking about funding for multicultural groups—page 123 on the appendix, I am just interested. The Northern Cowboys Association Incorporated received \$2000 under your department for the 2016 National Rodeo Finals. I am just wondering, would that fit in with the funding?

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#### Question on Notice No 12.2

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Arnhem, I will ask you to repeat the question for the record please.

**Ms UIBO:** Minister, on page 123 of the annual report under the appendix, the Northern Cowboys Association Incorporated received \$2000 for 2016 National Rodeo finals. I was just interested in how that fits in under your department.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you minister. Are you happy to accept that question on notice?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** More than happy to.

**Madam CHAIR:** That question has been allocated the number 12.2.

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

**Mr PAECH:** I have one more.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Namatjira?

**Ms NELSON:** I have got a couple

**Mr PAECH:** I was having a look over the previous government's final budget and looking at the announcements that had been made prior to the election, particularly in my home town of Alice Springs. And there seems that there were far more announcements than had been budgeted for.

**Ms NELSON:** That was my question.

**Mr PAECH:** Pardon?

**Ms NELSON:** That was my question.

**Mr PAECH:** Oh was it? Well great minds think alike. Trying to get my head around that there had never—obviously the budget was allocated for youth services or youth justice in Central Australia, in particular, had never really been budget for appropriately. Is that a fair analysis to make?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Yes Member for Namatjira it is. I do not think we quite understood the extent of that. And as we have stepped through the year there was—the domestic violence services were not funded to a tune of around \$6m, the youth services in Alice Springs were not funded a tune of \$1m—there was a range of announcements made that we could not find any kind of long-term line to or where money was coming from.

It was a bit confusing about whether the money was coming from DCM or from Territory Families. Some of that, to be fair, was around the change of machinery of government, but there were clearly promises made that were unfunded and it was not made clear that it was unfunded.

**Mr PAECH:** All right, thank you. All yours Member for Katherine.

**Ms NELSON:** Thank you. This is a contract management type question. So there is approximately 10% of all children in care residing in residential care homes. I am just wondering if the department can provide some clarification and explanation to how you are ensuring that these children are receiving adequate care and how are you monitoring their social and emotional wellbeing while they are care?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** That is a really great question because when we—as I said before—when we first came to government I asked some very specific questions about how we were managing our residential care programs and there was clearly some work to do in terms of standards and oversight. And that has been a large piece of work we have done this year, not only with our non-government providers but also for our own residential care houses.

I have visited quite a few of those ones run by Territory Families. We have some fantastic staff on the ground, but I think at times we need to be work at making sure there is good communication between the case manager and the people within the house, and making sure the school is included. There is much work to do in this area, but I think we have better oversight of those out-of-home care facilities through the audit process, as well as setting standards as we move forward.

**Mr DAVIES:** One of the things I was very concerned about when I first started as chief executive and having been to the facilities in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs—the context is, what would a family expect if a young child was being accommodated in resicare. What would you, as a parent, expect?

I was very concerned about what I saw. This is in regard to the infrastructure and the way some of the houses were being managed and the cleanliness of them. We came back and said it had to change. We started doing a proper inspection initially around the infrastructure, and then we decided it had to be more than just that. What is the programmatic response, and how is that being dealt with and managed?

That is why we went to these inspections unannounced and are now building a standards framework around the inspections so we are not only looking at the facility but at the program being offered to make sure it is better than adequate and supporting the children in care, many of whom have—it is a traumatic experience.

I am pleased from one of the recent inspections in the Tangentyere services being offered in Alice Springs. It came up as a high-quality service, which is fantastic. It is fair to say we have had the one-on-one discussions with some providers where we have been very unhappy with what they provided. Some of these services were our own with our own resicare workers in them.

We will lift the standard and get recommendations from the national inquiry into institutional sexual abuse, which will hopefully lead to a roll-out of a national standards framework for residential care that operates in the context of NGO auspice residences and our own.

Commissioner Gooda, in talking to me and the minister about this issue, made it very clear that when out-of-home care is outsourced the government cannot walk away from its responsibilities in that area.

**Ms NELSON:** That is what I am leading to. It has been reported in the media; there is loads of that. What strategies do we have in the Territory Families department to mitigate?

**Mr DAVIES:** We have a team that is focused on—we have also regionalised. This used to largely be managed not with a line of sight. The program was largely being managed out of Darwin, even into Alice Springs and Katherine. The local executive director of child protection had no line of sight to the actual residences or program offerings.

That is not the case anymore. They are responsible for what is going on. They are doing some of these checks and looking at what is going on. We have instigated this meeting regularly with the resicare providers to up the ante around standards.

We want to make sure these services are culturally appropriate. That is another lens we are applying. What does a house look like when it is housing Aboriginal children? What would you expect to see? We will be working with APO NT and other Aboriginal services on a standard they would expect in a cultural overlay.

**Mr PAECH:** In your annual report, which is very refreshing as there are lots of familiar faces in it, on page 27 talks about camping at Yulara. Is that a one-off activity? There is probably a cost associated with that, but the economic benefits are outweighed by the social benefits.

Will we continue to see that in the future, or was that a pilot?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Yes, something we will continue to see. It is part of what the CEO was saying about making sure we are acting as a regular parent would when we have kids in our care. Going on holidays is part of being a regular parent.

We have a plan for most kids in Alice Springs to go on holiday over that Christmas period, so you do not have kids in care for a long period of time with no program or anything to do. If they are not going away, as residential providers—as I need to, with my six-year-old, work out ways he is busy over the school holidays. It is about that normalisation of care and making sure we are providing kids with opportunities that everyday, regular Australians would expect as part of the care process they are receiving.

We are also making sure it is the children who direct where they go. The CEO just told me the children asked to go to Yulara.

**Mr PAECH:** Good choice. Good electorate.

I want to follow on talking about this. One of my concerns with Aboriginal children placed in care is how we manage, as a government or department, to maintain their cultural competence and that we have strong cultural care plans. I understand, for various aspects and reasons, not all Aboriginal children can be placed with Aboriginal families. I accept that. But how do we, as an agency, make sure they have that ongoing, continuing connection ...

**Ms NELSON:** And exposure.

**Mr PAECH:** ... to culture and the customs?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** The CEO just said to me, 'It is a big issue for us, minister'. It really is a challenge. Often, where it is working ...

**Ms NELSON:** Is that considered in the budget? I am sorry to interrupt, sorry.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** I am happy to include a budget question.

**Ms NELSON:** Thank you.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Where it is often working well is because foster carers have built a trusting relationship with family and they are facilitating the care, rather than the workforce. We need to really think about how we do this, because I do not think we are doing it well. It is very difficult for a worker who has maybe only been in Alice Springs for six months, to try to work out how to best contact someone—all of those things that those of us who have been in the Territory a long time take for granted. That is a real challenge for a young social worker on the front line in Alice Springs.

We need to be working with our Aboriginal control sector on how we do this better. It is a big piece of work and there are budget implications for it—often kids need to travel, they may have healthcare needs or parents need to be away. There is even further stress. This is something I know from when I worked with NPY. It is an ongoing issue where kids come into care from over the state border into Alice Springs. How do you keep that connection with South Australian families?

The advantage we have there is we now have a strong working relationship with the South Australian government. Some of that cross-border work is starting to be strengthened. But I do not think we are doing this well at the moment. We all realise we need to be doing it better because we know that for kids to have a strong sense of self and belonging, they need to understand where they come from and who their family is and what their culture is. We acknowledge it and we need to keep working on it.

**Ms NELSON:** I have a few more questions, Madam Chair. I am aware of keeping an eye on the time as well.

I am going back to the contract management side of out-of-home care and residential care. What strategies does Territory Families have to assist or aid children who are ageing out of out-of-home care?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Again it is a challenge. It is something the Children's Commissioner has raised with as an area of concern. We have been working on developing a transition team. I understand from speaking to the manager yesterday that we will have staff on the ground who will be part of a transition team. We need to ensure that there is that continuity of relationship as well as with the transferring team.

The other challenge we have—and this has been highlighted to us by a guardian—is where a child has a disability and is under the guardianship of Territory Families but need to transition to the guardianship of the Public Guardian. We have not necessarily had the right processes in place for that to happen smoothly. Particularly in light of the NDIS, that will have some challenges.

We are hoping that we will be better able to do those things, having the transition team in place. I think there are opportunities within law reform to make sure we are thinking about that transition time more flexibly. The idea that a guardianship ends the day someone turns 18—settling in the youth justice centre, we have been talking about that.

We want to stop that story where someone has walked from the youth justice facility to the adult facility, as happened in Alice Springs on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We want to be able to be more flexible with that. We also want to make sure we are more flexible with those agents. The NGO sector are calling for us to provide support for a bit longer, as my parents certainly did, not stopping at 18.

I think there is work we can do with our law reform with the 16 to 24-year-old ...

**Ms NELSON:** The intentions are there, it is just ...

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** It is a big piece of work, it has resource implications as well, but we also know that if we do not get it right, the resource implications to our whole economy in terms of people not managing on welfare, not able to get a job or successfully parent.

Unless we deal with all of those things and acknowledge that some of those people transition in care, their children are coming to the attention of our system. We need to see that opportunity to support young parents in that space as well.

There are a lot of things we can do. This law reform—we are committed to pulling the *Youth Justice Act* and the *Child Protection Act* together—this will provide us with a great opportunity to look at some of those nuanced areas.

**Ms NELSON:** Great. Conceptually the intention is there. Maybe if Mr Davies could answer, what strategies do we currently have in place to support the young adults transitioning?

**Mr DAVIES:** Thanks very much, Member for Katherine. In terms of leaving care plans for 17-year-old young people, the finding of the Children's Commissioner was that 79% of 17-year-olds had a leaving care plan. Of those leaving care plans, only about 56% of the young people had participated in the transition from care process.

One of the challenges we have is—this goes to a discussion we had with the minister about how we improve the quality of these plans and make sure we are engaging with Housing to make sure that when young people are leaving care, they have the basics they need with Housing, Health and safety sorted out.

The Public Guardian is also taking a big interest in this area, particularly with young people with disabilities. I am thinking of an example of a young girl we have been engaged with recently, who has deafness issues. She is based in Karama. We have been working with the Public Guardian and Disability Services, making sure we are still funding support for her, quite a substantial amount. There is also some coming in from Disability Services. She is housed in a lovely complex where she is safe, but is still needing the support.

These leaving care plans can be quite complex, particularly where there are disabilities involved and where people have ongoing trauma as well.

The other part of it as well, is that many of these young people leave care and return to their families that they have come from, pretty quickly. So it is also about us having a lens around the family and making sure they are properly advised and we are working on that.

Government has agreed to fund three transition support officers. They are being recruited. We had a large number of applications for these transition support officers. The recruitment process is being completed, we now have to get them in place, pull them together as a team and they will be servicing across the Territory to make sure all of the young people exiting care have a proper plan they have signed and agreed, that the right people have been spoken to and the right agencies are in place.

We also have a funded program with Anglicare called The Moving On program. Also, the Commonwealth are involved—again, this is a complexity—with a transition to independent living allowance and we are using CREATE to give young people a voice.

If you think about yourself being an 18-year-old young person leaving home, even if you have the full support of your family it is not always an easy experience especially if it has been a secure context. Suddenly the agency turns round and says that you are 18 now, you need to move on.

This is not what we want to do any more and this goes to the minister's issue about keeping an eye on things well into young people's 20s so we know what is happening and they can be supported. That is where CREATE and this Anglicare Moving On program will help.

I think we are also getting some pretty loud and clear messages from the Aboriginal medical services, in particular AMSANT, they want to play a role in this as well.

**Ms NELSON:** The other thing for me is that we have spent time, energy, resources and a lot of money on youth justice issues and looking after youth. What strategies do we have in place also to support the parents of the youth we are supporting and spending time with as well?

That is something that comes up a lot in Katherine. Sometimes I get fearful that we are losing sight of that side of youth justice issue.

Have we got strategies in place?

**Mr DAVIES:** In terms of the crossover here we have.

I am just reading more here. If we go back to the 15-year-old time frame, which is two or three years out, one of the things with the leaving care plans was the Children's Commissioner did a random sample of 45 cases that were selected for review. It found that 47% of the young people 15 years and older had a leaving care plan significantly more than 27% at the age of 15–16, which is great. We have got more work to do and it how far we backcast here.

Going to your issue around the youth justice overlay, that is why the through-care model is going to be so important here. One of the things we are doing in the agency is working with other Chief Executives around what we are calling and what the Royal Commission called cross-over families, so that we can actually get in with families who have young people who are engaged in our systems to start the work early with them.

To do that is a complex process. You have to get in, seek permission from the family. We are probably going to have to use some NGOs to do some of this work, certainly Aboriginal organisations.

**Ms NELSON:** Just to clarify, we can send a disengaged youth to a cultural camp, but if they are coming home to the same environment that they were in before and nothing has really changed, what are we doing to support the families while the youth is being supported elsewhere?

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** Going back to your first question regarding increased case management and family support services, we are very much seeing that early intervention point with the child within their context and making sure we have those family support services.

In some ways it is the broader government policy regarding the early childhood plan, which is not necessarily in the remit of just Territory Families—it is across government—and making sure that in those first thousand days we are supporting families.

As we move more into where Territory Families plays a role we can do better to work with families and communicating with them about where they might need to seek support. One of the weaknesses in our legislation, and this is an opportunity with legislation reform, is that the child is often sighted in isolation. The workers are often forced to look at a child in isolation, or the legislation allows them to do so without seeing the broader context.

**Ms NELSON:** That is what I was trying to get to.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** That will be part of thinking about how we reform the law so we see a child within their system and there is never a child by themselves.

If we are not intervening—if we have a 14-year-old coming to the attention of the youth justice system, we know there is a chance their siblings will follow that path as well. We need to intervene with the siblings. The advantage we have, despite there is a huge amount of need, we actually have quite a small community. If we start working genuinely across government with Police, with the courts, with Health and with Education and Housing—if we generally pull together I think we can actually get some really great outcomes for families and make sure that they are visible within this process.

**Ms NELSON:** It is just a comment more than anything—we saw, in the previous four years with the previous government, that you cannot make decisions or change legislation without thinking laterally—and we are starting to feel the consequences now of what happened previously. There was legislation introduced—permanent care orders for example, paperless arrest legislation—it was a reactive thing.

That is what I was trying to get at with the question—the strategies and are we thinking laterally as well. To bring it back in to context of this estimates, we need to make sure that it is reflected within the budget also, so that we are not caught out again. That is the other concern I have.

**Mr PAECH:** We have spent a lot of time here this evening talking about young people on a negative issue, I want to take it back for a second because Territory Families has the opportunity, deals with the office of young people and young Territorians—and fortunately I was young last week but things have changed. I want to provide an opportunity for you minister to elaborate on the work that the agency of Territory Families does with young people in a positive light. I understand that there is a whole series of youth grants that are able to be distributed amongst young Territorians and you have the Youth Round Table.

**Ms WAKEFIELD:** It is a really great question and something that I have been talking about a lot. In some ways we either focus on the really high achievers, which I would say my Youth Round Table are—they are an amazing group of young people, it has been one of the great pleasures of being a minister is to watch them develop over a 12-month period.

In some way we have no way to celebrate the ordinary kid who is going to school and getting the best and fairest, under 13, getting a B in maths but that is actually a massive achievement for them. We know we are missing—those ordinary kids who are doing great things and are loved by their families, are contributing and are going to be the contributors to the Northern Territory are invisible in our conversation about young people. That is something we have been thinking about; how can we tackle that as an agency and make sure we are doing that universal youth service delivery that not only acts as an early intervention for kids going down the rail but supports kids who are just regular parts of our community. We want to support and courage them to be the best they can be because that is going to be good for the Northern Territory.

We have an office of youth affairs and there is some more work to do in the grant process there but they are the ones who do the Youth Vibe grants, the Quick Response grants, for youth participation where we give money for kids to go to sporting events. They do not have to be high level, it can be, 'We are coming to Darwin to participate in the games'. All of us in our electorates support young people to do those things. It is also to make sure kids are talking around things like National Youth Week. There is more to do in that space and need to change the narrative.

The Youth Round Table are meeting for the last time on Sunday and I am really looking forward to the presentations because I am sure they are going to be incredible. One of the things I have asked the Youth Round Table is to always come back to me and ask how we can challenge those perceptions. And next year we are going to change the structure of that Youth Round Table a little so we are using it as a mechanism to get young people's voice into how we change that narrative and address that.

The Children's Commissioner has just done some great work around See Me, Hear Me—one other that I cannot remember. She has done some great photography and getting people really involved. We have more to do but it has to be the focus that we are celebrating all young people and providing services for all young people that develop and support them. This is not just in education but in sport, art and all the ways we want young people to participate in our community.

**Mr PAECH:** Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much, minister. That was very enlightening and a great way to finish off our estimates hearings of the annual reports for this year. The time is past 6.30 pm so on behalf of the committee I would like to thank you for appearing and thank departmental staff for accompanying you.

That concludes the committees' public hearing process on agencies annual reports. I remind officers that all answers to questions taken on notice must be given to the first clerk assistant by 14 December 2017.

On behalf of the committee I, again, extend my thanks to the ministers, board chairs, Speaker and officials who appeared before the committee this week. I also take this opportunity to place on the public record my appreciation of the assistance provided by agency staff. I know many hours of preparation have taken place and I thank you all for your efforts.

I also thank the members of this committee and other members who participated in the hearings for the work they 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. Thank you everyone.

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The committee concluded.

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