

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

MINISTER VATSKALIS'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good morning, minister, welcome to Estimates. Would you like to introduce the people with you today and make an opening statement if you have one.

Mr VATSKALIS: Good morning, Mr Chairman. I introduce the panel of Health officials joining me today: Mr Jeff Moffet, Chief Executive Office of the Department; Ian Pollock, Acting Chief Financial Officer; Penny Fielding, Executive Director, Strategy and Reform; Jill Macandrew is not here yet; Stephen Moo, Chief Information Officer is not here yet; Liz Stackhouse, Acting Executive Director, Planning and Infrastructure; Jenny Cleary, Acting Executive Director, Top End Hospital Network is running late; Mike Melino, Acting Executive Director, Central Australian Hospital Network; Nikki Walford, Acting Executive Director, Health Services; and Dr Barbara Paterson, Chief Health Officer and Executive Director, Health Protection.

Our government has to deliver on our commitment to improve the health status of all Territorians with services which are safe, sustainable and close to people's homes. We delivered the Territory's first \$1bn budget in 2009, and in 2012 the budget has now reached \$1.2bn, which represents an additional \$107m from the previous year.

This increase in resources has enabled our dedicated health professionals to deliver real improvements in Territorians' health. We now have a four-and-a-half year improvement in life expectancy for Aboriginal women; Indigenous infant mortality rate has fallen by 37%; anaemia rates for Aboriginal children have fallen by 20%; cervical cancer rates have fallen by 61%; a dramatic decline in mortality from cervical cancer falling by 64% in non-Indigenous women, and by 92% for Indigenous women between 1991 and 2003. Death from all cancers has fallen by 28% for Aboriginal women, and 36% for non-Aboriginal women. Patients on renal dialysis survival rates are now equivalent to the rest of Australia - an improvement of seven years in their life expectancy.

Before I highlight some of the key areas of the budget for 2012-13, I thank the large team of people - doctors, nurses, primary healthcare staff, the people in the kitchen and the laundries, and all other support staff who passionately care about the patients and clients they help every day. Our health system is performing well through the dedicated efforts of our staff, and will continue to improve each year despite the fact we have the busiest emergency department in Australia with over 140 000 people treated in 2010-11, an increase of 6% on the previous year.

We continue to make improvements against a range of national elective surgery targets. In 2011, more people in the Territory had their surgery within benchmark time, ahead of our 2012 national partnership agreement targets. In addition, there was a continued trend of fewer people waiting for surgery, and for those on the waiting list, they waited a shorter period of time.

Nationally, we continue to resource our hospitals and health services well. We have the highest number of nurses per capita, the highest average hospital staffing rate, the highest use of public dental services, the highest rate of older Indigenous people who receive a health assessment, and the highest rate of children receiving a fourth-year developmental health check. Our services are assessed and meet contemporary quality and safety standards with national accreditation for all of our five hospitals. Breast Screen NT, dental clinics, mental health, community health centres and Clinic 34 were leading the development of remote health standards with accreditation in Nguiu, Milikapati, Milingimbi, Batchelor, Adelaide River and Maningrida.

As I have previously said, the \$1.2bn budget for the Department of Health for 2012-13 is the largest of any Territory government agency. As occurs each year, the department has negotiated with the Australian government across a range of agreements which will affect the funding to be provided in 2012-13. We expect agreement to be reached shortly, after which time this variation will be incorporated into the department's 2012-13 Budget.

This year marks the first full year of operation for the Top End and Central Australian hospital networks as government business divisions, as part of the Australian government's National Health Reform Agenda. The hospital networks will be operational on 1 July 2012 with their own governing councils. This will mark a significant change to the way the Territory delivers hospital services.

In total, our five public hospitals and associated acute care services will be allocated a record \$775m in 2012-13. This equates to an additional \$54.3m in funding, including an additional \$7.8m for improving hospital services, \$10.7m for the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme to support travel for Territorians living in rural and remote regions who require special health services, and \$13.6m for aeromedical retrieval services.

The Health and Wellbeing output provides community health, mental health services for frail and aged people, people with disabilities, and support for senior Territorians which will receive \$48m increase in funding, which includes \$12.7m increasing this government's ongoing commitment to assist clients in the community who have a disability, particularly those with exceptional and complex needs.

Alcohol consumption is a major impact on the health and wellbeing of the Northern Territory community which we are addressing through the Enough is Enough alcohol reform policy. Funding for the Public Health Service output has increased by an additional \$2m to continue alcohol reform services and development, including Substance Misuse Assessment and Referral for Treatment – SMART – Court, withdrawal support and community outreach programs.

We continue our commitment to major capital works projects across the Territory. In addition to existing capital works programs, additional projects amounting to \$63.7m will commence in 2012-13. A further \$67m will ensure the continuation of major upgrades throughout the Royal Darwin Hospital, including increasing the number of beds in the emergency department and short-stay unit, two additional operating theatres, completion of the 50-unit 100-bed pensioner accommodation complex, the medi-hotel, and the creation of a geriatric evaluation and management unit which will decrease hospital stays and improve care of the elderly.

I will be very happy to take questions from the committee relating to my current output responsibilities.

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

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. Thank you, minister, for a comprehensive opening statement. I welcome, of course, all departmental staff. At the outset the shadow minister has had an unforeseen issue come up. He may be in today, he may not; he could come in very shortly. I apologise for that at the outset.

Minister, I picked up on the \$63m figure for, essentially, capital works. You also talked about \$67m - was it? - for hospital upgrades.

Mr VATSAKLIS: \$63.7m for the upgrades of the Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. The question I have is it is my understanding there are a couple of gen sets at the hospital. These generators are outside of the UPS. You have your UPS system and these extra generators. What are they for?

Mr VATSAKLIS: The extra generators provide additional capacity in the Royal Darwin Hospital. The Royal Darwin Hospital is quite old. Many of the facilities were built in times long ago. Some of them now have problems of talking to each other, compatibility, because of modern equipment. However, the generator capacity we now have put in the hospital is needed to provide additional capacity. We have a \$43m overhaul of the whole generator capacity, but these extra generators provide additional capacities. I am very happy for the CEO to provide some further detail.

Mr ELFERINK: That answer is sufficient. The reason I ask is it is my understanding the radiation oncology unit has a substantial drawdown on the overall hospital's consumption. What percentage of the hospital's overall consumption is caused by the radiation oncology unit?

Mr VATSAKLIS: I have to provide this information in a minute. This is technical for me, so I do not know about it. I will ask the experts.

Mr ELFERINK: Someone is scribbling away frantically in the background.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please introduce yourself for Hansard.

Mr WALDING: Adam Walding. I am the Campus Development and Facility Manager for Royal Darwin Hospital. I cannot answer the percentage in particular. I ...

Mr ELFERINK: The ballpark figure, if you care to hazard one.

Mr WALDING: If I was going to guess, probably about 12%.

Mr ELFERINK: All right, about 12% of the overall consumption. Is it the case, minister, the drawdown of the radiation oncology unit is sufficiently large to have forced the installation of these generators?

Mr WALDING: Basically, the generators are there to create the essential power. The new generators will create enough essential power to run the majority of the site should we lose Power and Water mains. That includes the oncology unit. As the site expands, we will need load shed, but at this stage with the new generators that go in, we will be able to run the majority of the site off the new generators, including oncology.

Mr ELFERINK: All right. It is not they are actually running at the moment, augmenting the supply from the grid?

Mr WALDING: No, no, definitely. It is for the emergency situation, so if Power and Water goes out, the UPS that you mentioned earlier, create the initial standover power, then the generators come online and we go into generator power.

Mr ELFERINK: All right, no worries. Is it the case that the UPS just is not up to the job anymore? It is an old system so ...

Mr WALDING: No, the UPS does not really come into your power system. The UPS is your support function. If your power goes out, your UPS keeps your key infrastructure going. Let us pick ICU – it holds that over, say, for 30, 60 minutes and then the generators come online.

Mr ELFERINK: The hospital would have had, up until now, a standby generator somewhere on the grounds, I presume?

Mr WALDING: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: That standby generator no longer has the capacity, I presume, to deal with the drawdown of the hospital, hence, the two new generators.

Mr WALDING: Yes, yes.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, so it is basically a fail safe from your perspective?

Mr WALDING: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: When was it determined it was necessary, minister, to have this augmented power system in place?

Mr VATSAKLIS: As you are aware, the Royal Darwin Hospital has undergone significant development in the past few years, and continues to do so with new facilities being put in place: the oncology unit and the Menzies School of Health. We have realised now that much of this capacity currently at the hospital has to be augmented, improved and increased to deal with the demand by the new facilities.

Mr ELFERINK: All right.

Mr VATSAKLIS: Mind you, the hospital site is quite significant. It is big and it has capacity to incorporate other areas, as we do the medi-hotel and the Indigenous mothers' accommodation. This requires additional power, and that is why we will provide standby generators just in case there is a power failure in the system in the case of a cyclone or other circumstances.

Mr ELFERINK: Where are these generators currently housed?

Mr WALDING: The new ones or the ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, the ones which are there - the two new ones.

Mr WALDING: Yes. Can I just clarify, there are three new ones.

Mr ELFERINK: There are three new ones?

Mr WALDING: Yes, there are three new ones ...

Mr ELFERINK: I lost one somewhere.

Mr WALDING: ... with greater capacity. Yes, 3.24 MW units. They are currently sitting on-site ready for the next stage of the project to install.

Mr ELFERINK: What are we doing? Are we building a shed for them and putting them in a shed, or are they sitting outside on the lawn at the moment? Whereabouts are they?

Mr WALDING: They are sitting outside under cover, per manufacturer's compliance, and everything else that goes with those nodes. Then, the old units will be removed and they will go into that facility where the old ones were.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, so there is a structure somewhere on-site?

Mr WALDING: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: So they are pulling out the old ones?

Mr WALDING: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: When was it determined it was necessary to require this extra generation capacity?

Mr WALDING: Some of this is a bit historical before - I daresay it was when the Casuarina Zone Substation went down ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Mr WALDING: ... a number of years ago. That was the intent in the design, and the bunding method went through from there.

Mr ELFERINK: The Casuarina Substation meltdown, for lack of better words ...

Mr WALDING: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: ... essentially exposed some weaknesses in your system and this is the response to those weaknesses. Would that be a fair call? I am genuinely inquiring. I am not trying to be clever or cute or anything else. When did these find their way on to the forward design list, or on to the – what is it? - this is under minor new works, or would this be ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Capital works.

Mr ELFERINK: ... major capital items?

Mr VATSKALIS: Capital works.

Mr MOFFET: Jeff Moffet, Chief Executive for the department. I do not have the specific time frame, but the RDH high voltage electrical systems upgrade is worth \$38m. It spans several years. It was initiated by some of the substation failures. A number of issues have occurred since then. We now have dual power feeds into the site, which is the primary issue, so we have contingency in the loss of a substation now. The other issue was the actual electrical distribution around the site was old; it needed to be upgraded. That is currently happening. The final major element was making sure our essential standby power, when we do lose mains power, was sufficient to drive a site that had service growth and had more capacity compared to previous years.

Mr ELFERINK: I suppose what I am trying to determine is, with the radiation oncology unit that was well planned before the Casuarina Substation meltdown. I am trying to test, if you like, the planning that went into it, because it strikes me that 12% is a substantial drawdown for a unit of that size compared to the rest of the hospital. I am trying to determine the planning process that went into the radiation oncology unit. Presumably, it was designed with the anticipation you could just plug it into the hospital system and

everything would be Mickey Mouse and, subsequent to that, you have then had this exposure where you are going: 'Oh, goodness, we have to respond to that'.

Minister, are you satisfied that when the determination, or the rubber stamp, was given to the radiation oncology unit, the secondary support was properly planned? Or would you agree this has been something you have had to deal with *post factum*?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Port Darwin, the situation with the generators is not to provide power during the normal hours of operation.

Mr ELFERINK: I understand that.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is provided by Power and Water. The generators are there to provide power if there is a power failure. The generators will provide power to the essential areas of the hospital – ICU, Accident and Emergency. I do not expect, during a cyclone when the power goes down, the oncology unit would be operating because it is not part of the operations.

Mr ELFERINK: All right. Yes, fair call.

Mr VATSKALIS: If there is a power failure, the decision will be made where the power is going to be directed. We know the first will be the ICU, and the emergency department where it is needed. Other areas we do not need to operate at that particular time will not be operating, so there will be no drawback. The oncology unit will not operate like normal oncology. If there is a cyclone, it will be shut down. This 12% additional power will not be required at the time.

Mr ELFERINK: It is definitely not the case that the generators are on-site at the moment are supplying directly power to the ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, this is Power and Water Corporation power. This generator is actually for emergency.

Mr ELFERINK: No worries. Minister, could you tell us, in respect of your agency outputs, if you have received any funding for new and expanded initiatives either in the year 2011-12 or 2012-13 and, if so, could you detail them, please?

Mr VATSKALIS: Any specific things you would like? Generic?

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is agency whole-of-government.

Mr ELFERINK: Well, across the agency. We are talking about SPPs, results of funding through NP agreements, and any other further funding sources.

Mr MOFFET: Could we refer this to our Chief Finance Officer?

Mr ELFERINK: Happy to.

Mr POLLOCK: Ian Pollock, Acting Chief Finance Officer. In the 2011-12 financial year - in response to your question looking at the variations to Australian government funding - there was \$23.54m from the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Health (OATSIH) funding; \$1.16m for Digital Regions Initiative Implementation Plan; \$8m for e-Health tripartite funding; \$3.4m improving public hospitals; \$8.7m for improving public hospitals infrastructure; \$1.8m for the Medical Specialists Outreach Assistance Program; \$1.1m for longer stay older patients; \$1.13m improving ear health services for Indigenous Australian children; \$1m for highly specialised drugs; \$4.18m for various NPAs and other Commonwealth agreements ...

Mr ELFERINK: NPAs?

Mr POLLOCK: National partnership agreements.

Mr ELFERINK: Oh, I see. Yes, sorry.

Mr POLLOCK: ... \$1m for the trachoma project; and \$2.4m for the Alice Springs Transformation Plan.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, at any stage ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: John, at that point we need to pause. You are moving on to government agency whole-of-government questions, and the member for Nelson had question on the opening statement.

Mr ELFERINK: Well, I was still – oh, okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There are two separate sections ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, no, no, that is fine, if we come back to that shortly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will come straight back to you, but the member for Nelson has a question on the opening comments.

Mr WOOD: They do overlap a bit, I must admit.

Mr ELFERINK: I was still on whole-of-agency, you see ...

Mr WOOD: My questions relates to your opening statement, minister. You mentioned renal services. In the *Centralian Advocate* on 12 June, it talked about renal crisis talks. Basically, it was asking why there has been a delay in the coordination of renal services in Central Australia by South Australian, Western Australian and NT governments. In the Senate estimates recently, it was advised there were a number of outstanding issues the NT government needed to resolve before it was able to finalise the plans. It talked about land tenure at Tennant Creek and confusion regarding the Alice Springs site. It appears the holdup is with the NT government.

Mr VATSKALIS: Let me clarify that. First of all, there are no problems within the Northern Territory government's renal services. The issue is actually with the provision of service for people who choose to come to Alice Springs for renal dialysis, rather than going to Port Augusta or Adelaide. That has been an issue now for a long time now, which I am trying to resolve with the minister of South Australia.

There is a similar issue with the people from Western Australia coming to Alice Springs for treatment. We have an agreement with the Western Australian government that every person east of Warburton will now come to Alice Springs for treatment. We do not have an agreement yet with South Australia. South Australia insists their people can go to Port Augusta or Adelaide. Unfortunately, their people choose to come to Alice Springs.

The other issue is accommodation. We have very sick people coming for treatment in Alice Springs and they decide to stay at the Todd River. I find it unacceptable that people who are sick come to Alice Springs for treatment and they have nowhere to stay.

The particular article referred to money provided to the Northern Territory government from the Commonwealth for the construction of an accommodation facility in Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. The question was who is going to pay for the maintenance of this facility. It is unfair for Territorians to pay for the maintaining of a facility to be used by Western Australians and South Australians. We are trying to find an agreement.

While Western Australia seems to be willing to negotiate with us, the South Australians still are not. That is where we had the tripartate meeting the other day - four people: Warren Snowdon, me, the minister of South Australia, and the minister of Western Australia - to resolve the issue.

Mr WOOD: Right. Thanks, minister ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We had the same issue before when we actually could not treat people from other states because there was overwhelming demand by Territorians on the Alice Springs renal services. We made the tough decision not to accept any person from other states because our people come first.

Mr WOOD: You also mentioned capital expenditure on the hospitals. What is the budget for the Alice Springs Hospital in regard to ...

Mr ELFERINK: Mr Chairman?

Mr VATSKALIS: That will come in the hospital area.

Mr CHAIRMAIN: You can ask qualification questions ...

Mr ELFERINK: That is what I was doing before and I had it taken away from me. That is fine.

Mr CHAIRMAIN: No, you moved to agency-related whole-of-government. You were asking about new initiatives. To clarify, the minister makes an opening statement and then members have an opportunity to ask the minister questions about anything he raises in his opening statement, or about where things might fall so we can clarify for later outputs. We then move to agency-related whole-of-government questions. The member for Port Darwin went to agency-related whole-of-government with his last question.

Member for Nelson, you have an opportunity - because we skipped you - to ask questions to the minister about the things he raised in the statement, or clarification questions about where things fall by output.

Mr WOOD: It does cross over. I will ask this one and then go back to the Chair. I will ask a couple of questions in relation to it when I get the answer. Minister, what is the capital expenditure of Alice Springs Hospital this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Project description in Alice Springs: the secure care facility which was completed in 2011-12 was \$2m. The project currently under way in Alice Springs: we have the eight-bed secure transitional care facilities at \$5.7m; the elective surgery upgrades, \$384 000; the fire protection air-conditioning remediation, \$19m; the relocation and upgrade to the emergency department, \$20m; Alice Springs Hospital upgrade, \$7.7m; and, of course, coming up is remediation and upgrade of operating theatres, \$5m.

There has been a significant expenditure at Alice Springs Hospital in order to upgrade facilities and correct some of the problems that resulted from the renovation of Alice Springs that took place in 1999.

Mr WOOD: You are also building an accident and emergency unit. What is the cost of that? Was that included in those figures?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$20.4m.

Mr WOOD: When do you expect to move into that new building?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is currently under construction. We believe it will be ready by the end of this year.

Mr WOOD: When was the original forecast to move in?

Mr MOFFET: It was October.

Mr WOOD: What is the delay?

Mr MOFFET: We can get Mike Melino to speak to this. There have been no substantive delays I am aware of.

Mr MELINO: Mike Melino, Acting Executive Director, Central Australian Hospital Network. October was the end of the construction period, and that is in line with the original program timetable. There will be a period for commissioning of equipment, the final cleaning, and staff orientation. That will probably take about two months to complete. The building program is within its current time frame at the moment. There may be a possibility it could even finish early, but there is still a commissioning period we need to go through.

Mr WOOD: Were there any significant changes to the tender?

Mr MELINO: In what way?

Mr WOOD: Was there something not in the original tender that was found to be missing?

Mr MELINO: Not in relation to the hospital, the ED construction, no.

Mr WOOD: There was no firewall missing?

Mr MELINO: Not to my knowledge, no.

Mr WOOD: I will ask that question of the department of Infrastructure.

Mr VATSKALIS: A correction, member for Nelson. The Alice Springs emergency department total cost will be \$26m not \$20m.

Mr WOOD: That is the original budget allocation?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it had to be increased by a significant amount of money because of the design of the Alice Springs Hospital to incorporate extra beds and the MRI facilities.

Mr MOFFET: CT imaging.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, medical imaging facilities.

Mr WOOD: Were there no changes to the tender except for what you are saying in relation to design? In other words, was there anything left out of the building that had to be included later on?

Mr MOFFET: No, the building we have ended up with is a modern facility which will cater for current service delivery models. The inclusion of the 24-hour medical imaging was always part of the original brief, but there was nothing added, post-tender being awarded, by way of significant - or any addition to that building.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, the firewall and the fire remediation you refer to is part of what we are doing to rectify some of the problems we have with the Alice Springs Hospital following the renovation which took place in 1999-2000. The total cost this year will be \$25m. There were quite significant problems with fire protection which had to be redone.

Mr WOOD: I know that; I have heard that debated many times in parliament. My understanding is there was something left out of this new tender.

Mr MOFFET: The only issue is the below-ground service issue which was not completely anticipated, which was in the order of \$0.5m - I think, Mike? - in connection of plumbing essential supplies. That was an issue which was expected to be assessed as we got into the project which was assessed and completed. But, there was nothing relating to the actual hospital or ED functionality that was not part of the original tender.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: What output would that fall under, if the member for member for Nelson wanted to ask further questions?

Mr MOFFET: Acute Care Services.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Acute care, member for Nelson. Member for Port Darwin, you have the call.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Leading on from what Mr Pollock said before, you mentioned OATSIH funding. Minister, has at any stage OATSIH queried reports to them by the Northern Territory, NT Health, in relation to figures given to them?

Mr MOFFET: We go through annual acquittal processes with the Commonwealth. We recently had a meeting with the Commonwealth about the acquittal processes for this year. Essentially, the Commonwealth is changing the level of acquittal; its NPAs and implementation plans now require a third set of documents called action plans. Our acquittals against some of the action plans for 2011-12 expenditure were not at the level they were expecting regarding detail. We have worked with the officers concerned about improving our level of acquittal, including on-cost issues. The Commonwealth, to my understanding, is satisfied at this stage with our acquittal process.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, the reason I ask the question is it is my understanding that before the Commissioner for Public Disclosures there is currently an issue relating to funding, particularly figures given by remote health. Are you aware of that issue?

Mr MOFFET: I am not aware of that issue. Before who? Commissioner for Public Disclosures?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, basically, the freedom of information - not the freedom of information, the whistleblower stuff!

Mr MOFFET: No, sorry, I am not aware of the issue and neither is our Executive Director for that area.

Mr ELFERINK: I find that a little surprising, because it is my understanding there is an issue there. Minister, are you aware of any questions at all surrounding figures given by remote health to OATSIH, and the integrity of those figures at all?

Mr MOFFET: I am happy to respond again. This relates to your first question. Essentially, we have a primary care funding quantum each year which is fairly significant. It provides a range of services across most of our remote sites. Part of that process is acquittal of specific positions, in particular places at particular times. We have been working with the Commonwealth about a more flexible approach.

The example we have talked through with the Commonwealth is we had difficulty with a resident podiatry service. I cannot remember which community specifically. We, essentially, could not recruit and retain someone for that service, so we used a fly-in/fly-out method of service delivery. The Commonwealth acknowledged it did not accept, initially, that was an appropriate way to acquit, but we have had agreements since, including from the Audit Chair, that if we can deliver the service in outputs, a more flexible way of looking at the inputs is appropriate. I think we have agreed on that point.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, I can appreciate your answer. Perhaps, Mr Moffet, I can also suggest some inquiries to Remote Health about this particular issue, because it is my understanding there are two areas under your portfolio, minister, which are currently before the Commissioner for Public Disclosures specifically, relating to figures being provided - one out of Child Protection which, of course, we are not talking about at the moment, and the other one is emanating out of Remote Health.

The assertions, as I understand them, before the Commissioner for Public Disclosures are quite serious. If they are upheld or found to be true, or whatever - and I would appreciate if it is possible before we finish here today, that we at least have some answer in relation to these areas, if you can confirm these issues are being dealt with by your department. In my understanding of how that legislation is supposed to work, your department should be aware of these issues if they are there.

I will raise the one again about what is happening in child protection. Bearing in mind it is not dissimilar to what the Ombudsman found in relation to the use of dummy documents on a previous occasion, my understanding in both of these instances, is there are issues surrounding declarations by the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth, and those declarations deal directly with funding. Specifically, I understand OATSIH is the federal department which is alleged to have received this information. Can we get an answer to those queries at some point during the day?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Port Darwin, I acknowledge your statement, but I have to tell you I have not received any inquiry from any Commonwealth department about these issues. With serious issues you mention, first of all the minister's office would be advised formally ...

Mr ELFERINK: One would hope so, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... but I have not received any inquiries from any federal authority, OATSIH, or the minister with regard to these inquiries. Both Health – and I will check again with the Department of Children and Families because, if it was something so serious, I will be advised. My CEO can respond to that with regard to health issues.

Mr MOFFET: We have met directly with the Department of Health and Ageing and OATSIH officers as recently as probably six weeks ago in relation to acquittals and other processes. One of the purposes of that meeting was to meet with the DoHA Audit Chair around a new level of accountability and authority the Commonwealth Auditor-General has. That was a normal process; to understand they have an audit trail right through the organisations they fund.

They had full opportunity to raise any concerns. The only discussions we had were around more commonsense acquittal arrangements that allowed for service provision in a flexible way, as I explained, and there was agreement around the table in of that. We also discussed the provision of oncosts, which is a normal discussion, and we agreed to be in a process with them about stepping through more detail around our oncosts, similar to other agencies.

There was no suggestion of anything improper or untoward occurring. There was full opportunity for the Director or OATSIH to raise that with us, so I would be very surprised if there is anything ...

Mr ELFERINK: That is fine; I am merely inquiring. You hear things and this is the opportunity to raise those issues.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am glad you raised the issues. If you have anything you consider to be serious, I invite you to approach me directly and I will personally take care of it.

Mr ELFERINK: You and I will have a chat, minister, in due course. I am not doing this lightly.

Mr VATSKALIS: I accept that.

Mr ELFERINK: If there is any change to your answers at any stage, I would be obliged ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Please let me know and advise me of that, and certainly we will follow it up.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you.

Mr CONLAN: Good morning. My apologies for my tardiness. Good to see you again. Good to be here for what is my fifth Estimates - I cannot believe it.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is my 11th. The first one I was not interrogated.

Mr WOOD: It must be my 11th then. I have done 11.

Mr CONLAN: Before we get to some of the hospital issues - I know you are going to pursue a bit more on the Alice Springs emergency department, too, member for Nelson – with regard to equipment and technology; I just wanted to touch on a bit of that. Can you just inform us what the overall standard of technology and equipment available is in our Territory hospitals?

Mr VATSKALIS: That will probably come under the Acute Care output rather than ...

Mr CONLAN: Are you happy to mention that in Acute Care with regard to all technology?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: All right. Well, we might even move straight into that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions at all about agency-related whole-of-government, or did the member for Port Darwin ask them?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, he has.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, if you want to take an opportunity to look through your notes, the member for Nelson might have agency-related whole-of-government questions. We do not have to lose this spot, so to speak, if you want.

Mr CONLAN: I just have one, then.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Have you more than one, though? You technically cannot come back. Is that right? Is that how it works?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I was demonstrating flexibility, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: No, no. I will clarify that. I was not saying you should not ask questions, but I did not want you getting cut off if I started asking questions and he was not going to allow you to come back. That was the only reason. Do you have ...

Mr CONLAN: I just have the one here. I just needed clarification of where should the questions regarding the provision of health services to the prison be asked?

Mr VATSKALIS: The prison?

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Health services in the prison.

Mr VATSKALIS: Community Health.

Mr CONLAN: Community Health? Okay, great. Over to you, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I asked the department for some responses to questions regarding airfares. One of the differences between your department and other departments was the number of business class interstate airfares. In fact, it said there were 68 business class airfares, and Health is by far the highest user of those types of fares. Why is the department using business class airfares?

I put this little proviso over these comments; that the government is in a deficit and I am looking to see where departments - forgetting the 3% efficiency dividend stuff - are showing they also are a part of trying to reduce that deficit.

Mr VATSKALIS: Most of the business class airfares are actually Commonwealth funded or college funded, rather than actual department funded. Our people usually fly light aeroplanes where they do not have business class fares. It is mainly Commonwealth funded or college funded or, in some cases, some of the specialists fly from down south as part of their agreement we have with them. My CEO can elaborate further on that.

Mr MOFFET: I could respond a bit further. Approximately two years ago, the department also restricted all of its business class travel for its executives. Currently, only the Chief Executive travels by business class, and I only travel by business class on occasion. Last week, I flew to Sydney Jetstar and came back Qantas business class in the evening. We are trying to take a very modest approach as an agency.

We are a very large agency, member for Nelson, but it is true we have a significant number of our staff who are funded by other organisations such as colleges or professional associations, to travel. We book and pay for that travel and are funded for it separately. We have very little business class travel relative to other agencies. I would be surprised we would stand out.

Mr WOOD: In actual fact, you have the most but, to be fair, in relation to all the air travel you have, it is relatively small. I just need to then clarify, if the minister is saying many of these airfares are funded by the Commonwealth, then why does it appear on your travel? My question was about how much - I will give you the question. What was the expenditure on official business class interstate airfares and how many trips did that cover? If they are being covered by the Commonwealth and you are being reimbursed, I would not expect it to be in these figures, that is all.

Mr MOFFET: You would expect it to be where, sorry?

Mr WOOD: I would not expect it to be in these figures. The question I was really asking was what does the Department of Health itself spend on business class airfares?

Mr MOFFET: We could actually separate those by funding source, if that was helpful.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that a question on notice?

Question on Notice No 6.1

Mr WOOD: Yes, okay. Minister, could you give us the number of official business class interstate airfares that were purely funded by the Department of Health?

Mr VASTSKALIS: We will take that on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.1.

Mr WOOD: The other question was in regard to international airfares. According to this, there were 58 airfares overseas. Do you have an indication of what those trips overseas were for?

Mr MOFFET: Happy to respond to that. We have some of our specialists qualify for study leave; some of that is international study leave. That is pretty ordinary for jurisdictions to allow senior medical officers to participate in international conferences. We also have the Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, which is asked to attend and deliver course overseas on quite a regular basis; for example, in Chile last year and more recently in Timor and other places.

Mr WOOD: The other question was in relation to moves. I have asked this of other places as well. In the last say, two years, could you say if there have been any sections of your Department of Health that have not shifted residence physically? How many times has the department moved parts of its department, from say Casuarina to Darwin, or Darwin to Palmerston? What I am looking at is, what is the cost of those moves. I hear all the time: 'Oh no, we have been shifted to X building, and a whole pile of new furniture and rewiring has gone on'. Is there any strategic plan to stop moving and just do the work?

Mr MOFFET: I will probably need to take on notice any detail you are chasing.

Question on Notice No 6.2

Mr WOOD: Could you give us, over the last two years - as I need to go a bit further than just the last 12 months - the number of moves the department has made in relation to moving offices in the Northern Territory? I will put it that broad.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that a question you are happy to take on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: And if there could be some idea of the cost of those moves, because that is the important bit.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.2.

Mr VATSKALIS: We may be able to answer that one.

Mr MOFFET: If you are talking about major program moves, rather than just individual officers taking up different ...

Mr WOOD: Sorry, not officers, e-r-s, but offices, e-s.

Mr MOFFET: Okay, my facilities manager advises me the only significant move we have had in the last two years has really been the Darwin Plaza back to Construction House move of the ICT team, which was roughly 150 people. That is the only significant move I am aware of.

Mr WOOD: If you could give us an idea of what the reason for that move was, and what the costs were? That is all costs which include rewiring, new furniture, new carpet ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can we pause there, member for Nelson. Question on notice No 6.2 is changing. We have a new question No 6.2. If you could, for Hansard, because they will get lost up there ...

Mr WOOD: They are used to me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you could start that neatly now, that would be great.

Mr WOOD: Could the department provide the numbers of substantial moves by the department over the last two years, the reasons for those moves, and the costs associated with those moves?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Again, that is question No 6.2.

Mr WOOD: I have two general questions. Has the Health Department budgeted for lease fees for their facilities on Aboriginal land?

Mr MOFFET: We are currently working through the land tenure costs. We are certainly making provision for those now, in those we are entering at the moment. For example, as we go out to tender for Milingimbi, we are making provision for the land tenure lease issues that will impact Milingimbi in the future. Yes, we are, but it is obviously developing.

Mr WOOD: From a practical point of view, for every facility you have, you will have to negotiate a lease arrangement?

Mr MOFFET: Yes. For facilities on Aboriginal land, yes, we will.

Mr WOOD: You will have to negotiate with different traditional owners for every lease arrangement?

Mr MOFFET: My understanding is we have worked with the Northern and Central Land Councils, through the Department of Housing and Local Government, and we have a generic agreement. Obviously, each negotiation would occur, consistent with that framework. We would certainly engage with local traditional owners, but it is inside a framework that is pretty well established and agreed.

Mr WOOD: Could I clarify what the framework is that has been established and agreed?

Mr MOFFET: I ask Liz Stackhouse, our Executive Director for Infrastructure and Planning, to respond to that.

Ms STACKHOUSE: Liz Stackhouse, Executive Director for Planning and Infrastructure. The agreed process is based on a 40-year lease, and the value of the lease is the unimproved value of the land.

Mr WOOD: Who will decide on what the unimproved value of the land is?

Ms STACKHOUSE: The Valuer-General for the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: Will you actually look at – I know it might sound a bit silly – a second opinion from an independent valuer?

Ms STACKHOUSE: My understanding at this stage is the Valuer-General's value has been agreed and accepted.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Mr MOFFET: Yes, that methodology has been agreed with the land councils.

Mr WOOD: All right. We will not know what that amount is for this year, will we? You have an estimate?

Ms STACKHOUSE: As we agree to various parcels of land being leased, it will roll across the program. At this stage, it is minor, but there will be an ongoing estimate.

Mr WOOD: We know leases are going to run out this year in many non-growth towns or areas where no lease has been established longer than the five-year intervention lease. Do you have a large number of facilities on those communities where the leases will run out by, I think, mid this year?

Ms STACKHOUSE: We do have many, but I cannot give you the exact number.

Mr WOOD: What concerns me is if those negotiations have not been completed, your facilities are then owned by the Aboriginal Land Trust. Are you in danger of some of the public facilities being owned by a non-public body?

Mr Elferink: For every police station and health clinic, we have in the bush now, Gerry.

Mr MOFFET: We are not the agency that is leading the negotiation of the land lease issues, so our knowledge is somewhat limited. To our knowledge, there are two separate issues about the existing leases versus new leases on the basis of the recent agreement with the Central and Northern Land Councils. I am

not aware of any risk to us, and we have been discussing these in a fairly commonsense fashion about progressively now paying for land we otherwise did not have an agreement on.

Mr WOOD: What agency is doing this work on your behalf?

Mr MOFFET: Housing and Local Government is my understanding.

Ms STACKHOUSE: Yes.

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Ms STACKHOUSE: They are the lead agency across the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Is there a committee you get together with? You must have millions of dollars worth of facilities out there?

Ms STACKHOUSE: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Has the issue that you could run out of time if these lease arrangements have not been sorted out before the date the leases expire been raised?

Mr MOFFET: It has not been expressed as a direct concern to us. We have been negotiating through that process in good faith. It certainly has not been raised as an imminent risk. A small unit has been set up to progress these issues, and Mike Chiodo heads that unit. We meet directly with Mike on a regular basis, and that issue has not been raised as an urgent or imminent issue.

Mr WOOD: One other question in relation to your annual report on page 33 regarding \$11.8m for the Northern Territory Public Sector Medical Officer Enterprise Agreement. What does that \$11.8m cover? What was the \$11.8m for?

Mr MOFFET: I will answer this in a general rather than a specific because there is, obviously, quite a bit of detail in relation to the EBA. Through the last round, one of the things we achieved was recognition of the market value of specialists in a contemporary national environment. There were some significant improvements in pay and conditions for our senior staff in particular. The \$11.8m was recognition of the additional enhanced conditions we have managed to achieve. That has been very successful in retaining our staff and, indeed, attracting new specialists to the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Who fits into that classification of medical officers?

Mr MOFFET: It is all medical officers. Starting at the intern level, what we call PGY 1 residents, then PGY 2 and 3, registrars, our doctors in training, our district medical officers who provide support to the remote, our rural medical practitioners who actually provide services out in the remote locations and are based there, and our medical specialists.

Mr WOOD: Basically, doctors of all sorts?

Mr MOFFET: All doctors.

Mr WOOD: I do not know why you do not just put doctors. However, that is public service speak. That is all my whole-of-government questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Apologises for the back and forth this morning, minister. Before we move from agency-related whole-of-government to Output 1.1, Admitted Patient Services, I want to see if the member for Greatorex has any more questions to agency-related whole-of-government?

Mr CONLAN: No, we will just move straight into it.

OUTPUT 1.0 – HOSPITALS **Output 1.1 – Admitted Patient Services**

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output Group 1.0, Hospitals, Output 1.1, Admitted Patient Services. Member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Thanks, Mr Chairman. I would like to ask a couple of questions regarding PATS. It is my understanding it comes under this output group?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: You are happy for that. Can you tell us what the current cost of the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme is?

Mr VATSKALIS: You mean how much we reimburse people?

Mr CONLAN: What is the current cost of the scheme overall?

Mr VATSKALIS: Overall. We can provide a response to that today. I can take notes to provide the figures to you today.

Question on Notice No 6.3

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you repeat the question, member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: What is the current cost of the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme in the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Interstate and intrastate?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, the whole lot.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.3.

Mr CONLAN: Also, would you be able to provide the administration costs surrounding that? How much it actually costs to administer the scheme?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we can provide that.

Mr CONLAN: Do you see what I mean? They are different. The amount of money patients receive, and how much it actually ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that two separate questions? The second question is ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, can we incorporate them in one?

Mr MOFFET: We will incorporate them in one

Mr VATSKALIS: A breakdown of administrative costs, yes.

Mr CONLAN: What is the current cost of individual support packages to assist clients in the community? Would you like that on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is disabilities – a different output.

Mr CONLAN: All right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Which output?

Mr VATSKALIS: Disabilities.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 2.3.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Aeromedical - I have a quick question which you may need to take on notice, as well. I want to know the current costs of the Top End aeromedical retrieval service.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Ms Penny Fielding to respond to that one.

Ms FIELDING: Penny Fielding, Executive Director, Strategy and Reform. The budget for 2011-12 is \$22.538m.

Mr CONLAN: \$22.538m. Is that on target with your estimate?

Ms FIELDING: We have had some significant over-fly, so we are slightly over budget. We are also through a transition period, so we are paying for a number of things around the setting up of the new contract, which includes payment for additional aeroplanes as they come online.

Mr CONLAN: Can you explain why the overrun?

Ms FIELDING: There is an excess-hours component in the contract so when the flight hours are over and above the standard level, we pay over-charges.

Mr CONLAN: There has been significant ...

Ms FIELDING: Not significant, there is a difference between the position point of the flight hours within the contract, which is over and above that, and there were some thresholds around that.

Mr CONLAN: My understanding is that was about \$20m, so you are \$2.5m over?

Ms FIELDING: In relation to this specific contract costs, yes.

Mr CONLAN: Specific contract? That is \$2.5m additional money spent on flight hours?

Ms FIELDING: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: So, there has been an extra \$2.5m worth of retrievals in the Northern Territory?

Ms FIELDING: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Is that through exceptional circumstances, or do you think perhaps you have come in under budget for this 10-year contract of \$20m ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on. The 10-year contract starts on 1 January 2013. We are talking about a transitional contract in the time before 1 January. We are not talking about a 10-year contract now; we are talking about a fill-gap contract.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I understand, but the new contract is for \$20m a year?

Mr VATSKALISL: Approximately \$25m a year.

Mr CONLAN: \$25m?

Mr VATSKALIS: Approximately \$25m a year.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. All right.

Mr WOOD: Sorry. Are you going to move off that question?

Mr CONLAN: I was, yes.

Mr WOOD: Could I just ask - on page 142 of the budget it says \$9m for Top End aeromedical retrieval services. That is more than the \$2.5m you were talking about. Why \$9m above the budget?

Ms FIELDING: In this financial year and next financial year, we are transitioning between the old service model and the new service model, so there are a number of one-off costs in the latter half of 2011-12, and the first half of 2012-13.

Mr WOOD: I heard that before. Sorry, I am not trying to make you repeat, but it seemed we were dealing with different figures. The figure I have seemed higher than the one the member for Greatorex was talking about. The budget paper says \$9m. Is there a significant change in what you are talking about? Is there something we should know about that has caused that high variance?

Ms FIELDING: My understanding is that is for 2012-13. In 2011-12, there are a number of additional over-charge costs which we consider to be part of the existing contract arrangements, plus some one-off costs associated with additional aeroplanes coming onboard. Similarly, in 2012-13, there will be some one-off additions as part of that transition arrangements to 1 January 2013, plus there is some provision around the increased flight hours.

Mr WOOD: Is it possible to ask a question on notice, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Of course.

Question on Notice No 6.4

Mr WOOD: Could the minister provide us with a breakdown of what the \$9m variation is for 2012-13 in the Top End aeromedical retrieval services budget?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.4, minister.

Mr CONLAN: Can I just get a clarification? That \$9m is for the new contract - is that right? - the new aeromedical contract with CareFlight - that \$9m the member for the Nelson was talking about?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Whereas the \$2.5m is the current transitional contract costs?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, extra.

Mr MOFFET: I also clarify that one of the features of the new contract we are going through with transition is we are focusing the high-end transport resources around the P123s. We are actually putting pressure on demand management. As we go through, we gave contracted for as low a number of hours as we think we can to try keep it slim.

We are working with CareFlight to bring down demand. We always expected to see demand lagging. We started about the 5000-hour mark; we are moving down toward 4000 hours. So, it is expected we will see some demand pressures emerging because we are deliberately putting pressure on the system to focus our resources on those who need the service most.

Mr CONLAN: Right. I might move on to the technology questions, if that is okay? We cover these in Output 1. With respect to the equipment and technology in our hospitals, can you just tell us the overall standard of the equipment and technology available throughout the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a very generic question, Matt. What particular standards are you referring to?

Mr CONLAN: How does it compare, then, to contemporary technology available in other jurisdictions? Are we operating state-of-the-art equipment across the Territory in our hospitals and our healthcare centres? What, if any, major deficiencies exist?

Mr VATSKALIS: The hospitals prioritise their requirements annually, and they actually field advice from the medical personnel and staff and doctors. Some of the equipment, like the oncology, is state of the art; it is most modern. Some of the others are not as up to date; they were purchased probably two or three years ago and, as they wear out, they will be replaced. There is significant funding for the replacement of this equipment.

However, we make sure the equipment - and also the demand comes from the doctors because, as they operate and conduct different operations now, they demand different equipment from what they required, let us say, five or six years ago. I am happy for Mr Moffet to respond further to that.

Mr MOFFET: We have an equipment replacement program that is prioritised through clinical and management processes each year, so we attend to those priorities that service level prioritisation sets. From a surgical and imaging perspective, we have all the equipment you would expect to see in major tertiary and regional settings such as MRIs, CTs, and ultrasounds. So, we do have cutting edge technology

in that space. We, obviously, have very good and modern cancer services – in fact, our cancer services are probably more accessible and more cutting edge than most jurisdictions.

Another space that is a good example in our use of technology to deliver services is around telehealth. We are the national leaders in telehealth service delivery for a combination of reasons but, essentially, because our infrastructure is excellent and our use of contemporary equipment such as Medicarts or Telecards to get diagnostic information to clinicians who are providing services to someone in a remote setting. That has all started to commence recently. We really are at the front end of the telehealth spectrum.

Mr VATSKALIS: We always take the advice of medical personnel about what equipment they require. Probably you remember a few weeks ago, months ago, there was a report in the newspaper about the scopes. What the newspaper omitted to report was that so-called leaked memo was two years old and, by that time, new scopes and new equipment had already been purchased by Royal Darwin Hospital.

The overall budget for the capital equipment replacement is about \$2.5m and that is allocated in different hospitals depending on the demand and the advice of medical personnel.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I am aware in the oncology unit, we have a state-of-the-art oncology unit. I believe, though, there have been some issues with the CT scan and the MRI at RDH. Are you able to take us through that?

Mr VATSKALIS: The MRI is not owned by the hospital; it is actually owned by NT Imaging. It is housed in the hospital. There was an accident during maintenance of fire equipment, and water was leaked and it damaged the MRI. This equipment is not manufactured in Australia, it is manufactured overseas. They had to bring the whole replacement from overseas, which took time. That was replaced. People who needed priority service were given PATS to go to Adelaide. The others were rescheduled.

There is different CT scan equipment around Darwin and the Territory. There was a fault with the CT scan, so people were referred to NT Imaging and other areas. Unfortunately, these things happen. But, we acted quickly so what is owned by the hospital was replaced and repaired in time. What is owned by private business, private business make arrangements to repair it.

Mr CONLAN: Do you know how many patients were affected as a result of that, and what the cost to the Territory was through PATS - or the travel cost or the incurred cost as a result of that MRI ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Give us a moment. Dr Sarah Watson will be able to provide this information.

Dr WATSON: Dr Sarah Watson, Director of Medical Services, Royal Darwin Hospital. I oversaw the arrangements which were put in place when the MRI went down. Essentially, we had an arrangement with NT Imaging to send patients to their MRI in Adelaide. We spent \$60 000 in PATS. We transferred five inpatients, who actually had to be scanned and admitted in Adelaide. We transferred a number of patients who were walking patients who actually needed a scan. Obviously, this was available to all of Darwin and the Top End. So, patients who needed a scan but did not actually need to be admitted were also sent down under PATS. That came to about \$60 000.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you, doctor.

Mr VATSKALIS: Approximately 60 people.

Dr WATSON: Yes, approximate in total.

Mr CONLAN: Sixty people?

Dr WATSON: Yes. That is a combination of inpatients and the flown down, walking patients.

Mr CONLAN: Is there any mechanism then, minister, to recoup some of that money from the actual provider of the MRI? As you say, it is not a Territory government asset. If they are providing a service - such an expensive piece of equipment - and cannot provide that service, are there any penalties in place?

Dr WATSON: I will answer that. There are no penalties in place. I do know it was a subject of discussion with the insurers, but we have not been told of the outcome of that; that was never relayed back to me. The issues of the cost transfers were all discussed with the insurers, I understand.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Do you know where that is, where we are at with that, minister?

Dr WATSON: I will need to find that out. I can find out.

Question on Notice No 6.5

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want to take that on notice? Could you repeat the question.

Mr CONLAN: What cost recovery procedures are in place with regard to the lack of operation of the MRI at Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.5

Mr WOOD: Could I just ask a follow-up question quickly? The machine that was damaged by water was caused by a contractor - correct?

Dr WATSON: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I could ask first, did the contractor have to pay, or was he covered by insurance to cover some of those costs? The other one is: if any contractors are working in that building, is there a series of protocols? This is a pretty expensive bit of equipment we are talking about, and it is of vital importance to the health of Northern Territory people. Is there a set of protocols, and are they set in management practices that would ensure this would not happen again? Were there any protocols in place before this accident, and were those protocols carried out?

Mr WALDING: Yes, it was a contractor. The contractor is managed by DCI. We have not heard any further information on the insurance on that side of it, through the claims and everything else. DCI has been working through that process. However, this is more information we have probably gathered. Sorry, speaking out of turn.

Processes and systems, yes, we have improved our processes and systems in place to cross check. Basically, the contractor on the day isolated the wrong valve and, when he took a drain plug out, water came out of the end. That is where the water came from. When they went to do the isolation of the fire sprinkler system, they isolated the wrong valve in the fire control room. There are about eight valves, and they isolated No 6 instead of No 5, or whatever it was on the day.

Mr MOFFET: Obviously, the apportionment of liability in this matter is currently on foot. We would not want to reach conclusions about who is liable and who is not, because there is a complex set of issues at play about who is the contractor, procedures, and what actually occurred - the facts of the matter.

What we can say is we do have procedures. There was a contractor who was engaged through DCI who caused substantial damage. There is action on foot from the owner with the insurer in relation to shared liability.

Mr WOOD: As part of the Public Accounts Committee this year and last year, we were looking at risk audits. Is there a risk audit done for that particular oncology facility? Has there been an audit to say what the risks are to damage of equipment in that building, which is very high-tech, very expensive - one drop of water and we are out of business for months? Did someone say what the risks involved in these machines being damaged is and how we can minimise those risks - such as the turning on of the wrong valve? We know that happens now, but were there any risk management processes put in place to ensure nothing would - the risk of anything happening was minimal?

Mr MOFFET: Before Adam answers the specifics, we have, obviously, a risk management framework for the department. That has pretty much been bottom-up driven for a long period of time, including incidents such as this. What we have done in the last year is try to have a stronger governance approach where we group up things of risk, such as infrastructure, and ensure we are identifying strategic risks as well.

On this occasion, we investigated the incident. Adam can speak to whether it has ended up in the risk register. I presume it probably has. We would certainly adopt a risk management approach for anything that is significant we have become aware of. I guess we try to forecast those issues we are unaware of, as well, through a risk assessment process. Adam, do you want to answer?

Mr VATSKALIS: Just to clarify, the MRI is not housed in the oncology unit; it is housed in the Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mr WOOD: I am sorry. Maybe I should have made that slightly broader. All those sorts of implements – implements is not the right word - pieces of high-tech equipment we are very dependent on and are very expensive - that they are protected.

Mr WALDING: As the Chief Executive said, we have the risk management process we go through. We have the risk registers and it is reviewed through those risk registers, on the equipment and maintenance on our systems, and things like that as well.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thanks.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Thanks, Mr Chairman. It really does require another question - perhaps a broader question - regarding assets and their maintenance or their operation. This MRI has been reported quite widely. People have come to me about it when they are unable to access the service. What other equipment in the Northern Territory hospitals have ceased operation, either through maintenance or through faults? What costs have been incurred as a result of that? Are you able to provide that information? As I said, it has spent \$60 000 to send 60-odd patients interstate - predominantly in Adelaide in this case - for MRIs. What other costs have been incurred as a result of faulty equipment?

Mr VATSKALIS: Just to clarify something, member for Greatorex. I had people coming to my office complaining about MRI, and I understand that. There is only one MRI machine in the Territory. It is privately owned and, in order for a company to operate an MRI, they have to have a licence that is issued by the Commonwealth; not by the Territory Health Department. There is only one machine and, unfortunately, when it went down, it went down due to circumstances you heard, and people had to be sent down to Adelaide.

If it is a CT scan, there are more than one CT scan machines in the Territory, so we can actually reallocate people in different areas. NT Imaging has their own CT scans. Also, the one in Alice Springs is privately owned; it is not publicly owned.

MRI is the only issue we have a problem with because there is only one in the Territory, and there is only one licence. If something goes wrong with it, we have to send people interstate. There are approaches to me by people now who want to establish a second service in the Territory. I have provided a letter of support to go to the Commonwealth to seek a new licence for both CT scans and MRIs.

We had two separate faults that happened between 14 and 20 May 2012. The CT scanner could not be used intermittently because of a fault, and some people were actually transferred to different scanners from RDH to the Darwin Private Hospital scanner. With CT scanners we do not have a problem; there are many in the Territory. We can send people to other areas within the Territory - within Darwin. MRI was the only problem because only one was here.

Mr CONLAN: Are there CT scan facilities in Central Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: There is one CT scan facility in Central Australia.

Mr CONLAN: Were the faults with that CT scan ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Previously, we had an issue where something was wrong and that was rectified immediately because parts are available in Australia. It is very easy to reallocate parts from another state. MRIs are difficult because they have to come from overseas.

Mr CONLAN: I understand that. Moving away from MRIs for a moment, any other imaging – not necessarily imaging equipment - but any equipment in Northern Territory hospitals that perhaps has been faulty? We are talking now, for example, the CT scan in Central Australia. No patients were affected

there? No patients were affected in Central Australia and had to be transferred to Darwin as a result of that faulty piece of equipment?

Mr MELINO: There were some patients affected. The equipment was down – and I am testing my memory here – for probably about four hours. I am not sure about that time line but, yes, some patients were affected but they were managed clinically. I am unsure of the numbers transferred or required to be transferred to Darwin, but I can get those figures if that is important to this question. These things are unforeseen and the down time is usually dependent on how soon we can get a part. It might be a globe or a special part of the equipment that needs to be replaced.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, it is important, if you would not mind. I am trying to gauge an overall cost on what it costs to run and manage these things across the Northern Territory, particularly in the more remote parts. We are talking Alice Springs or ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The important thing with CT scans is we have a technician in Darwin so it is very easy to relocate somebody very quickly to fix a problem if there is one. With MRIs, it was a significant piece of equipment which weight more than one tonne and had to be transported from America to Darwin by air freight.

Question on Notice No 6.6

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before we move too far away from the question on notice, I might get the member for Greatorex to repeat the question.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I am happy with that.

Mr CONLAN: The whole question?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question you want answered.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, can you please provide a total cost – it is harder than you think to clarify a question on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is why Hansard ask – was it not about patient travel?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, essentially, I would like to know the result of some of the faulty equipment and maintenance of equipment in Territory hospitals has cost the Northern Territory government. Is that clear?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to take that question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is No 6.6.

Mr CONLAN: With regard to patients in Tennant Creek, Katherine, even the remote parts of the Territory in our communities, when they require this type of service, does that come under PATS? Are they actually provided that service under PATS?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: They are?

Mr VATSKALIS: They are.

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: If they are urgent cases that have not been seen, they are provided PATS to go interstate for a CT scan or an MRI scan.

Mr CONLAN: All right. We are staying on this output, but I might move on to the Palmerston Hospital.

Mr WOOD: And rural.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, Palmerston and rural hospital. Minister, we could spend some time on this so I would like to get into it as much as we can. According to the Department of Health website, nine out of 10 respondents to the Palmerston Hospital community survey ranked accident and emergency services as their No 1 priority. As a result of that, I would like to hear what your government means by a 24/7 accident and emergency service and what services will actually be available through the Palmerston Hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: There will be a 24/7 accident and emergency services which means 24-hour seven-days-a-week, 365-days-a-year accidents service in the Palmerston Hospital. There will be a maternity ward which will deliver babies; 60 beds for patients including four paediatric short-stay beds co-located in the emergency department; two theatres for same-day surgery; and there will be ambulatory care capacity; and, of course, outpatient services and everything else.

Mr CONLAN: Will emergency surgeries be performed at Palmerston Hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: If it is a serious case it will be referred to Darwin hospital. As it happens in the emergency services in Royal Darwin Hospital, if there is emergency surgery it will be referred immediately to theatre rather than being done on the emergency department.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, but there is a bit of a difference - you can appreciate - going from the emergency department to the theatre in RDH, and going ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No. You have to remember currently people who have an accident, let us say in Berry Springs, they have to be transported by ambulance to the emergency department at RDH. Before they are transported they are stabilised in the ambulance to be transferred. If a person who had an accident in Berry Springs will be transferred to the Palmerston accident and emergency services, they look after them. If they need to have an emergency operation they will be stabilised there and transferred straight to the Darwin emergency department.

Most of the issues in emergency do not usually require serious surgery unless there is a serious car accident.

Mr WOOD: I have a question on that specific issue. Minister, you said we will have a maternity ward. If there is a serious problem with the delivery of a baby that requires theatre, what is going to happen?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, women actually have babies in Gove and Katherine now. Before most of the women have their babies, they are assessed by doctors and, if the doctors realise it is going to be a difficult birth, they are referred to Royal Darwin Hospital. The same thing will apply there. Where we had emergency cases in Tennant Creek where we do not have a birthing service, the women were referred to Alice Springs Hospital.

Women are assessed before they have the baby and, if people realise it is going to be a difficult birth, they will be referred to Royal Darwin Hospital. If there is an emergency birth - and ask the midwives - they can actually deliver babies quite safely. So, it is not something new; it happens everywhere in the Territory and will continue to happen in the Territory.

Mr WOOD: The AMA is at variance with the nursing people about the need - if you are going to have maternity facilities at that hospital, if there is an emergency, you have some place where a person can be looked after immediately?

Mr VATSKALIS: AMA expressed the same concerns to me, and I told them we have four years to sit down and develop a protocol and a program, how to address this situation. They promised to sit down with the department and develop a proper protocol and program for the Palmerston Hospital to deliver babies safely.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Mr CONLAN: Sorry. Can you say that again? You are going to develop a four-year protocol?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, four years from now until the hospital opens to sit down with the department to have a look at this issue and other issues, in order to put something in place to avoid any emergencies in the future. I cannot tell you now what is going to happen in four years time. AMA and the department will sit down and develop a proper program on how to deliver babies safely in Palmerston.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I would have thought you would know what is required. Do you know what is required then to deliver babies safely in Territory hospitals?

Mr VATSKALIS: I want babies to be delivered safely in Palmerston. The government said there is going to be a birthing suite in Palmerston.

Mr CONLAN: Do you know, then, what is required to do that?

Mr VATSKALIS: AMA said they had some concerns, and I said they have four years to express those concerns clearly with the department, and sit down and resolve the issue.

Mr CONLAN: Do you know, minister, as the Minister for Health, what is required? What are the basic services required to deliver babies safely in Territory hospitals?

Mr VATSKALIS: In my own experience, I did not have to face a difficult birth. At the same time, there could be difficulties in birth. That is why I said doctors are the most appropriate people to decide what is required for a safe delivery of a baby in Palmerston Hospital. The doctors will sit down with my department to develop the method, the protocol, the program, or what is required to deliver babies safely in Palmerston. I would like my CEO to further expand on that.

Mr MOFFET: Essentially, we have undertaken a very robust planning process for Palmerston in the clinical services plan, the nature and model of services that will operate there, as well as the facility modelling. Regarding your generic question of what is required, obviously, at a dry technical level, we need the facilities, birthing suites, staff with the appropriate skills, and to provide the full spectrum of emergency care that can arise during even low-risk deliveries.

The important point here is we need to go through an appropriate planning process over the next several years to work out what that model of care looks like. That is very normal with a greenfield facility start-up of a new birthing service. That is what we have committed to.

If you want to talk through some of the clinical detail, Dr Sarah Watson can talk about the process that has occurred to this point. What I would say, often starting - whether it is birthing services or perinatal wraparound maternity service - is often contentious in communities. There are often balances between getting the service right in safety, reliability, and standards as well as access. It is a constant challenge for health systems right around the nation.

In a setting where there is approximately 800 deliveries a year coming from that catchment population, that is a very large number of deliveries - far larger than, for example, we would see in Nhulunbuy or Katherine. A safe and effective service is certainly possible there in the future, but it does require the right planning and the right resources to deliver it.

Mr CONLAN: Is that 800 in the Palmerston/rural area you are talking about?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, which are currently delivered in RDH, or in the RDH setting.

Dr WATSON: A planning process has commenced. It was led by the department, by a specialist obstetrician, a medical advisor within the department. Essentially, what has been developed is a framework which consists of two levels. As I said, this is, obviously, the basis to go on in the future.

The first level is called the Level 1 Maternity Service, which is, essentially, the provision of antenatal and postnatal services, but does not require the delivery of a baby, or a planned birth. That is the Level 1 service and that is a constant, fairly standard term across the country in planning of services.

We have also developed the framework for the Level 2 service. The Level 2 service delivers planned births. Those planned births would be low risk. Low risk in this context is a single birth, a single foetus, not twins. It is a mother delivering at 37 weeks or greater, and the foetus weight would be 2500 gm or greater. That is the definition of a low-risk birth.

That is the planning process at the moment. We have developed a Northern Territory maternity standard framework based on the national standards. Level 1 does not anticipate planned births; Level 2 does, as I said, in this well-defined low-risk category. The outcome, of course, is always to have a well-planned birth.

As the CEO said, all the discussions now until the months before the facility opens is how we get from where we are now through Level 1 and into that Level 2 service? Obviously, the Level 2 service requires a higher degree of staffing, infrastructure, and resources than the Level 1 does and that has to be taken account of in the fitting out and the planning for all the equipment.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. I just do not understand, I am sorry. We have been delivering babies for a long time – safely, too. I do not understand why we have this planning process. Why can we just not take the RDH model, the Alice Springs, or the Katherine model where we are delivering babies, we know what we need, and put that into the Palmerston Hospital? I do not understand this whole planning process and everything else you have just talked about. What is required to deliver babies is pretty well known, I would have thought. Why can we not just develop that, build it, buy it, pay for it, do whatever is required, and get on with it?

If that is what the government are so – obviously, minister, you have been pretty adamant that a maternity service will be available in Palmerston. I would have thought we know what is required to do it, so why this grey area?

Dr PATERSON: Barbara Paterson, Chief Health Officer and Executive Director, Health Protection. May I talk about that? What we are excited about in Palmerston is it does offer the opportunity for a community-based model of care. With the best will in the world, RDH does not offer a community-based model of care, because there are too many high-risk pregnancies to offer that model of care as a standard model, whilst Palmerston, because it is focused at the low-risk woman, will be able to offer that community-based level of care. This means the local GPs will be able to have admitting rights and do shared care, if that is what the local GPs are qualified to do and want to do. That does not happen at RDH.

Also, the local community midwives and all those midwife services at the moment have a role at RDH, but are not absolutely standard to every single birth. It is our expectation that at Palmerston, because it is a low-risk birthing centre, they will be absolutely integral to that model of care. I believe that is what really - as I said, we are coming from a specialist model of care, which is what exists right now at RDH, to a much more community focused. That is the good thing about Palmerston. However, we also want to ensure it is safe, it is surrounded by a high-quality framework, and all the risks have been identified. That is that planning process that, as I said, has already commenced.

Mr CONLAN: But the community care model is well and truly in place in Alice Springs and Katherine.

Dr Paterson: It has not been in ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Not in Katherine and Alice Springs - the midwifery practice.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. But there is a community level of care in Katherine as well.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. Of course, you have to remember that, apart from this type of birth, we have home births as well, which present the same challenges like having a baby in Palmerston. What happens if something goes wrong at home? The mother and child are transported immediately to Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: Of the 800 babies that come from the Palmerston and rural area, how many of those have been low risk?

Dr PATERSON: The 800 is actually the low-risk number. That is what has been defined - or it may be 500, I believe. It is 800 births, 500 of them are low risk. So, it is between that 500 and 800 number.

Mr CONLAN: A little more than half?

Dr PATERSON: Yes, which are low risk.

Mr MOFFET: I can add, often the concepts are quite simple in healthcare, but even the term 'low risk' has very many different meanings around Australia. One of the purposes of this planning is we actually

need to have a common dictionary of language for our clinical services planning. So, we are going through a process, not just for the paediatric services, but with our clinicians generally about getting a clinical services framework in place which describes a Level 1 to 6, for example, type of maternity service. Sarah has referred to Levels 1 and 2, but it goes right up to a Level 6 service, which is the most intense neonatology service you could imagine.

It is the same right across the spectrum of our services. One of the issues we are presented with, because we do not have a common dictionary and we are developing one at the moment, it is so much more important to go through the planning processes, mainly to bring all the different voices along. As you know, there is much contention, and many different opinions about birthing and obstetrics. The planning process we are committing to over the next few years is ensuring we bring along all the partners we need to bring along in that process. The human element is a really important element of it.

Mr WOOD: Do you have more questions on that?

Mr CONLAN: I do, yes, unless Mr Chairman wants to take a break.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I was going to flag a five-minute break, but I did not want to interrupt your line of questioning.

Mr WOOD: I have more on the maternity ...

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I have too.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want to keep going and then I will turn over to the member for Nelson?

Mr CONLAN: I just might just throw it to the member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: A couple of things. I must admit, when I heard someone talk about the maximum weight for the delivery of babies that could only be delivered at the Palmerston Hospital, it reminded me of the Indonesian restrictions on live cattle exports. I thought this is getting a bit too clinical, but I believe we are talking about babies.

Even though I am being flippant, we are talking about a very important thing; that is, the community having a facility to have a baby delivered safely. The problem I have with what has been said is that is not, I believe, what the public is hearing. The public is hearing - in that debate which was on ABC between the nurses and the doctors - that we are going to have a maternity ward at the Palmerston and rural hospital. They are not really hearing it is only going to be for babies who are single, weigh X number of grams - or pounds if you want to go back to the old days - and the rest have to go to RDH.

They are not hearing there will not be the emergency facilities at Palmerston and the rural hospital, but if, just out of the blue - I know that babies or mother will be assessed - that person will have to go to RDH. They are not hearing that, and I am not hearing that. So, it is a little surprise we are getting half a maternity hospital, in the sense we are going to be able to deliver babies, but we will not be delivering them to the extent that Darwin and Alice Springs will have a maternity section. That is what is missing in this debate.

The public does not know - and I did not understand that until now - there is a limitation. Basically, there will be single-baby births up to a certain weight, and everyone will be assessed, and the rest will go to RDH. There is a bit of public relations out there that might have sounded good but, in fact, it is not what people expected.

Mr VATSAKLIS: Member for Nelson, we are still actually talking to people out there. The department will talk about the Palmerston Hospital. We have spoken to a significant number of people in the community before, and we will keep talking to them. We are talking to the AMA. The reality is a majority of births are actually single births, with a weight range from what the doctor described. Certainly, when this is the parameters, that person, if she lives in the rural area and Palmerston, will refer to the Palmerston Hospital.

Doctors make assessments of the person who has to deliver the baby. If the baby is too big or there are two or more babies, that will be RDH for safety reasons, not for any other reasons. Again, it will be a medical decision where a person has to give birth. The majority of the births are natural births with no complications, and doctors are able to tell beforehand if there is going to be a complication or not, to refer them to a particular hospital.

This is Stage 1. We have to remember the hospital is not going to be just that, it is going to have Stage 2, Stage 3, and Stage 4. As demand increases, and as the population increases, more and more facilities will be added. There will be a time when you can deliver difficult babies and multiple births in Palmerston Hospital in Stage 2 or Stage 3.

Mr WOOD: The issue I have is I do not think the public know that. If that is going to be the case - you are going to develop this over three or four stages - then you need to have those stages clearly put forward to the public saying: 'Yes, for the first couple of years it is going to be for safe births, then we will develop, as time goes on, these things will change'. It is just the public and people in my area would not have known that unless they are in fairly close contact with the department. The general public is missing out there.

Mr CONLAN: Just on that, there is no way they would know that, minister, because you have never clarified that - ever. You have only ever said that women can have their children in Palmerston. You even you said on ABC radio:

When the hospital is open, you can come and give birth in this hospital. I know one of the contractors living in Palmerston. He actually told me he has a young family who are looking forward to this hospital to be ready when he will need it.

That is just one quote of a raft of statements you have made about the Palmerston Hospital and delivering babies there. You have never said it was for low risk only, it is for this area, it is going to take four years, or you are developing a plan. Never, ever has that been articulated in the public arena. Is it little wonder people think: 'Great, we are going to have a hospital there ...

Mr VATSAKLIS: With all due respect, member for Greatorex, I have been on the public record saying this hospital is actually at Stage 1, and there will be more stages. I have stated publicly this hospital now is not going to be a single-storey hospital. When questioned on whether it is going to get bigger, I said, yes, we have sufficient land for this hospital to expand. and we will be expanding as the need increases, and as the number of people increases.

I said women will be able to give birth in Palmerston Hospital – they will be able to give birth. Most of the births we have now are natural births, not complicated. There will be complications, and they will be referred to RDH. The same way you go to the hospital for an issue, feeling sick, and then you are referred straightaway to the oncology unit because something serious is wrong with you.

We say these hospitals provide birthing services for women. Whether women will be able to give birth there or not will be determined by the midwife or the doctor. The same thing applies for births in Tennant Creek or in Katherine. Women can give birth in Katherine but, if there are serious complications, they are referred straightaway to RDH to give birth there.

Mr MOFFET: I just add, this process is very iterative as well. One of the key pieces of feedback we get from women is they want, most of all, to have a safe delivery and a safe birth. That, obviously, is how they express that.

The technical way we actually assess Stage 1, 2, 3 and 4 is not something you can easily communicate to the public; it is quite a technical definition. There are also circumstances and reasons outside those definitions where clinicians make individual judgments around patients based on history and otherwise.

I accept we need to do more work with the public as time goes on around planning these services. We have been very engaged with the community so far, including the emergency care as well. However, it is iterative and it also changes. For example, some women having babies will need to be referred out of the Territory from time to time if there are highly complex congenital heart disease issues or otherwise. There are levels of care that can be provided in certain settings. We have tried to balance in our planning the feedback from the community and the desire for women to birth in as local and as close to home place as possible. However, we have to start that at a safe and sustainable level and build the service over time.

Perhaps we need to communicate that more over the next few years. We will certainly be involved in stakeholder groups and the general community, as we have done to this point, in our planning for Palmerston.

Mr WOOD: Can I ask one more question on that? Where will Aboriginal people fit into this maternity ward? Will you have Aboriginal workers, and will it be a place where Aboriginal people will feel comfortable?

Dr WATSON: I can answer that. Yes, absolutely. As part of the planning of the facilities, we have had a special focus group with Aboriginal clients and Aboriginal staff. The inclusion of Aboriginal clients is extremely important.

Mr WOOD: They will not be separate, but they will have people who can make them comfortable in ...

Dr WATSON: Absolutely, absolutely.

Mr VATSKALIS: As Dr Watson said, we are looking for a community model rather than a highly specialised medical model similar to Alice Springs. We have a midwifery practice - midwives deliver babies - and we want to do the same in Palmerston because of the low number of people. If the population increases significantly we might have a dual system, both a medical and community one. But, currently, we are really looking at the community delivery program.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will take a five-minute break.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are at Output 1.1, Admitted Patient Services and the call is with the member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, just to continue that line with the maternity services at Palmerston, can you tell us how many caesarean sections which have been performed at RDH in the last 12 months were classified as low risk? Yes, how many caesareans were performed at RDH which were originally classified as low-risk births?

Dr WATSON: I cannot give you that answer off the top of my head. Our caesarean section rate is about 30% and we deliver - I think it is in here - about 1300 to 1400 births a year. I cannot tell you how many of those started off as a low risk and then ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We can take it on notice.

Dr WATSON: ... but I can take it notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want to say it one more time?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, so not a planned caesarean section, one that ...

Dr WATSON: Yes, an unplanned. Of those unplanned, what started off as a low risk - I do not know the answer to that precise question.

Question on Notice No 6.7

Mr CHAIRMAN: I you could just ask that question, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: How many emergency caesarean sections which have been performed at Royal Darwin Hospital in the last 12 months were classified as low risk?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.7, minister.

Mr CONLAN: This whole issue with low risk though. I think you are right - as Mr Moffet put it correctly - there is a lot of conjecture around the language there, or the interpretation of low risk. I notice, though, the mother's condition does not come into it - well, not in your explanation anyway. Does the mother's condition, in your explanation, minister, come into the category of low risk and, if so, what conditions of the mother would be considered to be low risk or high risk?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not a doctor, but I expect when they make an assessment of low risk or high risk, they take into consideration not only the birth or the baby, but also the mother. The mother can have a

co-morbidities or some other condition that has to be looked after when she is giving birth. I expect doctors take all of this into consideration. Dr Watson would be most appropriate to answer that.

Dr WATSON: I can answer that. A low-risk mother is, obviously, a mother who is, I would say, in her 20s and 30s, who is obviously well. You would grade complexity and risk. A lady who might be diabetic, who may have had multiple pregnancies in the past, who may have heart failure, who may have heart disease - there is a large population with rheumatic heart disease here - those sorts of conditions take you further and further up into the high-risk category.

Mr CONLAN: I guess I was trying to come back a little there – we did break that momentum. You have said on a number of occasions that maternity services would be available at Palmerston Hospital. I am still trying to get my head around, when you talk about the community model of care, etcetera, why we need a four-year plan to develop a community care model at Palmerston to be able to deliver ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, let me clarify that. We do not need a four-year plan to develop the model. I said you have four years before the hospital opens, so you have the time to sit down and develop this model. You might develop it in two weeks, six months, or a year, but you have a four-year period before that hospital opens.

What I want at the end is safe delivery of babies in Palmerston. You develop the model; you have four years to come to me with the model before the doors open at the Palmerston Hospital. It is not, 'you have four years, take all these four years to develop the model'. AMA, doctors, nurses, midwives – midwives are critical; it is not only the doctors. Certainly, the obstetrician sees the model as obstetrician centred; midwives is the other way around. We want something in between.

Mr CONLAN: Again it comes back. What is so specific, what is so unique about Palmerston that we have to go back to the drawing board and develop a model to be able to deliver and provide maternity services in this particular facility? What is so special about it, I suppose - with great respect for the rural area and the whole issue? What is so special about it that makes it so unique compared to other jurisdictions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Young families - young families tend to have babies. That is why it is important in Palmerston to have a maternity ward ...

Mr CONLAN: I know, and I understand all that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... and also the growing population, reducing the pressure on RDH. RDH can cater for the Darwin population, plus the remote that comes in, while Palmerston can look after the rural and Palmerston population which is going to grow. Palmerston is growing. I remember when I first came to Darwin, driving up the road, it was 'Palmerston 7000 population', now it is 'Palmerston 30 000 population'. The rural area keeps growing, new subdivisions opening. Weddell will be another town of 40 000 people, which would put more pressure on the Palmerston Hospital, which is actually 25 minutes to half-an-hour closer than RDH.

Mr CONLAN: All right. We have established we need to do more in the public relations arena about this, because you have admitted, you have said a number of times ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember the scope has just been finalised, it has not been considered by Cabinet. When we have the scope, and we have something on our hands to go out, we can give a 3D presentation of the Palmerston Hospital. I have been in the public arena repeatedly saying this is going to be a staged approach. This is Stage 1; there is going to be Stage 2 and Stage 3. We have ensured we have a big piece of land to actually put the hospital there. I have made clear my thoughts to the department, not a single-storey facility. We made that mistake before in other areas. We put a single-storey facility and we ran out of space. This can be a multistorey facility to cater for the people of Darwin and the future growth.

Mr CONLAN: A bit like the Country Liberals model in 2008 election.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, ours is different. Actually, the doors in our model are bigger and wider than your model. It could actually fit in the Bathurst Hospital because they did not work out. Also, ours will deliver 60 beds in 2006, while your model would deliver - I do not know how many beds in 2013. So, there is a slight difference between our model and your model.

Mr CONLAN: With regard to staffing, this is a concern because we have seen pressures on staffing with Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital, particularly with these specialists services, maternity services, obstetricians, and midwifery. Are you confident you can fully staff a maternity unit at Palmerston Hospital? We are talking, obviously, anaesthetists, obstetricians, or at least a trained GP to deliver a baby, and the midwifery services to go with that. Can you explain how we are going to achieve that under the current conditions where, obviously, there are some staffing pressures?

Mr VATSKALIS: Actually, our problem is not in recruiting people at the hospital service; our problem is in the GPs in the community. We have a midwifery school and a medical school at Charles Darwin University, training programs in place to train GPs to provide obstetrician services, and no problem attracting nurses - we actually have the highest number of nurses and doctors than we ever had before. With regard to specialists, we have about 6% vacancy rate, which is extremely low.

Our problem is not in the hospital; our problem is in the community. We have about 58 GPs in the community per 100 000 population. When you look in other states, there are 86 to 90 GPs in the community. Our problem is not actually - and the specialist. You have to remember we do not have the population to attract every single specialist to be based in Darwin. They will not come to Darwin. We have visiting specialists, we have teleconferencing, telehealth, and PATS to provide the services.

However, we will attract people. Because of growing the midwives and doctors here, it is more likely they will stay here because they have better employment and training opportunities. We are confident we are going to have the staff in the Palmerston Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: Without question?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are confident we are going to have the staff in Palmerston Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: Member for Nelson, did you want to tack on anything there? I have a couple of others; I will move off maternity.

Mr WOOD: I know you two have been working out which party will build the best hospital, but which model are you going to have when it comes to car parking, because that has always been an issue with Royal Darwin Hospital? Will you consider actually calling the hospital the Palmerston district hospital so there is some recognition people in the rural area are part of this? I do not think it is just Palmerston - 20 000 people in the rural area will be using this hospital as well. So car parking is certainly an issue - and the naming.

Mr VATSKALIS: The car park is an issue that is being considered under the scoping of the new hospital. I made it clear I would like to have a car park where people can park and go to hospital very quickly.

The other thing was about the name of the hospital. We asked the people what name they wanted, and the majority wanted it to be called Palmerston Hospital. I am not prepared to change that until there is another move supported by the community to change it.

Again, as I said to you before, on the issue of car parking, we are spoilt in the Territory. We would like to be able to park at the front door and walk in. I have had so many complaints about car parking at Royal Darwin Hospital. I have never had a problem parking at Royal Darwin Hospital. I had to walk a bit - so what? We have more than 1000 parking spaces at Royal Darwin Hospital. We have a map now when you enter Royal Darwin Hospital to tell you where the different car parks are. Car parking at Royal Darwin Hospital is locked in the morning so people do not occupy it early and leave their cars there forever. There are a number of measures to address the issues of car parking at Royal Darwin Hospital.

However, I made it clear the issue of car parking at Palmerston has been taken into consideration from very early stages. From what I have seen to date, I am happy it is going to work.

Mr WOOD: It is slightly off the subject and may apply to Palmerston, but are you going to build a hospital with a pleasant landscape? RDH is concrete with trees trying to grow in 0.5 m² of soil? Is there going to be something to make the place feel good, such as good landscaping, at Palmerston?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, the Royal Darwin Hospital was built by people from Canberra and has snow shields on it ...

Mr WOOD: I know that, but ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The Palmerston Hospital will be designed and built by Territorians.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but a hospital is not just about bricks and mortar, it is about trying to have ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. Do not forget we have to cater for many Indigenous people who do not like to be locked in an air-conditioned area; they like to be outside. We have to make provisions for that. I am happy to say that in Katherine they have established an area for Indigenous people so they can sit together. They can even have some ceremonies, especially when somebody dies. That is a very good idea when one-third of the population is Indigenous, and they maintain strong traditions and culture.

Mr WOOD: There are many good examples in the original Darwin Hospital when it comes to how hospitals should be built in the north.

Mr VATSKALIS: Without snow shields is a good idea.

Mr WOOD: That is right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Thanks, Mr Chairman. With regard to the maternity services, you said you could have done better in your PR and you will endeavour to clarify the position - clarify the reality of what is going to take place there. Could we then extrapolate and say you need to do a bit better in the overall marketing and selling of the facility? I say that because I will put this question to you: if someone arrives at the hospital with a child who has a broken arm at 11 pm, 12 pm, what will happen to that child? Will they be treated there and then, or will they need to be relocated to Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: If a child comes with a broken arm to the emergency department they will be treated in the emergency department. If the child has broken bones from a car accident it certainly will be seen at the emergency department. If emergency surgery is required they will be stabilised and forwarded to Royal Darwin Hospital as soon as possible. It depends on the level of injury and complexity.

Even at Royal Darwin Hospital when somebody arrives at the front desk, they are triaged and then admitted for care. If it is complicated, they are forwarded straightaway to surgery. Sometimes that person has to wait because a surgery or a surgeon is not available immediately. The same thing is going to happen at Palmerston Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: What is the level of severity or complexity? Do you know what that is?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not know.

Mr CONLAN: We have been doing this for a long time, we must ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not know because I am not a doctor, but I am saying that ...

Mr CONLAN: No, but you have a few here. Can we find out what it is?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, a simple snap of a bone is okay, but if a bone is broken in many places or is protruding or is affecting, let us say, a vital organ, that is rather complex.

Mr CONLAN: Can we have an example of a common case that is too complex or too severe to be treated at Palmerston Hospital?

Mr MOFFET: I can respond in general, first of all, before I hand over to Dr Watson. Essentially, the reason we are developing a clinical services framework for the Northern Territory hospitals is so these conversations are clear, easily understood. We have a level of one to six services that is understood by clinicians, community and, obviously, our parliament to make conversations consistent, clear, and understandable. We will have a level attributed to our emergency services in Palmerston.

Another general way to answer this is to say within a year or two of the opening we will have 12 000 to 15 000 occasions of service. That is the projected demand. It will be a serious emergency department seeing serious volumes in a very short space of time.

In regard to having a child with a fracture, if that could be dealt with in a conservative sense and not go to theatre, in general, that would be dealt with at Palmerston. If it is a highly complex open fracture that needs emergency surgery, it will be dealt with at RDH. If it is, indeed, even more complex it might be referred, in some instances, to other quaternary hospitals in South Australia. There will be a scale of response in the system, as there currently is, based on the child's need.

We will be hoping to deal with upwards of 80% of attending presentations to that emergency department so there is significant retention of service in that area. This is all subject to building our models of care, getting our staffing right, and making sure our service plans fit the need for the community.

Dr Watson might have a further comment on the clinical levels.

Dr WATSON: Sure. About the paediatric services, there was enormous discussion, I have to say, about what sort of paediatric service maybe best be offered at Palmerston, given the predicted numbers. When the analysis came out, it was that the predicted demand was for three beds of paediatric cases at Palmerston, which is not much. It is too few to base a full paediatric inpatient service on that relies on paediatric doctors, paediatric nurses, paediatric allied health. It is too few; that was what all the analysis came out at.

After much discussion, that is why we have now established four - not three, four - paediatric short-stay beds in the ED. It was felt the vast majority of paediatric admissions, after a very short space of time, say 24 to 36 hours. That is a vast number of admissions for that type of case, which is the type of case which the CEO and the minister had talked about.

That will cater for the vast number of patients going through. However, what it will not cater for is, for instance, croup or fairly common - there is, obviously, a gradulative range of illness. Croup could be very minor and the child just needs observation for, say, 24 hours - in which case Palmerston is fine. If the child is severely ill with croup - and croup can occasionally be a fatal condition - then, obviously, that child should be transferred to the Royal Darwin. So that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: That will not - sorry, doctor. You have to remember that will happen if this happens in Katherine, too. We have situations where people have accidents in Katherine or have a medical condition. They are assessed in Katherine and, yes, they can stay there or, no, the condition is too serious and they have to go to RDH. It can happen in Gove, in some cases it can happen in Alice Springs.

Dr WATSON: Yes, but that difference is there, as I said. The vast majority of admissions can be absolutely perfectly catered for within that 24 to 36 hour time frame.

Mr CONLAN: You mentioned you treat 80% of presentation, essentially. What is the percentage of people you treat at Royal Darwin Hospital? It would not be a 100%, would it? There would be some cases where people have to be evacuated somewhere else, is there, or can Darwin take everyone?

Mr MOFFET: We would need to provide detail on notice. I guess this is a concept of what they call self-sufficiency. The self-sufficiency of various hospitals have certain target ranges. We will be at the very high 90% for Royal Darwin Hospital, for example. I do not have the exact numbers, but if it was not 98% or 99%, I will be very surprised.

In the modelling for Palmerston, there is a reverse flow concept which assumes that some patients from the Palmerston and regional, rural areas who are currently going to the RDH will, in fact, be seen in Palmerston. The numbers are built up around some assumptions, and one of those is assuming that at least 80% of patients who present to that ED can be seen within that ED.

Again, it is all subject to further development of models of care, but that is what we are intending to do. We want to have care closer to home in the Palmerston area. Where we cannot appropriately provide that level of care, we will immediately refer through to RDH and onwards if necessary to Adelaide and other places.

Mr CONLAN: Would Alice Springs Hospital be in the high 90% too, do you think? Would you ...

Mr MOFFET: I would be surprised. It probably would be slightly lower because of its functionality. It does not have the level of tertiary services, for example, RDH has, but it will certainly be in the 90%.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Again, we are not talking about Katherine. I know you use the example of Katherine and Gove people who live in Katherine and Gove are well aware of their remoteness and the disadvantages that come with that. They are very happy with their health services, essentially, in Katherine and Gove - for where they live and for what you get.

However, we are talking now about a growing capital city, with one of the fastest growing regions through the Palmerston rural area in the country. People are under the impression this is going to be a first-class tertiary level style of hospital where you will be able to turn up at any time of day and have just about anything done. That is the message which has been coming out of government.

Minister, you have not said: 'It is going to be based around the Katherine model. If you have a high level of croup, we would have to evacuate you. Or if you are having twins, no, you cannot have them there. Or if the mother is obese or has diabetes, she will not be able to have her babies in Palmerston'.

There are many qualifications with regard to all that. It brings me back to that original question where we have established we needed to do a bit more PR work on the maternity issue, but it looks like it is much broader as well.

Mr VATSKALIS: Let us talk about what you just mentioned. First of all, the Palmerston Hospital is not going to be a tertiary hospital; RDH is the tertiary hospital. Palmerston Hospital will be a hospital to address the needs of the community. If there are complications, they will be referred to RDH, because RDH has an Intensive Care Unit, a High Dependency Unit, and Trauma Response, which will not be duplicated in the Palmerston Hospital.

Yes, you talk about Katherine and Gove. The reality is the distance and time factors are very relevant. If you have an accident, let us say in Adelaide River, it will take about two or two-and-a-half hours to be admitted to the emergency department in Darwin. However, if you are in Gove and you need to medivac to Darwin, it would probably take about an hour-and-a-half to be sent to Darwin. This is all relevant.

What we want to have in Palmerston is a hospital that will grow as the community grows. Stage 1 will be a secondary hospital. If they require tertiary intervention, they will go to RDH, but it will be there to provide accident and emergency, the birthing suite, and theatres for same-day surgery. We are not talking about duplicating a tertiary hospital 20 minutes away from RDH. It would be a waste of resources at this stage. Later, as the community grows, it will grow.

The fact that you raise these issues highlights your proposal to build a hospital in Palmerston with actually \$100m, delivered in 2023, but with no information about what kind of services you will be delivering in Palmerston. We have \$140m on the table. Work has already started on the Palmerston Hospital with the contract being awarded, and there is debate in the community about the services to be provided in Palmerston Hospital. We will be listening to the community.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Minister, the point I was trying to make is you have made some extraordinary claims about the hospital. It is not until we have come in here and spoken to, largely, competent staff members who have been able to explain to us what the real story is here. You have made some extraordinary claims about the functionality of the Palmerston Hospital ...

Mr VATSKALIS: That is what I have been doing in the past year. The doctors, the CEO and I said exactly what we have said here today. People out there understand that when you have a complicated birth, you will go to RDH and expect to get the best care. The best care can be delivered at RDH.

Mr CONLAN: That is the first time you have said that, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is not true.

Mr CONLAN: Maybe be a bit more honest with Territorians and put out a media release and say that is the case.

Mr VATSKALIS: Sometimes you have selective hearing; you only hear what you want to hear. You need to look at the statements we have made all along. We have said there will be a birthing centre at Palmerston Hospital, but should there be complications, the patient will be referred to RDH.

Mr CONLAN: Right. With regard to the site - I want to talk about the site of the Palmerston Hospital. In the 20-year hospital blueprint prepared by Ernst & Young, was the preferred site identified for the Palmerston Hospital at its current location? To clarify, what was the preferred site in that?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the report did not identify a location. Generally, they said four areas should be considered.

Mr CONLAN: What were the reasons for choosing the current site?

Mr VATSKALIS: Central, a growing population, and able to service the growing community of Palmerston and the rural community.

Mr Wood: Rural – good name

Mr CHAIRMAN: Mr Moffet.

Mr MOFFET: Regarding the site selection process, we have gone through a process recently which was a formal site selection process. It evaluated many things: obviously, proximity to services, transport routes, capacity for utilities and underground services to get in there, along with a whole host of other factors. DCI led that process on our behalf, and the site selection was made on that basis for that particular parcel of land.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Were there any other reports done? Are you aware of any other reports that identified certain sites around Palmerston?

Mr MOFFET: No, not that I am aware of.

Mr WOOD: Was the site on the corner of Howard Springs Road and the Stuart Highway ever considered?

Mr MOFFET: Not that I am aware of.

Mr WOOD: It makes you wonder - plenty of land on the Stuart Highway.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not only the availability of land, it is also the ability for people to go there if they do not have a car ...

Mr WOOD: Hang on. Yes, Lambrick Avenue has a bus service ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... also the availability of services. The last thing you need is spending \$10m to bring power, water and sewerage to a green site. Also, there is the proximity to other health providers who can refer directly to the hospital, including the clinics and Indigenous clinics as well. It is not just a site, it is how central that site is.

Mr WOOD: I understand that. This site would have been on the Stuart Highway, right next to Palmerston. The original site the CLP picked, which was opposite that, was a heritage site on the other side of the road. I just thought there would have been some advantages, especially for people coming up the track, to come to a hospital on the Stuart Highway. However, it has been picked now. I wondered whether it had been looked at as an option.

Mr CONLAN: Did you get an answer?

Mr WOOD: It was not selected. Lands and Planning do not always talk to local members. A secure care centre is a fine example, INPEX village is another example. Sometimes, local members have at least some knowledge and, sometimes, they are excluded from the discussions, which is a bit sad.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am going to suggest we return to Output 1.1 and questions. Member for Greatorex, you have the call.

Mr CONLAN: Just a question which, essentially, was leading into that anyway. How much community consultation was done with regard to the site?

Mr VATSKALIS: We did not do the selection of the site, it was the department of Lands which did the selection of the site on our behalf. I cannot answer that question.

Mr CONLAN: How does that work? Did the department of Lands say to you: 'This is the site we are picking and this is where the hospital will go'? You, obviously, have some input, because you have mentioned this is about a central location and that type of thing ...

Mr VATSKALIS: They are the parameters we give before we ask them to do the site location; this is where we would like to do it. I said to you before, the last thing I need is to spend most of the money in providing underground services.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Are you able to, or will you indulge and answer, whether there was any community consultation done with regard to that site?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, we did not do the selection. I cannot answer that question ...

Mr CONLAN: No, I know. Was some done? It would have had to come back to Cabinet eventually, wouldn't it?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department of Lands did the selection of the site on the parameters we provided.

Mr MOFFET: I can just add - just getting advice to say when the site selection process occurred, there were about six different parcels of land considered in that proximity. The Department of Lands and Planning had previously set down a reserve around a future hospital site. They took a broader approach, looking at up to six different parcels of land, with a number of issues. I do not believe, member for Nelson, it included the site you are talking about.

Mr WOOD: It is a pity. I am not saying they had to pick that, but it was a very good option that was not included.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, what input do you have as Minister for Health to say: 'Okay, I want to build a hospital here. I am the minister and I am going to build a hospital for the people of Palmerston, for the future and the growth of the Palmerston and rural area'. What input do you have about where that is going to go, what services are available? You have told us you said: 'I want maternity services, I told them in four years when the doors open we are having maternity services'. But do you have any input, or any say as to where it is going to go?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our input is we want a site that is going to service the community, be close to bus lines, an ability to expand, and have all the services available. I cannot tell them I want it here, there, or anywhere. I might want it in the middle of Palmerston, but if there is not land available - suitable land - in the middle of Palmerston, it is not going to be picked up. As I said to you before, the area that is picked up we think is suitable because it is very close to services, it has services already in place, it is close to bus lines, it is very close to the Palmerston Super Clinic, it is going to be close to the Danila Dilba Clinic when it is built, and it is going to be close to the MRI facilities in Palmerston. There are a number of health facilities in a health precinct there, so the hospital is quite suitable to be there. It is also a suitable parcel of land which will allow for the hospital to expand in the future.

Mr CONLAN: All right. We can move on. Member for Nelson, do you have any further questions on that, because I can move on? Not from the output group, just from the line of questioning.

Mr WOOD: No. I believe we need to move along.

Mr CONLAN: Actually, member for Nelson, you did mention the RDH car park. I just want to know what plans, if any, does the government have to address the serious car parking issue at RDH?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said to you before, we have now increased the number of car parking areas. We have identified areas clearly, and there as a map as you enter the car park. We provided brochures and leaflets to give people to tell them exactly where they can park.

We consider other options for staff parking. We even have looked at the way we make appointments for people so they do not come there at 8 am and stay until 1 pm, but actually rotate every 20 or 30 minutes, so there will be a constant movement of vehicles.

The other thing we have is a bus that goes to the Royal Darwin Hospital. Unfortunately, it is not used very well by people; they prefer to use their own car rather than pick up the bus from Casuarina.

We have 1337 parking bays in the RDH. As I said to you before, many times I go there, I find a parking space, even if I have to walk for 500 m. It is not very big a distance, and it is all free of charge. If you go to anywhere else in Australia, you actually cough up some money for hospital parking because they are either privately operated, or revenue raised for the hospital.

Mr CONLAN: That is 1337 current bays?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: How many are you expanding them to?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, that is actually currently, but we are looking at different ways of providing car parking facilities. We have looked at different areas. If we have an ability to expand by another 100 car parking sites now, we are looking at that and how we are going to facilitate the expansion.

When the Royal Darwin Hospital was built, it was not built with any provision for a multistorey car park; it was all flat, open air car park. As the services and the demand increased, the number of people coming and going increased.

What we are also doing now is engage with the Darwin City Council to overview the parking areas - people overstaying or parking in places they should not be parked, or in places for people with disabilities.

We want to ensure people actually come and go, rather than come, leave the car and go somewhere else and come back and pick it up later. There are 1400 parking spaces for a 700-bed hospital. It is sufficient - it is very sufficient. I know people do not like to walk, and I can understand that, especially during the Wet. That is why we are looking at different options.

Mr CONLAN: What are those? Can you outline some of those?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are looking at options of a multistorey car park, privately built and operated. We are looking at providing some other car park areas and utilising a bus shuttle to bring people forward and back. We will look at different options.

Mr CONLAN: With regard to Alice Springs Hospital, the new ED has eaten into a large amount of that car park there.

Mr VATSKALIS: Currently, but my understanding is we are looking at other areas in Alice Springs to relocate the park. Actually, I have information here. Public car parking will be expanded by an additional 60 car parks. Currently, there is a construction compound. The staff car park will be expanded by an additional 53 car parks. Now, it is a biomed car park ...

Mr CONLAN: A what, sorry, car park?

Mr VATSKALIS: Currently, it is a biomedical car park west of the construction compound. Council car parking spaces will increase by 20 in Gap Road in the construction compound. After construction in September 2012, there will be an extra 81 public and 99 staff car parks in the Alice Springs Hospital, compared to the ones before construction.

Mr CONLAN: How many were there before construction, do you know?

Mr MELINO: In total, the accommodation of public car parking pre-existing was 213. That will increase to 314 at the end of construction. For staff, it was 293 staff car parks, and that will increase to 392.

Some of the staff secure parking has already come on stream as of this week in the old gaol precinct, so that has alleviated much of the pressure on some of the public parking which was being utilised by some staff.

Mr CONLAN: So, 213 originally. Sorry, once it is all complete, how many will there be?

Mr MELINO: 314.

Mr CONLAN: 314. Did you say the old gaol has been identified as a site? Is that right?

Mr MELINO: It has opened this week.

Mr VATSKALIS: A secure car park.

Mr MELINO: A secure car park for staff, yes. It is already in use, yes.

Mr CONLAN: For staffing, yes. How will that look – the 314 - where are they going to go? It is pretty tight around there? What land have you identified for ...

Mr MELINO: Yes, of those 314, 145 will be on the current ash precinct. The old existing staff car park will become a public car park - just off Gap Road. That is currently being used as a public car park, albeit with some staff there because of waiting for the old gaol car park. There are about 89 of those, which is no change, and they are the council parking. The public parking along Gap Road will remain unaltered.

We will retrieve some of the parking which is currently being used by the site office. That will be restored once that is complete. There is some additional parking as part of the new ED at the front of the ED - the disabled and short-term drop off. From memory, there are about 15 or 20 car parks there. The big change has been the handing over of the existing secure staff car park to become public.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, with the federal government's Health and Hospitals Fund, what priorities did you, as a Health Minister in the Northern Territory government, identify as a priority in your submission to the federal government's Health and Hospital Fund?

Mr VATSKALIS: One of the first we identified was the Paediatric Ward. I was very happy to receive \$11.9m from the federal government for that. I always thought the Paediatric Ward at Royal Darwin Hospital had to be remodelled. Children come in and are locked in four walls- it is not a very good idea. I have seen Paediatric Wards in other hospitals where they can open up to an open area with playgrounds. We have spoken to - this year I was looking into the redevelopment of the Paediatric Ward. We have also committed to a Starlight Express room in the new ward when it is constructed.

Mr CONLAN: Were these priorities ranked?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Paediatric Ward was top of the rank. Of course, in Alice Springs, the teaching and training facility was high on our agenda and we received \$5.2m for that.

Mr CONLAN: I want to get through a couple of questions quickly. As usual, we are Araldited on one or two output groups. Are there any plans to extend the capacity of St John Ambulance to deliver to the Palmerston and rural area?

Mr VATSKALIS: It has already been expanded by an extra ambulance full-time - 24/7. We are also in negotiations with the Commonwealth government to provide an ambulance and staff to look after the detention centre, and that has been successful. We have a commitment by the Commonwealth.

Mr CONLAN: How many ambulance call-outs have there been at the detention centre since it opened?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not Admitted Patient Services, but I am happy to respond to that.

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: Do you mind repeating the question again?

Mr CONLAN: How many ambulance call-outs have there been to Wickham Point detention centre since it opened?

Mr VATSKALIS: There were 319 call-outs to the detention centre from July 2011 to May 2012.

Mr CONLAN: You would expect that to rise as the population of the centre increases?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, that incorporates both the Darwin Airport Lodge and the Wickham Point detention centre. There are two detention centres - one is at the airport, the other at Wickham Point.

Mr CONLAN: Have you done any projections on future demand for ambulance services at the centre?

Mr VATSKALIS: The centre is currently not full and is not going to expand to the projected number of people. We have, in cooperation with St John Ambulance, identified how many extra people we need, how many cars we will need, and have discussed it with the Commonwealth.

Mr CONLAN: You have done a ...

Mr VATSKALIS: An extra service, yes.

Mr MOFFET: Can I respond?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr MOFFET: I met with the Deputy Secretary of DIAC around this issue because the demand was impacting on some of our capability. We have negotiated a couple of things. One is they have a full-time 24/7 primary care presence out at the Wickham Point facility. That has made a significant difference. They are also required to provide a patient transport vehicle which they are doing now, which has impacted significantly downward on the numbers. What we did negotiate was a two-month agreement as well where they would enhance local ambulance services to cater for the demand that was existing at that time. We have seen a dramatic improvement as a result of those changes to this point.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, I think the member for Nelson had a question on the subject.

Mr WOOD: Just on that, have you looked at having an ambulance service in the rural area? If you are talking about having an ambulance service to provide services to Wickham Point, have you looked at the possibility of an ambulance at Humpty Doo which would provide service for the rural area and, perhaps, Wickham Point?

Mr VATSKALIS: Currently, we have a number of ambulances in Palmerston that service the Palmerston and rural area. As demand increases, especially with the new abattoir in place and the new subdivision in Coolalinga, we will reassess the need for another station there, and we will consider it.

Mr WOOD: The reason I ask, of course, is that Humpty Doo also provides services to Marrakai and that area for fire and police. The one thing we have missing is a permanent ambulance service there. I do not know whether it is on projected forecasts or what.

Mr MOFFET: Member for Nelson, we are actually engaged around planning – the broader Palmerston planning encapsulates patient transport, so we are considering the volumes which are likely to arise from a number of developments out there, as well as the presence of a hospital in the Palmerston township.

Mr WOOD: Will the new prison also have an effect on ambulance services?

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions to Output 1.1, member for Greatorex?

Mr WOOD: For Output 1.1, yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You have the call for Output 1.1 Admitted Patient Services.

Mr WOOD: In regard to renal services, minister, do you have a cost per year for the mobile respite dialysis bus operating throughout the Territory? There is more than one, I think, is there?

Mr VATSKALIS: One. Central Australia.

Mr WOOD: Central Australia? While you are looking there, does it cover all people who require dialysis? It is not just an Aboriginal respite dialysis bus?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr WOOD: It goes to anybody in the area that requires that?

Mr VATSKALIS: The bus is travelling to rural and remote areas - especially when they have festivals or footy competitions – to a central point so people are coming to that.

Mr WOOD: All right.

Mr VATSKALIS: It provides services to anybody who actually needs renal dialysis. The department would not discriminate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It does not matter if they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, if people come to us with renal problems, we provide the same level of service.

Mr WOOD: Just quickly, on page 42 of your annual report, it talks about ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Page 142, you mean?

Mr WOOD: Sorry, 42.

Mr VATSKALIS: Page 42 in the annual report?

Mr WOOD: Page 42 in your annual report. It says the Northern Territory has the highest prevalence of renal disease in Australia. In not too many words, could you say why the Northern Territory has the highest prevalence of renal disease?

Mr VATSKALIS: The highest proportion of Indigenous population with co-morbidities, sick population, and continuous infections contributes to the renal problems.

Mr WOOD: If we were to compare that with, say, rural Western Australia and rural and outback Queensland, do they ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You will find exactly the same situation in north Western Australia, the Kimberleys, and the Pilbara, where you have a significant Indigenous population.

Mr WOOD: Right. The main causes of that occurring?

Mr VATSKALIS: A combination of factors, but recurring infections.

Mr WOOD: But it is lifestyle, is it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Looking at the treatments, Figure 16 on page 43 of your annual report, it is, obviously, still going up if the treatments are still going up. Are there any projections that will see that actually decreasing?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is generational. That is why we have embarked on a campaign about improving lifestyle, improving living conditions, improving water supply - all these have an effect on renal disease. We are trying to change it, but it will take time and effort.

We are the only jurisdiction in Australia which has embarked on a significant campaign about renal disease. Other states have not come to that yet. Some of the states now copy our programs to implement in their areas, such as Western Australia and South Australia, because they can see it is effective.

Mr WOOD: On a different line, I note that palliative care won a prize at the 18th International Congress on Palliative Care in Canada. Can you give us a brief analysis of what that was about?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, we received an award – internationally, in fact - for that. That was what is called the Pepper Program. That has been a very successful program about supporting family members and other carers at home to deliver palliation-style services. We could provide more detail, but it was recognised nationally and internationally as a fantastic program, outreaching and supporting workers providing ordinary care for someone who is in an palliative end-of-life setting.

Mr WOOD: Are we doing more work in relation to Aboriginal communities in relation to palliative care, especially at home or where people live, rather than in the city?

Mr MOFFET: That was substantially what the program was about.

Mr WOOD: That was what it was about?

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Right, okay.

Mr MOFFET: It was particularly targeted to remote Aboriginal communities.

Mr WOOD: This is a question I have not asked for a while, but I will ask it: terminations of pregnancies. It is an important issue for some people. Minister, basically, I am asking have the termination of pregnancy figures risen over the last couple of years? Are there any schemes to try to reduce the numbers?

Mr VATSKALIS: They are static. They are around the 800, but the department always embarks on a campaign about contraception. We are talking to people from a very young age. We run campaigns throughout the Territory. Unfortunately, unplanned pregnancies happen, and women choose to terminate their pregnancy for various reasons.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, and I am not here to make judgments on people. I suppose I am trying to come from a slightly different perspective; that it is about human life and hospitals are about preserving human life. Do we have some programs which encourage people to go through with those pregnancies, which might be very difficult? I am not making any judgments on the reasons why people do that, but are there any proactive programs to reduce the number?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask the doctor to talk about it on medical grounds rather than ethical.

Mr WOOD: I do not think you are going to avoid both. Medical is also ethical.

Dr WATSON: I can talk to that. We are reviewing our termination services in Royal Darwin Hospital at the moment. We have established a very good relationship with the Family Planning Association for them to provide that sort of service and counselling - a much more holistic type of service than we have been able to offer in the past. Hopefully, that will cover some of those issues.

Mr WOOD: I might be able to talk to you later about what those services are?

Dr WATSON: Sure.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I will ask it. I believe it is important. One more question. What is the future of the RDH? The other day we heard from the minister about the cost of providing electricity. We always hear it was built for snow and it is a copy of the one in Canberra. I have heard from the hospital board that it does not have a long life. I partly raise that issue to ask, when you are discussing the building of Palmerston Hospital, did you look at the possibility of not building two hospitals but building one in a more central location for both communities, knowing there must be an end of life for the RDH at some point?

Mr VATSKALIS: RDH is there to stay. It is a huge investment by both the Commonwealth and Territory. It is the primary hospital of the Territory. We know we have problems; the building is old. We actually put in a big effort to renovate wards. We know the services are old. We put a big effort into renovate the services. There is now new equipment that actually utilises less power than we did before. We started with chillers. We are rewiring new distribution boards, electricity boards. We actually are retrofitting the hospital to be a modern hospital – it will be a modern hospital.

The structure is solid. It is probably one of the most solid structures in the Northern Territory, so it can withstand cyclones. It has in the past and it will again.

Demolishing the Royal Darwin Hospital and building a new one would be a waste of resources because it is a perfectly sound building. There would be enormous cost to build a new one to replicate it at Royal Darwin Hospital. It is better to take a staged approach, rather than actually say we will demolish Royal Darwin Hospital and build something somewhere else.

Mr WOOD: Will you ever be able to open a window? If you are looking at cutting energy costs, that is one thing you cannot do with the building. I have very rarely seen a clean outside window on RDH.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I agree with you. That was actually built in the 1980s, so it was a different design. I believe that fresh air is much better than tinned air or preserved air. At the same time, if you cannot control which windows open, then you can lose a great deal of power by refrigerating the suburb. I have teenage sons who actually refrigerated Nightcliff.

Mr WOOD: It was designed earlier than ...

Mr VASKALIS: They leave their windows open and we have the air-conditioner going full blast.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I have that problem too. There are no windows in my building.

Mr VATSKALIS: Power and Water did not complain about this; they were quite happy about this, but I was not. The reality is we take a number of measures to reduce the power consumption by upgrading the facilities, providing new distribution boards, upgrading the chillers and air-conditioning facilities. We factor laundry, coal generation, utilising gas instead of utilising electricity, so there are a number of things we do to reduce the demand ...

Mr WOOD: Do you have a long-term plan that sets out these things; where that hospital is heading in the next 10 years?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, there is a plan in place. We will see if we can further advise on that.

Mr MOFFET: If I could add. Yes, we are currently doing a future facility profile for RDH which takes into account the condition of the existing infrastructure and its future life, and what issues would need attention: the type of beds and the number of beds we would need for the future, and what a staged redevelopment might look like in a master plan for the whole site. We have almost completed that work.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before we move on, the member for Port Darwin had some follow-up questions from earlier.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. My question is to the minister. Minister, you will agree that during the tea break you and I had a quick chat outside the room in reference to some queries I raised earlier on. Basically, if I pursue that matter with you behind closed doors, there is a potential that certain people inside the department may be possibly identified.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, you will agree that during the tea break you and I had a quick chat outside the room in reference to some queries I raised earlier. Basically, if I pursue that matter with you behind closed doors, there is a potential that certain people inside the department may possibly be identified.

Where a person acts in good faith, will you give me a cast-iron guarantee publicly that, as a result of the information I give you in any closed-door briefing, there will be no reprisals or actions against individuals?

Mr VATSKALIS: Both I and the CEO will work with the information we have, and we guarantee nobody is going to be reprimanded, pursued, or persecuted for providing information. We have a look at them and, if they are vital, they reveal something that is not good for the department, we will try to pursue it and rectify it without pursuing the person who disclosed this information.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. Mr Moffet, I have that guarantee from you as well?

Mr MOFFET: Oh, absolutely. There are also public interest disclosure mechanisms as well ...

Mr ELFERINK: I understand that, but ...

Mr MOFFET: We encourage people to come forward with information and we investigate allegations that are put to us.

Mr ELFERINK: Mr Moffet and Mr Vatskalis, you and I will have a discussion at some point.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you. I appreciate your information.

Mr CONLAN: I will get through a couple of others, just on PATS again. I will be happy to put these down on notice for you and you could provide them when you can. We have already asked for the cost of

PATS for the financial year. I would like to know what the amount spent on PATS has been for the last five years, if you can.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is a new question?

Question on Notice No 6.8

Mr CONLAN: That is a new question. What was the actual amount spent on the PATS scheme for the last five years?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is No 6.8, minister.

Question on Notice No 6.9

Mr CONLAN: Okay, another one here. How much of this has been for interstate travel and how much has been for intrastate travel?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is No 6.9.

Question on Notice No 6.10

Mr CONLAN: Is this able to be broken down according to how much was spent on flights, taxi fares and accommodation?

Mr MOFFET: It may be limited going back five years; we can for the current year.

Mr CONLAN: At least for the last 12 months?

Mr MOFFET: We will do our best to provide that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: So for the last 12 months?

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is No 6.10.

Mr CONLAN: Can you break down according to how much was spent on flights, taxi fares and accommodation?

Mr CONLAN: What has been the total number of patients that have accessed the scheme over the past 12 months, and for each year for the previous five years?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, we can probably provide that now if you like. Yes, total number, or did you want to split the between interstate and intrastate?

Mr CONLAN: No, total number.

Mr MOFFET: Starting in 2006-07?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr MOFFET: In 2006-07 it was 23 328; 2007-08 was 22 904; 2008-09 was 24 077; 2009-10 was 26 677 ...

Mr CONLAN: So, 26 677?

Mr MOFFET: Yes. And 2010-11 was 27 648.

Mr VATSKALIS: And year-to-date, 20 961.

Mr MOFFET: That figure includes all patient transport. If you want PATS specifically, I can give you a sub-set.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, please.

Mr MOFFET: The PAT sub-set is from 2006-07 it was 16 486; 2007-08 was 16 404; 2008-09 was 17 828; 2009-10 was 19 389; and 2010-11 was 20 189.

Mr CONLAN: Sorry?

Mr MOFFET: For 2010-11, 20 189.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you, great. What has been the total number of escorts who have been paid for under the scheme for the past 12 months, and for each year for the previous five years?

Mr MOFFET: Did you ask for numbers or costs?

Mr CONLAN: The total number of escorts who have been paid for under the scheme?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, I can provide those if you would like. From 2006-07, 5185; 2007-08, 5672; 2008-09, 6743; 2009-10, 7239; and 2010-11 was 7737.

Mr CONLAN: Is it possible to get a breakdown of the number of interstate trips that have been paid for according to procedure - what they went interstate for?

Mr MOFFET: I am told not by procedure, but I assume - do we have any program level information? We could possibly do program level. We will have a look at what level of information we can reliably provide.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want that as a question on notice.

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.11

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you repeat the question.

Mr CONLAN: Can you please provide the breakdown for the number of interstate trips that have been paid for according to procedure? You said ...

Mr MOFFET: I think you can say clinical program.

Mr CONLAN: Clinical programs? Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.11.

Mr CONLAN: This one, I know, is probably a bit of a bug bear for everyone involved in PATS. What has been the number of flights or other transport for which there has been a 'no show'? Do you have that information?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not with us. Oh yes, no shows - we have them.

Mr MOFFET: We can provide this?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr MOFFET: 'No shows' has quite a broad definition. It includes notified cancellations. In other words, where we, in fact, did not undertake the trip. Then, unknown cancellations, so a genuine 'no show'.

Mr CONLAN: The unknown.

Mr MOFFET: I just have a total, I do not have a breakdown of the unknowns.

Mr CONLAN: Oh, okay.

Mr MOFFET: You want the total numbers?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, please.

Mr MOFFET: The total number for 2006-07 was 2986; 2007-08, 3587; 2008-09, 3409; 2009-10, 3773; and 2010-11 was 4737.

Mr CONLAN: Why do you not break that down? Why do you find it necessary not to split the unknowns and the knowns?

Mr MOFFET: I assume this relates to our data systems. It would not be intentional, it would just be the limitation of the software we operate.

Mr CONLAN: Would it be helpful to know that data?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, sure.

Ms FIELDING: We are actually going through the process of developing a better patient travel data system that will give us much better information around this. The 'no shows' currently includes those notified cancellations where there has not been a lost trip or lost funding. That is one of the elements in a new system rebuild.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, because 4000 is a significant number, isn't it?

Ms FIELDING: It looks quite high, yes. It is an over-reporting.

Mr MOFFET: For all clinics we cancel, for example, are counted in there. Your answer is, yes, it would be helpful for us to differentiate between the two, and we are setting about doing that.

Ms FIELDING: Absolutely.

Mr CONLAN: All right.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.7

Mr VATSKALIS: I have the answer to question on notice No 6.7 the member asked about how many beds we have at Royal Darwin Hospital and how many were caesareans.

The answer is for the period of 1 June to 31 March 2012, there were 1556 births at RDH. Of those, 21% or 328 births were emergency caesarean sections, but we cannot separate them into low risk and emergency. I table that.

Mr CONLAN: That is interesting. Would that data be helpful to you again? Is that part of the software or the programs you have - if you were able to identify emergency caesareans as opposed to planned?

Mr MOFFET: For our planning processes, yes, we go down to a very granular level in planning. The planning we have done for the projections around deliveries and types of deliveries has incorporated that type of information. ETS is helpful.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, you can see my glazed-over look. Are there strategies in place to split that information to find out ...

Mr MOFFET: In relation to PATS?

Mr CONLAN: Did you answer that? I am sorry. Have you answered that?

Mr MOFFET: I was responding to the question on notice we just provided.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. The follow-up question is: would it be helpful to have the unplanned and planned data? I believe you said yes, it would be.

Mr MOFFET: Yes, are we back to PATS?

Mr CONLAN: No, no. That is the question on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I was lost too, Mr Moffet. Questions from the member for Greatorex are currently to the answer provided to the question on notice ...

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is right. Yes.

Mr MOFFET: I took the first question that way but not the second.

Mr CONLAN: On the question on notice, of the 1356 or 21%, you said 328 caesareans - we cannot break that down into planned or unplanned?

Mr MOFFET: We have the emergency numbers, so we would have the balance, I presume, of the planned numbers.

Dr PATERSON: The emergencies would be unplanned.

Mr MOFFET: Yes, so we would be able to split our caesareans into planned and unplanned. We routinely do that, but for the purposes of that answer it was not required so we did not provide ...

Mr CONLAN: No, that is okay. Did we not ask that? Can we put that on notice?

Question on Notice No 6.12

Mr CHAIRMAN: A different question on notice now, which is 6.12. Member for Greatorex, if you could ask that again.

Mr CONLAN: Of that 21%, of the - I believe it was 338 - 21% of caesarean sections how many were emergencies?

Mr MOFFET: My reading of that question was all of those were emergencies. I just saw it flash past, but ...

Mr CONLAN: I thought it said some were planned or unplanned.

Mr CHAIRMAN: A copy of it will be coming back soon. Tabled papers have taken it to copy.

Mr MOFFET: We will have a higher caesarean rate than that. My understanding is 21% - I just saw it go past quickly - was the unplanned or emergency caesarean sections, so it does not include the planned sections.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I suggest, if you have other questions, member for Greatorex, we can return to that question when we get the tabled paper back.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, all right. I thought someone said they were unsure which ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It could be separated into lower risk and emergencies - the combined caesareans. Of combined caesareans - which ones were low risk that went to caesareans and how many were emergencies.

Mr CONLAN: Well, I will have a look at that when it comes back. Have we moved on to another output?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is on its way now.

Mr CONLAN: These are not able to be separated into low risk and emergency. The answer is for the period 1 June to 31 March 2012 there were 1556 births at Royal Darwin Hospital. Of those, 328, or 21%, were emergency caesarean sections. Then it says: 'However, these are not able to be separated into low risk and emergency'.

I am sorry, I do not understand that. Can you explain to me what caesareans were emergencies? Then it says cannot separate into low risk and emergency.

Mr MOFFET: It probably should say low risk or high risk – those are the two categories. We only categorise two.

Mr CONLAN: Would high risk not be an emergency?

Dr WATSON: If you do not mind, we need to consult, sorry. Yes, I believe you would assume that an unplanned caesarean section is an emergency because it has not been planned for. However, it is not clear from that data if they started off as a high-risk labour or a low-risk labour. That is the additional information I believe you are seeking.

Mr CONLAN: Essentially, yes.

Dr WATSON: Which we will need to probably go back to the records for, but we can do that.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, so they were emergency caesarean sections, how many of those actually did begin as a low-risk or unplanned caesarean.

Question on Notice No 6.12

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right, so if you could just say that one more time, member for Greatorex, and that will be No 6.12.

Mr CONLAN: For the period 1 June 2011 to 31 March 2012, how many emergency caesarean sections began as low-risk labour?

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.3

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I would like to table a response to question on notice No 6.3, cost of parts.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions, member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We have now concluded consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Non-Admitted Patient Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are now moving on to Output 1.2, Non-Admitted Patient Services.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, when someone is referred by their GP to a specialist for a surgical consult, do you keep records of the amount of time people must wait before being seen to by a specialist?

Ms FIELDING: The management of wait lists for outpatient services is currently managed on a hospital-by-hospital basis. Some hospitals, for example the smaller hospitals, use manual lists which work well in that local environment. Currently, work is under way across the hospital networks to develop a more standardised reporting system that will allow for benchmarks to be developed over time.

Mr CONLAN: What plans are under way? What are we doing about it?

Ms FIELDING: We will develop a standardised reporting system that will allow for benchmarks on referrals in for an outpatient referral, the time the referral is received, and how long the person has waited for, as part of an outpatient management system.

Mr CONLAN: Can you just take us through how that works or what that will actually look like? You can understand that people, obviously, who are referred, who need a specialist, are very concerned about the wait times and ...

Mr MOFFET: When actually setting up a system one of the complexities – we have an elective surgery policy, for example, that sets out the time from which a specialist has referred them for elective surgery through until the time they have surgery. It is a simple concept, but then it gets quite complex in people being ready for care or deferring surgery. A similar thing would apply for an outpatient waiting list.

We would need to develop a system that not only catches the time of referral and the time seen, but the journey the patient has through that process as well, which sometimes means they are not actually part of a waiting time frame because they have excluded themselves from being referred - in the same way for elective surgery you become not ready for care at certain points in time if you are not ready for your surgery.

There are elements to it that mean we need to properly build a system, have consistent data definitions, and are able to report that information consistently and reliably. Currently, we have manual systems that do not allow that to occur.

Mr CONLAN: When is a waiting time for elective surgery actually calculated from?

Ms FIELDING: Elective surgery ...

Mr CONLAN: Is it from the point of referral, or is it from when they are first ...

Ms FIELDING: The elective surgery waiting time structure is quite nationally defined, so there are clear national definitions around that. A referral for elective surgery wait list is based on a referral from a doctor to the surgery list. That is very clearly defined, and there is quite a tight parameter around that. On referral to the specialist, who might see the person in an outpatient clinic, make a decision the person needs to have surgery, and the referral goes on to the surgery wait list at that time.

Mr CONLAN: Do you have any data on what the current wait lists are for ...

Ms FIELDING: Elective surgery?

Mr CONLAN: ... elective surgeries?

Mr VATSKALIS: Despite all the issues about waiting lists for elective surgery, they are looking really good. They have been going down, and most people in the Territory receive their elective surgery within the recommended time.

In 2011, in Category 1, 80% of the patients had their surgery within the recommended time, and that was improved from 79% baseline. In 2012, the target is 83%.

For Category 2, 64% of people had their surgery within the recommend time. The target time is 59%.

For Category 3, 85% of people had their surgery within the recommended time where the target has been 83%.

Of course, I would be glad to table the Elective Surgery Waiting List Patients and Percent Overview, Mr Chairman. I also table the Completed Elective Surgery Procedures June 2009 to 2011 and the Elective Surgery Admissions and Medium Waiting Time. They all go down. That is not only because of the blitz that was done a few years ago, but because we now have better planning. The operating theatres, now they are renovated, are working better, and we are better organising the elective surgeries. I am happy for Ms Fielding to talk further to that.

Ms FIELDING: Patients are waiting shorter times right across the categories in the Northern Territory. The impacts of these have included better data management, a focus on the wait list, implementation of a case management approach for people who miss their appointments, and the increase of a number of

specialists from RDH who are taking on visiting roles across Katherine and Alice Springs Hospitals, additional resources to theatre scheduling and, of course, planning for additional theatre capacity in Alice Springs and RDH.

Mr VATSKALIS: Our median waiting time in 2010-11 was better than any other jurisdiction but Western Australia and Queensland. We come third in Australia in median waiting times, so we are doing really well.

Mr CONLAN: Is it an accurate picture of how long people, after all that - those three questions we have asked, and the answer provided - does it actually give an accurate picture of the amount of time people are actually waiting for their surgery?

Mr MOFFET: Yes. The data is really reliable in this area. Our clinicians and theatre managers have actually done a fantastic job in the last 18 months or so in getting organised around the data, the scheduling, and the surgical capability required. We are also expanding theatre capability in the near future as well. Yes, the data is very reliable and it is actually a good news story. We will have more surgery done this year than ever before in the NT.

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: That has improved in the last 10 years. In 2001, 36% of the people on the waiting list were overdue for their operation. That has gone down to 20% in March 2012. That is a significant improvement.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. I am happy to hand over to you now, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, member for Greatorex. Before I start, I would like to say some good words about the department. Sometimes, the Department of Health gets a lot of knocking. I watched a show last Sunday night called *The English Surgeon* about an English doctor who goes to Kiev and helps a Ukrainian neurosurgeon. When you see the conditions they live under - and it is a western country - and the waiting lists and the lack of facilities which means many people die when, perhaps, they should not, we have to keep ourselves in perspective. We live in a pretty good place and we are pretty lucky, really. We might have a whinge, but there are a many other people a lot worse off than us. I thought I needed to say good about our health department.

Minister, can your department give some idea of the treatment given to the 6.2% increase in emergency department attendances? This is in the annual report at page 47. It has gone up quite substantially. The other question, if I can put the two together, so you can look into the figures: do we keep a check of the number of people who come back time and time again within 12 months? In other words, do we have figures that actually tell us whether we have new people attending, against regular people attending?

Mr VATSKALIS: The emergency department in the Northern Territory is really working overstretched. To give you an example, in 2001 we had 38 000 people come to the emergency department in Royal Darwin Hospital. In 2010-11, the number went to 62 000 people - it doubled. In Alice Springs, in 2001, there were 31 000 people; in 2010-11 it went to 41 000 people, so it is really overstretched.

We have done much to improve flow through the emergency department, with triaging, extra beds, short stay, but people keep on coming. One of the problems we have is people who come to the emergency department come because they cannot access a GP. In a case where we have an epidemic in Darwin or in another city, people have to book to wait two, three, and four days. A family with children who are very sick will go to the emergency department. That has been alleviated a bit by the super clinic in Palmerston and the after-hours clinic in Palmerston. About 25 000 have not gone to the emergency department because they have gone to the super clinic. With the new Palmerston Hospital, it will be even better.

However, we have seen lately private clinics with more GPs opening in Darwin. Of course, we have spoken to the Commonwealth government for a new super clinic in the northern suburbs. That will take a lot of pressure out of the emergency department in the Royal Darwin Hospital.

We cannot tell if the same person turns up more than one time in the emergency department. However, from now on we will be able to do that because, under the new rules put by the Commonwealth, we are required to do so.

Mr WOOD: Are you also able to analyse which treatments, or which requests are trivial. Do not get me wrong there, but 'I have a cough and a cold', as against this person who has a heart condition?

Mr VATSKALIS: A person who comes in the emergency department with a problem with the heart, are seen immediately, 100%.

Mr WOOD: Yes, that is right,

Mr VATSKALIS: Category 2 starts slowing down emergency; Categories 4 and 5 are seen within a prescribed time, but that time can be up to two hours. If you have a cough, you will have to wait, because somebody who has had a traffic accident or heart attack goes in first. Categories 4 and 5 should not be in the emergency department, or at least most of them should be in a GP - but they cannot access a GP; that is why they are there.

Mr WOOD: Do you analyse those patients who come in with that Category 4 and 5 to see whether that is increasing?

Mr MOFFET: We look at all our trend data in our ED planning, yes, we do.

Mr WOOD: I suppose the question I am asking is - it is a bit of a double-edged question because I am going to get to the super clinic in Palmerston. If the super clinic at Palmerston is operating, in theory, 24 hours a day then, surely, those Categories 4 and 5 - or whatever it is - should be going down at RDH because people should be able to access those clinics.

The word I have had from people - and I have not been to the super clinic. Minister, it is still hard to find if you come from the rural area; it is not well signposted. Palmerston people might know where it is. However, what I have from people is it is not open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. People have gone there and it is shut. Is it shut and, if it is shut, why? If it was open, surely that would reduce the numbers of people being admitted to the Royal Darwin Hospital who do not need to go there?

Mr VATSKALIS: In spite of the fact it is in a different output, I will answer that. The super clinic is open between 8 am in the morning and 6 pm in the afternoon, five days a week. On Saturdays and Sundays, it is open between 8 am in the morning until 12 noon. The after-hours clinic is open 6 pm at night until 8 am in the morning, seven days a week.

What we are trying to do, because we have two different entities - the super clinic and the after-hours clinic - is working to actually incorporate it into one, so people go to the same building 24/7 - and that will happen.

Mr WOOD: It is my understanding people thought that getting a super clinic which would, basically, cut off the reason why they have had to go to Darwin hospital. Everyone gets sick at 9 pm; that is when they get sick and that is why people were looking for that service.

Mr VATSKALIS: The super clinic and the after-hours clinic are actually based in the same area, and the after-hours clinic is very clearly marked. We have lines on the ground now that actually say where to go.

Mr WOOD: Well, that was the feedback I was getting

Mr VATSKALIS: I was getting that about a year ago but, since then, I have not had a complaint about not being able to find out where the after-hours clinic is.

Mr WOOD: You are saying we have these super clinics, and I see a 6% increase in non-admitted patients. Are they actually doing what they were prescribed to do: reduce the number? Should this number be reducing and, if not, why not?

Mr VATSKALIS: When they were together, super clinic is 24/7. With the Palmerston clinic, we work with the CDU and Flinders to actually incorporate both clinics in one building.

Mr WOOD: The impression I am getting is it is not making a difference.

Mr MOFFET: Can I just respond generally? Nationally, there is quite a significant level of demand on emergency departments. We see it more so here in the Territory because of the level of chronic disease that affects Territorians; it is higher than other jurisdictions. It is fair to say good primary care - a good number of GPs in the community setting - avoids some of the ED attendances. We work with the Commonwealth to encourage them to get as many GPs into the community setting as possible.

We have seen some reduction in the proportion, year on year, the last couple of years, of triage Category 5. But, it is not significant. The reality is, there is a significant amount of chronic disease and emergency department presentations that continue to challenge us. But, we need to continue to work with the Commonwealth and the GP sector to ensure we get as many services in the community settings as we possibly can.

The super clinic itself has enhanced its services over the last year or so. We have gone to Saturdays, and we have ensured we have provided the 6 pm to 8 am service every single night, so it is there every single night. We have incorporated this urgent care after-hours service into the super clinic setting, so it is just one entry, and a one-stop shop that is supported by one team. We are looking at continuing to expand that service so it will be 24/7, so it will include the only gap it has at the moment, which is between 12 noon and 6 pm on a Saturday and a Sunday. We are currently working with the super clinic operators on that.

Mr WOOD: If someone in the rural area gets a heart murmur - and I am known to have that - and it always occurs somewhere between 2 am and 4 am and you start to panic, where do you go? Palmerston or do you go to RDH?

Mr MOFFET: Obviously, you make a call about whether you are going to call an ambulance, if it is an emergency situation. I guess if you are transporting yourself, you would go to the super clinic but, if it is an emergency situation that needs emergency care, you would call an ambulance and they would transport you to the Darwin ED.

Mr VATSKALIS: If you get a chest pain, go to the emergency department.

Mr WOOD: At RDH?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

The issue with the GPs is a big issue. I have some friends who opened a clinic - there are seven doctors - and they see 320 people a day. They bulkbill - full bulkbilling - 320 people a day. That gives you an understanding of what a demand there is for GPs.

Mr WOOD: My office is right next to one. Okay, thanks.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Does that conclude consideration of Output 1.2?

Output 2.1 – Community Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move onto Output 2.1, Community Health Services.

Mr CONLAN: I want to touch on the prisons, minister. I understand you have recently taken a decision not to renew the contracts of either Alice Springs or Darwin prison for the provision of primary healthcare services by an external provider. Rather, the decision has been made to in-source these services. Can you just take us through the logic, or the decision-making time line, or reasons for this?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you need a moment, minister, for the witnesses to change?

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mr MOFFET: We provide a range of services to prisoners - primary care service that is currently contracted through International SOS. We also provide, at a department level, aged and disability, mental health, and drug and alcohol services. So, there is a spectrum of services provided.

We have recently taken a decision to return the prison primary healthcare service to the department for a number of reasons: (1) it is a far more effective and value-for-money-driven service; and (2) because in quality systems we think we can deliver an appropriate level of quality in the future and current demand than with an outsourced model. That is probably it in a nutshell.

Mr CONLAN: You have said, as I understand, perhaps a cost saving. But you say a more efficient service. Do you feel the department can provide a better level of care than the current contractor?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, from a clinical governance perspective, as well as leveraging off the rest of our systems, it is much easier for a large department - with the complexity of care we are seeing in a prison setting - to provide that care rather than through an outsource contractor.

Mr VATSKALIS: In addition to that, with the significant number of prisoners being Indigenous, there will be a continuation of care. When they leave prison they go back to remote communities where the system there works together with the Health Department. Also, people who have worked for and are employed by the Health Department are more culturally aware of the needs of Indigenous prisoners than people who might come with a short-term contract from down south or overseas.

Mr CONLAN: How far advanced is the transition process? The contract ceases on 30 September?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, that is right.

Mr CONLAN: So ...

Mr MOFFET: We will commence operation on 1 October. We will have a transition plan through the September period to ensure there is a progressive and continuous take-up of services.

Mr CONLAN: You are totally confident you will be able to pick up the service as of 1 October?

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: What will be the staffing arrangement for each prison with regard to ...

Mr MOFFET: Essentially, we will be emulating the current service models. We have a staffing arrangement that is really the agreed arrangement for the services required for that population. We will be picking that up initially. We are incorporating an additional health worker and a stronger clinical governance. There are medical leadership, nursing leadership, elements to the service but they will be coming out of our remote services branch.

Mr CONLAN: Will they be recruited from the within the department, or will you be sourcing some of these staff externally?

Mr MOFFET: We will, obviously, need to recruit new staff, but some staff may choose to come internally. We are ensuring we use our remote health management infrastructure. We have a very large remote health team which has clinical nursing governance and other systems wrapping around it. We will use those systems to support the prison health service.

Mr CONLAN: Has advertising commenced?

Ms WALFORD: Nikki Walford, Acting Executive Director Health Services. The recruitment process is well under way and the ads should be in the paper in the next couple of weeks.

Mr CONLAN: Any further on prisons? I have several ...

Mr WOOD: Not prisons, no.

Mr CONLAN: I will move off prisons. I want to go to the Sanderson super clinic. I want to understand the process for selecting the site at Sanderson, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have been very strong advocates for a super clinic in the northern suburbs - specifically in the northern suburbs. We wanted a clinic that would provide comprehensive services to the population that most needs it. We looked at different areas.

We were also approached by a proponent who has similar operations in Queensland and South Australia. We made different suggestions to the proponent. We suggested a site at the hospital. He was very reluctant to accept the site at the hospital because he considered people coming to the hospital will bypass the super clinic and go straight to the emergency department, which defies the purpose. We are looking at different areas around Darwin from both private and public.

The Commonwealth made it clear it would support the concept of a super clinic. It also said the \$5m it had promised to begin the works will be spent in Darwin, and it wanted the government to be partners with it

by providing land. We looked at land around Darwin that was both suitably located and of a sufficient size, and the Sanderson site was a proper size - very central and specific and near where the socioeconomic conditions are favouring a bulkbilling super clinic.

Mr CONLAN: Again, was there community consultation around this site?

Mr VATSKALIS: Currently, there is a proposal for rezoning that goes for a period of time. That will provide the opportunity for people to express any opinions during the rezoning process. That is the first step before the land is provided for a proposed super clinic.

Mr CONLAN: Will the model of the Sanderson super clinic be the same as the Palmerston Super Clinic - the hours – 8 am until 6 pm?

Mr VATSKALIS: Similar, in a concept – no, it will be longer hours. The proponent has come with a model that will be between 8 am and 10 pm, but that is still under negotiation with the Commonwealth.

Mr CONLAN: What is the logic behind that?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the model they are using in other states and they want to replicate it in the Territory.

Mr CONLAN: Help me understand, please? Why would Sanderson super clinic, which is, essentially, a stone's throw from RDH, be operating longer than Palmerston Super Clinic which ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The Palmerston Super Clinic was actually building up to the full 24 hours, seven days a week. It started slow and is building up to it. This one is a different model, in that the proponents are a private business that operates in other states and want to replicate the model here in the Territory. It comes down to economic viability. We believe with the number of doctors and the operating hours they can actually make it work.

Mr CONLAN: Is there any data on how many people arrive at the Palmerston Super Clinic, and then are sent to either RDH or to the 24-hour emergency clinic next door, in other words.

Mr VATSKALIS: A total of 8% of people who attend the after-hours service in Palmerston are referred to the Royal Darwin Hospital

Mr CONLAN: 8% that go to Palmerston?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, that is the after hours.

Mr CONLAN: I find it interesting that people of Sanderson are getting a fairly advanced service and people of Palmerston ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember that the after-hours clinics in Palmerston operates from 6 pm to 8 pm, now since ...

Mr CONLAN: The after-hours service?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, the after-hours service.

Mr CONLAN: 6 pm to 8 pm - two hours.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, 6 pm to 8 am ...

Mr CONLAN: You said 8 pm.

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, 8 am. Since 2008, they have seen 36 000 people. In the past 12 months they had about 12 699 representations - 35 clients a night. That is a 17% increase on the previous year. Out of this number of people, about 8% are sent to the Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: It is interesting modelling, that is all. I would just like to know if that modelling available? Obviously, you envisage the Sanderson super clinic will be a lot busier than the Palmerston Super Clinic.

Mr VATSKALIS: Considering the Palmerston Super Clinic caters for about 30 000 people, plus the rural, the northern suburbs super clinic would probably cater for about 50 000, 60 000, or 70 000 people.

Mr CONLAN: You have RDH as well, though.

Mr VATSKALIS: But, that is the point. I would rather see people going to a GP than turn up to the emergency department.

Mr MOFFET: If I could just add? The Commonwealth super clinic program – a Commonwealth administered program - has a number of principals in it. They went through an open tender process and did not get any outcomes from it, but they have now had a proponent approach them. They have yet to make a decision about the super clinic outcome. One of the principals is comprehensive primary healthcare, multidisciplinary focus, having strong diagnostic capability and access in extended hours of service. What is proposed at Sanderson would be consistent with those principals, but that is a decision for the Commonwealth around what they would contract for.

Mr CONLAN: Who makes that decision - the Commonwealth?

Mr VATSKALIS: In combination with the proponent.

Mr CONLAN: Sanderson is one of the key seats, isn't it, in the battleground for the 2012 election? Sorry ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, I would rather have it in Casuarina, in my electorate, rather than Sanderson.

Mr CONLAN: That is another key seat.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no. The decision was actually where it is needed most and where the land developed.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. You gave me some information - and it is probably on *Hansard*, so I can find that - regarding how many patients at Palmerston Super Clinic, after-hours clinic, has seen. I just want to ask about the funding arrangements around the Palmerston Super Clinic. Can you take us through the funding arrangements with Palmerston Super Clinic, please?

Ms WALFORD: I can speak to that. In the Palmerston Super Clinic, there is no recurrent funding provided to that arrangement. Obviously, we are contracted to the Commonwealth for that particular service, and we subcontract to a consortium, which is Flinders/Charles Darwin, FCD. They have a range of reporting requirements but we do not provide any recurrent funding to them.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, when can the Palmerston Super Clinic expect to receive bulkbilling for all patients like the model proposed at Malak?

Mr VATSKALIS: Bulkbilling is provided currently for DVA, Pensioner and Carer Concession card holders, Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders, and people under 16 years old. Other clients might be bulkbilled at the discretion of clinicians.

Mr CONLAN: So to answer the question?

Mr VATSKALIS: The proposal in Malak is a decision by the operator to bulkbill everybody.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. A question that has just come to hand, minister. Does the Northern Territory government, in any way, fund Congress in Alice Springs? Does any funding at all go to Congress?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we provide certain funding to Congress, yes.

Mr CONLAN: Happy for Gerry, if you would like to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any questions on Output 2.1, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, in relation to school dental check-ups, a little while ago, on 8 July last year, you wrote a letter to me regarding the change to procedures for dentists operating

at schools. Now, you have said that a parent or guardian is now required to attend each dental appointment with their child. Has the department any statistics to show whether there are fewer children now being treated by dentists than there were before the change of process occurred?

Mr MOFFET: I am happy to respond to that. We have had an initial level of analysis. We committed the policy implementation to an analysis in the first 12 months. That analysis indicates there is no reduction in numbers, but I have asked for a further analysis in partnership with the department of Education around specifically whether there were any individual vulnerable children who have not had services. We are currently doing that analysis in partnership with Education.

Mr WOOD: One of the areas which concerned me was how this operated out bush. The Menzies School of Health has a program called the Strong Teeth for Little Kids project. I am wondering whether, in that project operated for preschool children in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities, were parents also required to attend?

Mr MOFFET: We will have to confirm. I would not think so because it is a separate program, but we will have to confirm that.

Mr WOOD: Why would parents be required to attend this oral program to prevent tooth decay, and not the one you are providing in schools presently?

Mr MOFFET: I will have to get more information on that program regarding Menzies' operating method. The Parental Participation Policy was based on getting parents involved in care. It is, to some extent, based on best practice around Australia about getting more family-driven care. The outcomes demonstrate if parents are involved in care, you get far better outcomes long term. However, raise a valid point, which is while we are going through implementation of that policy, are there any vulnerable children we need to be sensitive to and ensure we have some flexibility with.

Mr WOOD: I am making sure, if there is a process which says we need to have the parents there or the parents' consent, then it should apply across the board. I am just asking if there is a difference between what you are doing and the requirements of the Menzies School of Health? Menzies School of Health has terrific people; I am not knocking it. I am just making sure it is even.

Ms WALFORD: We will confirm that, but my understanding is it is a parent or a carer. Possibly in the Indigenous setting where you have other support mechanisms within the school, there would be another carer present, so it could be slightly different for that purpose. A teacher could be present in an urban primary health care setting, but with the challenges of what a teacher covers, that is why the parental rule came in.

Mr WOOD: I gather the reasons, from the minister's letter, why you need a parent is because of a particular incident where an unaccompanied child experienced post-treatment complications, then legal advice was sought regarding the duty of care of oral health staff and school staff. That is where this change of process came from, I understand. I am saying if it applies to all the schools in the Northern Territory, does it apply also to other bodies like the Menzies School of Health which is doing work on oral health as well? Do they need to ensure a parent gives approval for that? I am not knocking the programs; I am just seeing if it applies across the board. If you could find out for me.

Mr MOFFET: Yes. It relates to the mechanism for informed consent. Being a different agency, they will have a different mechanism for informed consent. We have changed ours in response to that issue, but also in making sure we maximise parental education and parental participation in children's care as well.

Mr WOOD: My original concern was whether – because now parents have to attend, and a lot of parent work - there was a drop-off in the ability of children to get the dental service they used to get.

Mr MOFFET: That is exactly what I have asked to be evaluated.

Mr WOOD: Okay. You would be able to come back with that?

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Do you want to make that a question or just leave it as is?

Mr CHAIRMAN: What is the time frame for that? Is it a question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: It cannot be a question on notice because it is still in negotiation.

Mr MOFFET: It will be two or three months before we can.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I recommend just getting a briefing, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes, all right. The other question is in relation to the four-wheel-drive mobile dental truck, which will be based out of Alice Springs and service up to 8000 people. I asked the same question about the renal dialysis vehicle. Is it just for Aboriginal people?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr WOOD: Will it also be providing services to cattle stations in the area and other remote communities?

Mr MOFFET: Can we just take that one on notice and we will provide that information?

Mr WOOD: Okay. Question, Mr Chairman, do you want a number for that or will I just go ...

Question on Notice No 6.13

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you just repeat the question, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: In relation to the special purpose four-wheel-drive mobile dental truck which is based out of Alice Springs and meant to service up to 8000 people, will it provide service not only to Aboriginal communities but all other communities; for instance, cattle stations, in that area?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I explained before with the renal dialysis trucks, or any service, it is not exclusive for any particular group, only a specific need. They will be for all the population. That will be my clear direction to the department, unless there is particular need for a group to provide special services, this will be for the whole population. There are no divisions in the department.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That was question No 6.13.

Ms WALFORD: Can I say something? With the oral health services, obviously, there is a certain range of criteria for the population to meet to be eligible for services. Those rules would generally apply across the Northern Territory but, obviously, in those remote regional areas if a client came was in pain and needed immediate attention, then the service will provide that - just to qualify that.

Mr WOOD: Are you saying that the service is only provided to certain people, and only other people when they are in pain?

Ms WALFORD: No, I am saying there is eligibility – sorry.

Mr WOOD: What is the purpose of this dental truck, just to provide for people who are in pain or just a general check-up?

Ms WALFORD: No, it is a general check-up, but the oral service in general is provided to a range of client groups, and there is eligibility criteria for that.

Mr WOOD: What is the eligibility criteria?

Ms WALFORD: That is all linked with a healthcare card, and also if a client is in need and there is a level of pain involved in that, then the oral service will attend as well.

Mr MOFFET: There is a differentiation between adults and children in this space, nationally and in the Territory as well. For adults there are eligibility criteria. For children, all children up to the end of school age are provided with dental care free of charge.

Mr WOOD: Right.

Mr VATSKALIS: You would not go to the truck for major dental work, you go only for a check-up and if you are in pain.

Mr WOOD: That is right. However, I thought if it is going to travel around all of Central Australia, and many people on outback communities do have problems accessing dental care, then I hoped this would have been for everybody. The reason I was not sure whether it was provided just for certain people is because Karl Hampton made a statement saying:

The Minister for Central Australia, Karl Hampton, today joined with the federal Minister for Indigenous Health, Warren Snowdon, to welcome a special purpose four-wheel-drive mobile dental vehicle set to deliver high-quality oral healthcare.

I was wanting to ensure that particular vehicle was available for all people anywhere in that area, no matter whether they were Indigenous or not. That is the reason I was a bit concerned when the statement came from the federal minister for Indigenous Health, not the federal minister for Health.

Was there any criteria that this is only to be used for Indigenous people, and not non-Indigenous people, in that area?

Mr MOFFET: No, our program makes it available to remote community populations, whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

Mr WOOD: That is fine, but just when I read this, I thought, um ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Many times we launch programs the federal minister for Health would not be able to come, and we do it on her behalf.

Mr WOOD: That is all right. I have been out to stations where people have felt there has been a service to some people in the area, and not a service to them, especially cattle stations. That is something we should try to avoid.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you. That is all my questions in that area.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Port Darwin, any questions to Output 2.1?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, just a couple of issues. Minister, earlier, after your opening statement, I raised the issue about some information provided to OATSIH by Remote Health. Have you had any further briefing on that since I raised the issue three hours ago at all?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr ELFERINK: No, okay, that is fine.

Mr VATSKALIS: You have some information?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, I did get a brief. We contacted the director of OATSIH, and she has confirmed there is no matter they have concerns about in relation to the department's acquittal of funds, and none that has been referred anywhere else. That is consistent with my meeting with her.

Mr ELFERINK: Sure, that is what you said before. Yes, all right, no worries. That answer goes to the quality of information I have received. However, there are still other issues arising out of it. Mr Moffet, have you had any other briefings in relation to the matters I have raised in relation to this particular ...

Mr MOFFET: No, I have not.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, that is cool. I will take it up with the minister and probably you at some stage afterwards. My next question relates to Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. Minister, you said before you provide funding to it. What is the exposure - how much do we provide?

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice is between \$6m and \$6.5m a year.

Mr ELFERINK: \$6m and \$6.5m a year? Are you aware there seems to have been an investigation by the federal Department of Health and Ageing in relation to expenditure in Aboriginal Congress?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have been alerted to that fact at a recent meeting with Mr Warren Snowdon.

Mr ELFERINK: It is reported in *Alice Springs News Online*:

... the News has obtained a letter from the department's Assistant Secretary, Garry Fisk, to Congress chairperson, Helen Kantawarra, dated 23 April 2012, which we understand is far more comprehensive in relation to the ... 'questions, queries, and concerns' than was the meeting.

An audit commissioned by the department suggests that 'in excess of \$2m' could potentially be recovered from Congress, says Mr Fisk. He outlines apparent irregularities with the charging of a 20% administration fee for each project; transfers of funds between projects; the use of a corporate credit card by CEO Stephanie Bell; unauthorised overseas travel; and the failure to return unspent projects funds to the department.

Minister, have we had any cause to look into the Territory's funding in relation to Congress?

Mr MOFFET: No, we have had no cause. We have actually done a recent review of our Safe and Sober program, which is a fairly substantial program with Congress. The evaluation of that has come back very positive. We also fund them for primary care work, obviously, in remote settings. They auspice a range of communities. We have had no issues of acquittal or governance. We have been briefed by DoHA in relation to this matter. We are maintaining a watching brief, but we have advised we have no concerns as at current.

Mr ELFERINK: What is the quality of the acquittal process? When a matter is acquitted, is it simply then signing off on an acquittal, or is there an audit process in place?

Mr MOFFET: Perhaps the CFO can add to this. Obviously, we have acquittal requirements; we receive reports. There are also requirements for agencies through contract arrangements to have independent audit verification themselves. I might ask Ian Pollock to comment further on that.

Mr POLLOCK: Various NGOs the department funds all have different service level agreements with milestones the program areas check against as a condition of current funding each year. The Congress specific ones we would have to take on notice and provide that back to you. As the Chief Executive pointed out, there are audit requirements depending on the structure of the organisation. They have to comply in their own right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want to put that as a question on notice, member for Port Darwin?

Mr ELFERINK: Not yet, but I might return to it. I do not want to start.

Mr MOFFET: Can I just add? Regarding the Safe and Sober program review, that is a multimillion dollar program. We have had both an internal and an external audit – a very comprehensive audit - done on that particular program which has been very positive. There have been no concerns at all.

Mr ELFERINK: So, out of the \$6m, how much is the Safe and Sober program?

Ms WALFORD: That is over \$2m.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, so that is a \$2m project. When you say over ...

Ms WALFORD: Between \$2m and \$2.5m.

Mr ELFERINK: So, there is another \$3.5m to \$4m in other programs. I take it from you, Mr Pollock, you cannot say with certainty what the acquittal processes are for that other \$3.5m to \$4m, setting aside the fact there has been an external audit on the Safe and Sober program.

Minister, clearly, you have been aware of this review, and the federal report appears to be throwing up some serious issues. Have you sought any other briefings in relation to this? When did you become aware of these potential problems?

Mr VATSKALIS: I became aware of this last week when the Minister for Indigenous Health, Warren Snowdon, brought it to my attention. I advised him my department would work with him very closely on any issues he raised, and I invited him to speak to my department to bring these issues up and discuss them at an official level.

Mr ELFERINK: Have you asked for any further audit to be done? Your own Health Department will have a quarterly audit committee that will look into ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly, Warren Snowdon's department will bring this issue to the attention of my department. The department will then make a decision as to what kind of audit it will make.

Mr ELFERINK: A several million dollar exposure, would you not be interested ...

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the reason I said my department will cooperate with the federal department in that investigation, if an investigation ...

Mr ELFERINK: The federal department is not looking into your expenditure; it is looking into its expenditure.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, and we find out – well, if they provide information on irregularities with our expenditure, we will certainly look into it too.

Mr ELFERINK: Mr Moffet, you have an audit committee as part of your government structure, I imagine?

Mr MOFFET: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: It is quarterly, as per the Treasurer's Directions?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, Audit and Risk Committee.

Mr ELFERINK: Has the Audit and Risk Committee cast its mind to the broader components of monies spent by way of grants by other organisations? If so, has it looked at this issue or discussed this issue, to date?

Mr MOFFET: To answer your last question first; this is a recent issue which emerged last week. The audit committee has not received any information nor conducted any activity in that space. We have been building our governance capacity for the last 18 months or so around a much stronger risk base approach. We have made some changes around ensuring we get a single audit provider that has a more detailed and health literate approach to auditing.

The NGO contract framework, for example, we are currently developing came out of audit process recognition that we could improve our NGO contract management in the system – contracting and, engagement with our NGO service partners. We have a timetable of our audit program - NGO auditing for next year - but we have not had any specific audit this financial year of our NGO sector.

Mr ELFERINK: So I am clear, beyond talking to the federal government department, the Northern Territory government, essentially, has not done anything or activated any process of audit or review in relation to the other \$3.5m?

Mr MOFFET: To come to that matter specifically, yes, we have. We have conducted an initial review. I have received initial advice from various program areas to say they are satisfied with the level of acquittal and the governance in relation to our funds. I have also tasked our Audit and Risk Director to become more involved and familiarise himself with the issues or concerns the federal department is raising, and use that information to further look at our processes. That is currently on foot.

Obviously, it is Tuesday today, there was a process yesterday. It is unfolding this week as we are talking. I emphasise we have no current concerns but are maintaining a close watching brief.

Mr ELFERINK: We have clearly come full circle because we are back at the quality of acquittal question - whether or not the acquittal process is nothing more than a letter or a notification saying: 'We have acquitted the money as we said we would spend it'. Yes, rubber stamp, off it goes. This then leads me back to the question on notice, Mr Chairman, which I have to ask.

Question on Notice No 6.14

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, are you satisfied with the quality of acquittals in relation to Territory expenditure to the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress? Do you intend to investigate the Territory exposure further in relation to issues surrounding the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress? What is the quality of the acquittal process, with a full description in relation to the Territory government's granting of monies to the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.14.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, of the money that is provided to the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, I imagine it is a series of grants for specific programs, or is there some discretionary component built into it?

Mr MOFFET: I would not think we would have any discretionary component. It is all targeted to a direct program and service delivery.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay.

Ms WALFORD: For the remainder of the funds outside the Safe and Sober it is very specific programmatic funding. It goes down to maybe a funding for a particular employee, a health worker, and it is acquitted at that level. There is a range of different programs - quite a few, up to about 20 - that have quite specific deliverables.

Mr ELFERINK: Then again, we come back to the issue of the quality of the policing. The inference, of course - and this is more of an observation than anything - in this article, as I have read it so far, is there may be irregularities, which is why it is the quality of acquittal I am asking questions about. If there are irregularities, then I would have some concern about the Territory's exposure.

Getting back to the issue of a 20% administration fee for each project, are the projects we fund subject to a similar administration fee?

Mr MOFFET: We might have to take that on notice. I do not know that we have a particular admin fee. To be honest, a 20% admin fee or overhead charge is quite a low charge in our general contracting framework. A 20% overhead charge would not be, on the face of it, concerning for us. We operate on a higher margin in the remote sector.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, so basically ...

Mr MOFFET: Ian, did you want to comment as CFO on that issue?

Mr POLLOCK: Just to confirm that 20% is low. The direct costs of delivering programs in remote areas is only part of the costs to the whole-of-government for the Northern Territory. When we are providing services on behalf of others, we have to build in all those costs that are not associated with a direct service delivery; that is, the salaries of the medical officers in a remote area. There are the whole-of-government costs associated with all of those services provided centrally by DBE, for example.

Mr ELFERINK: All right, so ...

Mr MOFFET: Sorry, could I just add? One of the points of discussion when I had my meeting with the chair of the Department of Health and Aging Audit Committee, was the oncosts the department provided, which is closer to 40%. The reality is when you look at the remote sector you look at adding on accommodation, travel, freight, and additional staffing costs. It is easy to get to a 40% acquittal on the basis of what it otherwise would cost you in an urban setting.

Mr ELFERINK: All right. It is a case of hurry up and wait at this stage. Minister, if there is - and I am not suggesting for a second there is - an exposure to the Northern Territory government which may have led to, or may be the product of, some form of maladministration, would you under normal - no I will

rephrase that, that is hypothetical. Would you commit now, or do you commit, to seeking recovery from Congress if they have misspent Territory funds?

Mr VATSKALIS: That would apply to any organisation that has actually misspent Territory funds. We would be seeking recovery.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, just for getting it on the record as much as anything else.

Mr MOFFET: Could I just add in that respect? We have had an initial look at our information and also, obviously, our past arrangements with Congress. We have no immediate cause for concern. However, we are very interested, obviously, and we are collaborating with DoHA to the extent we can in order to understand their concerns and their issues. We are taking the issue seriously, we have engaged our Director of Risk and Audit. However, as it stands, we have no evidence in front of us that would cause us immediate concern, and we have processes ongoing inside the department at the moment.

Mr ELFERINK: It is the depth in which you drill which is what I am expressing.

Mr MOFFET: Sure.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have asked the minister for his department to provide all information they have to my department, and they will work together.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, bearing in mind, of course, that DoHA will be looking at Commonwealth expenditure and ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, if they uncover irregularities in their areas, certainly that will give us the opportunity to go and have a very good and deep look at what is happening with our money, which we have already instigated.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. In that case, it is hurry up and wait. No further questions, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions to Output 2.1, Community Health Services?

Output 2.2 – Mental Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case we move on to Output 2.2, Mental Health Services.

Mr CONLAN: We have seven minutes left, is that right?

Mr CHAIRMAN: To the lunch break.

Mr CONLAN: Are we moving on to Children and Families after lunch?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes. Well, that is up to you. We move through the outputs.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. I might drop down to Output 2.3, then, if that is the case – unless, sorry. I am happy for Gerry to ask questions.

Mr WOOD: Minister, why is the secure care centre facility at Holtze not operational?

Mr VATSKALIS: I asked exactly the same question, member for Nelson, and I was advised that despite the fact that it is actually ready, it is staffing and development protocols that is holding it back. It will not be long before it is fully staffed and operational.

Mr WOOD: The reason I asked, minister, is I had some concerns from residents of Dreamtime Drive in McMinn's Lagoon ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Somebody was brought to ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, and they were not told anything about it. When they asked me – because I did not know about it – why that person was there with two Correctional Services people and two carers, and we

have the secure care centre - which I visited with you - sitting there, I had to ask the question: why was that person not in that facility.

Mr VATSKALIS: That comes under the Aged and Disabilities output.

Mr WOOD: All right. Just to clarify: the person who was housed at McMinns, they were not there as a cognitive impaired person?

Ms WALFORD: The client who was in attendance at McMinns Lagoon was on a custodial supervision order, and falls in the responsibility of the Disability Service.

Mr WOOD: So which section?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The next output.

Ms WALFORD: The next one, but ...

Mr WOOD: All right. I might ask then. But I had to ask about the secure care centre, which comes under this one.

Ms WALFORD: Yes. Just to clarify on that, not all of our clients will qualify to be in the secure care facility. There is a range of criteria that needs to be met for them to be suitable for that. There still will be other clients who will not fall in secure care who will require day service.

Mr WOOD: All right. Minister, in regard to the youth suicide report, page 183, the Suicide Prevention Coordinating Committee was established in 2007 but the report states that it had not met for 18 months prior to the report's release. How can you demonstrate that the new coordination committee will be more effective?

Ms HENDRY: Bronwyn Hendry, Director of Mental Health. The new coordinating committee is designed to be a much higher-level committee with representation at a high level across various government departments, and reporting to the Social Responsibility Committee, which is a CEO-level committee. The previous committee had much lower-level representation, and that was one of the difficulties we encountered with it.

Mr WOOD: Will these two committees still operate, or will one cease to operate and one continue?

Ms HENDRY: I was not envisaging the lower-level one to continue to operate. It would be raised to upper level.

Mr WOOD: Minister, in the report on child and youth suicide in the NT, by the NT Child Deaths Review and Preventions Committee, it made some recommendations on page 3. There are recommendations in this report that are repeated in the youth suicide report. An example of that is Recommendation 14 in the youth suicide report, which is the same as Recommendation 8. Also Recommendation 21 in the youth suicide report is the same as Recommendation 15 in the other report. Why were some of those recommendations not already implemented before the second report came out?

Ms HENDRY: The child death committee report came out around the same time. In fact, the committee, I understand, had an embargoed copy of the report, but it was not publicly released until later.

Mr WOOD: Right. They made a recommendation about funding the Coroner's Office to maintain and provide access to a suicide register. I think there was another one there about the committee recommending the Northern Territory government actively lobby the Australian government to establish and fund headspace centres in Katherine and Nhulunbuy, and provide headspace outreach services to remote NT communities.

The question was really asking how come, if they have been repeated, why was not something acted on earlier, or were they acted on earlier? If you had one committee which put these recommendations and the next committee has repeated them, the question would be why were the previous recommendations not put into place?

Ms HENDRY: My understanding is the child death committee recommendations informed all of their draft recommendations before the report was released - informed the youth - no. Okay.

Mr WOOD: I am not looking at anyone here. Are you saying they took up the same recommendations? That is what they did?

Mr MOFFET: I believe the point is they were contemporary processes and not chronologically separated too much, so there was not much opportunity to react to one recommendation before the other came out.

Mr WOOD: Just quickly. Under the youth suicide report, page 92, Recommendation No 3, what department will have carriage of the construction of youth wellbeing facilities and youth drop-in centres in regional and rural areas? Who is going to take over that particular requirement?

Mr MOFFET: Those decisions, as far as I know, have not been made as yet. We are getting to the implementation plan around the recommendations. I do not believe there has been a decision on that front as far as I know.

Mr WOOD: In your annual report, on page 59, how many calls has the NT-wide, 24-hour, Mental Health Triage and Response Service taken in 2011-12?

Ms HENDRY: I am sorry, I do not have that with me. I will provide that.

Mr WOOD: Will you take that on notice?

Ms HENDRY: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.15

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you tell us how many calls has the NT-wide, 24-hour Mental Health Triage and Response Service taken in 2011-12?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 6.15.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, we will break for lunch and return to Output 2.2, Mental Health Services. I understand after the lunch break the member for Arafura will be Chair and the youth suicide committee will be briefing the member for Nelson on some of his questions during the last five minutes. We will return at 1 pm.

The committee suspended.

Output 2.2 – Mental Health Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, thank you. Welcome back everybody. I understand we are now at Output 2.2, Mental Health Services, and the opposition has the call.

Ms PURICK: Madam Deputy Chair, I have some questions for the minister. There is a house in the McMinns Lagoon area that is rented by Department of Health to house one male client ...

Mr WOOD: I did not realise you were going to ask at this point.

Ms PURICK: I have some different components to it. How much is it costing to rent the property per week?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the next output, the Disability output.

Ms PURICK: Is it under disabilities regarding whether that person has been moved around? Okay, that is fine.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Output 2.3, Community Support Services for Frail Aged and People with a Disability, member for Goyder.

Mr CONLAN: You had finished on 2.3, anyway.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I was told to go to that next area for that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, in taking over from the Chair, I was advised we were at Output 2.2.

Mr CONLAN: We were going to use that to ask those questions, but if it is 2.3, we can move to 2.3.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Were there any further questions on Output 2.2?

Mr CONLAN: Not for me.

Mr WOOD: No.

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

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now consider Output 2.3, Community Support Services for Frail Aged and People with a Disability. Member for Goyder.

Ms PURICK: Thank you. In the right output group. Minister, how much is it costing to house, treat and care for the male client who resides part-time, if not full-time, at the McMinns Lagoon property - which involves, as I understand it, two Correctional officers who take the person to the property each day - rental on property, and insurance on the property? What does it cost for carers for that individual?

Mr VATSKALIS: I refer that question to Robyn to respond to. Robyn, can you state your name?

Ms WESTERMAN: It is Robyn Westerman. I am the Director of Aged and Disability Program. I will have to take that question on notice to get the specific costs.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you happy for that question to be on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, certainly.

Question on Notice No. 6.16

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Can you repeat the question, Kezia?

Ms PURICK: How much is it costing to house, treat and care for the male client who resides part-time, if not full-time, at a McMinns Lagoon property, which involves two Correctional officers, rental of the property, insurance on the property, and the cost of carers for the male client?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the benefit of Hansard, that is question No 6.16. Further questions?

Ms PURICK: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, is this the same individual who has previously been housed in a facility in Berry Springs?

Ms WESTERMAN: No.

Ms PURICK: A different person. Okay, thank you. Why is this person not housed in the secure care facility which has just opened?

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you answer that, Nikki?

Ms WALFORD: The secure care facilities are planned to be opened in Darwin and Alice Springs - there are two facilities. They are not yet at the stage of opening. There is a range of legislative requirements that need to be completed. With regard to the client we are talking about who has done day service out at McMinns Lagoon, that client may or may not be eligible for secure care facility because there is a range of

conditions required for that. Irrespective of the secure care facility coming online, the client may or may not be eligible for that.

Ms PURICK: What would knock him out for not being eligible, given he is accompanied by two Correctional officers?

Ms WALFORD: The secure care facility Stage 2 is about rehabilitation in a secure environment. The legislation has a range of conditions including that the client will benefit from being in a secured environment where you can have a relatively intense level of therapeutic service intervention. Not all the clients who are on custodial supervision orders qualify for that.

Ms PURICK: Would this individual qualify, in your view, to be housed at the mental health facility that is associated with the new gaol?

Ms WALFORD: The behavioural facility that is happening in 2014?

Ms PURICK: Whatever it is called.

Ms WALFORD: Robyn. could you?

Ms WESTERMAN: Yes.

Ms WALFORD: Yes.

Ms PURICK: It would be. Okay. One more question. In regard to locating this individual at the property at McMinn's, and also other individuals who may or may not be located there in the near future, does the department undertake risk assessment in regard to that individual being placed on that property, and do you involve the surrounding community in working on the risk assessment process? If you do not involve the community, why not?

Ms WALFORD: Each individual client interface or engagement in the community is managed differently. In this particular situation, it is a client who is on a custodial supervision order. He was accessing the house twice a week for a day service to get him out in the community. There is, obviously, requirements attached to his condition which make that beneficial for him.

In the interface with the community, it will depend on the assessment of the risk of the client to the surrounding community. I guess the challenge in that space is, due to client confidentiality, we cannot necessarily engage in that discussion with the community.

Ms PURICK: No, I understand the confidentiality and the privacy in regard to the client, but has the department undertaken risk assessment in regard to locating that person in that house at McMinn's Lagoon?

Ms WALFORD: Yes.

Ms PURICK: Okay.

Mr WOOD: Can I follow up on that? I had quite a number of people approach me and I was not able to answer those questions. It is a little disappointing; maybe someone could have let us know. There may not have been anything wrong with having that person there, but when people do not know why that person is there, they fear the worst. I had a number of residents come to me and, thankfully, we have been able to work a solution out. We had quite a bit of a discussion.

We had issues about the site of the secure care centre, and there are some other issues coming up in regard to alcohol rehabilitation place. I sometimes think we make a rod for our back if we do not start off earlier and bring the community with us. Is it possible that local members may, for instance, have a little more knowledge of these things before they actually happen?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, I know very well the problems we had before with the secure care facility. I personally visited the area because a number of people who objected to it contacted me directly. Yes, the department can do better; a lesson we learnt from that is we can do better. But, you have to remember we have to balance the need for privacy of the individual and what the community wants to know. We have to find the golden medium there: what can we tell, what we cannot tell. There will always

be people who will be saying 'not in my back yard'. We are trying to engage community, talk to the community. Sometimes, we do better than others.

Again, this person is going to be there only for the next two years because, in the new prison facility, we have a specific area for people with these kinds of needs - secure care facility and another facility we put in Darwin rural area. We try to do our best.

Mr WOOD: That is good, minister. I suppose if someone turns up in a house in a rural area, with two Correctional Services people and two carers ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I understand.

Mr WOOD: ... they think the worst. Why would you need that many people for someone who is not dangerous? That is what their fear was. I know it is difficult, but there has to be more done to ensure the public is feeling safe. There needs to be a little more PR, you might say.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions?

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: How many of these houses do we have in the Darwin rural area?

Ms WESTERMAN: We have one client accommodated in the Darwin rural area who lives on his own and has 24/7 support. There was community consultation done for that client with his neighbours, and he seems to be managing really well. He accesses the community regularly.

Ms PURICK: Am I allowed to ask a question, Madam Deputy Chair?

Mr ELFERINK: Either that or she is just going to ask me to ask them, so it is just as easy if she does it, Madam Deputy Chair.

Ms PURICK: How many houses does the department rent in Darwin and the greater rural area that are similar to the houses at McMinns Lagoon and Berrimah? What is the number of houses or dwellings, I should say?

Ms WESTERMAN: We have one house we own, and I am not aware of any others in my program that we rent.

Ms PURICK: There is a property south of Berry Springs in Chibnall Road that houses one client.

Ms WESTERMAN: That may not be a client from my program.

Mr VATSKALIS: It could be a different program.

Ms PURICK: Okay, thank you.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.2

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I seek leave to table the answer to question on notice No 6.2 about the relocation of the Health Department.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Thanks, minister.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.13

Mr VATSKALIS: I also table question on notice No 6.13 about dental trucks. There is not one, there are two trucks, and there is no restriction about the clients who will use them.

Mr WOOD: Madam Deputy Chair ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, I understand, member for Nelson, there was some misunderstanding that we were moving off that output. Do you do have another question?

Mr WOOD: What normally happens is I have been allowed to jump in with a particular question. I thought it was going back to the member for Goyder; I thought she had to lead on this particular area. I have two questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay.

Mr WOOD: One is in relation to dementia, minister. It is an important area. I was looking at this Northern Territory annual report and I am interested to know how many places the Department of Health has for sufferers of dementia, where those places are, and what the long-term plans are for what will be an increasing problem for the Territory; that is, finding places and care for people with dementia?

Mr VATSKALIS: We work very closely with the Australian government to ensure that allocation for aged-care support for Territorians with dementia is in place. We have two full-time geriatricians working in Darwin's community sector, and they have outreach regions in Katherine and Alice Springs. The Royal Darwin Hospital will soon commence the operation of a Geriatric Evaluation Management Unit and, of course, we established Memory Clinics at RDH, Palmerston, and Alice Springs. We are really committed in diagnosing and looking after people with dementia.

The Northern Territory's Dementia Action Plan 2010 to 2015 embraces the National Dementia Action Framework. It is long-term planning for dementia in the next five years. We work very closely with the Commonwealth to develop the facilities needed for people with dementia in the Territory. You have to remember, considering other states, there are not many old people in the Territory. However, dementia does not affect only old people; it can affect people middle-aged and even earlier. We have to consider all cases of dementia in the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Just for the sake of time, minister, one other question. Recently, your department advised aged care for over 65s and over 50 for Aboriginal people in mental health will cease to be a Territory responsibility and will be transferred to Commonwealth control. Can you explain how this will benefit the Territory?

Mr MOFFET: As part of the national health reforms, there is a transfer of responsibility to Commonwealth in relation to aged care in those brackets. There is a transition process in place for the Northern Territory government so we, in fact, will be maintaining some services such as aged-care assessment for a further two years.

Fundamentally, the intent, I suppose, is to clarify programmatic responsibility between Commonwealth and state. That was part of the aspects; the lack of clarity and some of the confusion that arose. The National Hospital and Health Reform Commission report recommended much more clarity around aged-care program service delivery into the future. That is the reason that has changed.

Mr WOOD: Okay, that is all the questions I have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, member for Nelson. That concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

I note the questions for Output 2.4, Support for Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions will be answered by the minister for Senior Territorians tomorrow.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Environmental Health Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now consider Output Group 3.0, Public Health Services; Output 3.1 Environmental Health Services. Just a moment, I think we are just changing over officers.

Mr CONLAN: Gerry, have you much on this?

Mr WOOD: No, I will leave my questions on that. I have one on Disease Control Services.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, can I move then – because we really need to get cracking for the member for Araluen who has a whole afternoon lined up.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You have questions on 3.1?

Mr CONLAN: Well, I have, but I really want to just to get to say 3.2 and maybe even 3.3. I have to prioritise now, that is all, because I want to hand over at about 1.30 pm.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, so you do have questions for Output 3.1?

Mr CONLAN: I do, but they are just going to ping into the time, that is all. Seeing you are here, we may as well ask, when you make your way up to the front.

On how many occasions were test results received from Darwin beaches that were at or above the level that requires public notification and follow-up testing?

Mr VATSKALIS: Please state your name, Xavier, and your position.

Mr SCHOBEN: Xavier Schobben, Director Environmental Health. Just a point of clarification, through the Chair, are you talking about from the year 2011?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, for the last 12 months, yes.

Mr SCHOBEN: Can I take it on notice and get back to you?

Mr CONLAN: Great, okay.

Question on Notice No 6.17

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you happy for that question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: And, Matt, if you can just repeat it, please?

Mr CONLAN: On how many occasions were test results received from Darwin beaches that were at or above a level that required public notification and follow-up testing?

Mr SCHOBEN: We had four beach closures in 2011, as opposed to 14 in 2010.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is fine, but can you still take that actual question on notice?

Mr SCHOBEN: Sure.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.17.

Mr CONLAN: Do you have plans to follow-up on monitoring of water quality levels in Darwin Harbour following – actually, we will move on from that. That is fine there; I can leave it at that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is 3.1?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, 3.1, that is fine.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, no questions from you to that output?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I believe you had a few questions this morning. That concludes Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Disease Control Services

Madam ACTING CHAIR: We now go to Output 3.2, Disease Control Services.

Mr CONLAN: How are the rates of STDs in the Northern Territory travelling? Where are we with STDs in the NT?

Mr RYDER: Nathan Ryder, Specialist Physician, Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Unit. The rates of STIs in the Territory continue to increase. The predominant reason for that is we are doing much more testing. In many ways, the increase in notifications we are getting signifies better clinical care.

Mr CONLAN: When you say it is increasing, it is not really; it is only increasing on paper because there is still, obviously, the same number of people out there, isn't there, who have contracted it?

Mr RYDER: Yes. Our primary measure at the CDC level of rates of STIs is the notifications.

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr RYDER: That is an imperfect measure because it relies upon a test being done. We have other sources of data where we can look at the percentage of people who are tested who have an STI, and that is relatively stable overall.

Mr CONLAN: Are they more prevalent in younger or older Territorians?

Mr RYDER: All the STIs are more common in younger Territorians, as is the case for the rest of Australia - and the rest of the world for that matter.

Mr CONLAN: I was going to ask if STDs in children is declining, but they are not, they are actually increasing?

Mr RYDER: When you say children, do you mean under 18?

Mr CONLAN: Children, yes.

Mr RYDER: Yes, okay. The rate in people between the ages of 16 and 18 is higher than that of the older people, but once you drop below 16, the rate dramatically drops off. In children as defined in Health Services ...

Mr CONLAN: So under 16?

Mr RYDER: ... paediatric patients, such as under 12s, the rate there is very low.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: When they become sexually active, despite all the things we tell them, they do not listen, so we have *chlamydia trachomatis*. Some of the other STIs such as syphilis is dropping significantly, but some of the other common ones are increasing - again, in the time when the kids become sexually active and start experimenting.

Mr CONLAN: I am happy to move through to the member for Nelson now, if you like.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, 3.2?

Mr WOOD: Just one question. Minister, in relation to melioidosis, the figures in your annual report on page 76 show in 2009 there were 30 cases and in 2010 there is 106 cases, which is a very large increase. Could you explain why the cases of melioidosis have increased by such a large number?

Dr KRAUSE: Vicki Krause, Director for Centre for Disease Control. You are very right. Over the past 10 to 20 years, the usual number is 30 to 40 per year. Two or three years ago, it jumped up in the 90s and then the 100s, and again this year we are on 98. As to why this is occurring is not clear. We have an enhanced status that around all of our melioidosis cases, we work with Menzies to try to identify what the causes are. We do know that risk factors contribute to the disease, with the highest risk factor being diabetes. We all know that diabetes is going up. Another is alcohol overuse, and we know we do not have

that under control. It does tend to be that the higher rates where some of these co-morbidities exist are in the urban Darwin area.

Our approach to this is to have a very good awareness program, particularly awareness amongst our clinicians so there is early diagnosis. The good message here is the mortality rate has come down over the past 15 to 20 years. Where it was 30% - in the rest of the world it is 50% - 20 years ago, now we have it done to approaching 10%. With our ICU, our clinical treatment of this disease - which is in our environment; that is a given - has improved dramatically.

Mr VATSKALIS: Also the awareness. Vicki is quite right. When I came to the Territory 1993, I had no idea about melioidosis because I came from Western Australia. In Perth and Port Hedland there were no incidents there; it is a tropical disease. Now, if you live in Darwin, every two years, you have a new contingent of Army people coming. They have never been to a tropical environment before and they have no idea about melioidosis, and people who do not know do not take precautions. Doctors are becoming aware; there is better detection, so you have increase of numbers.

Mr WOOD: Just quickly. There was one case of leprosy recorded in the annual report. When do you think leprosy will be wiped out in the Northern Territory?

Dr KRAUSE: Leprosy has a very long time period between when you come into contact and when it can progress to disease. While we keep hoping it will be - everyone says within my generation - we will probably be looking for 20 or 30 more years. However, what we do is still ensure there is awareness about leprosy so there is not a long lag period from when the symptoms present and when it is diagnosed. I believe every year we will probably have a case of leprosy for the next five or 10 years.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Alcohol and Other Drug Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now move to Output 3.3, Alcohol and Other Drug Services.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, how many alcohol-related treatment beds are there currently in the Northern Territory?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: While officers are finding those stats, I acknowledge the presence in the room of former member for Nhulunbuy and former Deputy Chief Minister, Mr Syd Stirling.

Mr VATSKALIS: You cannot stay away from the bloody place.

Mr Elferink: Only gets a mention, and he bolts for the door!

Mr VATSKALIS: Number of beds for alcohol and other drugs?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, number of alcohol rehab beds, treatment beds, currently.

Mr VATSKALIS: Alcohol and other drugs are 299 total.

Mr CONLAN: 299.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: How successful have you measured the success of these treatment programs? It is asking for an opinion, but how successful are these treatment programs?

Dr PATERSON: As people would be aware, alcoholism is not an easy thing to treat. It is very much like a chronic disease where people have a potential to relapse, just like diabetes and other episodes. What we are able to measure is our closed episodes of care.

The residential treatment services are particularly useful for people who need extra level of care for their treatment; it gives them a safe environment to help them to have interventions and various models of care

that can happen, including therapeutic communities and, then, social supports. Some people then go into transitional after care, which is a little like a step-down facility.

Once you have had your treatment, you are being integrated back into community and employment. In our sector, you see people who enter the treatment program on a number of occasions. There is no set success rate; there are journal articles and literature which suggest approximately 20% on any one round of treatment would be deemed a success. In the Northern Territory, alcohol is a larger proportion of those treatment services to other drugs. The provision of services can facilitate that treatment.

Mr CONLAN: You can only measure closed episodes. Once a person has completed treatment that counts as one complete. Then, if they come back and complete it again, that is two for the same person?

Dr PATERSON: It would be, yes.

Mr CONLAN: You cannot measure it on an individual person?

Dr PATERSON: No, and the length of treatment, obviously, varies. Some people may go into the treatment program for 12, 14 or 16 weeks, then go into the step-down. Other treatment programs developed for the person may be shorter periods of time.

Mr CONLAN: Is there a record of how many times you are treating one particular person? Do you keep any data ...

Dr PATERSON: I do not have that ...

Mr CONLAN: ... which might not go towards this set? Does the Territory government, the Health Department keep any of that suggesting one person has gone through. say, 10 times?

Mr GELDING: Steve Gelding, Director, Alcohol and Other Drugs. Not for residential treatment per se. We do for other services like sobering-up shelters, but not in residential treatment.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. I am happy to ...

Mr WOOD: Just a very simple question. Who selected the proposed site for the removal of FORWAARD from Stuart Park to the rural area?

Mr GELDING: I met with FORWAARD in the last couple of weeks. They selected the site. They are currently making application to the Development Consent Authority. They have a proposal from the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Account through the Northern Land Council should the Development Consent Authority proposal be accepted.

Mr WOOD: I believe it is through the minister for a grant of land first, so that is where it is at. I will take that up later.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any other questions for Output 3.3?

Mr CONLAN: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Then we will proceed to Output 3.4.

Mr CONLAN: Madam Deputy Chair, the member for Araluen has a wonderful afternoon lined up for you full of fantastic questions. We really need to get into that. As an opposition, we are happy to pass through the next three output groups, but if the member for Nelson ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is fine, as long as the member for Nelson is also happy to pass through those.

Mr CONLAN: ... and then it is over to the member for Araluen.

Mr WOOD: I am never happy but, yes, that is okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of the Department of Health outputs. On behalf of the committee, I thank the departmental staff who have attended this morning, and we are now proceeding to the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.15

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I table the answer to Question on Notice No 6.15.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Output 4.1 – Health and Community Services Complaints Commission

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We move to this new section. I note Output 4.1, Health and Community Services Complaints Commission sits under the Department of Justice. Questions relating to Output 4.1 will be answered by the Minister for Health today.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials who are accompanying you, who are just moving up to the table now, and if you have an opening statement would you like to make it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I would like to make a brief statement in relation to my portfolio, but first allow me to introduce senior officers from the Department of Children and Families. Oh, we have another one. I welcome the Health Complaints Commissioner. We will take the questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We do not have an opening statement?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, not for this one.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: So it is whole-of-agency? No, it is on its own; it is just one output.

Mr ELFERINK: Madam Deputy Chair, for the sake brevity - and my apologies to the department that we are running late, they will have the shortest appearance in history here, as far as I am concerned. There are no questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No questions from the member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: There is nothing in my folder.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No questions from the member for Nelson. We are now going to consider Children's Commissioner.

Mr ELFERINK: Thanks very much, folks, and we apologise. If we had known this was going to happen we would have ...

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

Output 5.1 – Children's Commissioner

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are at Output 5.1, Children's Commissioner. Children's Commissioner also sits under Department of Justice and these questions will be answered by the Minister for Child Protection.

Mr WOOD: Are you dealing with Output 5 as a total output first? Are you dealing with the whole?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Output 5.1 is just one output on its own, member for Nelson. It is just the Children's Commissioner. Children and Families comes at Output 6 – it is quite separate. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement if you wish.

Mr VATSKALIS: Dr Howard Bath, Children's Commissioner and there is no opening statement.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: So, then we are open for questions. Member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Since the Northern Territory Ombudsman was removed from her duties investigating matters pertaining to child protection, which excludes matters relating to the police involvement in child protection matters, has the Children's Commissioner's workload increased substantially?

Mr VATSKALIS: First I would like to make clear the Ombudsman was never removed from her duty because the minister or anybody else cannot remove the Ombudsman from her duties to investigate. I will let the Children's Commissioner respond to the question about his responsibilities and whether they have increased or not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Dr Bath, if you could just introduce yourself?

Dr BATH: Howard Bath, Children's Commissioner, Northern Territory. Yes, the duties have increased considerably for a number of reasons, but mainly because of the extended scope of the investigation work. Prior to the legislation change in July last year, there was not a specific investigation service for a broader number of vulnerable children. They were not defined as vulnerable children prior to that. It was 'protected' children, then it became 'vulnerable' children, and it included children in touch with the child protection system, the juvenile justice system, the police - children who were arrested by the police, mental health - children with mental health problems, disability and seeking a social service.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There is no obvious change in complaints coming to the office of the Children's Commissioner due to the removal of the Ombudsman from her duties in dealing with complaints?

Dr BATH: I am struggling to understand about the change. It has been very significant change in both the numbers and the scope of the complaints process.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay, we will leave it there.

Dr BATH: Sorry, I can clarify one thing. There is ambiguity in the law about whether the Children's Commissioner can investigate a matter that involves a police officer and a vulnerable child. I can say that has not been finally resolved, but we do not exclude that possibility entirely.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Children's Commissioner still has an important role in evaluating and measuring the implementation of the recommendations of the *Little Children are Sacred* report. Minister, do you value the contribution of the Children's Commissioner in that role?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Given that role is due to be concluded within the next 12 months, will you be considering extending that role of the Children's Commissioner?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a discussion we tend to have with the Children's Commissioner. Dr Bath has been instrumental both in the board of inquiry in the work he has done and continues to do. We have absolute faith in Dr Bath. That is the reason why we changed the legislation; to broaden his powers. I know the Ombudsman probably was not very happy about it but, she had told me it was better for one agency or one officer to investigate any matters in relation to children than two or three people. That is what we did. Since then, Dr Bath has done a tremendous job, and he has investigated many complaints without any hindrance from me or my office.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have no more questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Dr Bath, a question about interagency collaboration, which was an issue I think was raised a few times. Are you happy with any improvements in that matter that was of concern? I think we talked about silos at one stage. Has that changed?

Dr BATH: That is a difficult one to answer in a yes/no.

Mr WOOD: I would not expect a yes/no on that one.

Dr BATH: I can also state you would understand there is a specific body which has been set up to review the recommendations from the board of inquiry, the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee headed up by Dr Vimpani. They have a specific role to evaluate and monitor how the government has responded to that. That particular question is one of the ones I know they are interested in and are looking at. I am a little reluctant to step on their turf. There has been a lot of movement in that area and, hopefully, we are going to see good outcomes for the structures that have been put in place; for instance, the Child Protection Executives Network.

Mr SHANAHAN: Greg Shanahan, Chief Executive, Department of Justice. On that point, there is a subcommittee of CEOs which meets and monitors the recommendations in the review as well. That meets as a subcommittee of the COAG, which we are part of as well.

Mr WOOD: A general question. When you mention there is a subcommittee, one of my concerns is whether there are too many committees and not enough action on the ground. I do not know whether Dr Bath would comment. Are we achieving things or are we setting up administration? Is something changing, or are we just looking at a committee here and a committee there and a strategy here and a strategy there? Are things actually changing on the ground?

Dr BATH: Are you speaking to me?

Mr WOOD: Yes, please.

Dr BATH: I would say yes and no. I am aware, as you probably are, there still are complaints coming in from members of the public and NGOs about the level of working together in cooperation. At the same time, we are hearing from some of the same people – not same people, but same agencies – that there has been movement. Like I said, I do not have an official role in monitoring that; it is just incidental when I pick up information and people pass this information on to me.

I am aware there are still complaints floating around the community about the level of interagency work, especially from some of the NGOs, but there are others that actually have said there is some movement in those programs.

Mr VATSKALIS: A typical example of that was the recent cooperation between departments in Alice Springs to overcome the problems we had with youth – Education department, police and child protection worked together to address the youth issues.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Port Darwin, you had a question?

Mr ELFERINK: Did you want to clarify something?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Just a point of clarification. The Children's Commissioner just said that the External Monitoring and Reporting Committee monitors the implementation of the *Growing them strong, together* report. The minister actually indicated in parliament in May that was not the case. Can you clarify that?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no. I have said all along the External Monitoring and Reporting Committee implements the board of inquiry's recommendations. That is why they were appointed. That is the job they are doing.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Dr Bath, how many complaints that you investigate are issues surrounding departmental conduct?

Dr BATH: I do not have the latest figures with me because we will publish them in our annual report in a couple of months, but it is a significant proportion. When you say 'departmental', it is several departments ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. What I am trying to establish is if someone comes along and actually has a complaint in the nature of the way the department conducts itself, rather than the work they do - if

somebody is unhappy with a child protection worker or something like that - is that something you investigate? If so, what do you do with that when you have finished the investigation?

Dr BATH: First of all, if I had to estimate, I would say about 80% of the complaints have to do with government agency activity, and the remainder to do with NGO service activity. What I investigate is services to vulnerable children, so it is not purely administrative actions. If it is a question, for instance, that someone - an adult - was upset about how they were treated, for instance, in the Department of Children and Families, I would not see that as something I investigate.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. My next question is then to you, minister. The problem I have is my understanding is the Ombudsman no longer has the capacity to look at that complaint. Is that correct or is - you are shaking your head, Dr Bath? Guide me through this, please?

Dr BATH: My understanding would be that is an administrative action of a department, and the Ombudsman could investigate.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay.

Dr BATH: If it is not a service to a vulnerable child - and most of the actions of the department could be construed as a service to a vulnerable child, but there are many other administrative actions that actually are not.

Mr ELFERINK: Then I suspect I know the answer to the next question. You meet with the Ombudsman, I presume, on a regular basis to determine who is who in the zoo in which complaint goes where?

Dr BATH: We communicate, we have shared a – well, it is not a formal memo of understanding, but we have an understanding in an exchange of letters as to what happens in a matter that is referred to the Ombudsman. There is a process for accepting responsibility.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. What I am trying to establish is whether or not there is a residual process for a complaint. There apparently is ...

Dr BATH: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: That is all I am curious about.

Dr BATH: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No further questions then. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers and the Children's Commissioner, Dr Bath, who have attended and provided advice to the minister today.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now move to the Department of Children and Families.

Minister, welcome once again, this time as the Minister for Children and Families. I invite you to introduce the officials who are accompanying you and to make an opening statement.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I would like to make a brief statement in relation to my portfolio. However, first allow me to introduce senior officers from the Department of Children and Families: the Chief Executive for the department, Ms Clare Gardiner-Barnes; the Deputy Executive, Ms Lorraine Williams; Jo Thompson will be here late; Simone Jackson will also be here later; Janette Howard, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services; and Chief Finance Officer, Cameron Wilson.

As you are aware, the Department of Children and Families is in its second year of operations, having been created in January 2011. Since that time, the department has made great progress in addressing the 147 recommendations of the board of inquiry's *Growing them strong, together* report, as well as managing the department's core business across the program areas of family and parent support services, child protection services, out-of-home care services, youth services, family violence and sexual assault services.

I will take questions for the general output and the whole-of-agency output for the Department of Children and Families for each of these areas, as well as questions related to the Children's

Commissioner – which I did. My colleague, minister Knight will take questions on the output group related to the Office of Youth Affairs, and questions relating to the Office of Women's Policy will be handled by minister Malamdirri McCarthy.

The Northern Territory government allocated an additional \$130m over five years as part of the Northern Territory government's response to the board of inquiry. In 2011-12, \$26m has been used to address the board of inquiry Recommendations 3 and 4, and build and strengthen Child and Family Services. In 2012-13, the Northern Territory government will invest further, with additional funding of \$7.1m being directed at the reforms, bringing the overall budget for the Department of Children and Families to \$177m.

The department has released its second progress report into child protection reforms, detailing the significant progress being made. Some of these achievements include:

- the passage of the Care and Protection of Children (Information Sharing) Bill, which will see a new framework to improve the sharing of information between agencies and service providers. This will play a major role in ensuring the protection and wellbeing of children;
- the implementation of strategies to address the ongoing challenge of recruiting to frontline child protection positions, including an agency recruitment hotline and an MOU with Charles Darwin University which will allow the department to recruit up to 25 graduates per year and over five full scholarships for Territorians;
- work has also been undertaken to develop and increase accessibility of education and training programs, and increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in providing career pathways from the administrative to the professional stream;
- the department has commenced to roll out the community child safety wellbeing teams, with staff already deployed to two Territory growth towns, and four more practitioners taking up positions in communities;
- close to \$63m has been provided to a range of peak bodies and non-government organisations to enhance and expand service provision to vulnerable children and their families;
- a Safe House for youth has been opened in Darwin, and construction of secure facilities for youth in Alice Springs and Darwin have been completed;
- multi-agency assessment and coordination teams have been established with the Royal Darwin Hospital base team having commenced operation, and the Alice Springs team set to commence in mid-2012;
- the establishment of cultural advisor positions in each regional office, and the establishment of a Kinship Carer Unit will ensure more cultural sensitive service delivery;
- I am particularly pleased to advise of the successful establishment of a new Aboriginal peak body for children, young people, and their families – SAF.T. I look forward to the outcomes achieved through the collaboration of the peak body and the Department of Children and Families; and
- the highlight of these positive achievements is the awarding of a two-year contract for a major community education campaign focused on the recruitment of foster and kinship carers and community education.

In 2012-13, \$33.7m will be used to continue the implementation of the recommendations of the board of inquiry, including \$11.2m supporting proved case ratios for child protection workers, and the continuation of incentive packages for frontline staff, as well as increased training for employees; \$7.2m for increased payments for foster and kinship carers, increased funding for Foster Care NT, and to further develop a residential and therapeutic service options; and \$6m for additional support for families, and the continued roll-out of community child safety and wellbeing teams in Territory growth towns.

Funding of \$1.4m is also provided by Department of Justice for the Office of the Children's Commissioner - an office proudly established by this government. The commissioner commenced in 2008, as a statutory officer charged with promoting the wellbeing of vulnerable and protected children.

In addition to these Northern Territory initiatives, the Northern Territory government is poised to formalise a 10-year national partnership agreement with the Australian government. known as the Stronger Futures package. The management of the investment, the duration of the agreement, and bolstered partnership between tiers of government means Stronger Futures will certainly deliver better outcomes for Territorian children and families. Stronger Futures will address the unique challenges of remote service delivery and build strong and sustainable communities.

As you have heard, there has been a great deal of progress, many successes, and many improvements made. The government has set a challenging agenda for the reform and remains committed to strengthening the responsiveness and effectiveness of services to vulnerable Territorian children and families.

Finally, I take the opportunity to reinforce the need to respect the privacy of all of the families and children, and request any questions that relate to the family circumstances are carefully framed to protect the identities of the individuals involved.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there are questions relating to the statement?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, you mentioned the challenge of recruitment. I understand you have recently undertaken quite an extensive recruitment drive in the United Kingdom, maybe six, seven, eight weeks ago. I am just wondering how much this trip cost in total; how many staff were recruited; and the general outcomes of this recruitment drive?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, member for Araluen. As I said before, one of my biggest problems is recruiting people, because there is a big demand for child protection services and frontline staff in child protection services around Australia. In addition to that, we try to recruit people who are experienced - very difficult.

In March 2012, we undertook a recruitment drive in the United Kingdom and, as a result, we have offered sponsorship and employment to 34 highly-experienced child protection professionals. These people start arriving in the Territory from June 2012. People have to sort out visas and everything else. I am happy for the CEO to provide the information about the costings.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Clare Gardiner-Barnes, Chief Executive of the Department of Children and Families. The most recent overseas recruitment exercise was undertaken in the United Kingdom and, as a result of that recruitment exercise, 34 experienced child protection professionals have been recruited and are currently undertaking processes to get visas and to commence. The total expenditure for that recruitment exercise was \$91 135.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What did that include?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The recruitment would have included the price of the team going over to the UK as well as any oncosts associated with that. I will hand over to the Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services, to pick up on any further comment in relation to those costs.

Ms HOWARD: Janette Howard, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services. Those costs include placement fees, accommodation of the staff who travelled to the UK – with the exception of one staff member - and visa costs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many staff were part of that team?

Ms HOWARD: Three staff travelled to the UK.

Mrs LAMBLEY: For how long? What period of time?

Ms HOWARD: I believe it was 25 days.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In total?

Ms HOWARD: In total.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the average cost of recruiting staff per head from the UK? What is a ballpark figure when you add up all those costs - the relocation expenses, the travel, the incentives, the staff? How does that work out per person recruited?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The overseas staff commencement fees comprise placement fees and visa costs - the average cost per recruit for the 2011-12 campaign was \$5360 per recruit. If we include airfares and relocation costs the average cost was \$9367 per recruit.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That includes the cost of staff - everything?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: And the cost of travel.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Travel, and the relocation expenses for them to come. Have you compiled any statistics on how long these international recruits tend to stay in their positions?

Mr VATSKALIS: From previous experience between July 2011 and March 2012, we had 26 overseas employees - nine from New Zealand and 17 from other countries. The 26 staff were frontline professionals and four overseas recruits left the employment between July 2011 and March 2012. Out of 49 overseas recruits from January 2011 to date, only five have left employment with my department, so the retention rate is quite high.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Unlike other workers within the department. You still have a very high turnover of staff - is that correct? What is the figure for the last 12 months?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The turnover rate for staff has significantly reduced this financial year, particularly for professional staff. I can report the reduction for the 2011-12 financial year has an overall turnover rate for the department down to 18%. That is a huge reduction from last year where there was a 42% turnover across the whole of the agency. That has also shown a marked drop comparatively with child protection professional staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where is the greatest turnover in your staff? In what section?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: This current financial year the highest turnover rate is reported in the Professional Level 1 stream. They are the newest or lowest level professionals within the organisation who are starting child protection work, potentially for the first time, or have the least amount of experience in child protection.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the turnover rate for that group for the last financial year?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The turnover rate this current financial year is 29%.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How long does it take to recruit staff to the department at the moment? Last year, figures around three to six months were quite regular, and that was a problem. What are the current figures looking like?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Time lines for recruitment of staff, I understand, are fairly consistent with last year's, but there has been a small drop.

Ms WILLIAMS: Lorraine Williams, Deputy Chief Executive, Regional Services. I am able to advise that with the arrival of the three regional directors we have been able, because of the professional leadership we have had in the front line, to attract practitioners we were not able to attract prior to that. Particularly in Central Australia, the regional group has had wonderful success in being able to attract professional staff to stay with them.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am not talking about attracting people; I am talking about the time it takes to recruit people. You have done the selection, and then they start work - that time it takes. Last year, it was quite high. Has that changed?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: In the period from 1 July 2011 to 31 March 2012 the average length of time it has taken for recruitment, from advertising to appointing the successful applicant, has been 56.38 days - which is a drop of a couple of days from last year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Going back to your opening statement, minister, you mentioned the peak body for Aboriginal Child and Family Safety. Following the progress of how this organisation has come about, is the peak body the same as an Aboriginal childcare agency? Can you tell me the difference?

Mr VATSKALIS: One of the emergencies we faced in the Territory is while the majority of children who require care and protection are Indigenous children, both in remote communities and in the urban environment, and there was no organisation specifically to look after Indigenous children. In the Health sector, we have Indigenous managed health providers; there was nothing like that with regard to child protection. The peak body was created not to provide child protection services itself, but to actually assist the department to focus on Indigenous children.

We learned from the report which was done - and I have mentioned many times in parliament the state of denial which actually made allegations - I know you roll your eyes, but it was not my report, it was another organisation's report that said at the time, and probably you, like me, were criticised for what happened at the time - that the department just withdrew from remote communities because they could not provide the services. In our case, we do not want that only, we have to expand the service outside the urban centres. SAF,T is one organisation we assist. We ask AMSANT to work to establish that peak organisation which, in turn then will work with the department to develop a number of models to address the issues with Indigenous children. Clare can speak more on that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There were two separate recommendations made by the board of inquiry in relation to this matter. One was a recommendation suggesting that a peak body be established as a governance and advocacy group for non-government organisations, and also to take on capacity building for those organisations. That peak body has been established.

There were further recommendation in relation to ACCAs, or childcare agencies that provide direct services to children and families. The department is in the process of negotiating with SAF,T, which is the peak organisation to potentially auspice ACCAs in the first instance, in both Darwin and Alice Springs and provide services from the new financial year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much are you funding this peak body at present?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The funding for the peak body is \$500 000. The current funding this financial year included some additional establishment costs and to also do some work to scope the work for the childcare agencies to get under way for the next financial year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much money are you looking to allocate to those ACCAs?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The budget for each childcare agency is \$1m for Darwin and \$1m for Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When are they likely to be up and running?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: In the 2012-13 financial year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, what do you want this peak body to achieve?

Mr VATSKALIS: Peak bodies actually perform the same function as AMSANT performs. It oversees the development of services, and the services that function in the community. The peak body will oversee the development of a specific organisation that will provide services to Indigenous communities in the 20 growth towns, together with my department in order to address the gaps which currently exist in the provision of child protection services in Indigenous communities.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay. Regarding training you mentioned in your opening statement. What is happening with your plans to train child protection workers and social workers at CDU? How far have you got in progressing that commitment to Territorians?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is progressing really well. I was very pleased recently to be able to provide the certificates of people who actually have undertaken training. Our intention is to be able to transition people from the administrative stream to the front line. We believe if we train our own here in the Territory, they will stay here and we will fill a lot of the gaps.

In 2011-12, we had 598 staff who attended 54 core and speciality training programs delivered across the Territory. We have now nine Graduate Certificates in Remote Health Practice (Child Protection) completed, and I was very pleased to hand out the certificates. We have nine completed Diplomas of Community Services, 14 Diplomas of Child Youth and Family Intervention, and four Diplomas of Management. There is currently enrolled 17 staff for Diploma of Child Youth and Family Intervention, which will be completed in July 2012.

We have eight staff doing Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, seven staff in Certificate IV in Youth Work, three staff Certificate IV in Frontline Management, three Diploma of Management, 25 Diploma of Child Youth and Family Intervention, 20 places in Graduate Certificate, and 16 enrolled in OCPE Leadership and Management programs. We have 10 Indigenous staff who have completed training in 2011-12, and currently 67 Indigenous staff are enrolled to complete a course.

We will continue our training. I have a personal belief we should train and empower our people to move from admin to frontline. Many of the admin staff are Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people, the people with the experience and the cultural awareness we need in the department. We try to improve their skills and, as you can see, a significant number of people have undertaken and completed training.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I specifically asked about child protection workers, social workers. You talked at some point about offering scholarships.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Has that happened yet?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have a memorandum of understanding with CDU for 25 places every year and five scholarships for child protection workers.

Mrs LAMBLEY: They have been issued?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The scholarships have not been issued at this stage, but they are in train for this year. Three of those have been identified for Aboriginal staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I give credit where credit is due, but you are still going to fall way short of the demand, aren't you? Is there any thought behind ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Of course there is, but we have to start somewhere. I cannot produce child protection workers out of the blue sky. The other thing, as Clare said, it is usually the P1s that decide to pull the plug very quickly. They come from other states, they hit the Territory, they do not know what hit them and, after a while, they become disillusioned, burnt out, and they try to find another profession. If I can provide them support - both mentoring and training support - many people choose to stay in the Territory because we provide other career pathways.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: If I could also make a comment that we have a project officer on board in the department at the moment who is developing a learning pathways program. That pathways program is specifically targeting the administrative stream, many of whom are Aboriginal staff occupying those positions, to enable them to move from the admin stream, lower paid positions, into the professional stream for the first time, given the lowest turnover of staff in our department is the Aboriginal staff. We are trying to use that approach to develop their capacity and create a stronger backbone for the agency through their own professional development.

Mr VATSKALIS: We try to retain people by providing a number of allowances. For example, we provide an intensive package location allowance, the skills retention allowance, the grandparenting allowance, professional classification review translation to other reviews. We try to encourage people to stay in child protection. Some of them can go somewhere else, get a less stressful job, equal if not better pay. If we can actually reward our staff, they will stay in the department - and they do stay with the department. The turnover in the department has gone down from high 20% to high 10%.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a few points of clarification on output groups. The External Monitoring and Reporting Committee, which one does that fall in?

Mr VATSKALIS: Output 6.2.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Output 6.2.

Mr VATSKALIS: Child Protection Services, yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Income management?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Output 6.2.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Output 5.2, you mean? Is that correct?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Output 6.2.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, 6.2.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have the old one.

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, make it 5.6.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you, that is interesting. Also Residential Programs for Children and Youth?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That would be 6.3.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Were there any further questions relating to the statement?

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, you may recall earlier during the day, when you had your Health Minister's hat on, I asked you specifically about two issues arising out of information I had received; one coming from child protection. We have discussed this behind the scenes; you have given us a guarantee that should I make some of that information available to you, you would give them indemnity. Would you extend that indemnity to anybody providing information under child protection?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Port Darwin, as I said to you, if you bring this information to my attention, I will consider this information without taking any action against any person. In the past - and I will do it in the future - I welcome people who provide information that would highlight some shortcomings or some sensitive issue in any department.

Mr ELFERINK: That has certainly been the advice I have received from your Chief Executive, Ms Gardiner-Barnes, in the past as well. Ms Gardiner-Barnes, were you aware that I had raised this issue earlier on today and, if so, have you looked into it at all? Do you have anything you can enlighten this committee on?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I have been issued with a confidentiality notice in relation to this matter and any further statement I make needs to be made *in-camera*.

Mr ELFERINK: I see. This is arising out of a notice being issued by whom?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: By the commissioner.

Mr ELFERINK: Of Public Disclosures?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Correct.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay. That kills that one dead right there.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No further questions in relation to the statement? Then, are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies before we move to Output 6.1.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions

Mr WOOD: Minister, in the annual report, page 97, it says:

Against many of the Coroner's recommendations, the department has noted consultations on amendments to the Care and Protection of Children Act are under way. These amendments have not been introduced into parliament and cannot now until after the election.

What has been the hold-up?

Mr VATSKALIS: We did not do this because we had a look at it and considered we needed further consultation with all stakeholders in order to have a more up-to-date view of their opinion. We did not have a chance to introduce it to parliament. The new government, hopefully, will bring it back to parliament.

Mr WOOD: All right. How many new positions, additional to those being brought over from the Department of Health, have been created, and how many are above the AO6 level?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask my CEO to respond to that.

Mr WOOD: Is it easier to table that, minister?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Or as a question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will let you know.

Mr WOOD: If it fits for time, do you want me to put that question on notice, or do you have that?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I have the answer to the first part of the question, which is the total growth in positions in the last financial year. Since 2011-12 from the previous year, the total growth in the department has been 119 as a head count, and 113 as an FTE.

Mr WOOD: Is that a growth or how many you have ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That is a growth in the financial year.

Mr WOOD: Okay. Do you know how many are now above the AO6 level?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will have to take that question on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Happy to take that question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.18

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you provide us with details of how many staff are above the AO6 level?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, that is Question No 6.18.

Mr WOOD: Minister, just a last question. One of the - I thought - promises of this new department was it would share facilities with existing departments. Why, then, has the Department of Children and Families moved to the Darwin Plaza? What cost has that been to the department?

Mr VATSKALIS: Despite claims about the department hiring flash facilities in Darwin Plaza, it was actually a swap with the Department of Health. Department of Health decided to consolidate its workforce in one area, and the area became available to Department of Children and Families. There was not any acquisition of new property, just a direct swap to consolidate both departments.

Mr WOOD: Isn't there a Department of Children and Families also at Casuarina?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: This departmental shift involved central office staff who were located in Health House in Mitchell Street, and Health Department staff who were located in Darwin Plaza. What occurred was a swap between the two, so all Health staff are now co-located in the same building wherever possible.

The Department of Children and Families staff who were spread across a number of buildings in Darwin CBD are now located in Darwin Plaza, in the main. We still share a number of corporate services between Department of Health and Department of Children and Families, and there is a service level agreement that defines those services.

Mr WOOD: All right, I will leave it at that for time.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Another point of clarification, Madam Deputy Chair. Staffing - where do we talk about that?

Mr WOOD: The whole-of-government.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is probably with this.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay. I need to ask some questions in that area.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sure.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have all read page 3 of *The Weekend Australian* of 16 June. It was a remarkable story, and great timing and all the rest of it for me and my scrutiny of government. I have some questions to ask around what was contained in that article which went on to feature in the *Northern Territory News*. This article alleges there has been a trebling of the Department of Children and Families bureaucracy in the last 18 months - it said two-and-a-half years, but it should have said 18 months; that was incorrect - in the Chief Executive, Executive Director and directors realm of higher bureaucracy. Is this true?

Mr VATSKALIS: First, let us point out we have the creation of a new department completely separate from the Department of Health. We have a new department that has to establish a leadership team. That leadership has to be established and Clare, to her credit, has established it now.

The allegations made in this article are totally untrue - every single word is totally untrue. They claim the enormous cost of relocating to Darwin Plaza. Clare just mentioned it was a swap of office space between people working in Health House going to Darwin Plaza to consolidate, and people from Darwin Plaza to Health House. The cost of the refit was \$80 000. Show me another department that has a changeover with such a small cost of refit.

They stated in the article - I read the article and was very surprised - we had not provided grants to NGOs. In fact, the total increase in funding of NGOs is about 50%.

As for the executive team, I will let Clare speak to that because the allegations made in this article are totally untrue. You said before credit should be given where it is due. The *Sunday Territorian* had an article about that, but it had the decency to ask the CEO of the department about the allegations, which she refuted very clearly in that article. The *Sunday Territorian* published a correction to the article.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Perhaps some figures also to justify the point you are making.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: In relation to the claim that the number of executive level positions have trebled, that is not true. The information provided to me indicates that, since the department was established in January 2011, there have been three additional executive level positions within the department.

As the minister outlined, there has been significant growth in funding to the non-government sector. In 2009-10, funding provided to the non-government sector was \$40m. That increased in 2010-11 to \$52m, and is expected to increase to \$63m by the end of this financial year. That represents an increase in funding of 20% in the last year, and over 50% over the last two years to the sector. There are a number of family support programs funded in 2011 and 2012. I am happy to provide the names to you of all those organisations which have been funded. In addition, more than one-third of the budget of the department is now allocated to the non-government sector.

I have to say, despite information being provided to *The Australian*, there were a number of inaccuracies in the article. I received a phone call from Muriel Bamblett on Saturday who was very angry and upset about things quoted in that article.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, the figures Ms Gardiner-Barnes has just quoted contradict the figures were given in budget Estimates last year. In budget Estimates last year - and I have the *Hansard* here - for 2009-10, there was a 23% increase in funding to non-government organisations - \$32.8m; 2010-11, \$37m - sorry, I will go back. In 2009-10, \$32.8m was spent in this sector and that equated to 23% of the budget; 2010-11, \$37m, which equated to 26% of the total budget. That meant there was a 3% increase - it is in the *Hansard* from 2009-10 to 2010-11. That does not measure up with what you have just told me. Can you explain the discrepancy?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I assume the discrepancy relates to some funding provided to the non-government sector through a grants program. That is probably the funding you were quoting now. When you ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am quoting you ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... from *Hansard*.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Ms Gardiner-Barnes is answering the question

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: If they are NGO grants, then that is a lower figure than all of the funding which is provided to the non-government sector. I will pass over to the Chief Finance Officer, Cameron Wilson, to respond to those.

Mr WILSON: Cameron Wilson, Chief Finance Officer. We provide a great deal with subsidies for the non-government sector and, for 2011-12, it is around \$17m. When that is added in, it then increases the total.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I find this unsatisfactory and very misleading. You have given one set of data 12 months ago, and now you are giving a completely different set of facts and data.

I want to know why you have changed the goal posts ...

Mr WILSON: It was just ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: To me, it looks like you have done it to say there has been a substantial increase and there has been more funding spent than has actually been spent. You need to explain this to the people of the Territory, not just me.

Mr WILSON: Yes, from my perspective the previous year it was just a focus on grants to the non-government sector, whereas we did not count those subsidies that were to be paid. By adding those in - and the previous year it was probably an oversight not to include those. But, when we do include those, it does ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Or is it an oversight this year that you have included them? How about we get the figures ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Wilson has the call, let him answer the question you have asked.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Sorry. I beg your pardon.

Mr WILSON: These are the total payments we make to the non-government sector.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What I would like from you then are the figures based on what you provided last year for this year?

Mr WILSON: I can do that because that was just grants, and just focused on grants.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Then we have the truth.

Mr VATSKALIS: We are quite happy to provide you the grants and all the subsidies to the sector because we are going to prove we actually spent more money in the NGO sector than what is recorded in

the *Hansard*. I am very happy to do that, and you will see the significant increase in expenditure to the NGO sector, both last year and this year continuing to the years after.

I am very happy to take it on notice. If you want to put it on notice we will provide you with the information.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like it taken on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.19

Mrs LAMBLEY: Regarding the figures which were presented by Clare Gardiner-Barnes in Budget Estimates in 2011, I would like the figures for this year to be presented on the same terms and basis in which they were presented in last year's Budget Estimates - if that makes sense - without the grants.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, hold on, hold on. Your question was why last year you provided that figure; now you provide a different one. We explained to you that last year we did not include the subsidy; we only include the grants we put in. We are happy to provide you both the grants and subsidy for last year and this year so you can see clearly there was a reduction or an increase of funding for NGOs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I want it the other way around, minister, please.

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot see what your purpose is, but we are happy to provide the answer in the way I described it to you and you can deduct it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Perhaps the people of the Territory can be provided it in both forms - with and without the grants and subsidy ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am very happy to say this is what was provided in subsidies ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... so we can make a fair comparison?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... and this is what we provided in grants, in both occasions – last year and this year.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Can we just have clarity around what the question on notice actually is?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I can give you the amount - just grants without subsidies now. The 2011-12 allocation is grant commitments to date, \$43.3m, expected to be \$46m by the end of the financial year. That is the total amount without the subsidies included, which reflects the same calculation that was provided last year.

Mr VATSKALIS: Just \$40m more than last year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I beg your pardon, sorry?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$40m more than last year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, that is not correct.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, what was last year?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Last year was \$37m.

Mr VATSKALIS: Now they are \$46m, \$9m more.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, it is six point - you can do your own calculations, but you are presenting incorrect information here, minister ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, you just said ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... and I cannot help but figure that it is designed to deceive.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order! Order! Minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... that last year the figure was ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You should know - \$37m, it is in *Hansard*.

Mr VATSKALIS: \$37m. The CEO said this year it is going to be \$44m, rising to \$46m by the end of the year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: \$43.3m at present.

Mr VATSKALIS: Rising to \$46m by the end of the year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A difference of \$7.3m.

Mr VATSKALIS: That means a \$9m increase since last year. That is only the grants without the subsidies. As I said to you, we will provide you an answer: the grants only last year and this year, and the subsidies last year and this year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: And the percentage increases. Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Of course. Quite happy to do so.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is a rather lengthy question on notice, but it is No 6.19.

Mr VATSKALIS: We might be able to answer you now. Madam Deputy Chair, I think Jo Townsend can answer that question now.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.19

Ms TOWNSEND: Jo Townsend, Executive Director of Social Inclusion Programs and Policy Area. The overall quantum of grants this year as at 18 June - as you can imagine, money is moving in and out still - was \$44m in grants. Last year, the reported figure was \$35.7m so, there is actually a \$10m difference there.

This year, there has been \$8.6m in new grants allocated. The difference there in the amount relates to a grant stopping and starting. There has been an investment of \$8.6m in new grants this year, but the difference is actually closer to \$10m.

Mrs LAMBLEY: So we have different figures again. Fantastic!

Ms TOWNSEND: No. The difference in figures between one year and the next is not necessarily an increase. There are one-off grants stopping and starting; there is the application of indexation. If the committee is interested in what we spent in new grants, it is \$8.6m.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: If you still want the question on notice I am happy to provide how much grants we gave last year and how many subsidies, and how many this year and how many subsidies.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have some more questions based on what Ms Gardiner-Barnes spoke of before. In respect to the increase in the senior bureaucracy at the executive level, the fax I have is that in 2010 there were nine executive positions and, in 2012, we had 33. That is where the trebling comes from. The figures you just gave me are based as of 1 January 2011 when the department commenced formally.

These figures pertain to when the reforms commenced, when the board of inquiry report was released. Are these figures true? Are the figures I have in front of me correct? Has there been a trebling since 2010 in the executive level of the bureaucracy of the Department of Children and Families?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There has not been a trebling of executive level positions. The figures you have are not accurate.

Question on Notice No 6.20

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many executive positions were there in 2010? Make it from October 2010. My colleague has just suggested I ask for the last three financial years. If you can demonstrate to us what the number of executive positions in the department have been over the last three or four years, we can put this to rest one way or another.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Okay, I will take that question on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: Before you go on, I remind you the department became an independent Department of Children and Families on 1 January 2011.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, we know that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Before that, you cannot get a clear indication of executives of the department because it was the Department of Health and Families.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, what that illustrates to people is the cost of becoming a department and how much the bureaucracy has grown - and that is a fair enough ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You cannot go to the past three financial years because the department did not exist as a department three years ago. It became ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was it called before, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Department and Health and Families.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can we have the statistics then, those numbers from then?

Mr VATSKALIS: If you are trying to compare how many executives there were in the then Department of Health and Families, it will be totally irrelevant, because there were no exclusive executives for the Department of Children and Families.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay, different question, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to say how many were in 2011 when we established, and how many are today - that will make sense.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many executive positions were there in the department on 1 January 2011? How many executive positions are there in the department today?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is a question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.20.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Further questions relating to agency-related whole-of-government?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes. Based on the current figure of 33 executive positions in the department, I am assuming that is correct? Yes or no?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are there 33 executive positions within the Department of Children and Families today? That should be reasonably easy to answer, I would imagine.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, The total number of executive positions is 22.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Twenty-two?

Mr VATSKALIS: Just 11 less than you said.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Does that include the chief executive deputy position?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That would include all executive level positions and above.

Mrs LAMBLEY: And director positions too?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Some director positions are not executive positions. It includes any person who is on an executive level contract with the department - they are non-permanent, contracted executive positions.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Given those figures, that there are 22 at the moment, what is the ratio between non-service delivery staff and operational staff at the moment?

Mr VATSKALIS: What do you mean by non-delivery staff? Can you clarify that, sorry? The total department ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the ratio of executive level positions to operational level staff within the department?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The headcount of frontline positions in the department, as of 28 March, Pay 20 this year, is 603.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay, and 22 executive positions?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The ratio is somewhere ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Small.

Mrs LAMBLEY: All right. I am just about done here.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Fine. Then we are going to Output 6.1. No, you had a question? This is agency, whole-of-government, Gerry?

Mr WOOD: Yes. Minister, will the departments that signed off on the Child Safety and Wellbeing Plan 2012 - such as the Chief Minister, Health, Children and Families, Housing, Local Government and Regional Services, Education and Training, NT Police and Justice - have access to the same database, or identified fields or reports from that database that keeps information on children at risk?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There are two agencies that currently have access to the Community Information System; that is, the Department of Health and Department of Children and Families. Not every officer in the Department of Children and Families has full access to that information, because it contains extremely sensitive secure information, and Department of Health employees have the capacity to see a flag. If, for example, a child in care is admitted to the hospital and a worker in the health system was providing a service, they could see the child was known to the Department of Children and Families and in care, and they could make further inquiries to our department.

Police have access through the Child Abuse Task Force to information related to joint investigations, and they work collaboratively together – the Department of Children and Families staff and police. Other departments do not have access to the information because there are very strict confidentiality provisions. However, the Department of Justice is currently exploring opportunities to have access to shared client information next financial year.

With the changes that have gone through the parliamentary process in relation to information sharing, there will be much more free-flowing access to information where that relates to service providers to a vulnerable child. I expect departments will work much more collaboratively in providing access to relevant information where that is in the best interest of the child.

Mr WOOD: Someone at a school - the principal, for instance - would have knowledge of whether a child at that school is at risk?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: School principals should be aware a child at their school is in care. They may not be aware the child is known to the department, or is currently under an investigation, or is at risk. It will depend on the circumstances related to that investigation and that report; whether it is important for the principal to know that to ensure proper services are provided to that child.

Mr WOOD: The last question, minister. What are the caseload ratios now for East Arnhem and Barkly regions? Could you say whether they have gone up or gone down?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The Department of Children and Families has successfully recruited a number of additional staff in the last six months, which has resulted in an enormous reduction in caseloads across the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Could you give us the figures to show that, please?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The average caseload today across the Territory is 18 cases per worker, if you consider all of the frontline child protection staff who carry cases in addition to other staff who are there to support them with large workloads, such as the Mobile Child Protection Team and the Darwin Backlog Team.

For each office, as of today, the Northern Remote office has a caseload of 28, the East Arnhem office has a caseload of 23, the Katherine office has a caseload of 26, the Barkly office has a caseload of 53, the Alice Springs office has a caseload of 15, the Casuarina office has a caseload of 29, and the Palmerston office has a caseload of 23.

In addition to those caseloads, there is an additional 24 staff who can support those offices with high caseloads such as Barkly. To that effect, three mobile child protection workers will be based at the Barkly office to assist with child protection investigations and case management early next month.

Mr WOOD: You just said you had employed some more people. What was East Arnhem and Barkly six months before this figure?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Have a look in here, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: You could probably say some of the questions are sometimes asked on that side ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I can advise the average caseload last year was double what it is now - it was 36 cases per worker. Today, it is 18 per worker across the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like to ask a question on that, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will allow some latitude but, strictly speaking, member for Araluen, you have completed and we keep moving forward. But, just a quick question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am looking at the Child Protection Reform Progress Report Volume 2 printed in April 2012. The figures you have cited, Ms Gardiner-Barnes, are quite miraculous. In the space of months - April, May, June - you have managed to halve the figures. That is wonderful news but almost beyond the realms of plausible, particularly in the more remote stations like the Barkly. I will not ask how you have done it because I am sure you are ready with a wonderful explanation. Would you agree it is miraculous and you have pulled off something within the space of 90 days that not many people could do?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There has been an incredible effort made by regional executive directors to recruit frontline staff. For the first time this year, we have employed agency staff. We have not done that in child protection before in the Territory. A number of agencies have risen to the challenge and provided agency staff for us at very quick notice, which has made a huge difference on top of the other recruitment strategies we have put in place. It just so happens, in the last few weeks a number of those additional staff have actually commenced in the agency.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It also has implications that if the caseloads have dropped, either you have more staff or cases have been closed quite rapidly. Is it a combination of both, or simply about increased staffing levels?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The full caseload information I have before me would indicate there has not been a drastic increase in closing of cases. The number of total cases open today is 2708. There are similar figures on 6 June, and similar figures in May and March.

Question on Notice No 6.21

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like to ask a question on notice because I do not imagine you would have all the figures there, but the increase in staffing of all those offices in the last 90 days?

Mr VATSKALIS: Happy to respond to that. Despite your conspiracy theories, the reality is people have done a tremendous job.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, I do not have conspiracy theories.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Katherine office, for example, when I first visited it, had quite a few vacancies. Last time I visited they were complaining they did not have enough office space because they had so many people working there, which was really good.

At the same time, at Barkly there is a high load level. We supported three people going there to help, plus recruitment of new people. The reality is, you can recruit people when you have money in your budget. Our budget this year is going to be \$177m. You could not recruit many people with a \$7m budget for the department, as it was in 2000-01.

There is the will, the money, and I said from the very beginning, our intention is to provide a safe environment for Territory children, and we will proceed to do so.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That question on notice is No 6.21.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Output 6.1 – Family and Parent Support Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are going to move to Output Group 6.0, Children and Families, Output 6.1, Family and Parent Support Services. Any questions?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, I am interested in the funding you give to non-government organisations for important things like maternal and child support, parenting skills development, and targeted family support. How many NGOs did the Department of Children and Families fund to provide family support services in 2011-12? What was the total funding - you have already quoted that. You told me the total funding given to these organisations was \$43.3m. Is that correct, or has it changed?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, my CEO will provide an answer to that.

Ms GARDNIER-BARNES: The Department of Children and Families allocated \$9.1m in family support in 2011-12 through grants to the non-government sector which includes \$2.7m for new services for family support, which is a total of 11 services.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was the increase from this year to the year before, presuming there was an increase?

Ms GARDNIER-BARNES: The increase for the current financial year for family support to non-government services is \$2.4m.

Mrs LAMBLEY: And a percentage? That is okay. Maybe on notice I can have the percentage. I can work it out myself. How many of these non-government organisations given funding by your department to provide family services have their contract finishing as of 30 June 2012?

Ms GARDNIER-BARNES: We need to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.22

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Could you just repeat that please, Robyn.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many of these non-government organisations given funding by the Department of Children and Families to provide family support services have their contract finishing on 30 June 2012?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For Hansard that is question No 6.22.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would also like to know how many of these contracts that cease as of 30 June will be extended, or do you have other NGOs lined up to take over from those contracts?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Is that another question on notice?

Ms TOWNSEND: If I could just add some clarifying comments? Any of the services that were due to cease this financial year in family support will already be aware of that. Any of those services that were getting new funding next year would already be aware of that. The date of the end of the service agreement for this year and next is not a measure of continuing support or funding for those organisations necessarily, but we will provide that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Townsend.. Can you just repeat that question, please, member for Araluen.

Question on Notice No 6.23

Mrs LAMBLEY: Of the X number of contracts that are ceasing as of 30 June 2012, do you have other non-government organisations secured to provide in family support services, and how many of those existing contracts will be extended?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.23.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have spoken to a number of NGOs over the last month who have said they had not been advised whether or not their contracts were up for renewal. This was probably three weeks ago. Can you explain the time frames around this year's notification of whether or not contracts were to be reviewed, ceased, or extended? These organisations did not know what their future held. I say four weeks ago to give some latitude, but it was probably three.

Ms GARDNIER-BARNES: There was a small group of services that had a delay in being notified of their ongoing funding, but that has now occurred in the last couple of weeks.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Presumably, you would have been aware of the impact the lack of notification of their future relationship with the department would have had on their staffing and their organisation as a whole. Is there much or any consideration put into that aspect of managing contracts?

Ms GARDNIER-BARNES: It is absolutely critical, obviously, for continuity of staff and business that services are provided with advice as soon as the department can confirm ongoing funding commitments. We were very conscious of the impact the delay was having on services. As soon as we could confirm that budget commitment, we put that in place.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What would the normal, or usual, or preferable practice be around that? How long before contracts are due for completion should they be notified of their future?

Ms TOWNSEND: The practice is to try to give organisations at least 90 days notice of the agreements. Obviously, that is not always possible. We do try to keep in regular contact with some organisations. I am aware of some organisations we did contact directly as soon as we had the confirmation of their funding ongoing. We also have a regional structure that supports a much closer proximity to those services.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What would prohibit not notifying these organisations within that 90-day time frame? Why would you not do that?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Confirmation of our overall budget allocation by the Department of Treasury, so we could ensure, where there was an end to an agreement, future funding commitments could be met in the future.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is not tardiness; it is about bureaucracy?

Mr VATSKALIS: Timing.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: As soon as the department was in a position to formally commit to that funding, we contacted those agencies on that day.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are going to take a pause now. We have been going for almost two hours, so it will be a quick five-minute break.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are still on Output 6.1. Member for Araluen, you have the call.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have no more questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No more questions, and the member for Nelson is not here so he has missed out.

Output 6.2 – Child Protection Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We move then to Output 6.2, Child Protection Services.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, in last year's budget estimates, you provided me with the number of carers the Department of Children and Families has referred to Centrelink for the 70% income management measure as being 51. What is the figure for this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: As at 1 June 2012, there are 205 families under income management.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How would you say that is working, minister? Is that a successful tool in assisting carers to perform as parents?

Mr VATSKALIS: We work very closely with carers to provide them means to support their families. However, some of them either do not understand or they are unwilling or difficult to work with, so the department does not hesitate to take them to task. We use the stick-and-carrot approach. People who behave themselves get a carrot, people who do not get a stick - and income management is the stick. It is now very clear out there that the department does not hesitate to take action.

I have given clear instructions to the department that the welfare of children is paramount to us, and income managers are told to ensure children are fed, they have a safe place to live, they are clothes and everything else. The department does not hesitate to take them to task.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The External Monitoring and Reporting Committee - how does the role of this body differ from the Northern Territory Children and Families Advisory Council? What are the differences, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: The committee was actually established in October 2010 as an independent committee with highly-regarded experts. The committee is actually overseeing the implementation of the recommendations that were made under the board of inquiry. It is totally independent, it is not directed by a minister of government, and it provides information to the government - good or bad - and we have to accept it.

To date, the committee has issued two reports. Both reports have praised the government for its commitment. Also, the recommendations are gradually implemented as per the board of inquiry recommendations. My CEO can add to this, please.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The NT Children and Families Advisory Council has a broader ambit than does the External Monitoring and Reporting Committee, in that the advisory council reports directly to the minister on a range of issues across the whole of the department rather than just child protection investigations and reforms as per the board of inquiry.

They have been interested in a range of issues including domestic and family violence, for example. Generally, the External Monitoring and Reporting Committee will call upon only how they relate to the recommendations as such. The advisory council has a much broader role than child protection.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is there significant overlap or duplication in their role?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There is certainly a level of similar interest, particularly in the child protection and reform agenda. The makeup of the advisory council group is of all NT residents, so they have a much stronger focus on the range of issues which impact on them, as representatives around the table. For example, we have a couple of doctors on the advisory council and non-government services providers. They bring a level of expertise and questions related specifically to information they gather through their own profession, whereas the External Monitoring and Reporting Committee also provides an overlay at a national level where they can compare progress of board of inquiry recommendations in comparison to what is happening in other jurisdictions. As well, those members of the External Monitoring and Reporting Committee have a Northern Territory residence capacity and interest specifically.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Would there be anything lost by combining the two, do you believe?

Mr VATSKALIS: The External Monitoring and Reporting Committee has a narrower focus. Actually, they will not see the implementation of the recommendations made by the board of inquiry, and progress from that.

I want to maintain that focus. I want this committee to actually have a look at the board of inquiry recommendations, look at what government is doing to progress the recommendations, and see how these recommendations are implemented. It is better to have a narrow focus rather than actually start broadening because things can get lost that way.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Just one more question. You said the External Monitoring and Reporting Committee has praised you. Do they criticise you at all, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: It has praised the government for the way it has implemented the recommendations. No, we have not received any criticisms; we received constructive comments about how things could be done better, or could be accelerated.

Mrs LAMBLEY: They are still not critiquing, analysing, or measuring what you are doing?

Mr VATSKALIS: They are measuring the – no, the role of the ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Because if they were, minister, you would be feeling the criticism, I can assure you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, the only one who has received criticism from the committee is you for your comments about wining and dining and criticising them professionally, or lack of it, and making comments in parliament which were highly embarrassing.

The committee has done an excellent job being independent, and provided the independent and fearless advice about what is happening with regard to the implementation of the recommendations. I have tabled all the reports in parliament and in public. If anybody wants to see what the committee has to say about the government and the way we have progressed the recommendations, they can look at the report or the *Hansard*. I will leave that to the Territorians to talk about.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is interesting, minister, that after six independent reports into child protection in the Northern Territory over the last 10 years, in which there were multiple criticisms and constructive analysis made of your performance in child protection, we now have an External Monitoring and Reporting Committee which praises you and does not criticise you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, I remind you when we took over government we found a system that was non-existent. We found a system that concentrated on the urban communities. We found a system which withdrew services from Indigenous children, the most vulnerable. We found a system that had a \$7m budget. We found a system that had fewer than 100 people working in the department. Yes, we found a system completely collapsed, completely destroyed. We had to start building from something. My colleagues and I, and whoever went before me, worked really hard.

Yes, the system is not perfect and it will take years to fix the system anywhere in Australia. This is not a Territory problem; this is an Australian problem. You can see the same thing happening in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria. We are trying our best. We try very hard. Every single minister in my position built more and more on the previous one in order to put in place a system that would work. The system you had in place - not personally; when I say 'you', I refer to your political party - the political party in power for 37 years did nothing for child protection, and that system had to be built from scratch.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have no further questions.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee Report No 2, on the front page, it says 12 of 34 urgent recommendations have been implemented. Is that a good thing or a poor thing?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is praise.

Mr WOOD: If so, I wish to know the state of the other 22 urgent recommendations.

Mr VATSKALIS: The recommendations were made by the board of inquiry and the recommendations will be complete in a very short period of time. There will be recommendations which will take a long period of time to be completed or can be ongoing. The 12 recommendations that were implemented were the ones that could be done in time, and were done in time; the others are currently in progress.

Mr WOOD: When do you see the rest of those urgent recommendations being implemented?

Mr VATSKALIS: Some of them will be implemented in a period of time; some of them will be ongoing and will need to be maintained. As the recommendations are completed, they will be marked as completed and will be reported to parliament.

Mr WOOD: As much as we had a plan at the beginning as to when these recommendations would be implemented and you say that is not possible, have you a new plan to say when those recommendations - obviously, you have to work to some target otherwise they lose their urgency?

Mr VATSKALIS: The board of inquiry put targets when the recommendations have to be implemented, not by when they have to be implemented. We have followed the target as set by the board of inquiry. We started the recommendations in the time prescribed by the board of inquiry, and we are working to implement these recommendations.

As I said before, some can be done very quickly, some can be done in months, and some will take years. I will let my CEO respond further to that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I can provide a bit more of a breakdown around the progress of the recommendations. Of the 34 urgent ones, 13 are completed and 21 commenced; of the 108 semi-urgent recommendations, 20 are completed and 88 commenced; and of the five important but not urgent recommendations, the five have all commenced.

The department continues to review its project management time lines for the commencement and completion of the recommendations. Those time lines will be adjusted based on priorities that emerge from the front line. Key issues are identified by staff as well as budget priorities across the agency. While we are absolutely committed to all of the recommendations, we also need to maintain a flexible approach which allows us to prioritise those recommendations that are most critical, and will have the best outcome for children and families, particularly those who are most vulnerable. That will be the driver around how we continue to reprioritise our budget with the completion of the recommendations.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you very much. That concludes consideration of Output 6.2.

Output 6.3 – Out of Home Care Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will proceed to Output 6.3, Out of Home Care Services.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Because of time constraints, I will not be asking any questions in this output group.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Much as I love resources, I have just a couple of questions. I believe they are important. Minister, how many children are in out-of-home care services that are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal?

Mr VATSKALIS: Total children on care and protection orders as of 31 March 2012 was 765 and Indigenous children are 82%, 631. Total children in out-of-home care 665 and Indigenous children in out-of-home care is 543, 81%.

Mr WOOD: Of the Aboriginal children how many have care plans and cultural care plans?

Mr VATSKALIS: My CEO will provide the information.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: As at 31 March 2012, there were 765 children in care, on care and protection orders. Of these, 651 had a care plan implemented and recorded on the information system.

Mr WOOD: Are care plans and cultural care plans the same thing?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The cultural care plan is a subset of the care plan, so every Indigenous child should have a cultural care plan developed as part of the care plan.

Mr WOOD: They should have - does that mean they have had?

Ms WILLIAMS: Absolutely. We require that to be the case. We are, through our practice reforms, getting to that position. I cannot say every child does have a cultural care plan at this point in time. We have invested heavily in putting some extra resources into each of the regions, so that can be followed up. The practice advisors will have that as a huge priority to follow through on. Today no, tomorrow yes.

Mr WOOD: Okay, we might follow that up. Just quickly, on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee page 9 it says – I am asking how many new foster carers have come onto the books since Life without Barriers started doing the assessments, and have any people been assessed as unsuitable since that time?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There have been 10 carers to date who have now had their assessments completed and are now undertaking or are about to commence training. There have been some prospective carers withdraw through the assessment process for a range of reasons. Some of those relate to moving interstate, starting a new job, changing their mind - a whole range of reasons. I am unable to provide information about whether or not that was because they did not actually meet the assessment process.

Mr WOOD: Okay. I will leave it at that because of the time.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.3.

Output 6.4 - Youth Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Output 6.4, Youth Services, sits with Minister for Young Territorians portfolio. I beg your pardon, questions relating to 6.4 will be answered by the Minister for Children and Families today. Are there questions for that output?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In 2011-12, how many non-government organisations did the Department of Children and Families fund to provide youth services? And at what cost?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There has been \$10.4m allocated for the provision of youth services to non-government organisations through grants. I do not have a total list of the number of organisations, but I could take that on notice.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That would be great. Was that an increase from the year before in expenditure?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If I can just clarify from information in front of me. Output 6.4, Youth Services sits within the Minister for Young Territorians' portfolio and the minister here today will answer questions relating to Youth Family Responsibility Agreements and Orders. Sorry, member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many family responsibility agreements do you have currently in play – active?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Sorry, I am just clarifying whether the previous question was to be answered.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It was a question on notice about the number of organisations, but what I have just clarified is it is in fact outside of this particular output today. We can leave that for minister Knight when he appears, which is tomorrow. Sorry about that; it was my fault.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It is 42.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Forty-two? In the whole of the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, which question?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Forty-two organisations funded under the Youth Services.

Mr VATSKALIS: There are 96 families entered into family responsibility agreements.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.2

Mr VATSKALIS: I have a response to one of the questions on notice. Question No 6.2: the number of executive level officers on 1 January 2011 and 31 May 2012. In January 2011, there were 17 executives. In May 2012, there were 20. The increase is three.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You said 22 for June.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is actually 31 May 2012.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In the last three weeks, you have recruited two executive positions? You have created two executive positions in three weeks?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The data actually relates to filled positions at the time the data is extracted from the HR system. My understanding is there was a point in time when those two positions were not filled.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. We are on Output 6.4.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The plot thickens. Okay. I have no more questions for this output area.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration Output 6.4.

Output 6.5 – Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions for this Output 6.5, Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, the AIHW, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, released data pertaining to hospital admissions in the five Northern Territory hospitals between July 2008 and June 2009 which showed that Northern Territory Indigenous women admitted into hospital for assault was over double the

national rate. If you are an Indigenous woman in the Northern Territory, you are twice as likely to be assaulted to the point of requiring hospital admission than anywhere else in Australia.

What has the government been doing to respond to this insane level of violence in Northern Territory Indigenous communities since these figures were released three years ago?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The domestic violence strategy was allocated \$15m over three years. There has been a range of programs put in place this current financial year: \$2.2m was allocated to non-government organisations for specialist crisis accommodation, support, community education, advocacy and outreach services across the NT for people affected by domestic violence and family violence; \$0.33m was transferred to the Department of Justice as a contribution to the NT Legal Aid Commission and the Central Australian Women's Legal Service in Alice Springs; and \$1.05m for the domestic and family violence hospital project, enhancing the capacity of NT hospitals to respond to domestic and family violence - the employment of specialist staff at the hospital emergency departments in Katherine, Darwin, Gove, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs has enhanced the capacity of NT hospitals to respond more effectively to domestic and family violence; \$0.13m for the Peace at Home program, a collaboration between the Department of Children and Families and NT Police in Katherine; \$0.17m paid to KPMG under their contract to evaluate the initial impact of the mandatory reporting of domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory; \$0.52m was distributed for a variety of activities and resource development in the area of education and community awareness raising, and the effects of domestic violence and mandatory reporting, including \$0.37m for advertising and promotional materials and \$0.15m for the production of information resources about domestic violence orders for both defendants and people in need of protection.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is really tragic, member for Araluen, that our Indigenous women visit the hospital at twice the rate than any other person. What is really more tragic is that most of these women are bashed by relatives, close relatives, husbands, and the main culprit in this is alcohol. We see that again in the Territory and everywhere else. That is the reason why many people feel strongly about alcohol. I have seen many women get bashed, I have seen women in the hospital, and I feel sad and sorry we have a situation like that. Alcohol is what actually causes most of this domestic violence.

It does not happen only in Indigenous houses; it happens in houses of non-Indigenous people. That is why I am a strong supporter of the Banned Drinker Register, and a reduction of sale of alcohol to people. I have no problems showing my card or people showing their cards where they buy alcohol. I hope you have a very strong voice in your government. They actually come out and said they want to get rid of the Banned Drinker Register. You oppose it, because every single drink consumed by a man may result in a woman being sent to hospital.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: In addition to the information provided, there was also an \$8.57m allocation for safe houses for women across the Territory. That included employment of 56 staff in the Women's Safe Houses program, and 19 staff in the Men's Places program. They are currently operating five men's places employing 14 men in communities at Maningrida, Ngukurr, Wurrumiyanga, Ramingining and Aputula. In addition, there are 42 local women working across a whole range of communities in remote parts of the Territory.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have questions for Output 6.5?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.5. I note that although Women's Police sits under DCF, questions will be answered by the Minister for Women's Policy on Thursday.

Non-specific Budget-related Questions

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

Thank you. That concludes consideration of the Department of Children and Families. On behalf of the committee, minister, thank you to your officers who have provided advice today.

We will now change over to Department of Resources.

DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I have three questions on notice to table, please.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Right, we are ready to go. Welcome back, minister, this time wearing your hat as Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources Minister. If you would like to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement – a brief one, hopefully.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

The department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources is responsible for supporting and facilitating the development of resources-based industries throughout the Northern Territory. Our three rings of circus, Primary Industry, Fisheries, and Minerals and Energy, are again expected to contribute over \$7bn to our economy over the coming 12 months.

Our Primary Industry sector not only contributes more than \$0.5bn a year to the Northern Territory economy, but also remains the backbone of so many of our regional and remote communities. For 2011-12, the Department of Resources forecasts a contribution of \$592.4m, exceeding the production value of \$503m for 2010-11.

The department expects Territory value production to fall back to \$569m in 2012-13, with the mango crop returning the long-term average value.

In 2010-11, the cattle industry increased in value by 12.3% to \$285m, despite a 6.6% increase in live cattle exports. The live export trade to the main Indonesian market has been, and continues to be, significantly impacted by policy decisions in both Indonesia and Australia. The introduction of export supply chain assurance regulation of livestock exports to Indonesia by the Australian government in late 2011 is intended to cover 99% of the trade by 31 August 2012.

The Department of Resources pastoral market update data shows exports of Northern Territory live cattle was down 30% in 2010, to 253 000 head in 2011. To the end of April 2012, cattle exported increased to 77 000 head, up 4% compared to the same month last year.

The outlook for the Northern Territory cattle industry remains challenging with development of new markets, live exports, and possibly local processing critical for a return to growth. The Department of Resources projects the cattle industry to contribute \$287m in 2011-12.

Excellence in market price conditions for most horticulture period 2011 support the provisional estimate of industry value now \$197.7m, up by more than 40% from the previous year. This estimate includes the \$80m mango crop, up 6.7%, and \$59m melon crop, up 26%. For 2012-13, the horticulture industry is forecast to return \$170m based on average years and prices.

Mixed farming, including fodder crops, is estimated to have contributed \$90m in 2010-11. However, the forecast for 2011-12 has been adjusted down to \$14.6m due to reduced live cattle export.

In 2010-11, the estimated production value from commercial fishing in the Territory was \$59.7m, including an estimated value of agriculture production of \$27m. In addition, the industry harvested a further \$19.3m of prawns in the Northern Territory zone of the Northern Prawn Fishery, making a total sector contribution of \$78.7m in 2010-11. For 2011-12, the forecast is for a similar measure of economic contribution by the commercial industry of around \$8m.

In addition to being an important part of the Northern Territory lifestyle, our recreational fisheries are also an important economic contributor. Expenditure on recreational fishing and fishing tours is estimated to be over \$80m.

Madam Deputy Chair, in providing for the economy, the mining and energy sector is clearly the most significant, not only in its direct contribution to the economy, but also through the spin-off benefits to industry and business. The value of production forecast for the current financial year, and for 2012-13, is in excess of \$7bn.

There are 345 authorised mining operations across the Northern Territory. Many of these are explorations sites, including several good prospects for new mining ventures in future years. In 2010-11, the current three producing mines, both in metallic and non-metallic minerals, generated production worth \$3.145bn. The forecast for 2011-12 is \$3bn, and \$2.9bn in 2012-13.

This government has committed to strategic programs to raise the profile of Territory minerals and energy potential, and to promote it as a preferred location for exploration investment. Programs cover a

range of best practices from attracting local interest and investment in drilling and geosciences initiatives to the continued highly successful China and Japan investment attraction strategies. As of March 2011, the international investment attraction strategy alone has seen 15 agreements signed and over \$144.3m in publically announced deals from Chinese companies since the strategy commenced four years ago.

Mineral exploration expenditure in the Territory for 2011 was a record of \$228.4m, an increase of 37% on the previous year, and continuing the trend in growth in recent years. Exploration was up 30% Australia-wide as most jurisdictions bounced back from the global financial crisis.

Commitment to petroleum exploration expenditure in the Territory for the 2010-11 financial year was \$42m, an increase of \$27m from the previous year. With the geothermal energy industry showing interest in certain parts of the Territory, we have granted six geothermal exploration permits this year with a potential \$660 000 of exploration on ground.

This year's result from the Fraser Institute's global survey of mining companies rates the Territory as the top jurisdiction in Australia and 11th globally for the index which measures attractiveness of government policies for exploration and mining investment. The Northern Territory Geological Survey Geological Database again ranked among the top 10 geological databases in the world. This is a survey of industry members themselves; it is about how the industry runs the Territory.

My department continues to manage the successful renewable remote power generation program. This year, the Alice Springs Solar Cities program is due to complete with full expenditure or funds. Administration of Commonwealth funds for a solar program at Ti Tree and Kalkarindji, and a solar and wind power at Lake Nash is also due to cease upon completion of the contracts.

The economic outlook remains positive in the China connection. Despite Australia's external trade moderating in line with considerable global uncertainty about the Euro Zone in particular, our resource base sectors look forward to strong Asia link trade. As I stated earlier, the Territory's resource sector is expected to continue to contribute in excess of \$7bn per year to the Territory economy.

Finally, Madam Deputy Chair, I introduce to the Estimates Committee the Department of Resources officials who are here today: Mr Richard Galton, CEO of the department; Mr Bernard Ho, Chief Financial Officer; Mr Rob Gobbey, Executive Director, Primary Industries; Mr Alister Trier, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy; and Mr Ian Curnow, Executive Director, Fisheries.

I will be happy to respond to any questions and I will, at times, be calling on these, or other departmental officials, where appropriate, to provide the information you request.

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

Ms PURICK: No.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there agency-related whole-of-government questions.

Ms PURICK: No. I have specific area questions. Is that agency?

Mr WOOD: One. Minister, considering the NT Cattlemen's Association and the Northern Territory Agricultural Association opposed the new Native Vegetation Management Bill, does your department support the new Native Vegetation Management Bill? Could you tell us whether any of your officers were reprimanded for attending and speaking out at a Palmerston meeting in relation to this bill last year?

Mr VATSKALIS: My department will consider the voice of industry and bring these opinions to the attention of the department which drafts the legislation. My department has contributed to drafting of the legislation, highlighting some of the issues that may affect the industry, and requested amendments where necessary. The department will always be looking after the industry. The industry, at the same time, has the interests of the Indigenous people because that bill will not only affect the cattlemen but the Indigenous people in their endeavour to develop their land. Also, at the same time, we have to actually develop the Territory but not at the cost of the environment.

Mr WOOD: Did any members of the department get a little ticking off for speaking out at the department's meeting last year?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr WOOD: That is okay, thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT
Output 7.1 – Minerals and Energy

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will move then to Output Group 7.0, Resource Industry Development, Output 7.1, Minerals and Energy.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, did you talk with the companies before you made the announcement to impose the moratorium on sea bed exploration and, if not, why not?

Mr VATSKALIS: It was a policy decision. Well, actually let me go a step back. These particular moratoriums affected a number of companies that had exploration applications - not granted licences - on areas under water. This covers areas in the Territory waters which may be subject to the Blue Mud Bay, and some areas that are subject to interests by the local people. When I first met with one particular company, I advised them strongly to consult with the local people because I was aware there were some issues raised by the local people ...

Ms PURICK: Minister, if I may interrupt, the question is: did you talk to the companies before you announced the moratorium that you were going to announce the moratorium?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is what I am telling you. I talked to the industry, I also made them aware of the potential of the traditional owners of a particular area to consult with the federal government which, in that case, the moratorium would be an extremely harsh moratorium - actually completely banned. I advised them to speak to the local people.

Following that, the government assessed the issues raised by traditional owners and other parties and decided to put a moratorium in place to investigate if there are any similar explorations taking place in other places in the world, how is it done, what effects on the environment, before we finish with a situation as in other places of the Territory - take action now and let somebody else clean up the mess later.

Mr PURICK: Minister, you have made public comments that this is a new form of exploration which involves new technology. Are you aware of any other sea bed and mining operations in Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is what we asked the EPA to go and find out: if this kind of exploration and mining is taking place in the Territory.

Mr PURICK: Minister, you issued exploration licences to companies to do sea bed mining. You would have known there were active operations off Western Australia: Cockatoo Island has operations; Cockburn Sound south out of Fremantle has operations; they are off northeast Tasmania ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Would the member like to enlighten the people here what kind of mining operations take place in Western Australia in Cockburn Sound?

Ms PURICK: Cockatoo Island has iron ore and bedrock mining, Cockburn Sound south of Fremantle has limestone, shell and marine places - it is all freely available information. I am sure you and your department would have looked at these projects before you issued exploration licences - which lead to the next question.

It has been three months since the announcement of the moratorium. Have you or your government provided the terms of reference for this review of the EPA? Have you given this information in regard to the terms of reference to the companies which have been affected by the moratorium?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Goyder, I actually come from Western Australia, I am very familiar with the Cockburn Sound.

Ms PURICK: Well, then you would know what goes on at Cockburn Sound.

Mr VATSKALIS: Oh, yes, exactly. That is why I said the difference between Cockburn Sound and the area between Groote Eylandt and the Territory mainland is significant. If I had to compare the two, I would compare the one as a very rich environmental ground, the other is a desert. That desert is the ...

Ms PURICK: You would have also looked at the projects off the coastline of New Zealand, which is also pristine waters - supposedly.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not interested about New Zealand, I am interested about the Northern Territory. You have to remember when we are assessing an exploration licence we do not only assess the impact on the physical environment, we also are assessing the impact on the cultural environment with regard to the terms of references that are currently in before the board of EPA for assessment.

Ms PURICK: Will those terms of reference be given to the companies?

Mr VATSKALIS: The EPA has to make this decision, not me. I am not the minister for EPA.

Ms PURICK: Will your department be talking with EPA in regard to the terms of reference?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Ms PURICK: There are nine companies affected by the moratorium. Why did you not propose special assessment on the impacts on such technology and exploration before you granted titles? Is it not putting the cart before the horse, saying now you will assess the environmental and cultural impacts when you have already issued the titles to explore?

Mr VATSKALIS: Companies come to us and put in an application for exploration, and application is granted. Before they commence operation they have to put in a mine management plan.

Ms PURICK: Correct.

Mr VATSKALIS: In that case, they provide information on how they will do the exploration work and what technology they are going to use. We declared the moratorium before a mine management plan was put in place. If I am correct - and I am correct - we did not have any information on what kind of - a very vague idea of what kind of technology they were going to use.

However, I admit, despite my strong support for mining in the Territory, the information I am getting from the companies alarmed me as to the impact it will have on the physical environment, especially in an area rich in sea grasses, the presence of dugongs, and some of the cultural environments in the area.

Ms PURICK: Minister, did you consider the impact such a moratorium would have on the exploration companies' operations?

Mr VATSKALIS: No such operation has been undertaken in Australia before.

Ms PURICK: It has been undertaken in Western Australia.

Ms VATSKALIS: Not in the Northern Territory.

Ms PURICK: You said Australia. We have had sea bed mining in Australia.

Mr VATSKALIS: I correct myself, in the Northern Territory. I was not satisfied this kind of operation would not have an adverse affect on Territory waters.

Ms PURICK: Have you had officers of the department speak to their counterparts in Western Australia about exploration on sea bed areas?

Mr VATSKALIS: Western Australia does its own business in its own area. We do business differently in the Territory.

Ms PURICK: No, minister, the question was: have you had officers of the department talk with their Western Australian counterparts in regard to this type of mining?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe the EPA would be a suitable organisation to do the research, and it should be discussing the issue with the EPA in Western Australia.

Ms PURICK: Minister, you have had your officers go to Western Australia to talk to them about fracking and extraction of gas from underneath the earth's crust. Why have you not sent officers to Western

Australia to talk about exploration in sea bed mining, given you will be the department regulating the operation?

Mr VATSKALIS: Alister Trier, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy can provide more information about the discussion they had with Western Australia.

Mr TRIER: Alistair Trier, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy. I spoke to my counterpart in Western Australia about offshore mining for minerals as a lead-up to this process.

Ms PURICK: Okay, thank you. Minister, did you personally encourage Northern Manganese, formerly Groote Resources, to set up an office in Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: I encourage any company which wants to set up an office in Darwin to come to Darwin. Northern Manganese is part of a group of companies which had a number of exploration applications in the Territory. When I met them in Perth they asked me about the possibility of setting up an office in Darwin. The discussion was not only about undersea exploration, it was for the whole package of exploration onshore and offshore in the Territory.

Ms PURICK: Minister, the terms of reference, once they have been decided by the EPA - what is the time frame for the terms of reference coming out? Will they be a public document for anyone to comment on?

Mr TRIER: It is really a matter for the EPA. I was talking to them a couple days ago and the terms of reference are before their board at the moment, or will be going before their board shortly. The way they are talking about it, they are looking to working closely with industry and all stakeholders in working through the process. The moratorium is declared for three years, and the EPA would be looking to finish their process well inside that time frame. I am not sure of the exact time frame they have set themselves.

Ms PURICK: Perhaps I can turn the questions to a slightly different topic. Minister, do the new quarry and extractive operations along Taylor Road which are providing material for the INPEX project have either an extractor mineral permit lease or a mineral lease?

Mr TRIER: Yes, they do.

Ms PURICK: Did they submit a mine management plan?

Mr TRIER: Yes, they are currently authorised to operate under a mining management plan.

Ms PURICK: Are there particular conditions attached to the mine management plan; for example, the hours of operation?

Mr TRIER: Yes, there are.

Ms PURICK: What are they?

Mr TRIER: I cannot give you the exact hours, but there have been certain conditions put which limit the hours of operation to reasonable hours.

Ms PURICK: Is 4 am to do extractive work reasonable, in your view?

Mr TRIER: I would personally consider that unreasonable, but I am unsure of the conditions. I can take that on notice.

Ms PURICK: Could we?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes. Minister, are you happy to take that on notice?

Question on Notice No 6.24

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If you could repeat the question.

Ms PURICK: Are there any special conditions attached to the mining management plan and authorisation, and what are they, including hours of operation, noise monitoring, dust monitoring and any community consultation?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For Hansard, that is question No 6.24.

Mr TRIER: I can provide some information on that now. First, an authorisation was issued with the condition that the operator of the site conduct noise monitoring along the near side of Wallaby Holtze Road and take immediate action to reduce the noise emitted from the operations on site. The operator was also directed to employ a specialist consultant and conduct a full survey of the noise from the site. The consultant must provide a report to the operator and the department by 22 June, with recommendations on actions to be taken to reduce the noise to an acceptable level to residents on Wallaby Holtze Road and any other nearby residential areas.

As a result of the investigation, the operator has taken action to reduce the noise levels from machinery operating on the authorisation, particularly during night time operations. Findings of the investigation and actions taken have been provided to the complainants, and they will be asked to keep records of any excessive noise levels and report them to the department.

Ms PURICK: Thank you. Minister, who paid for the upgrade of the access road into the quarry site, or extractive site - the dirt road?

Mr TRIER: I am not aware of that. I would assume the operator, but I am not 100% certain.

Ms PURICK: Could you take that on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on, it is not our area, this output. If it is a road, it should be the Department of Transport.

Ms PURICK: Okay. Minister, what is the size of the financial security being held by government against this project?

Mr TRIER: Again, I will have to take that on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, you will take that on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.25

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Would you repeat the question, please?

Ms PURICK: What is the size of the financial security being held by government against the 13 Mile Taylor Road extractive project?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For Hansard, that is question No 6.25.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.19

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I would like to answer question on notice No 6.19, regarding the member for Araluen questioning the grants and the subsidies provided.

In 2011, the department provided \$37.7m in grants to NGOs, and \$14m in subsidies, which makes a total of \$51.7m. In 2011-12, the Department of Children and Families provided grants of \$46m projected, with subsidies of \$17m, a total of \$63m. That was an increase of \$12.7m.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Ms PURICK: Minister, just finally on this topic, you would be aware that Taylor Road is a gazetted road. Have you or officers from the department gone to visit this extractive quarry site and, if so, what have they done in regard to bund wall or overburden which has been pushed on to Taylor Road limiting access, or completely stopping access, to that road?

Mr TRIER: We had officers there today; we have had officers there last week. Regarding the last part of your question - what action is being undertaken? – I cannot give you a specific answer, but the problems are well recognised and the department is working with the operator to resolve them.

Ms PURICK: Is it a part of the regulation that a project such as that is required to have hazard signs around the perimeter of the project, for example, 'Mine Site – Keep Out', under the regulations?

Mr TRIER: My assumption is that is more a Work Health and Safety matter than an environmental regulation matter.

Ms PURICK: But it is a project which is under your *Mining Management Act* regulation.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mining safety comes under WorkSafe.

Ms PURICK: But it is just signage that says 'Mine Site – Keep Out'. It is declaring that it is actually an operation under the *Mining Management Act*. Why is there no signage in regard to this project?

Mr TRIER: I am happy to take it on notice.

Ms PURICK: Okay.

Question on Notice No 6.26

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Please repeat that question, member for Goyder?

Ms PURICK: What are the requirements in regard to an extractive operation under the *Mining Management Act* having signs indicating it is a mining project?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 6.26.

Ms PURICK: Thank you.

Mr WOOD: I have a follow-up question on that. Those same people, of course, come to me. Was there an opportunity for residents in Wallaby Holtze Road to comment on the development of the mining management plan and, if there was, where was it advertised so they could have put their submissions in?

Mr TRIER: My assumption is the mining management plan, when referred to NRETAS for consideration under the *Environmental Assessment Act*, did not trigger the referral process. Under the *Mining Management Act*, there was no comment period. However, when the initial titles were advertised under the *Mining Titles Act* there would have been a commentary period there.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but the operating hours would not have been something people would have picked up without the specific requests to run it 24 hours a day?

Mr TRIER: That is correct, yes.

Mr WOOD: I might ask the question of NRETAS; whether noise did not come under their environmental assessment. Okay.

Ms PURICK: Minister, in regard to the proposed Limmen National Park, are there any native title implications and, if there is native title, how is that being managed? How does that impact on the explorers in that area?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Limmen National Park comes under NRETAS; you should ask NRETAS.

Ms PURICK: Okay. Given the companies can explore and mine in Territory parks currently, if a company comes to you with a proposal to mine - and, assuming they meet all the requirements at law, in good social and corporate management principles - will you support the project and authorise mining inside the Limmen National Park area and, if not, why not?

Mr VATSKALIS: All parks in the Northern Territory are mixed use. The only parks they are not allowed to mine is West MacDonnells and Kakadu.

Ms PURICK: If a project or a company comes to you to establish a mining operation, assuming they do all the assessment they ...

Mr VATSKALIS: If all the assessments are done, and they have passed, and they comply with all the rules and regulations in place ...

Ms PURICK: You will support project?

Mr VATSKALIS: Of course. As I said to you before, the only place you cannot approve exploration or mining is the West MacDonnells and Kakadu.

Ms PURICK: Okay, thank you, minister. What is the time, once a mine management plan is submitted to the department, it takes to get it all approved, assuming it goes across to WorkSafe and back to the department? How long does it take?

Mr VATSKALIS: That depends on the mine, the size of the mine, the complexity of the operations - subject to it has passed all the environmental requirements - and it provides all the information required for assessment by the department, it will be in a very short period of time. There are cases where the department has asked for information that was very late to come and, as a result, the mine management plan took a while to be approved.

It is not a department that delays the approval most of the time. It is actually the lack, or the slowness in providing information.

Ms PURICK: What is the average time for the department to approve a mine management plan?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, not all mines are the same, so I cannot give you that it is actually 10 days or 10 weeks, depending on the kind of the operation, the complexity of the operations, and the complexity of the product.

Ms PURICK: All right. Perhaps if I rephrase it. Does the department have any key performance indicators in assessing and approving a mine management plan and, if so, what are they?

Mr TRIER: The short answer is yes, they do. It relates to a range of - depending on what stage of the mine management plan; if it is an assessment or a review at the end of the year. A good indicative time would be four weeks to approve a mining management plan. That is not a legislative time frame; that is a performance indicator.

Ms PURICK: Okay, thank you. How many mine management plans are currently with the department being assessed?

Mr TRIER: I need to take that on notice, I am sorry.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: All right with you, minister, as a question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I would like to actually table the document *Moratorium Exploration and Mining in Coastal Waters in the Northern Territory* because, on page 4, it clearly has terms of reference, and also specifies what the Environmental Protection Authority will be asked to undertake. I will table it to read it because, obviously, you have not read it ...

Ms PURICK: Thank you, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... if you made the comments you made before.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Repeat the question on notice, Ms Purick.

Ms PURICK: How many mine management plans are currently with the department being assessed?

Mr TRIER: We do have that answer, my apologies. For the 2011-12 year, 379.

Mr VATSKALIS: That includes both exploration and mining operations.

Ms PURICK: How many positions are there within the group that assesses mine management plans, and how many are currently vacant?

Mr TRIER: Vacancies are very limited, but I can provide that information. We currently have in that area a total staff of 39, of which three positions are vacant.

Ms PURICK: Minister, in your annual report, you state in the priorities section for 2011-12 that:

Develop and implement strategies to improve access for exploration and mining on Aboriginal freehold land

under the Land Rights Act. What have you done to improve access for exploration and mining on Aboriginal freehold land for the industry?

Mr TRIER: Access to freehold land for exploration and mining is governed under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* - a Commonwealth act. The Commonwealth introduced amendments to the act in 2007 relating to section 4 of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*. Those amendments are up for review this year, and the Commonwealth has indicated it will be looking to commence that review in the second half of the year. We have been working closely with the Commonwealth, the land councils, explorers, and the Minerals Council of Australia in preparing ourselves for that review.

From a departmental point of view, we have an Aboriginal land rights group to facilitate on country meetings. Their prime role is to ensure explorers understand how best to prepare themselves on country with Aboriginal groups and to help facilitate some of those processes.

Ms PURICK: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Gerry, nothing on Output 7.1?

Output 7.2 – Primary Industry

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will proceed to Output 7.2, Primary Industry for the remaining minute.

Ms PURICK: I will ask one question. Minister, Labor previously announced it would buy back three commercial barramundi licences - they would be voluntarily surrendered. What happens if no one offers their licence?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the wrong output – it should be Fisheries.

Ms PURICK: Sorry, minister. Primary Industry. How many properties have used 1080 baiting in the last 12 months? Given the wild dog attacks which result in a 10% loss of herd per year, why is your government making it so difficult for pastoral properties to bait wild dogs?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Gobbey will answer that question.

Mr GOBBEY: Rod Gobbey, Executive Director, Primary Industry. The number of operations on stations is not in the bailiwick of this department; it is the responsibility of NRETAS, which provides the baiting service.

However, in response to the coordination across government, negotiations at senior officer level between agencies are at a pretty advanced stage. The coordination between governments will allow pastoralists, hopefully, to come to one agency in the Department of Resources for coordination of government services into the future. That process is not finalised yet, but I am hopeful I and my service staff will have a process concluded that will allow chief executives to sign off on a memorandum between agencies within the next period of time.

Ms PURICK: That is good because you would agree that 10% loss of herd per year from wild dog attacks is quite substantial.

Mr GOBBEY: I have no information as to the losses on property, but if the 10% you suggest ...

Ms PURICK: That is what industry is telling me.

Mr GOBBEY: ... is correct, it is significant.

Ms PURICK: The best way to bait against wild dog is usually 1080, yet the government departments are making it very difficult for pastoral people to get access to the product. They have to undertake training and it takes months. In the meantime, they are losing stock. If you say there is an intergovernmental discussion, that is good news.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. This now concludes consideration of Output 7.2. It is 4 pm, member for Nelson ...

Mr Wood: Next year, we have to turn it around the other way.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the committee and the Department of Resources for attending today.

MINISTER HAMPTON'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT, THE ARTS AND SPORT

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome minister. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you this afternoon and, if you wish to, make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair - and happy birthday.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: I am sure you have been getting that all day, but happy birthday for your birthday today.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will not say it is very nice to be here on my birthday, but ...

Mr HAMPTON: Stuck in Estimates on your birthday.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Madam Deputy Chair and members, I am joined at the table this afternoon by Mr Jim Grant, Chief Executive, and the relevant senior executives from my department. I am speaking to the committee as the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, Parks and Wildlife and Sport and Recreation portfolios. These portfolios sit within the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport, a department whose purpose is to work with Territory communities to ensure the demands on natural resources are kept within sustainable limits, celebrate the unique histories and foster lifelong artistic expressions, and involvement in sport and recreation.

First, I take this opportunity to recognise and thank staff of my department for their efforts to conserve the natural environment and cultural heritage. I recognise the work of my department and the valuable contribution they have had in implementing some initiatives that will benefit the Territory for many years to come.

I now go over some of those key highlights over the past 12 months which include, in January this year, the Northern Territory government introduced the Cash for Containers scheme. The aim of this program is to reduce the quantity of waste going into landfill and to minimise the impacts of litter on the natural environment. In the first quarter, eight million containers were redeemed by Territorians. This corresponds to a redemption rate of over 25% across all container types. Results show this rate is increasing rapidly and we anticipate greater returns as more Territorians participate in the program. One of the most exciting achievements is the value this program is providing to the community. More and more stories are coming

out about Territory children, families, schools, and community groups using this program to raise much-needed funds for local clubs, charities and events.

The Territory plastic bag ban came into effect on 1 September 2011. Already, it has been estimated some 200 000 lightweight, single-use, non-biodegradable bags have not been introduced to our natural environment since the scheme began.

Territory Eco-link is a 2000 km conservation corridor from the Arafura Sea to the South Australian border. This project aims to manage broad-scale connections between protected areas, as well as supporting Indigenous ranger groups, pastoralists, and private conservation groups to take an active role in the conservation of their land. The Territory Eco-link initiative will result in a far greater percentage of the Territory being protected for conservation than ever before. Currently, over 16.2 million hectares, or over 12% of the Territory, is under conservation management. With \$1.8m spent over the last three years, a further \$600 000 of ongoing funding has been provided to continue this initiative next financial year.

In addition to supported community conservation efforts, the Territory government has continued to demonstrate its commitment to the conservation of high biodiversity areas through announcing our intention to declare Limmen National Park and the Limmen Bight Marine Park.

This government is supporting Territorians in their efforts to help green the Territory. Some of our initiatives include the Energy Smart Rebates, the Water Wise rebates for Central Australia, ecoBiz NT and Solar Champions, which promote the sustainable use of natural resources and help save money at the same time.

This government recognises the importance of maintaining the great Territory lifestyle. Many of our initiatives have sought a balance between conservation and recreation. Some of our most significant initiatives include protecting Darwin Harbour by investing more money in research, monitoring and compliance; supporting national parks so Territorians can camp, swim and enjoy the great outdoors; safeguarding our heritage and culture so it can be experienced by future generations; and protecting fishing and ensuring fish stocks thrive into the future. I believe I have the greatest portfolios when you look at those initiatives and those achievements.

As part of our commitment to maintaining the great Territory lifestyle, this government continues to support and promote sport and recreational activities. For example, on 14 April 2012, the Northern Territory government sponsored the national Rugby League match between the Sydney Roosters and the Cowboys at TIO Stadium in Darwin. Unfortunately, it was not the Canberra Raiders, but that is okay. This year, more than 10 000 fans attended a game that was covered throughout the country. The NT government has an agreement with the Australian Football League which will see two home-and-away matches played in Darwin and one in Alice Springs each year. We will host two AFL matches this year. One was played on 19 May between the Western Bulldogs and the Gold Coast SUNS at TIO. Melbourne is scheduled to play Port Adelaide on 21 July.

This weekend we will open the new Palmerston water park. This \$18m venue includes upgrades to roads, intersections, services, and provides an access road to the university housing estate. This fantastic facility includes two wet play areas, being a teens' spray and kids' spray area, a six-lane racer waterslide, barbecues, car parking, first aid facilities, a kiosk, and upgrades to the skate park. The park will be operated by the YMCA, which has a successful record at Leanyer water park.

The government committed further funding totalling \$33m which will deliver significant upgrades to the existing Palmerston Magpies oval, the new Rugby League facilities which have opened, the new football facilities, and an upgrade to the tennis and netball facilities, which have been completed.

The NTIS has demonstrated significant achievements since its inception in 1996. To date, this program has supported and produced nine Olympians and nine Paralympians. In addition, we are proud to have Des Abbott and Joel Carroll, who have been selected to represent Australia in the men's hockey team at the London Olympics later this year.

Madam Deputy Chair, this government continues to deliver sound environmental, recreational and lifestyle outcomes for Territorians.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the statement?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I will get there in a second. I just wanted to ask a quick question because it is across the department. Carbon tax implications for the department, minister. Has an increase in operating costs across the board, including the direct costs to run the department, like electricity, etcetera, been factored into this year's budget?

Mr WOOD: Can I get a point of clarification? Are we talking to the minister's statement or to a whole-of-government?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are talking to the minister's statement.

Mr CHANDLER: Can I ask that when we go to Output Group 1.0 then?

Mr WOOD: No, I am not trying to stop you. I did not know ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We might seek direction from the minister as to which output this particular question you are asking should go to.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, I think, in corporate, that output group ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It might be agency or whole-of-government, I suggest.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, so questions relating to the statement.

Mr CHANDLER: All right. Minister, you mentioned the Cash for Containers legislation within your opening statement. To date, what is the total cost of implementing the Cash for Containers program?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I am happy to go to that in the output group, which is Output Group 3.0.

Mr CHANDLER: It is Output 3.1.

Mr HAMPTON: Output 3.1.

Mr CHANDLER: You mentioned it in your opening statement, though.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, but that was a broader statement regarding the success to date in three months of the scheme. I am happy to get to those other details in that particular Output 3.1.

Mr CHANDLER: So you do not want to talk about your opening statement at this stage?

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, member for Brennan, it is more of a broad statement in what the government has delivered, and our vision for the Northern Territory. In the budget, there are specific output groups which I am sure we will get to this evening.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Any other questions relating to the statement, member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Then we will move to agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies. Member for Brennan.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions

Mr CHANDLER: That carbon tax question. Has an increase in operating costs across the board, including direct costs to run the department, like electricity, been factored into this year's budget?

Mr HAMPTON: I will now pass over to Susan Kirkman, who is the Executive Director, for that particular question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I remind officers to introduce yourself each time you speak.

Ms KIRKMAN: I am Susan Kirkman, Executive Director Business Services. The budgets have CPI factored into them and that should cover any increase in costs such as electricity, provided they are in line with CPI.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, my understanding is CPI is calculated over previous years costs; the carbon tax being a new tax not effective until 1 July. Has it been factored into the budget this year?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, Susan Kirkman.

Ms KIRKMAN: No. As it is a tax that has not come into play yet, it has not been factored into the budget.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, while the carbon tax has been played down by the Labor camp with suggestions of only modest increases in electricity, etcetera, did you know that the cost of refrigerant gases will rise by some 150% due wholly to the carbon tax? Do you think this, in itself, will have an impact on your department or, in fact, anyone, whether a homeowner or business operator in the NT?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure where you are getting those figures from, member for Brennan ...

Mr CHANDLER: Industry.

Mr HAMPTON: in my agency, Susan Kirkman, Executive Director, has answered that.

Mr CHANDLER: What, in regard to refrigerant gases?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure how that is relevant to my agency and this output.

Mr CHANDLER: You do not have air-conditioning?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I will ask Susan Kirkman to talk to that. As she said, the tax has not come in yet and those figures have not been factored into it because it has not been introduced yet.

Ms KIRKMAN: That is correct. As and when those additional costs come through, or if there are additional costs that come through to the agency, the agency will look at ways to accommodate the additional costs, as they do if any new costs arise throughout the year.

Mr WOOD: I could ask one on carbon tax - is that all right? Minister, it is difficult for me to believe there is not some estimate of what it is going to cost - that is what a budget is about. If you are saying you will cross that bridge when you come to it, how do you throw the 3% efficiency dividend to something that you will be required to do if you do not know all the costs you might have in the new financial year?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, the efficiency dividend and the reprioritisation targets are applied evenly across the outputs within my division and my agency. I might ask Chief Executive, Jim Grant, to talk a bit more about it but, to me, they are two separate things. In regard to the efficiency dividend, we work through that as a government - across the agency it is applied equally. In relation to a price on carbon, that is yet to come in. That is something we will work on.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I might explain a little more. There is no guarantee you will get the extra money for the carbon tax. The government might say: 'We have a budget deficit. You are going to have to tighten your belt; reduce your energy output'. On top of that, you might have a 3% efficiency dividend. You are presuming the government will provide you the extra funds for the carbon tax. What worries me is no one seems to have done any calculations about what it could cost. After all, this is what the budget is about for the next financial year. There is a presumption that if you do have a carbon tax someone is going to wave the magic wand and say: 'Okay, we will give you a Treasurer's Advance and that will cover it'. What happens if you do not get a Treasurer's Advance? You are going to get extra costs and a 3% efficiency dividend. How are you going to cover all those costs, those changes?

Mr HAMPTON: Those questions would be for the Treasurer because it is such a significant reform to the taxation system in this country. You would not work in isolation with each agency; it would be across the government, and would be led by the Treasurer. Those types of questions for a whole-of-government would be best put to Treasury who have done the modelling on the price on carbon and the carbon tax. I do not know if Jim Grant, the Chief Executive, has anything further to add.

Mr GRANT: Jim Grant, CEO NRETAS. Do I address the answer directly to the member for Brennan?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, that is fine.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, this department, by the end of this financial year and over the next few years, will benefit from the carbon tax because the biodiversity fund expands rapidly over the period and is aimed at revegetation. Quite a bit of that is expected to come our way. We have already received the first \$2m from the first round, and I am expecting many more millions of dollars to come through that biodiversity fund. It is around \$25m to \$30m a year for the first two years, going up to well over \$100m, perhaps \$200m. Because the fund is focused on Indigenous landscape management, feral animals, in the north we are expecting to be a department that benefits. There will be a very big nett gain for the department through the carbon tax.

Mr WOOD: I need to study that answer.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No further questions in relation to agency-related whole-of-government? No?

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PROTECTED AREAS AND CONSERVATION **Output 1.1 – Parks Joint Management Programs**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will move to Output Group 1.0, Protected Areas and Conservation, Output 1.1, Parks Joint Management Programs. Questions?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you please advise what commitment to spending there is to implementing the park plan in regard to Limmen National Park?

Mr HAMPTON: Certainly, member for Brennan. I invite Graham Phelps to the table, from my Parks Division. I am sure Graham has much information and knowledge to bring to the Estimates Committee.

In relation to Limmen, I am very pleased to take the path we have taken in the consultation we have gone through in the declaration of the park. Reprioritisations with the last two budgets, member for Brennan have gone directly to the Parks Division, particularly focusing on joint management initiatives as well parks rental in this next financial year.

The other opportunities exist with Commonwealth funding. As you know, we are always looking towards the Commonwealth to leverage funding through various grants across Territory government agencies. We are always looking down south to leverage dollars from grants.

The private sector is very important as well, with community benefits packages from mining companies wanting to develop parts of the Territory. Huge opportunities exist within community benefits packages, the reprioritisation from our own budgets, and leveraging dollars from Commonwealth programs.

They are the areas I am looking at in providing the budget needed to support a new park and a new marine park. It is very exciting.

Mr CHANDLER: To clarify the question, I am looking for what figure you are going to contribute this year to developing that park. What contribution from businesses such as miners - how much have they been engaged to contribute at this stage?

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to the reprioritisations, member for Brennan, \$2.1m goes towards those initiatives of joint management as well as park rentals. I might ask Graham Phelps, Executive Director of Parks and Wildlife, to add further to that.

Mr PHELPS: Graham Phelps, Executive Director, Parks and Wildlife. Member for Brennan, we have been managing the Limmen National Park proposed area for some years - since 1996. Our current annual operation expenditure on that park is in the order of just over \$1m per year, and we anticipate we will continue to do that. When the marine park comes on stream there will be some additional costs, but we expect we will be able to work with the Department of Resources to use the community benefits package that will come out of any mining there to help to fund the management of the marine park.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, within Limmen, what areas are to be protected and how have their protection values been established?

Mr HAMPTON: A discussion paper has gone out for consultation on the boundaries proposed for Limmen. Many of those boundaries have been proposed for many years. The declaration of Limmen has been a long-standing initiative. When you look at the biodiversity values, the cultural values of that area, and the areas the rangers have historically worked on, many of those areas are ex-pastoral leases, and areas of very significant cultural and biodiversity values. They are the things you look at with the proposed boundaries, as well as weighing up the economic opportunities in that area, and the various types of land tenure. For many years, we have had a ranger station at Nathan River. That, again, is on old pastoral leases. We look at Indigenous protected areas, the Aboriginal Land Trust areas, as well as the biodiversity values of the marine areas in the Gulf. They are the types of things I look at when making these decisions.

Again, I might ask Graham to add anything from the park rangers' perspectives and the division in relation to the proposed boundaries.

Mr PHELPS: The biodiversity values of the park have been established through survey work. One of the key values of that area is the size; it is just short of one million hectares of land. If, as we expect will be the case, it will be abutted by some Indigenous protected areas and, ultimately, down to a marine park, it will be a substantial piece of land. When it comes to biodiversity conservation, the size of the area of land itself actually has a significant impact on being able to protect the values of that country.

Mr CHANDLER: Will the park preclude the use of off-road vehicles?

Mr WOOD: It is the only way you can get through there.

Mr ELFERINK: That would make it very pristine.

Mr HAMPTON: You can go through the park at the moment in off-road vehicles. There is a public road, the Savannah Way, as well as other access points to various attractions within the park. It would not preclude that. There would be issues with traditional owners and other stakeholders you would find as you looked at the detail of a plan of management. Whatever the type of visitor experience you want - four-wheel drive, off-road vehicles or boating access - those issues would be picked up within a plan of management process.

Mr CHANDLER: Would please describe how a jointly-managed park improves the experience for Territorians?

Mr HAMPTON: It is something that, as a Labor government, we have been very proud to build on the framework for the future act, focusing very much on joint management of our parks to improve the visitor experience. What that means is working with traditional owners around the table, or in the bush under a tree, talking about what experience and knowledge they have of country, whether it be biodiversity values, traditional methods of managing fire, weeds or ferals. Those issues are what a joint management process brings to the table, as well as a better experience for visitors.

Mr CHANDLER: To better couch that question, how does this differ from what occurred in these parks prior to a joint management plan? Did not each of these things occur before?

Mr HAMPTON: The way forward is joint management and those type of values add to the visitor experience, with joint management committees meeting regularly and talking through these plan of management issues. I will ask Graham to talk about what happened before, as he has a great deal of experience and knowledge.

Mr PHELPS: One of the clear ways joint management benefits visitors is, for those joint-managed parks, native title has been established over most of them. Where that is the case, any of the works we want to do to build facilities would require an Indigenous management agreement. In the framework act, all of those parks have a Indigenous land use agreement over the entire park so we do not have to go negotiate a new Indigenous land use agreement every time we want to build something, which is incredibly time consuming and can be quite a protracted process. Those agreements make a significant difference in our capacity to manage the parks smoothly and efficiently.

While there were not necessarily barriers to Indigenous people exploring park tourism opportunities prior to joint management, there is sense of being welcomed onto the park in the invitation that comes with joint management. That has made a significant difference to the relationship between parks and traditional owners' willingness and keenness to explore opportunities, be involved with the management of the parks and in sharing their stories. There was not necessarily a legal barrier to that; there was nothing to prevent it

in the past. There is a sense of opportunity and welcome that exists under joint management which did not exist prior to that.

Mr CHANDLER: Does a joint management plan preclude the landowners from applying a fee, at some stage in the future, for access to the land?

Mr PHELPS: I am not sure whether it is the legislation or the leases, but under the framework act the park entry fees were precluded as part of the joint management arrangements.

Mr WOOD: Sorry, can I just check? Is that all you had on that section?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I have said before I support the idea of joint management plans; I believe they are a good way forward. One of the reasons I supported it was because I hope there will be many Aboriginal people employed on a full-time basis as park rangers, or in some other status. Are you able to give us overall figures on the number of Aboriginal people who are employed in the parks? You have 25 parks on your proposed list in your annual report for which you think the negotiations which will be completed this year. Will there be Aboriginal people employed in those 25 new joint management parks?

Mr HAMPTON: Trying to create jobs on country is one of the key areas and drivers for joint management. I totally agree with you; there is no better way than getting Indigenous people to work on the country they know the best and have managed for thousands of generations.

There are approximately 48 Indigenous ranger groups throughout the Northern Territory. These groups employ an estimated 782 Indigenous people in land and sea management activities. They vary from full-time to part-time casual positions. As we know, the ranger groups are responsible for managing land in partnership with government, land councils, and the Commonwealth government.

Currently, 12% of the Territory is managed for conservation, and national parks make up approximately 2% of this area. The other important thing, as well, is it builds relationships; it is reconciliation. It is the best way to exchange different cultures. Besides the biodiversity values, that is probably a good reason why we should do it. Regarding the other questions, I will get Graham Phelps to add to that.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, as you would be aware, we do not necessarily have a ranger per park, or a team of rangers per park. They work over regions and local parks, so it is not necessarily a direct correlation between a park and staff.

I can give you the figures for Indigenous employment within Parks and Wildlife we currently have. There are 39 Aboriginal staff working for Parks and Wildlife, that is about 21% of our staff. In addition to that, we run a program called the Flexible Employment Program, which is a short labour, day labour, casual labour arrangement for traditional owners associated with parks. Across the course of the year, that equates to about the equivalent of 20 full-time equivalent staff.

In 2011-12, as part of the \$2.1m which Parks and Wildlife received for Indigenous employment for conservation and management on parks, we have also been able to set aside funding in the order of about \$0.5m a year to contract Indigenous ranger groups - not parks staff, but Indigenous ranger groups - which are located near parks to undertake work for us on parks to increase the sustainability and the work opportunities for traditional owners, both employed by Parks and Wildlife, but also employed by Indigenous ranger groups.

Mr WOOD: The other question in relation to rangers; we are talking about Indigenous rangers. One of the things I was hoping was the Aboriginal people will be fully qualified rangers, not just people who happen to live there and you give them a job, and that is fine. I am hoping this whole joint management would skill up people so young people especially have an opportunity to go to school, get the degrees that are required to be a ranger - so those opportunities would come out of this as well. Do we have any local people in these areas who are being trained to be fully-qualified rangers?

Mr PHELPS: We currently have 13 Indigenous trainees around the Territory, who are part of that 39 Indigenous staff. So, yes, we do. We have run an apprenticeship/traineeship program for many years to enable local Indigenous people to move into ranger positions.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I note in Employee Expenses, in 2011-12 it was \$64m, the estimate was \$66m, but in the budget it was \$62m, which is a reduction in employee expenses. Will that reduction mean there will be fewer rangers in our parks?

Mr HAMPTON: Our numbers have actually gone up, as we have said before, member for Nelson, with the reprioritisation over the last two budgets, particularly in the last financial year for the Indigenous employment initiatives through the Flexible Employment Program. In the Parks budget, it has gone up, particularly in that area.

Mr WOOD: I will see how I look from over there, but I need one other question. In relation to Limmen National Park - and I thank you, I had a briefing about the park - what I was after was to find out whether the park boundaries had been changed to fit in with the iron ore resources that are hoped to be mined? The reason I say that is because I could not find the information.

When I went to NT Maps in Smith Street, I was told they are not allowed to sell any maps of Limmen National Park at that time, therefore, I could not compare what I saw at the briefing with what I would have thought was the original boundaries of the proposed Limmen National Park, which has been around for, I think you mentioned 25 years. Have the boundaries been changed from the original proposed park and, if so, why?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, they have, because of those interests. We, as a government, looked at getting the right balance between economic, biodiversity values and conservation, and the original park boundaries.

Mr WOOD: And after that land is mined, will that land go back into the park?

Mr HAMPTON: There are opportunities for that to occur. As exploration takes place, there are discussions between the developer and the exploration companies for that part of the land. If it is not prospective, it does not go further on to a mining lease, it is to be returned to the park estate.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. That is all the questions I have, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1

Output 1.2 – Parks Visitor Management Programs

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We now proceed to Output Group 1.2, Parks Visitor Management Programs.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, in regard to the Berry Springs closures, what are the water quality results for the park?

Mr HAMPTON: We do not have those results with us, so can we get that as a question on notice?

Question on Notice No 7.01

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Please repeat the question, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, in regard to the Berry Springs park closures, what are the water quality results for the park?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question on notice No 7.01.

Mr CHANDLER: In regard to the same park, Berry Springs, have you ever undertaken a survey on user satisfaction of the facilities?

Mr HAMPTON: I will hand over to Graham Phelps, Executive Director, Parks and Wildlife.

Mr PHELPS: Just bear with me one moment, if you would not mind. Member for Brennan, we conduct out visitor satisfaction surveys on a rotating basis through various parks. If you would give me just one minute, I will try to find the brief to see whether Berry Springs has been done in recent years. The simple answer is it would get picked up in the rotation of visitor satisfaction surveys. I cannot find it. Thank you, minister. This year they have been conducted in Litchfield and West MacDonnells.

Mr CHANDLER: Litchfield and West MacDonnells. You are saying it was a rotation, so it will be picked up at some stage?

Mr PHELPS: That is right.

Mr CHANDLER: On to the water parks and wave pools. Minister, how do the water parks in Palmerston and Leanyer fit into Parks' operational model in the Top End?

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Brennan, I will get Susan Kirkman - it probably would come under a sports output, so we have the right people here when we get to that output group.

Mr CHANDLER: If I was to ask questions in regard to operating costs, would you ...

Mr HAMPTON: For the water parks?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, that would be ...

Mr CHANDLER: Under sport and rec and not parks management?

Mr HAMPTON: Output Group 5.0, and Output 5.1.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay.

Mr HAMPTON: Output 5.3, sorry, in that output group.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay. Minister, I have received a number of complaints; the media has reported on it. What have you done to prevent antisocial behaviour occurring within our parks, in particular Litchfield National Park - and not just Buley Rockhole?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I and my office have received a number of complaints as well, and we know it is a regular issue that does get into the media. I am certainly aware of it. We have put forward a number of initiatives to try to improve this particular area, and to fix some of those complaints that we receive.

Obviously, that type of behaviour is not acceptable,. We do not condone this type of behaviour. I am currently working with the Parks and Wildlife Service and relevant advisory groups to find solutions to these types of issues. Graham Phelps might want to add anything further there.

Mr PHELPS: Our rangers, as part of their normal duty, of course, deal with antisocial, inappropriate, and unruly behaviour in parks. We also have very good relationships with NT Police and organise joint patrols with them, particularly in periods of high visitation when there is significant chance of issues.

Over the Easter long weekend, we had an absolutely clear weekend, largely through that joint presence of police and rangers in the parks. Unfortunately, over the Anzac Day long weekend, we had some appalling behaviour in Litchfield National Park. People who had done that have had various charges laid against them. We have also issued a trespass notice against them which, effectively, bans them from coming back into the park for a 12-month period.

We take it quite seriously and we take action where we can. Primarily, we attempt to reduce the likelihood of it happening. As I said, with the police helping us, we get a pretty good response.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, more than any other complaint I receive, on numbers alone, is the fact that many of our parks and reserves are locked up - gates are closed, not maintained. It is the most significant complaint I have received. Minister, how does locking up our assets promote Tourism?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not too sure which ones you are talking about, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: There are plenty of gates out there which are locked when they come in from all ...

Mr HAMPTON: If you can write to me, I am happy to get you to talk to the department about that, get a briefing, and let us work through this together. We have been able to show the committee, particularly over

the last two budgets, the reprioritisations which have gone through to the parks division of the agency. We totally respect the value of our parks - the experience. We know tourism visitor numbers are a challenge. People are not travelling, there is a global financial crisis; tourism is down. We certainly do try to broaden that experience. We try to resource the parks the best way we can so the visitor experience is a good one.

I am not aware of where the gates are closed. I am more than happy to provide a briefing for you, member for Brennan, with Parks, if you have particular issues you can raise with me.

Mr CHANDLER: Feedback in general, minister, is that often through lack of money to fix a road or a pothole, gates are closed rather than fixing the asset.

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I am happy to provide you with a briefing if you have particular examples of where that is happening. Over the years - in 2008 we provided a stimulus package to the parks, particularly for infrastructure to upgrade those things. If you look at Litchfield, with the centre going up there and at the Desert Park with the visitor information centre - a number of parks are receiving infrastructure upgrades. Through joint management, working with traditional owners and Indigenous rangers, we are improving that experience.

I do not know how many parks you have been through, member for Brennan, but I have been through Limmen, Judburra, Kings Canyon, and Finke Gorge. I have not been to Tree Point, but I have been through quite a few parks - Nitmiluk, the Mereenie Loop, Finke Gorge through to Kings Canyon, through the West MacDonnell Ranges, through the East MacDonnell Ranges, Limmen and many others. I get out and about. I am not a minister who will sit in the office as minister for Parks; I get out there and talk to rangers on the ground and see for myself what the experience is.

If gates are closed - I have not, in my three years as a minister and all those parks I have visited, come across one park that is closed or the gate is closed.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, if you have been out to all these parks you will know the answer to the next question. While I acknowledge the importance of our Indigenous heritage, why does not any of our interactive signage in our parks refer to the geology or the science of the area? They always just seem to focus on the Indigenous heritage. It is important, but why do we not equally share the science and that type of information with visitors?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I would like to hear specific examples of that, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Nitmiluk.

Mr HAMPTON: I have been there and I am pretty sure I have seen signage that reflects the geological background of the park. I have toured on the boats, and I know the rangers and the people who deliver the tours explain the geological experience or the formation of the gorge. I am happy for you to get a briefing and bring to the table those specific examples and we will look at it.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I raised the issue the same time last year - Tennant Creek Telegraph Station being locked up. In fact, the most significant item, the old telegraph machinery, is locked away so no one can see it. Twelve months later, minister, do we have any additional rangers in Tennant Creek? Is the telegraph station open for visitors?

Mr HAMPTON: I might ask Mr Phelps to answer that.

Mr PHELPS: The arrangements for the Tennant Creek Telegraph Station are unchanged, as far as I know, for many years. The access to it is through - we do not have it staffed; there are no people at the site - picking up a key at the tourist visitor centre. That has been the case for many years. It is unchanged.

Mr CHANDLER: Again, this time last year, we were talking about rangers for Tennant Creek. After a long period of time, the answer was you were in a recruitment phase to replace rangers. Have they been replaced?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I will ask Mr Phelps to answer that. When I was in Tennant Creek I met the CLC rangers working on some of the joint management of the parks, particularly Devils Marbles. It is about working together with Indigenous ranger groups through the CLC. Parks and Wildlife cannot be out there managing the whole of the Territory - it is a huge area we are talking about and we need to work together with traditional owners and Indigenous ranger groups.

Mr PHELPS: We have been able to fill one of those ranger positions, member for Brennan. We have offered a second position to another candidate and are hoping we will hear within a day or so that the candidate has accepted the position and will be moving in there soon.

Mr CHANDLER: You might forgive my cynicism here, but we are 12 months down the track and it is very similar to the answer we had this time last year, minister - that we are waiting to fill positions. Twelve months down the track it is nearly the same answer again.

Mr HAMPTON: I take that comment on board. Sometimes, it is hard to recruit in places like Tennant Creek. It is unfortunate, but that is just the way it is in remote regional areas all across the country. We will be persistent. We will keep putting out feelers for people who want to move to Tennant Creek. We will encourage them. My colleague, the member for Barkly, thinks it is a wonderful place and I am sure it is. However, there were issues with the previous person there and with illnesses. We have to remember that sometimes it takes a long time to recruit in smaller places, and be considerate of people who are leaving and the reasons they are leaving.

Mr CHANDLER: This question has Commonwealth implications because it relates to Commonwealth funded and managed parks. I have received a number of complaints this year about increases in insurance premiums for public liability insurance in Commonwealth managed parks. There has been an increase from \$10m to \$20m. That is a major jump for anyone, particularly smaller operators. This will have a direct consequence on tourist numbers. What have you done to negotiate a better deal for tour operators working in Northern Territory parks?

Mr HAMPTON: I acknowledge that you are talking about national parks funded through the Commonwealth. I am not sure of Mr Phelps has an answer to that.

Mr PHELPS: No, we have not had any dealings with that. It is a Commonwealth parks decision.

Mr HAMPTON: So it is a Commonwealth parks decision, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: I asked the question because you are the Minister for Parks and Wildlife in the Northern Territory and, acknowledging they are Commonwealth, they are still within the Northern Territory. This will have an impact on tourists and operators. Can you have any influence on our Commonwealth ministers?

Mr HAMPTON: I do not know if you have written to the federal minister, but I would be happy to write and raise that issue with him.

Mr CHANDLER: That is all I have with that output group.

Mr WOOD: I will try to keep my questions succinct, and perhaps you can keep the answers succinct because it takes less time. Would you please tell us what the budget price was for the Howard Springs Nature Park waterfall, pools and pumping station, and what it has cost now the work is nearly complete?

Mr HAMPTON: I know you are passionate about Howard Springs Nature Park; it is a great spot. I have been there quite a few times and the rangers do a great job. As I said earlier, as part of the \$8m Territory parks infrastructure package, \$3m over three years was committed in 2008-09 to redevelop Howard Springs Nature Park as a major tourist and family attraction. Stage 1 of the \$3m works included a trial to determine if water quality could be improved to allow safe swimming. The trial found that the water quality ...

Mr WOOD: You have to be succinct. The question is about the rock pool, waterfall and pumping station. That was a budgeted project on its own.

Mr HAMPTON: I believe it is Stage 2, which was valued at \$1.8m. Stage 2, you are right, involves the shallow pools, 40 m in length ...

Mr WOOD: Believe me, I am right.

Mr HAMPTON: It is on budget.

Mr WOOD: How long was it expected to take from beginning to end? On what date was it meant to be completed? My understanding is there was a delay because the pump house was built next to the springs

and they could not work there because it filled up with water. I was trying to find out whether that delay caused any extra cost to the budget and, if so, who had to pick up the extra cost.

Mr PHELPS: We can take that on notice, but we have never heard of that situation.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.02

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Would you repeat that as a question on notice please, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, may I have a costing of the Stage 2 development at Howard Springs Nature Park, including the original budget allocation and the final budget cost. Were there any delays in the construction of that facility? If there were delays, did that add to the cost of the facility? If there were extra costs, who was responsible for those extra costs?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is Question on Notice No 7.02.

Mr HAMPTON: We will take that on notice, but Jim Grant might be able to answer that for you.

Mr GRANT: Member for Nelson, I have just spoken to Susan. We understand there was a little inundation in the Wet Season, but it was par for the course for working up here. It has not delayed it or cost anything particularly.

Mr WOOD: All right. But if we could get those details, it would be good.

Question on Notice No 7.03

Mr WOOD: Minister, I do not want you to read this out - I ask it every year. Can you give us a table of visitor numbers for all the parks for the last, say, five years, so we see which way the visitors are travelling, or whether they are going to the parks or not? Could I ask that as a question on notice?

Mr GRANT: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Could I clarify. If you ask that question every year, member for Nelson, why would you want five years of information?

Mr WOOD: Because it just gives me an idea. I have probably lost the file.

Mr HAMPTON: It has probably changed in 12 months, so I am happy to take that on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. That is question No 7.3.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am mindful of our busy public servants.

Mr WOOD: No, they will have those, you can bet.

I gather Graham has been on the media talking recently, minister, about increasing camping fees. I have been out to some of those parks you talk about. What parks are you considering bringing those changes in, and will you consider actually having a rounded figure parking fee instead of \$3.75 which, if you are out on the Bullita stock route, it is not something I would really want to worry about. Can we just have it rounded at \$5 for the night, because the loose change might not be available out there? Are there changes to the camping fees and, if so, where are they and what will they be?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, we are looking at ways we can improve our systems in the parks. Collecting fees is one area - looking towards technology, having that system online, wanting to improve

peoples' ability to be able to do that, as well as improving the system where you have a box at the front entry of every park and you provide a donation there. I am happy to pass over to Graham Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, yes, we are looking at online booking systems to improve the system. I agree, the \$3.60 drives me nuts every time I have to dig around and try to find the change. We think we can significantly improve revenue derived from camping if we make it easier for people to pay, particularly if we make it easy to pay before they go, so you can do it from home before you get out the door.

Mr WOOD: All right. Quickly, my other favourite question, and considering you have a program here called Territory Parks Alive. I like to try – I have not done it this year – walk in Nitmiluk National Park in the Wet Season. For some reason, it is highly dangerous to do the same thing in Litchfield National Park. When are we going to allow people to walk in Litchfield in the Wet Season, which is the best time to visit the park? Why does that park stop people from walking?

Mr PEHLPS: This is the Tabletop Walk?

Mr WOOD: That is the Tabletop Walk. Surely ...

Mr HAMPTON: I suppose the first point, it is Wet Season, so it is a matter of being able to get in there.

Mr WOOD: No, no. Walking. Big boots, pack on the back.

Mr HAMPTON: You have to get in there first. I am certainly happy to take that question on notice.

Mr WOOD: Okay, I would love to get an answer. It is a waste of a park if you cannot get in there in the Wet Season.

Question on Notice No 7.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you repeat that for Hansard, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Minister, can you tell us why Litchfield National Park is not available for walking on the Tabletop walking route?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.4.

Mr WOOD: Come back with a positive answer, minister. That is all the questions I have, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions for Output 1.2?

Output 1.3 – Conservation Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, we will move on to Output 1.3, Conservation Management Programs. Are there any questions?

Mr CHANDLER: Just to clarify, are you happy to answer questions on crocodiles, camels and Eco-link in this output group?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr CHANDLER: I will start with Eco-link. To date, minister, how much has been spent on the program?

Mr HAMPTON: \$1.8m.

Mr CHANDLER: What was it spent on?

Mr HAMPTON: I happy to hand you over to Jim Grant, Chief Executive.

Mr GRANT: It has been spent on a number of things. I can get you a proper breakdown but, essentially, it has been spent on running Land for Wildlife programs, supporting Indigenous ranger groups, and assisting with infrastructure. They are the main things it has been spent on.

Mr CHANDLER: What measurable differences has it made?

Mr HAMPTON: This increased our conservation corridor. It has given us the science and the knowledge of those areas of the Territory that are biodiversity delicate regarding pathways, flight ways of birds and animals and particular species. It has given us the information and knowledge of those particular species. For me, they are probably some of the measurables I look at in Eco-link; in how much of the land has returned to conservation management, and the condition that land is in. It is also about engaging the private sector, all the different landowners - whether it is an Indigenous land trust, a pastoral leaseholder, the national parks through the Commonwealth. It is about bringing all those people together, all the different landowners, to better conserve the Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what I am interested in is, the land existed before, the land exists now, what is the difference that the Eco-link program and the money that has been spent? What difference has it actually made to whether animals can still walk on, or fly over, the same land? It is that measurable difference.

Mr HAMPTON: Absolutely, that is what I am saying, member for Brennan. What it has enabled us to do is to focus on those bits of the Territory we know, through research, science, rangers, and different landowners, what condition that land is in and what we need to do to preserve it, and how we best manage that land. That is what Eco-link is about. It is not only in the Territory, it is transcontinental now; South Australia has come on board. Eco-link is from one end of Australia to the other end.

It is quite simple really: it is how we better manage that land for future generations, given the knowledge we have, and how we work with the different landowners to conserve that bit of the Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: Is there any ongoing monitoring or measuring of the success of the program?

Mr HAMPTON: Oh, absolutely. We are always looking at how we can do things better. We are always talking to different landowners. We are trying to engage with the private sector in how they get involved in being part of Eco-link. Jim is very close to it, so I will hand that over to Jim to talk a bit more about that.

Mr CHANDLER: Can I just clarify that? Not just engaging people - I get all that - it is what kind of ongoing monitoring occurs to see the improvement because of Eco-link?

Mr GRANT: I will give you a very good example. The Fish River blocks, I believe, is an excellent example, where a landowner sold the block at a big discount for conservation to some conservation and Indigenous groups. We have also contributed a covenant on our Fish River block next door; that is, the NT Land Corporation's block. Those blocks have been able to attract philanthropic funding from as far away as the USA. They have an excellent ranger group there. That block has been managed for conservation now. It is bigger than Litchfield Park. It has been managed well for conservation for the last couple of years. Anyone who goes there can easily see the incredible improvement in the state of that vast area.

It is also being monitored by our biodiversity scientists from the department, and the results of those surveys are quite astounding. It is not only highly effective, but the contribution has not come at a great deal of cost to the Territory government, because the covenanting of the Fish River block was free of charge. The donation from Mr Myer of his land was at low cost. The raising of philanthropic funds from the Pugh Foundation.

The ILC has created a ranger group there, I think, of seven. Not only is it a Indigenous ranger group it is a stunningly well-run Indigenous ranger group. That is one example. I could give you many more ...

Mr CHANDLER: No, no, that is fine. That I understand. I have seen where penguins have been given paths on the roads to get across roads, and had these visions of signs on all our Territory roads where birds and things can cross without fear; they have this Eco-link from one end to the other. That I actually understand.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am not sure if the bird gets the map.

Mr GRANT: It means, effectively, the biodiversity in that area is resilient. Once we get the link to Litchfield, we will have virtually double or triple the resilience for those populations.

Mr CHANDLER: Can you tell me about the Weeds Branch officer based in Tennant Creek resigning, and the department's decision not to replace him?

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Brennan. I am not aware of that. I am not going to get into personal issues of public servants and their reasons for leaving. It may be inappropriate ...

Mr CHANDLER: Can you focus on the department's decision not to replace them.

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass on to Jim Grant, Chief Executive.

Mr GRANT: We have not made that decision. Can we cover that in natural resources, please?

Mr CHANDLER: Each year, we have spoken about an area around Gunn Point and some of the issues that have occurred out there. Have any fines been issued in the last 12 months in that particular area?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass on to Mr Graham Phelps, Executive Director.

Mr PHELPS: I am going back to visitor management - just one moment. Only for conservation.

Mr CHANDLER: It is in conservation areas. Protection conservation is an issue.

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Brennan. I can inform the committee that nine infringements for driving, riding, on Tree Point beach had been issued since November 2009.

Mr CHANDLER: Since 2009?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, patrols are undertaken on weekends and public holidays when visitation to the area is the greatest. There is a ranger present in the Tree Point Reserve on at least one day during most weeks as they undertake routine maintenance, weed, and fire abatement work.

Mr CHANDLER: Can you be more specific? You said 2009. How many in the last 12 months?

Mr HAMPTON: We do not have that information with us, but will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.05

Mr CHAIRMAN: Repeat the question, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: How many fines have been issued on in the Gunn Point area, Tree Point in particular, in the last 12 months?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.05, minister.

Mr CHANDLER: Moving on to crocodile management, how much has been spent on crocodile management in this forward budget, and how much was spent last year?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, we do not have that figure in one summary. It is broken down in crocodile management on parks. You have the BE CROCWISE education campaign, croc management in the Darwin area, the outer Darwin area, the Katherine area, Nhulunbuy, and Borroloola. It is a bit of all over the place in the budget for our crocodile management. I am quite happy to take that on notice and get you an overall figure.

Question on Notice No 7.06

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you repeat the question?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, how much has being spent on crocodile management in the past 12 months, and in this budget for the 2012-13 year?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.06.

Mr CHANDLER: Should I ask for the break-up, member for Nelson? Do you not think I should trust the minister?

Mr WOOD: He did not say he was going to give the break-up.

Mr CHANDLER: He offered it. He did.

Mr HAMPTON: I have just mentioned the break-up, and it is on *Hansard*. I am happy to - put another question if you want, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: A break-up of those numbers, please?

Mr HAMPTON: Crocodile management on parks.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Question No 7.06 has all that, including the break-up. We are with the member for Brennan and a question.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, why has the government's 50 km exclusion zone not been established?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, a Crocodile Management Program for the outer Darwin rural zone is in place, as well as the formalisation of the outer Darwin crocodile management zone. I presume that is what you are alluding to. Over the past budget or two we have increased the crocodile management team to allow them to manage the growing population of crocodiles along with the growing population of the rural area. We recruited two new members of the crocodile management team as well as increased the number of traps we have out there – new traps.

In regard to crocodile management, we have done an enormous amount of work, particularly over the last two years. Of course, we are world-renowned for our crocodile management. We have trained East Timorese crocodile handlers in a recent exchange with Timor-Leste. We have some of the best in the world in the Territory. We have two additions to the crocodile management team. We have more traps than ever.

The BE CROCWISE education campaign reaches out to thousands upon thousands of Territory children through our schools. I have been to Nhulunbuy, I have been through Katherine, and I have seen the BE CROCWISE campaign stickers and badges everywhere. We are world-renowned for it. We have done a very good job, but we cannot drop our eyes off this one because it is so important we learn to manage the crocodile population.

We have a Commonwealth croc management plan we have to adhere to in managing the population of crocodiles for egg harvesting, juvenile and adult population - a whole range of things.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, you are talking about a croc management plan. It is not nice reading, but the Coroner's report into Briony Goodsell's death, page 8 section 19 refers to an increase in crocodile numbers in the Top End from 100 000 to 150 000. That is a massive increase - 50 000 crocodiles. How many crocodiles do you think we have in Top End waters, minister?

Mr HAMPTON: I have also read that Coroner's report. It was very early on when I became minister. I had much support within Cabinet and government to increase the resources - the staffing of our croc management in the Top End - because it was a tragic event. We need to continue looking at how we can improve croc management - whether it is BE CROCWISE, our croc management plan with the Commonwealth government, or sharing our knowledge and expertise with our neighbours. Many of the initiatives I have mentioned tonight ...

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, where I am going is it is my understanding the last time a proper census was done was in the 1980s. If we do not truly know what the numbers are today, how can we have an effective management program which really understands the resources required?

Mr HAMPTON: We manage crocodiles in various areas whether they are parks or through the crocodile management team, I will hand that over to Alaric Fisher, who is the Executive Director of Biodiversity Conservation. As I said, through the crocodile management plan in regard to the number of eggs people are collecting and the number of permits we issue to those collectors, and number of juveniles and adult crocodiles that are captured - there are regular reports on how many crocodiles have been caught in the harbour. I am sure Alaric has more detail on survey work.

Mr FISHER: Alaric Fisher, Director Biodiversity Conservation. The crocodile population in the Northern Territory has been monitored since the 1970s when protection was introduced for crocodiles. You are right, the methodologies used changed in the 1990s. Monitoring is based in the major rivers in the Top End and until the 1990s, 20 of the major rivers were monitored. The focus there was to track the recovery of the whole crocodile population.

In the past 20 years, monitoring has focused on 10 rivers where the largest crocodile populations are, including Mary River, Adelaide River, and Daly River, and where the interaction between humans and crocodiles is the greatest. That monitoring has been focused on assessing the sustainability of the Crocodile Management Program and the harvest of crocodiles. We are able to extrapolate from those two datasets and track the gradual increase in crocodiles in the Territory.

Our current figure is approximately 100 000 non-hatchling crocodiles. We have seen a steady increase since the 1970s and, more recently, a gradual tapering off in numbers. It appears in some rivers the crocodiles are reaching or returning to their natural population levels and, in some rivers, they are still slowly increasing. We can provide quite detailed data about changes in populations in the major rivers in the Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, moving on to the camel culling program. I appreciate it is a Commonwealth program, but can you give me an update on the status of the camel culling program from a Territory perspective?

Mr HAMPTON: We are leaders in the Camel Action Plan, which is the national plan put to the ministerial council some years ago now. The plan involves the Territory, South Australia and Western Australia working with the Commonwealth because, as we know, camels do not stay within state boundaries particularly through Central Australia, Western Australia and South Australia. We were the leaders in setting up the Camel Action Plan with the Commonwealth through the ministerial council meetings, through NT1 and Desert Knowledge. Parks become very involved with those two organisations in managing it.

Very early on, our government put in money to assist with the camel management project. There is \$1.97m in the 2012-13 budget.

In recent times, we have had a great deal of rain through Central Australia and camels are very hard to reach; they are very mobile beasts in that part of Central Australia. Depending on rain, weather, and the patterns and movements of camels, we continue to do what we can to control them. The program is supported the Northern Territory Cattleman's Association, Indigenous landowners, and the Central Land Council. It is a well-supported program. The Territory government has allocated money in the budget for that to occur.

Mr CHANDLER: My understanding is the Commonwealth funding for the camel culling was \$19m over four years, and the initial target was 350 000 camels. With the best estimates I have seen of over a million camels in Central Australia and growing, can you advise how many camels have been culled to date, and how much of that \$19m has been used?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I can advise you that culling operations have ramped up in 2011-12, as drier conditions returned. Over the life of the program, almost 25 000 camels have been aurally culled in the Northern Territory at an overall operational cost of just under \$40 per camel. In the Northern Territory government, we have contributed new funding of \$3.3m over four years to support this program. As I said, \$300 000 in 2009-10, \$1m in 2010-11 and 2012-13.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, the reason I have raised this is because I have seen some recent figures that came out of the federal Estimates Committee. It, basically, said that in Year 1, 23 000 camels were culled; a wetter year in the next year where only 13 000 camels were culled; and they have expended \$10.6m of that \$19m budget. My figures suggest, to date, that is a cost of between \$250 and \$350 a camel, not \$40 a camel as you have suggested today.

While it would appear highly unlikely you will reach the target of 350 000 over four years, given the success of their breeding, what decline will be achieved in real terms by removing 350 000 camels over the four years?

Mr HAMPTON: I do not know, member for Brennan, some of those figures – I am not sure if you have taken in the contribution of the South Australian and WA governments. The figures I have given you is

Northern Territory government. I presume the Commonwealth estimates would include South Australia and Western Australia as well.

I can say it is anticipated up to 50 000 camels may be removed during 2012-13. As the weather dries up, we will certainly be ramping up the culling program. I am not sure if Mr Grant has anything to add.

Mr GRANT: Yes, the weather has been an issue. It is important to realise about 250 000 to 300 000 camels are in the Territory. So far, 25 000 of those - so 10% - are gone already. With the drying out of the weather, we will get quite a few more.

The Territory money is highly focused on actually killing camels, not on administration. We have been very careful to ensure our money is absolutely spent on camels and, if it is not spent, it is pushed back. Alaric, would you like to add anything to that?

Mr FISHER: Yes, that is right. You will see that the budget figures - \$1.97m for the coming financial year - represents a push out of an accumulated nearly \$1m from the previous years that we have not been able to spend because of the wet years. Between, I think it was November 2010 and October last year, we were not able to undertake any area of culling operations because the camels were so widely distributed. Now they are much more concentrated, we have some very good aerial survey information which shows us where the major concentrations of camels are in the Simpson Desert and around the Petermans.

Since late last year, there have been four aerial culls, and there is a fifth one due to commence in a couple of weeks time. Those culls have been very successful in numbers. Although the numbers to date are about 25 000, if the conditions persist and our rate of culling continues, we predict another 50 000-odd animals to be culled over the next year, which means we would have managed to reduce the NT populations by somewhere between 30% and 40% over the culling program.

Mr CHANDLER: While I appreciate the answers last year in regarding to possible slaughtering for human consumption and export, since then I have read a report recently where at least two businesses in South Australia - in Peterborough and Port Pirie - are wanting up to 200 000 camels a year for export. Is the NT government still interested or willing to work with businesses that might want to engage in exporting camel meat?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I am aware that has been tried in the past - live exports. The difficulties of exporting such a large beast have challenges, and in the past it has not proven to be economically viable. You are right, the abattoir in Peterborough has recently reopened. The other important thing is over the life of this program 2190 camels have been commercially harvested in the Northern Territory from pastoral and Aboriginal lands.

Mr CHANDLER: What was the number again?

Mr HAMPTON: An amount of 2190 camels have been commercially harvested in the Northern Territory from pastoral and Aboriginal lands. Pastoralists have been contributing to camel management through undertaking ground shooting. I understand they have removed more than 8000 feral camels since July 2009. The other important thing we talked about, particularly with the parks, with the Camel Action Plan there have been 306 Indigenous rangers and traditional owners involved or participated in monitoring activities.

Mr WOOD: Minister, back to crocs. Do the Manton Dam crocs come from Darwin River Dam? I am told Darwin River Dam has plenty of them and, if they do, is it feasible to fence the catchment area between the two dams, or are we going to have this problem forever and a day that we have to close Manton Dam because of crocs?

Mr HAMPTON: I might hand over to Graham, but member for Nelson, for me it is always about public safety. There have been issues - and the night time spotting to ensure it is safe. To me, it is always about public safety first. I will hand you over to Graham Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, it is a Wet Season issue. The two dams join up during the Wet Season and it is not really feasible to put a barrier between the two. We maintain a series of traps in a monthly program and remove the animals if they are spotted - when we get them in there. We have had some earlier this year and we were able to get them out in time for the May long weekend and the dam has been opened since. It will be an annual issue and one that we will have to manage and monitor.

Mr WOOD: Are you saying the two dams overlap, or are you saying - you have a catchment which is a contour line. What concerned me is one dam is used for recreational purposes and the other one is a pristine catchment. Are you saying Manton Dam water goes into the mix?

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, I have not been into that area but my understanding is the water levels rise to such an extent that it is very easy for the crocodiles to move between one dam to the other in that time. That is where the crocodiles are coming into Manton Dam.

Mr WOOD: Is it feasible, on that catchment line, to put traps - in the sense of fencing traps as you do for buffalos and other animals - to make it difficult for them to cross? This issue comes up every year about closing Manton Dam and people become frustrated. The long weekends come and I get the phone calls. I put that suggestion - maybe I will not put it as a question. Could the feasibility be looked at?

Minister, in relation to one of your biodiversity surveys, the Howard sand plains, which are mentioned in your annual report. Has that survey been completed and what are the outcomes of that, bearing in mind this area is a very valuable sand mining area?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass over to Alaric.

Mr FISHER: There is an ongoing program there because, under the recently announced biodiversity fund, there is some additional funding to continue that work. You are right, the basis for doing that is to get a good understanding of where the high conservation values are within the Howard sand plain in relation to, particularly, sand mining operations. Those programs have been joint exercises, including; for example, Greening Australia, but also the mining association - sorry, the exact title slips my mind ...

Mr WOOD: Extractive mining.

Mr FISHER: Extractive mining, that is it. ... also, particularly with a goal of looking at methodologies behind rehabilitating sand mining areas to actually return as much as possible some of the conservation values associated with them.

Mr WOOD: It is an area that certainly needs looking at, because it is a valuable area that is being mined. At the same time, obviously it has some very good conservation components.

Mr FISHER: That is recognised and that is the purpose of that work.

Mr WOOD: The other two questions are in relation to Tree Point. Last year, and maybe the year before, I asked whether the government been willing to talk to Land Corp about some more permanent placement of a person - a ranger or whatever - in that area, because there is no real distinction between the Tree Point beach and the rest of the place. It all becomes a very active area during the long weekends. There are quad bikes, motor bikes, and campers, and all sorts of things. Have you had any more discussions with Land Corp, or is there any proposal to try to manage that beach area, because the beach does not know the difference, but one end is not under anybody's control, and a little down your end it has some control?

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, unfortunately, we have not been able to come up with a solution with NT Land Corp for a permanent presence in that area, so we are continuing to rely on our patrols at busy times, to manage the Tree Point part of it, which is the only part that Parks and Wildlife has responsibility for.

Mr GRANT: Member for Nelson, we have been talking to NT Land Corp about getting some more integrated and permanent camping around that area. With that would come better supervision and presence there, but that might just be a few years away, I think. They have certainly agreed with us that just having the camping where we have it, and then different kinds of camping, we could come up with a scheme together that would - we do not want to make it too formal or anything - try to get some sense of an integration of the camping area and get that supervised through that.

Mr WOOD: I have heard about the project, but nothing so far has happened. I have another question on Tree Point. I have been approached by one of the owners of the Aboriginal excision that is there at the end of the point. One of the problems seems to be no one knows where the boundary is because it is on the beach. Is it possible to at least put some survey peg somewhere there, because there has been many an argument about a person landing on that beach and, sometimes, that argument has been moved to

actual aggression. It would be nice to know where the boundary of your area is and where the boundary of that excision is.

Mr GRANT: Member for Nelson, I would need to check, but I think that boundary is between the two privately-held blocks and the Aboriginal area.

Mr WOOD: No, your boundary goes out into the sea and actually goes around Tree Point, and Tree Point's boundary is on this beach. What is happening is, people, even fishermen, are coming up on to the beach and are being told off for being on the Aboriginal land, but no one knows where the boundary is because it is on the beach. I do not know whether there is any possibility of some surveys being done to put some concrete markers in there so people know who is on what land there.

Mr GRANT: We certainly can look at that, yes.

Mr WOOD: There was one other question, but I ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, I was going to propose a five-minute break, so we can return to you.

Mr WOOD: I will just ask one last question, and that is it. I have been in touch with the LaBelle Station people, and they are run by R M Williams now. I was surprised to hear they are involved in quite a bit of conservation management, including also Aboriginal people in that Finnis River area. Could you explain if they intend to move the LaBelle Station into a conservation park - one of those conversions - or do they intend to maintain it as a cattle station with some conservation?

Mr CHAIRMAN: You missed the *Landline* story, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes. It is fairly ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will cover the *Landline* story.

Mr WOOD: I do not have time to sit and watch television in the middle of the day. I have been contacted. The reason is I have relations there who did not know much about it. Is there something going on between the station and the government in relation to conservation?

Mr HAMPTON: I met with R M Williams very early on, and I am aware of it. Jim Grant has been much closer to those discussions, so I will hand over to him.

Mr GRANT: There is no intention to destock LaBelle. They want to have varied use there for conservation, tourism and pastoralism. I believe they also have some intention of growing seed for biofuels. They have different models for different places. It is a pastoral company and it intends to run it as a pastoral block.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will take a five-minute break and return to Output 2.1 and the member for Brennan.

The committee suspended.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES

Output 2.1 – Land Management

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will commence. We are at Output Group 2.0, Natural Resources, Output 2.1, Land Management, and the call is with the member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, what are the identified impacts of the Central Australian bushfires in relation to the habitat?

Mr HAMPTON: Members for Brennan, the Central Australian bushfires, as we all know, were very extensive fires which had a profound impact on Alice Springs, but also pastoral activity and tourism. A total of 41% of the Territory was burnt in 2011, making it the worst fire season in a generation.

Regarding your specific question, I do not have that information. I am happy to take it on notice unless someone from the agency has more information on that question.

Mr GRANT: I can give a preliminary answer, but we can get you more information if required. The habitat many of the fires went through are Spinifex and buffel grass types of country. The firefighters paid particular attention to protecting national parks and high conservation areas.

I do not think there was any profound effect on any highly valued habitats. *Acacia peuce* was not affected, which is probably the most endangered species we have there. I do not think there would have been profound effects. Spinifex is made to burn; that is what it does – it burns and regenerates. We also have Slater's skink, which is the other highly endangered animal there. It did not get into that habitat. Nor did it get into the habitat of the possums around Ormiston. In relation to the really critical species, it did not have any particular effect. We can get you more information if you want.

Mr CHANDLER: No, that is okay. Minister, last year we spoke about - I will be very careful what I say - an allegation that fires lit by departmental staff had burnt on to private land and that feedstock was burnt. Do you have any more information on that? Were negotiations or settlements made with landowners regarding fires which started in national parks and ended up in private land?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass that on to Jim Grant.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, I think you are talking about the Davenports area there. I do not think a settlement has been reached on that, but I understand there might be some negotiations.

Mr CHANDLER: So, currently under negotiation? Okay. That is all I have at the moment; I want to move on.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any questions to Output 2.1, Land Management, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes. In relation to weeds - I presume that comes under Land Management. Weeds like mimosa - and now I have lost the name of the other weed, it lives in the water ...

A member: Salvinia.

Mr WOOD: Salvinia. Salvinia and mimosa - for a long time there have been attempts to control them biologically. Can the minister say who is winning? Are we reducing the population of either of those plants, and, if so, by how much?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to pass that one on to Diana Leeder, the senior executive director.

Dr LEEDER: Diana Leeder, Senior Executive Director. Sorry, I am just finding that; I was reading about it earlier. For which particular weeds, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Mimosa and salvinia. I know there has been quite a bit of work done with salvinia around the Daly River area.

Dr LEEDER: Certainly, with salvinia, the weevil - whose name I cannot really pronounce, *Cytobagous salviniae*, was released in the NT in 1981 with spectacular success. Current management of salvinia largely involves redistribution of the biocontrol agent and rarely requires herbicide use. Colonies of the weevil are maintained by our weed management staff for distribution to land managers, and by at least one Aboriginal community. Also, the Weed Management Branch is providing assistance to at least two ranger groups which are currently setting up rearing programs for that weevil. At the moment, the control has an enduring effect. CSIRO estimates the benefit to cost ratio for introducing the salvinia weevil worldwide is 53:1. The short answer is the weevils are winning.

Mr WOOD: Do we have a map of the extent of salvinia in the Top End? Do we have a map which shows the extent to which that particular insect has taken hold and the reduction in salvinia populations?

Dr LEEDER: Yes, we do have that. I do not have it here this evening, but we could take it on notice to provide that map.

Question on Notice No 7.07

Mr WOOD: Through you, Mr Chairman, could the minister provide a map showing the extent of salvinia in the Top End, the extent to which the release of the weevil has occurred, and the extent to which salvinia has been reduced?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.07, minister.

Mr WOOD: In the case of mimosa, there has been many attempt to biologically control mimosa. Was there any success?

Dr LEEDER: Mimosa is a little more difficult, but I can tell you the biological control program started in 1979, and it has resulted in 15 insects and two fungal pathogens being introduced into the Territory. Ten of the insects have now established, and six of those are considered to be damaging the weed.

One of the pathogens of fungus has established on the Daly and Finniss River catchments. In some areas, biological controls resulted in up to 70% to 90% reduction in seed production, then reduced growth of seedlings.

Other things it has been recorded as doing are opening the canopy to allow grass growth, then a reduced size of mimosa plants and more competition that way. The weed scientists say recent data suggests the mimosa seed bank is declining in some areas to levels close to those found in the native range, which is about one-tenth of what we were seeing a decade or so ago. They also suggest, through field work, that biocontrol agents make the mimosa susceptible to native pathogens and, in some areas, this is resulting in wide-scale dieback of the mimosa, which is being completely replaced by native species.

Mr WOOD: I visited Melaleuca Station two years ago and there was a very large area that had died off. At the time, it was not known why it had died off. It was completely dead; there were hectares of dead mimosa. Was there any study done by the your department, CSIRO, or anyone, to find out why that vast area of mimosa had died back?

Dr LEEDER: There has been some study done on it. A PhD student from the University of Queensland is investigating it. Some analysis of samples taken from the plants by the pathologists and the Department of Resources has isolated eight species of fungi, two of which have proved to be pathogenic to mimosa seedlings. There is a collaborative project operating at the moment between NRETAS and the University of Queensland, with this PhD student, to further investigate the phenomenon.

I believe you raised it a couple of years ago ...

Mr WOOD: You did not have any information then.

Dr LEEDER: No, we did not have any information then. I am happy to say we have had more work done on it since and understand a little more of what is happening.

Mr WOOD: That is good. According to Budget Paper No 3, there were 20 clearing applications received and processed. Do you know what the total acreage, or hectare-age, was for those clearing applications? You might be able to say where they those clearing applications were in general. Put that on notice if you do not have it handy.

Dr LEEDER: Minister, we can take that on notice.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, member for Nelson, can we put that on notice?

Question on Notice No 7.08

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you provide information about the 20 clearing applications received and processed during 2012-13, and information on the total hectares cleared and where that land was.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.08, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, this is very important area in regard to weed management in the Northern Territory. In Budget Paper No 3, in new plants declared in accordance with section 10 of the *Weeds Management Act*, and in actively managing weed species on known land, the Indigenous ranger groups participating in weed management are very important. There are 26 Indigenous ranger groups participating in the management programs. Two regional catchment and sub-catchment weed strategies plans have been developed. We acknowledge it is a very important area and one in which we can always do better. It is important we continue to look at these plans. The catchment areas of the Northern Territory and our river systems are really important sources of weeds.

Many people, like Tom Stockwell who I met recently, are equally concerned about it on the land as well. I understand the importance of this issue.

Mr WOOD: I could ask you plenty of questions about weeds. A lovely little weed book was launched the other day on urban weeds. I am not sure who people should go through if they want a copy, but it is a great little book.

Mr Chairman, there are no other questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Water Management

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move on to Output 2.2, Water Management.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, have we found the source of the beach water pollution?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Brennan. It has been a priority of government to ensure we track the source of the pollution. We have commissioned the Andrew Campbell report. More than any other government, we are open and transparent in what we are doing in monitoring and researching in the harbour, on the beaches, and in improving infrastructure such as closing the outfall and improving our sewerage treatment facilities and trying to identify the source.

Much work has gone on in the report. As we know, there has been no single smoking gun for the sources of the bacteria that forces the closure of beaches.

We will continue to look at those recommendations from the report, and work with the Darwin City Council and get experts in - whether it is through AIMS or Charles Darwin University - to continue to try to improve the quality of our beaches, as well as our harbour.

Mr CHANDLER: What has been the cost to date searching for this solution? What have you spent to date?

Mr HAMPTON: I will ask Sam Fox, Executive Director Natural Resources.

Dr FOX: Samantha Fox, Executive Director Natural Resources. As you are aware, we had the first concern around the beach closures in 2010 when the City of Darwin detected high levels of bacteria in Lake Alexander. At that time, the Department of Health commenced sampling of beaches regularly in the Darwin Harbour around the primary swimming beaches in the Darwin Harbour, and NRETAS worked with the Department of Health to undertake that work.

Since 2010, we have been monitoring beaches regularly in Darwin Harbour - weekly during the swimming season - in 2010-11, and in 2012 now the swimming season has commenced again. Using that monitoring, as well as the broader Darwin Harbour monitoring, we undertake as part of the development of the Darwin Harbour Regional Report Cards, we have a good picture of the water quality of the Darwin Harbour and what is happening with bacteria levels ...

Mr CHANDLER: Can I ask: that water testing that is done goes all year round, doesn't it?

Dr FOX: We have a program of monitoring water quality in Darwin Harbour through NRETAS. That is quarterly monitoring that happens all year round. The beach monitoring for 2010-11 was during the

swimming season only, but in 2011–12 we did weekly and fortnightly beach monitoring over the Wet Season as well to get an indication of how the bacteria levels were changing over the Wet Season.

That monitoring, together with the monitoring Power and Water does around the outfalls, and with monitoring other stakeholders do in the harbour, gave us a good picture of water quality over the last few years in the harbour.

What we discovered, together with our colleagues on the Darwin Harbor Beach Water Quality Taskforce was, as the minister said, there are multiple sources of bacteria on beaches. As a result, there is no one recommendation - no way we can say: 'Solve this by doing this'. There will be a suite of recommendations come out of the task force. So far, we ...

Mr CHANDLER: Cost to date?

Dr FOX: For the Darwin Harbour Monitoring Program in the broad that is conducted by NRETAS, we receive \$800 000 per annum towards that program. That program includes both the work that is undertaken by the Aquatic Health Unit, which is about \$550 000 per year, and the work that is undertaken by the Biodiversity Unit, which looks at dolphins, dugong, turtles, seagrass, and coral monitoring. As part of that \$550 000 per year, we conduct the broad water quality monitoring program in the harbour, but also the beach monitoring program.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, on how many occasions were the test results received from Darwin beaches that were at, or above, a level that required public notification and follow-up testing? Can I include through the Wet Season testing as well?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass over to Sam Fox.

Dr FOX: In 2010, we had 14 beach closures during the swimming season; in 2011, we had four beach closures during the swimming season; over the Wet Season of 2011-12 when we did the extra sampling, we did not have beach closures because the beaches were already closed to swimming. However, we did have, I think, three or four occasions - and I can get the numbers to you - where the levels of bacteria were high, above 200 units per 100 ml for *Enterococci*.

Mr CHANDLER: I appreciate that in the Wet Season with stingers people really should not swim, but we have some people who probably deserve the Darwin awards for what they get up to. Is it worthwhile including on signage on our beaches the quality of the water as well as stingers? Are they two separate issues? I might be asking for an opinion, sorry. I know you should not swim here in the Wet Season because of stingers, but that might not necessarily keep somebody out of the water if they wear stockings or ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is your question on signage?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes. The signage we have today mentions stingers but I do not think it talks about water quality. When we have times where the water quality is degraded to the point where you should not swim, should we be signposting the beaches during the Wet Season?

Mr HAMPTON: Those signs are put up by Department of Health, not NRETAS. Perhaps that is a question for that minister.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you have plans to follow-up on monitoring of water quality levels in Darwin Harbour following the closure of the poo shooter?

Mr HAMPTON: That funding is ongoing - what Samantha Fox has just detailed in regard to additional monitoring - \$551 000 as part of the additional \$800 000. That is ongoing funding.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what are the benefits of shutting down the poo shooter?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, that may be a question for the minister for Power and Water or the Minister for Health. There are many benefits in improving waste treatment facilities in the Top End. The city of Darwin has grown and there is more demand and pressure on those essential services. We have to keep them all up to date. It would be irresponsible of government not to look at how we can improve essential infrastructure such as power and water and sewerage treatment facilities. It brings it up to a more modern

standard and more acceptable standard in a tropical area of Darwin where we have unique challenges with the weather, the tides, and the seasons. They are some of the advantages of closing the poo shooter ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: On Thursday morning, we will have Power and Water present for four hours. They will be able to talk in detail about the Larrakeyah macerator and the diversion through the Ludmilla Sewerage Treatment Plant.

Mr CHANDLER: Mr Chairman, I appreciate that. I am speaking more from the environmental side of things. I have struggled over the last few years to understand, when we have had monitoring of the harbour, that at every opportunity ministers of this government have tried to distance themselves from any link between the poo shooter and the quality of the water in our harbour. They say the testing Power and Water does and the testing that NRETAS does has failed to provide a link that sewage pouring into our harbour detracts in any way to our water quality. I have had more than a number of people ask me why we are spending \$60m. It is a great idea, but why are we spending \$60m on something you guys are telling us has no link to poor water quality and the Larrakeyah poo shooter? Please enlighten me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, we are here to discuss the budget, essentially, and output decisions that you are making in your agency and the decisions you make in this particular output. The question does not go to decisions your agency is making or any money that has been spent in your output.

While I can understand the question from the member, it needs to be directed to Power and Water at GOC when they meet on Thursday morning for four hours. The ministers who will be present – the Treasurer and the minister for Power and Water - as well as the chairman of Power and Water and the CEO of Power and Water - will be able to answer questions in detail about why those decisions have been made, how much they have cost, and any other things you care to ask. They were asked similar questions last Estimates, so they will be prepared and happy to answer those questions, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: All right. Minister, from the point of view of the environment, have you been shown any evidence of a lowering of the water quality in the harbour due to the Larrakeyah outfall?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, that goes to the Larrakeyah outfall, a different output group. What I am saying is ...

Mr CHANDLER: I am not talking about the money. All I want to know is, have you seen any evidence whatsoever that links the Larrakeyah outfall to lowering the quality of water in our harbour?

Mr HAMPTON: What I can say, member for Brennan, is I have seen the Andrew Campbell report, as part of the task force we created - independent expert advice. What the report strongly says is there is no single source of contamination; there is a number of areas. It could be stormwater drainage, it could be treatment facilities, it could be rats, bats and mice - whatever. There is no single smoking gun. What we do know, member for Brennan, is, more than ever before, we have more monitoring being done.

The Northern Territory government has put in an additional \$800 000 per annum to do more monitoring, on top of the \$500 000 that is in the budget papers. I would like to say to Territorians is be reassured, we have more monitoring than has ever been there before to ensure our beaches are safe, our Darwin Harbour remains pristine - a working harbour, but also a recreational harbour for people to enjoy.

We will seek the best advice we can from people such as Professor Campbell and the task force, to continue to improve and to do better monitoring where we can.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. One correction: monitoring will not improve the water quality.

Moving on, I have a question on the water testing for Leanyer water park. This is about the water quality, not so much about the sport and recreation elements of the park itself. Will you take a question on water quality for the water parks?

Mr HAMPTON: I think that may be more for Output 5.3, Sport and Recreation.

Mr CHANDLER: It is not about sport in this case, it is just about the water quality.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, does the department of Sport, which I think ...

Mr HAMPTON: They manage the particular facility.

Mr CHAIRMAN: ... they will actually know about the water quality of the park as well as ...

Mr HAMPTON: That is right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, that is not an operation of this output.

Mr CHANDLER: That is it for me.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I have a copy of this letter from your CEO referring to an Estimates Committee question I asked last year:

Which lagoons are waterways and which are not; provide an analysis of all lagoons and waterways in Litchfield Shire. If they are not, why not?

Minister, I received this wonderful desktop study which, to me, means someone sat in a room with an aerial photograph and decided which were waterways and which were not. Is that correct?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to get Mr Jim Grant or Diana Leeder to clarify that misunderstanding, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: No, it is not a misunderstanding. It says here it is a desktop study.

Dr LEEDER: Part of it, member for Nelson, was a desktop study that was then followed up with site visits to particular areas, and also some further analysis of it. It was based on a 2004 desktop study to give the base data of where the lagoons were. It was then added to by work the department had done out in the field in identifying where there were particular other ones. Minister, with this, if there are particular areas the member for Nelson is interested in, perhaps we can ...

Mr WOOD: There will be. Thank you, minister. I know this might be a little longwinded, but it needs to be. I have some knowledge of the lagoons in my area. I am not an expert, but I do know some of the major ones. The statement in this letter says:

Of note, the depression located in the Lorikeet Court area ...

It is actually Lorikeet Road.

... was not included in this latest inventory as there was no standing order in the area at the time in which the imagery was collected. The Lorikeet Court depression is not considered a waterway as it does not fit the definition of waterways.

The reason this is an important question is, as you would know, there is an ongoing - forever and a day - discussion about the flooded blocks in that area, because the department was considering allowing a developer to drain this area. Minister, your department said this was not a waterway. What I am concerned about is, since then, your department funded a contour map and a vegetation map. I do not have the contour map here but the department would know it clearly shows the depression has an outlet which is over one of the blocks about which one of the people complained.

If you look at the vegetation there - there is leptospermum, which is always around wet areas - you realise this lagoon drains into Benjamin Lagoon or the smaller version of Benjamin Lagoon. That is obvious to anyone who knows the wetlands vegetation. If you stand on the block, as I did during Cyclone Carlos, you were standing in water which was seeping across the land.

If you still say that is not a waterway, how did this person come to presume that Wadham's Lagoon - Wadham's Lagoon is in Howard Springs, it dries up and it has artificial drains that drain the water. That is the only reason, when you read this document - it is the same at McMinns Lagoon, which is artificially drained. Many of these lagoons flow across the surface. It is very hard to see where they would flow. It says that Wadham's Lagoon drains into a natural creek system. The previous government spent \$400 000 buying a block of land and building a drain to drain it. It is being drained artificially.

It says Dutchies Lagoon drains into a natural creek - it is a drain. A drain was approved by the Department of Natural Resources for McMinns Lagoon. Benjamin Lagoon is the worst one of all - it is next to the lagoon we are talking about. It drains to the north and the south, and it drains artificially through land that was not the natural drainage area. Mr Hutchinson was the developer who put a drain from Benjamin

Lagoon into the Howard River system. Because his road flooded in the north, he built a drain through high ground. This document classes Benjamin Lagoon as a natural watercourse now. It says:

... *appears to be a natural depression with a drain running towards the Adelaide River floodplain.*

We have four or five lagoons that have been artificially drained and regarded as natural. We have a lagoon that has a natural overflow. It has not been drained yet, although that is the intention. How can that lagoon not be regarded as a natural watercourse and, therefore, be protected under the *Water Act*?

Surely, the department has an interest in the biodiversity, not just the water? Before it says it is okay to drain something, does it have a biodiversity side to that decision? I believe this is inaccurate and it is being used as a means of not allowing Lorikeet road lagoon protection under the *Water Act*.

I do not know whether the question is whether you could reinvestigate this ...

Mr Chandler: It is somewhere in there.

Mr WOOD: It is important because it has been 14 months of hard work trying to help the people in that area. This is a major focal point in what is happening in that area. So ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I think you are asked three questions, so we will give the minister and the agency the opportunity to answer.

Mr WOOD: Sorry I took so long.

Mr HAMPTON: I acknowledge it is a very important issue for the people there. We have had some discussions before about the study. I offer you a briefing with the person ...

Mr WOOD: Who was the independent body? Is that public?

Dr LEEDER: I am sorry, I do not have the name of it. As the minister is suggesting, perhaps the best way would be for the member for Nelson to meet with that unit and the people involved in it, and have a discussion around it, because in an area that has actually been zoned for residential, there are a whole range of competing considerations. It is not to detract from the member for Nelson's concerns about biodiversity and protection of the waterway, but there are a range of other issues that are taken into account when we are assessing those areas compared to an unzoned area. I am not the technical person for it, and perhaps being able to have that discussion would be the best way to deal with it.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, but I drive across Wadham's Lagoon every morning and every afternoon - it is cut up into about six or seven different block and it has been drained. It is listed under here as a natural watercourse, therefore, protected by the *Water Act*. Wadham's Lagoon is nearly pristine, except it has been cut up, and the government says: 'That is not a lagoon. You can drain it, and we do not really want to know about it'.

I am more worried about not only the people who are affected, but what that means to many water areas. I hope the department of water resources has some protection over water bodies - not saying they should all be totally protected. What do we need, minister, to change the act, if the act is not clear enough to allow for some of these lagoons in the rural area to have some protection under the *Water Act*? Does this mean the act requires an amendment?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, the other possibly is reviewing the *Water Act*. There could be opportunities there for those sorts of discussions to take place regarding that review. I certainly offer, again, to look at the details of who has done the study, and offer a briefing to you.

Mr WOOD: Thanks, minister. I realise I have taken up more time with the question, which is probably the way it should not be.

The other question - and this could have gone under either area of land management or water management - is the Howard Springs pine forest. You know my concern. After so much time waiting for the native title issue to be resolved on that land, your department wrote to me and said because of the possible effect on the aquifer, septic tanks would not be allowed.

I can understand the reasoning, but have there now been some positive moves to at least analyse that area you have said is not open for development, or do you have plans to do it? As I said before, this is not just about the environment, there is a social impact here. There is no rural land available for young people at a reasonable price, except the possibility of developing this or surrounding land. What is the latest on the issues in relation to this land not being available for subdivision because of the possible contamination by septic tanks?

Mr Chandler: I know a man who will strip the trees for nothing.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I know. There are plenty of trees.

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Nelson, I will get Samantha Fox to answer that one.

Dr FOX: As we discussed in April, NRETAS' concerns are around the ground water. What we were trying to convey is, as for any development, prior to development proceeding there needs to be an understanding of the potential risk associated with that to the environment, and some assurances, I guess, made about how those risks will be addressed.

We were not meaning to suggest that development could not proceed on the pine forest block; what we were saying is our recommended approach would be for a sewer, but if septic tanks were to proceed then we would expect there to be some investigation undertaken to ensure the impacts to the ground water were not significant, and impacts to the Howard Springs Nature Park were not significant.

Mr WOOD: You cannot swim in nature park. I am not saying we should fill it up with sewage, by the way. Most septic tanks have a reasonable quality of water coming out. Howard Springs is not now available for swimming.

However, the issue for me really was - and you might have heard me say this publically, minister - I get the feeling we have become a 'cannot do' rather a 'can do'. It would be nice if the department said: 'Besides sewerage, which will make it too expensive' - it is government land we are talking about, Crown land. Are there options which would allow this land to be developed? It is a social issue, an environmental issue and, all of a sudden, you come up against a brick wall. Is the department capable of looking at various sewerage systems which could alleviate the environmental concerns but allow this land to be developed? No young person can buy a block of land between \$300 000 and \$550 000 today. I am pleading for the environment. I do not want the environment wrecked, but we have to live. Is the department capable of trying to help develop this land and look at new mechanisms to open the land?

Mr HAMPTON: The No 1 test is the community. You need to go through a planning process. It might be something for minister McCarthy's office - the Department of Lands and Planning. Those options you would want to put back to the community in the rural area - those options, those issues, it is not one for ...

Mr WOOD: It will not go anywhere. You told us you cannot use a particular type of - you are the people saying you cannot use that septic system because it could damage the aquifer. First I say you need to give me some scientific proof it would - and I am hoping you will be doing that.

You are all public servants. That is what sometimes annoys me. I get stuff passed to Gerry Wood to fix. I am not the public servant in the sense people in this room are. I am quite happy to help. But, make a decision, look at the problem. Can your department help fix it or is it going to say: 'That is it. Go away and sort it out yourself?' It is a whole-of-government issue. Your department has said: 'No go'. Where do we go from then to sort it out? Do we leave the land for conservation or what?

Mr HAMPTON: I would have thought as a local member you would ...

Mr WOOD: I have been trying hard for four years. It is in the agreement - open up the forestry land and at the last minute, your department said: 'No go'. You tell me if we can fix it without having to put an expensive sewerage system in? Who is going to help?

Mr GRANT: Member for Nelson, we often help come up with solutions we raise; we do not often get credit for that. Our job is to identify the risks, as Sam said, and that is what we have done in this case. We have said there is a risk, it needs to be dealt with. But, we have not ruled out anything. We will work with Lands and Planning to help come up with a solution. There have been many cases with developments where we will identify a risk - there is a problem - and then help work on a solution. That is what we do; we do not just send it off.

Mr WOOD: I will keep trying. It is government land, and I am asking the government, as a government, to do something about it. I have taken up too much time, sorry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The last comment was a commitment to help.

Mr WOOD: I will be in trouble with the member for Port Darwin. Sorry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Brennan has another question under Output 2.2.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, can you please provide an update of the McKinley Road, Herbert flooding - but I will not ask that now. What have you been told about future water needs for the greater Darwin area?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, that is a question for Power and Water regarding water usage for greater Darwin. My agency, in relation to water allocation and being more efficient with water use, offers rebates to Territorians. We have had issues with quality of water. They are the things my agency is involved with. Diana, do you want to add anything further to that? That is our role as NRETAS.

Dr LEEDER: Yes, that is correct, minister. We certainly do the water allocation planning outside the actual inner Darwin area. Where there are people who are using bores, or relying on bores, we do the water allocation planning to ensure both the environment and the users of the water have sufficient from it. We are currently in the process of looking at the needs in the Howard Springs East aquifer area and Berry Springs. Regarding the whole potable water supply, that issue is actually a Power and Water question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions, member for Brennan, to those operations?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, I do, because I am also aware that it is NRETAS' job to, I suppose, have a relationship with Power and Water, to the point where you guys would either approve or not approve their extraction from Howard Springs East aquifer. If they wanted to increase the level of water out of that aquifer, it is up to NRETAS to approve or not approve that extraction - is that correct? I am just trying to understand the relationship between natural resources and ...

Dr LEEDER: Yes, that is correct. The department issues water licences in areas where water licences are required, and works with the community to work out what the needs are for resources that are under pressure - in areas where there is a water controlled district and a water allocation plan. We have a close working relationship with the Power and Water Corporation around their bore field in that area, and the issues that both they and residents experience in what is the actual draw on the aquifer and where that is impacted. Is it actually an impact for Power and Water in what they are trying to extract to augment the water supply? Or is the pressure - believed by some to be the water that Power and Water are extracting - having an impact on the other? We have a close working relationship around that.

In the bigger picture of what the water needs are of the greater Darwin area, you would start with Power and Water about what their responsibilities are for providing reticulated water to urban areas. Where does that go? What is the overall from that? We then work with them in understanding the nature of the resource and where and when it can be extracted.

You are quite correct in there being a close relationship, but it is not as simple as saying, 'Did NRETAS approve this or not approve it', because those would be discussions around what the impacts and the risks are in agreeing to an increase of extraction by one party versus another.

Mr CHANDLER: Please explain to me the relationship. In my mind, I can see the Department of Lands and Planning, NRETAS, and Power and Water all sitting down and having discussions about the future water needs. Do these meetings occur, and maybe in the last 12 months, has there been a meeting of those agencies to discuss future water needs?

Mr HAMPTON: A community-based water advisory committee was established in late 2010 to provide NRETAS with that sort of advice. Members represented include horticulture, tourism, environment, local government, Indigenous groups, and local water users. Part of the water allocation planning process was also to establish the community water advisory committee.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, thank you. I am not coming from that side of the thing, I am just talking about how government reaches a decision on future water needs for, say, the greater Darwin area. As I said, I

am assuming it would be Lands and Planning, Power and Water, NRETAS, all sitting down. You would each have your areas of expertise you would be reporting on.

If, for instance, one of the questions was 'Are we going to need a dam?' NRETAS would have some say in where that dam would be, what the implications are, and what damage to the ecosystems in the area. That is what I am trying to understand more: how it works.

Dr LEEDER: Yes, member for Brennan, there are those discussions and those longer-term strategic planning discussions. Of course, because each of the agencies has particular responsibilities but they are all whole-of-government issues, I cannot recall the last time we met in the last nine to 12 months, but there is an ongoing agenda for looking at that.

Issue have been identified about where the most appropriate land for future allocation of water is and those types of issues. We have those discussions. None of that type of planning would be done in isolation from one agency or another.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, I have spoken to Andrew Macrides about this within the last year, and he said there are no immediate issues for the Darwin water supply, so it is not being considered. There are issues around the Howard Springs aquifer and how much is available there. However, as I understand it, the modifications Power and Water has made will see us through for quite a long time.

Mr CHANDLER: The reason I ask the question is I was gobsmacked to hear the minister for Resources say the Warrai Dam site had been approved for a mining exploration licence. How did something like that happen if these meetings are ongoing? I am not talking about how we might need a dam in two or three years; we might need one in a decade or 30 years from now. At some stage, Darwin will reach the point where the population demands more water resources. If these meetings occur, I am interested in how a decision like that can be made in isolation, not understanding or appreciating future water sources.

Mr HAMPTON: Water allocation plans are a very important way forward and the way we, as a government, best preserve water in the Northern Territory. Water allocation planning is very important. It is detailing technical and scientific assessments, as well as the extensive community consultations that have to occur to discuss such an important issue. That is the whole idea of water allocation planning: involving the whole community based around scientific and technical information.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Output 3.1 – Environment and Sustainability

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will move on to Output Group 3.0, Environment and Heritage, Output 3.1, Environment and Sustainability.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. What funding streams are provided to the Environment Centre groups and on what rationale?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will take a moment, member for Brennan, while witnesses are changing. Do you want the member for Brennan to repeat that question, minister?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, thanks.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what funding streams are provided to the Environment Centre groups and on what rationale do you base those decisions?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, the 2012-13 EnvironmeNT Grants program has a total budget of \$731 000. That is focusing on schools, individual projects, and new operational funding. The program has five categories: climate change, invasive species management, waste and resource recovery, water conservation, and wildlife conservation. There is the schools component, the individual component, operational components, and the Cool Communities component.

Mr CHANDLER: How much goes to the Environment Centre?

Mr HAMPTON: The amount is \$185 000.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, why will you not fund Keep Australia Beautiful campaigns to the same extent as \$731 000 – a great deal of money. Not much appears to go to Keep Australia Beautiful. Are there any reasons behind that?

Mr WOOD: The beverage industry is not funding it adequately anymore.

Mr HAMPTON: The answer may be, member for Brennan, that the Environment Grants program is a transparent and fair process. The grants are awarded to those organisations considered to provide the best environmental outcomes for the Territory, irrespective of political affiliation.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, it is not a political question at all. To your knowledge, has Keep Australia Beautiful applied under this grant scheme for funding?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr CHANDLER: Were they successful or not?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, they received, member for Brennan, \$80 000 in 2011-12 under the operational category.

Mr CHANDLER: Nothing budgeted for in the 2012-13 financial year?

Mr HAMPTON: We have not announced those grants.

Mr CHANDLER: That is fine. Minister, page 51 of the NEPC - National Environment Protection Council - Annual Report says in regard to the ambient air quality - first, congratulations minister, your photo appears in this report, unlike previous ones, where we have had up to three Northern Territory ministers appear during the reporting period. It is good you hung around. Minister, I digress.

In regard to ambient air quality:

Significant downtime was encouraged with the Casuarina team being inoperable for nearly two months and the partisol from early November 2010 to mid March 2011.

What does that mean in the report? Were you encouraging people to be on leave? I do not quite understand the wording used here. It is page 51.

Mr PURDON: Paul Purdon, Acting Executive Director, Environment and Heritage. Would you mind repeating that, member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: Under Table 2, Summary of Implementation Issues Arising, under the Northern Territory it has says:

Significant downtime was encouraged with the Casuarina team being inoperable for nearly two months and the partisol from early November 2010 to mid March 2011.

Mr PURDON: You might be reading a typo or a misplaced word there.

Mr CHANDLER: I hope so.

Mr PURDON: We would not be encouraging that.

Mr CHANDLER: No, no. Further it says:

The monitoring station Palmerston was established during the 2010-11 reporting year. As data was only collected from 1 January 2010 to 30 June 2011, this data was classified as 'not demonstrated'.

That is six months of data collection. I am not an expert, but six months of data would give you some kind of reportable information.

Mr PURDON: It is the way we have to report that data to NEPC. The technical panel we have to get our data and reporting through will not accept data for reporting unless it is a certain percentage coverage

of the year. I do not recall what the percentage is, but it is more than 50% - it is closer to 80% or 90% of the year worth of data.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, page 59 records diesel emissions. I am assuming they are your comments. It says:

Aggregate data for the Northern Territory is not available.

This report must be fairly simple for you each year because there is nothing in here to report. Given you do not have aggregate data, how do you come up with many of your emissions targets?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, with our small jurisdiction our pollution is much lower than those of larger states, and Sydney or Melbourne.

Mr CHANDLER: That is all I have in Output 3.0.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, any questions in Output 3.1, Environment and Sustainability?

Mr WOOD: I am surprised; I thought we would do cash for cans. I will do Cash for Containers. Under this section?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I have a few questions, minister, and I will try to keep them short. I am passionate about cash for cans but I have some problems, minister ...

Mr CHANDLER: A point of order! Can I go back? I made an error. I thought we were in output 3.0 not 3.1. I have questions in output 3.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We have not gone past it.

Mr WOOD: As you were waving the Ford flag at the V8s on Sunday, I will allow it.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Absolutely nothing wrong with that. There is something about the colour red I find disturbing.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are at output 3.1 with the member for Brennan. Holden, dominated at the V8s over the weekend.

Mr CHANDLER: There might have been some shuffling going on.

I started earlier, minister, by asking questions on cash for cans. To date, what is the total cost of implementing the Cash for Containers program?

Mr HAMPTON: \$1.45m.

Mr CHANDLER: What is the difference between the estimated cost associated with implementing the Cash for Containers - your estimates - versus the final cost you just mentioned?

Ms KIRKMAN: The budget from 2009-10 through to 2011-12 is \$1.3m.

Mr CHANDLER: Does this figure include research prior to the introduction - visits to South Australia by NRETAS staff, initial employment and training of NRETAS staff, setting up offices, employees for the scheme, ongoing training of staff, setting up of websites, maintenance of websites? Does that include everything?

Ms KIRKMAN: Yes.

Mr CHANDLER: Does that figure include all previous and current advertising for the aspects of the scheme?

Ms KIRKMAN: That figure includes the total expenditure from 2009 through to May in 2011-12.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what about the mediation process with Mr Tom Pauling? What did that cost the taxpayer and is it included in the overall cost?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, the total cost was \$15 000.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what was the tonnage of recycled material covered under your Cash for Containers legislation that went directly to landfill in the Northern Territory prior to the implementation of the CFC legislation? Only containers that are covered under the legislation - what was the tonnage that went to NT landfill prior to the introduction of the legislation?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I am happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.09

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you repeat the question one more time, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what was the tonnage of recycled material covered under your Cash for Containers legislation that went directly to landfill in the Northern Territory prior to the implementation of the legislation?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.09, minister.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you know what the tonnage is now?

Mr HAMPTON: Can we include that in the question on notice?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will add that to 7.9. What is the tonnage, or do you want a separate question?

Mr CHANDLER: That is fine, minister. What is the tonnage?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That remains question No 7.09.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you provide a breakdown for the Darwin and Palmerston areas compared to the wider Territory? If not, why not?

Mr HAMPTON: We will have to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.10

Mr CHANDLER: Can you provide a breakdown for the Darwin and Palmerston areas compared to the wider Territory?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.10.

Mr CHANDLER: Is this information you would have, because I find it difficult to reconcile any improvements if you do not have that baseline information?

Mr DARCEY: Matt Darcey, Senior Executive Director, Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage. We actually had a real issue with statistics around landfill and tonnages going into landfill. We hope the new Northern Territory waste strategy should provide the ability to collect that information.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, when this program was being sold to Territorians, much was said about saving products and materials going to landfill, because this program was going to reduce the products going to landfill. That is why I am interested to know how much went to landfill prior to the legislation compared to what is going there now.

Mr HAMPTON: That was one of the issues. We had municipal councils running landfills, and kerbside recycling was only happening in Darwin and Palmerston - so it was very hard to measure what tonnage was

going through those areas. We certainly now know, through the quarterly report and the Cash for Containers scheme, how much is now not going into the landfill.

Mr CHANDLER: But how do you know what was going in there before?

Mr HAMPTON: I am saying that is the problem; we did not. Landfills were being operated ...

Mr CHANDLER: You designed something to solve a problem that you did not know was a problem.

Mr HAMPTON: It is fairly clear; we know litter and these containers in our river ways and the landfill were a problem. The working group put together the regional financial and legal model we have today. Different indexes and surveys, different environmental groups, highlighted there was a problem with litter and containers within the Northern Territory, based on the South Australian model. That is why we took on the bold move to put up a Cash for Containers scheme, because we knew there was a problem through various areas. That is why we have come up with the model we have. What that model does tell us in the quarterly report is how significant the problem has been.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I am finding it hard to understand it. I get it; you are talking about cleaning up the litter from the environment. The program to date, though, has not rolled out into wider areas of the Northern Territory and, in many of the communities, again, what were used in the preamble to promote the scheme, was this was going to clean up communities. To date, I have not seen much evidence of that occurring.

Again, the baseline data that I am looking for - before you even design a program you need to have baseline information. You have said litter was a problem, waste going into landfill was a problem, yet, you are also telling me you do not know how much waste was going into landfill. How do you know it was a problem?

In a broader sense, you have said before the Territory is a large jurisdiction with a small - we talk about diesel emissions in a moment - so we do not have much pollution compared to other states. Why did this become such a monumental issue that you had to design a program to clean up something - you do not know what or how much it was a problem? You said, we have to stop the landfill, we have to reduce landfill, but you do not know how much was going in there because you do not have those figures.

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, member for Brennan, I have travelled around to most depots. I am not sure how many other members in the Legislative Assembly have. I have been to Aputula, a remote community south of Alice Springs, I take my own containers to the depot in Alice Springs, I have been to Tennant Creek, I have been talking up the scheme in Nhulunbuy, and to the depots in Darwin.

The scheme has been in place for three months; South Australia has had 30-odd years. I have been there and seen some of the depots. The quarterly report tells us how big a problem we had. That is what is important: the modern information contemporary information and data collected through the quarterly report. Almost eight million containers were redeemed at container deposit depots during the first quarter - in three months almost eight million containers.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you know how many of those eight million containers come through pubs and clubs versus mums, dads, and average people taking them back to depots?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure if the quarterly report data drills down into those details. It does tell us there were almost four million aluminium cans, amounting to approximately 50 tonnes; 1.2 million PET containers; 2.4 million glass containers, amounting to over 450 tonnes; 100 000 HDPE containers; 185 000 liquid paper board containers; 24 674 other containers, including LPB aseptic plastic and steel containers. Redemption of that almost eight million containers amounts to almost \$800 000 in deposits that have been returned to the community. There are fantastic stories around about this scheme. This tells what a big problem we had before this data was collected and this scheme started. That is the success of the scheme.

Mr CHANDLER: But two of the biggest jurisdictions already had recycling programs in place. You cannot even give me the figures of what was recycled before.

Mr HAMPTON: Which ones were they?

Mr CHANDLER: In Palmerston and Darwin, the two major centres.

Mr HAMPTON: Kerbside recycling was in place before, but it was not available in Tennant Creek, Aputula, Alice Springs ...

Mr Chandler: I appreciate that, but what I am saying is ...

Mr HAMPTON: ... Katherine.

Mr Chandler: ... of the 800 000 containers, I am interested in two things. From the quarterly report, with four months of information in it ...

Mr HAMPTON: Three months.

Mr CHANDLER: There is four months' worth of information in the quarterly report ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Three months.

Mr CHANDLER: There is four months' worth of information in the quarterly report because the April figures were included. From my best estimates, it has cost Territorians about \$5m to date in the increased costs of the scheme, and \$800 000 has been returned to Territorians.

How many of those containers have been returned through mechanisms that pubs and clubs have in place versus how many people are waiting in line at some of the collection depots and returning them - the mums and dads, and the average Territorian collecting. There must be a way we can find out where the containers are coming from to work out where the money was returned.

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to take that on notice. I reiterate to Territorians listening to this Estimates Committee, and to you, member for Brennan, and the committee members, how successful this scheme has been. In three months there were eight million containers returned and \$800 000 in the pockets of Territory families and kids. I have travelled around.

I do not know if you have visited the school in Aputula, which was sending its returns to kids in Ethiopia. There was passion in the Nhulunbuy community to have a scheme going - the local member there is also passionate to have it running.

It has been three months; South Australia has had 35 years. We should not be talking the scheme down. We have to remain passionate about it. The old schemes with kerbside recycling happened in Darwin and Palmerston, not in Tennant Creek, Katherine, Alice Springs, or Aputula where wonderful things are being done. Many people there - elderly people, pensioners - have a new lease of life. The ladies at Aputula who are the backbone of the scheme, are there every day picking up containers and taking them to the depot.

Question on Notice No 7.11

Mr CHAIRMAN: Go back a little and put that question that was on notice.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, from the \$800 000 worth of deemed deposits that have been returned to date how much of that \$800 000 has come through clubs and pubs versus how many have been returned to mums and dads, or anybody else who turns up at a normal collection depot?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.11. At that point, we are going to break for dinner. We will return at 7.30 pm.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will commence, minister. Before we start, I thank the member for Nhulunbuy for providing her own birthday cake during the dinner break.

Members: Hear, Hear!

Mr CHAIRMAN: Happy birthday. Minister, you had questions on notice you wanted to answer.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. What is the procedure? Do I got through each question and answer?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Table it, minister.

Answer to Questions on Notice Nos 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Chairman, I table answers to questions on notice Nos 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are with the member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I am going to stay on the subject of cash for cans for a little while. I am interested in, again, this \$800 000 that has been spoken about which has been returned. Given the NTRS now no longer take returns from the general public and, therefore, concentrate heavily on the clubs and pubs scene, is it not easier to get a breakdown of those figures?

Mr HAMPTON: I ask Mr Matt Darcey, Senior Executive Director of Natural Resources, to answer that, particularly how we collect the data for the quarterly report.

Mr DARCEY: I believe we have taken that question on notice. Our first quarterly report had some weaknesses in it and we have worked to improve that for the next quarterly report. Our expectation is the next report will have a much greater depth of information from both collection depots and coordinators.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you confirm with me whether this depth of information will ensure we can keep a longitudinal picture of what is going on, and the new data presented will not be presented in such a way that masks any of the information in any way?

Mr HAMPTON: The consistency, the completeness, and the quality of the information provided needs to be improved for the next reporting period. It is something we will always be looking at improving as the scheme progresses. This is the first report since Cash for Containers legislation was passed by the Northern Territory parliament in February 2011.

There is a requirement under the approvals for all CDS coordinators and collection depots to provide information on the operational performance of the scheme. Under the approvals for CDS coordinators and collection depots, quarterly reports on scheme performances are required which require detailed data on return of containers by material type. The number of declarations confirming containers which were purchased in the Territory after 3 January 2012 must also be reported. In addition, CDS coordinators are required to provide the total number of containers for each material type for the quarter, and the total weight of containers returned.

There are many highlights in the first quarter, but we are always looking at ways we can improve it. I am sure that will occur, given more time. Almost eight containers were redeemed at collection depots ...

Mr Elferink: Well, more than eight.

Mr HAMPTON: Eight million, sorry. Nearly eight million containers were redeemed at collection depots over the first quarter of the scheme's operation, and I have given a breakdown. We are always looking at how we can improve that data collection.

Mr CHANDLER: I appreciate that. Now you have admitted there were some errors, or there are better ways of collecting data, can you outline the errors you are referring to?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass that onto Mr Matt Darcey.

Mr DARCEY: I am not so sure they are errors; it is more that the detail of the information we receive from depots and coordinators could be improved - and the timeliness of that information.

Mr CHANDLER: When you talk about the eight million, referring back to this report, the graph shown on page 2 refers to January, February, March, and April. We understand that is four months of reporting, not three. If you were to add up each of those columns - and I know it is only a graph - it only comes to around six million containers, not eight million.

Mr PURDON: As the Chief Executive stated, that graph represents data from four collection depots, not every collection depot operating in the scheme across four months. It is not for the three months the quarterly report actually covers. If you are looking at four collection depots rather than the nine that are operating, you would not expect those four collection depots to be recovering the full eight million that has been received. There is a difference in the coverage of collection depots and time frames for that graph.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you give us an accurate picture of how many containers were returned in the first three months of the scheme?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Purdon.

Mr PURDON: If you look at page 3 of the quarterly report in the executive summary, it will tell you there were 7 952 502 containers processed through collection depots. That is containers returned to collection depots, and provision of a 10¢ deposit for every one of those containers.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, do you not think it would have been ideal to have had that in a graph rather than buried in the report somewhere. Graphs are supposed to make it easier for people to see how things are going. Why was it necessary to provide a graph which shows only four depots and includes April? It would have been just as easy to put the three months in, detail the 7.9 million and where they are from?

Mr GRANT: Not all the depots have been operating for three months, so we could not put them in. What we tried to do with that graph was establish a trend with the existing depots.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, all the evidence I can find from this government indicates it was never interested in cash for cans or any type of legislation. In fact, I have heard previous ministers say, on the record, the only way a cash for cans program would work in the Northern Territory was with a national scheme. What changed your mind?

Mr HAMPTON: This Northern Territory government has certainly not said that. The Environmental Protection Bill was passed unanimously and supported by the Independent through the Legislative Assembly. This legislation, the framework for the Cash for Containers scheme, was wholeheartedly passed by the Territory parliament. We have taken the bold move. We had unanimous support through the Legislative Assembly for the bill to be passed, and the model and framework to be set out.

Mr CHANDLER: I appreciate that. When was the government's mind changed in regard to a stand-alone cash for cans program in the Northern Territory, given every piece of evidence I can find prior to that legislation being introduced led me, and others, to believe the government would never see the benefit in going it alone and a national scheme was necessary to ensure it worked? At what point did you have an epiphany? At what point was evidence seen that proved this would work in the Northern Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: Debate around a national scheme has been around for years and years. I am sure it will be around for a few more years. It was a bold decision by government to take the bull by the horns and put a scheme in place and, supported by the member for Nelson, a working group was established. Unfortunately, it was government and Independent only; the opposition did not join. They are decisions governments make, particularly a Labor government, as one for reforms – it is bringing in progressive schemes and initiatives. It was a decision made by government and supported by the Independent.

The working group was formed and quite a number of years of work were put into looking at the best model and what would fit for the Territory financially, legally and regionally. We have the right model in place. It was supported unanimously in parliament and, three months on and almost eight million containers collected, the streets and the rivers are much cleaner. There is \$800 000 going into the pockets of Territory families and kids. The alternative is what? Do we wait longer for a national scheme or do we get on with it and show some courage?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, again, I refer to the NEPC annual report. Page 76 of that report details the implementation of the national environmental protection used packaging material measures:

The goal of the Measure is to reduce environmental degradation arising from the disposal of used packaging and conserve virgin materials through the encouragement of re-use and recycling of used packaging materials by supporting and complementing the voluntary strategies in the National Packaging Covenant.

What I find extremely interesting is in Table 2 the summary of information issues arising under Northern Territory:

The Northern Territory government is not a signatory to the Australian Packaging Covenant as it is unlikely to deliver cost effective outcomes relevant to the unique demographic position of NT.

Has the Territory's unique demographic position changed just for the Cash for Containers legislation?

Mr HAMPTON: Our position is clear. We are getting on with it.

Mr CHANDLER: In this national report you said there is a unique demographic position in the NT, which is why you cannot sign up to that particular covenant. Why is that different to the cash for cans legislation? What is the unique demographic position you are referring to that is different to the position you have taken on cash for cans?

Mr HAMPTON: Our scheme is the best model. The regionalisation of the remoteness, the challenges that come with it is why we have come up with our own model that best fits the Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: That covenant talks about recycling and about packaging materials. Your position, up to and including the 2010-11 report, is nothing would work under that system because of our unique demographic position. If you made a recycling decision based on a unique demographic position, why is that any different under this particular model? What has changed about our demographic position?

Mr HAMPTON: There is no difference.

Mr CHANDLER: There is no difference. How can you then not support something which deals with recycling and decide the same excuse for not signing is not acceptable today?

Mr GRANT: You might not quite understand that ...

Mr CHANDLER: I hope so, because it does not make sense to me.

Mr GRANT: ... we have not signed the National Packaging Covenant because it involves systems that work well in big cities but do not work well here. That is why we did not sign it. We are doing Cash for Containers as a local solution instead of signing the covenant. We have never signed the covenant, as far as I know.

Mr CHANDLER: Is that wording about the demographic position - are you saying you have made a decision based on the fact the Northern Territory is remote, it is unique, the tyranny of distance, all those reasons why a recycling program will not work?

Mr GRANT: No, we are saying that is why we did not sign the National Packaging Covenant system for recycling.

Mr CHANDLER: Are you saying their system will not work but this system will?

Mr GRANT: Exactly.

Mr CHANDLER: I do not understand. You have used an excuse that could equally apply to this system.

Mr GRANT: No, the National Packaging Covenant does not include container deposit schemes.

Mr CHANDLER: I am talking about recycling in general. If the wording is wrong or I have been led up the garden path - you appear to be making a decision not to sign up to a certain agreement based on the fact the Territory is unique. I can only assume this uniqueness might mean the tyranny of distance - all those things where it would not work. You seem to think the model you put forward, cash for cans, is the right model and will cover off on all those areas.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay, good call. Minister, you are saying Territorians are forced to pay about 50¢ to get 10¢ back under your existing model. In a jurisdiction with the highest cost of living in Australia, the

government has now signed up to what is, effectively, for most people a tax where they are paying up to 50¢ extra – those are figures from your report - to get 10¢ back. Out of that 10¢ we are still not clear how much is coming directly to club and pubs, from what Territorians have paid out, to what mums and dads - you keep referring to the fact they are getting \$800 000 back when we know much of it comes from the clubs and pubs and not directly back to the people who are turning up to the collection depots.

Mr WOOD: A point of order! Can I ask the member for Brennan where this report mentions 50¢?

Mr CHANDLER: Well, it talks about \$5m, and when you break that down, it has to effectively mean about \$5m additional that people have paid for products.

Mr WOOD: I am not sure how that logic works, but I will have a look.

Mr CHAIRMAN: What was the question again, member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: It was a statement. Moving on, this next part may sound like a bit of a statement as well. In opinion, you have taken perhaps a very good idea and mucked it up. You have taken a concept that, designed well, implemented well and managed well, just might have worked.

Instead, you have taken a model from South Australia, thrown it out, and designed your own very complicated and costly model that has no chance of ever becoming financially viable across the wider Territory. That failure, minister, plays right into the bigger players' hands by being able to demonstrate, right across the nation, just how impossible the NT's particular model of CDL will not work, and cannot work without major wholesale changes. What are you going to do to fix the mess you have created?

Mr HAMPTON: I do not believe what you are saying. A great deal of work has been done on this. We have had constitutional lawyers test the legality of our model. As I said, it is regionally based and financially based, in what the Territory is all about. A great deal of work has been done on this.

Your party supported it in a bipartisan way. The figures speak for themselves. In three months, we have had almost eight million containers and \$800 000 going back into the pockets of Territorians.

Regarding the costs of living, there are many issues there and people need to shop around. If the price of a can of Coke is more expensive in one place than the other, then shop around. We have been encouraging people to do that for a long time. There are some good businesses out there which are keeping their prices reasonable - whether it be for a carton of beer or a can of soft drink - so shop around. If you feel you are being ripped off, then go and contact the ACCC.

Mr CHANDLER: That is difficult in many of the remote communities. Did you agree with COAG that only a national approach to beverage recycling would work? In meetings you had with other ministers ...

Mr HAMPTON: As we have said, we never signed the covenant. We believe the path we have gone down is the right path for the Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: In any meeting you had with other ministers around the country, did you ever agree that a national approach is the only way it would work?

Mr HAMPTON: No. What we have said is a national approach would be welcomed, but we are not going to wait for a national approach because it has been discussed for a long time. We have taken a courageous step and gone ahead and put our own scheme out. Three months on, almost eight millions containers have been collected.

Mr CHANDLER: Were you made aware of any other recycling models that were available - models that were less expensive to operate, and could provide similar outcomes, and that actually have the industry onside and every chance of succeeding, without providing to the high cost of living in the NT?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure who you are lobbying on behalf of, member for Brennan, but certainly ...

Mr CHANDLER: I am just talking about models that were available.

Mr HAMPTON: ... the model we have come up with, as I said, there has been a great deal of work done on it. This is the best model for the Territory. Other people might have bids, and you are maybe trying to lobby for alternative models. But, a few bins in a few streets and across a few parks is not going to

work. The volumes we are talking about are growing month by month. I have no doubt we will see more depots opening across the Northern Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: Were you aware the industry offered to run a pilot program here in the NT at absolutely no cost to government to demonstrate how its particular model would work?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I was aware of that but, as I said, that model does not fit or suit the Northern Territory. A few bins across a few parks are not going to fix our litter problem. When you look at the volume the Territory makes up in national litter for a small jurisdiction, we have significant problems with our litter and containers. That is why we went down the courageous path of basing our model on the South Australian model.

Mr CHANDLER: If there was the potential for an industry-driven model to be piloted here in the Northern Territory, and given there would be no cost to government whatsoever, even if you give them a very tight time frame, should it not have been considered to at least see if it would work, rather than visit this new frontier? At the moment, unfortunately minister, it is costing Territorians much more for their beverages today. Recycling is an important factor, but you cannot get away from the fact that Territorians are paying more for their beverages than they were before. Was there a reason you did not allow this pilot program to operate, given there was no cost to government?

Mr HAMPTON: That model was not the best fit for the Territory. It is more money going into the beverage industry, run by the beverage industry. It is not Cash for Containers, it is not money going back into the pockets of Territorians, which we are seeing today with this model.

Mr CHANDLER: We are not seeing it today.

Mr HAMPTON: Well \$800 000 has gone back into pockets.

Mr CHANDLER: You have already demonstrated today a lot of that is coming from clubs and pubs, not going back to the mums and dads and the people going to the collection depots. You keep referring to the \$800 000. Prove it to me; show me how much of the \$800 000, and I will shut my mouth. At the moment, from what I can see from your figures, Territorians are paying far more for their beverages. Who is right and wrong in all that? These are the facts; they are paying far more for their beverages than they are getting a chance to receive back. It a little like saying: 'You pay me 50¢ then, if you can find me, I will give you 10¢ back'.

I ask you again, if you did not know this model was going to work how did you not know the pilot model was not going to work? Was it not worth giving it a try, given there would be no cost to the government and no cost to Territorians to trial something?

Mr HAMPTON: It is a real shame the CLP thinks the model is not working. As I said, almost eight million containers did not end up in our landfill or in the creeks ...

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, eight million containers again ...

Mr HAMPTON: ... much cleaner environment, \$800 000 going back into the pockets of Territorians. If it was the CLP government, you would be running with a trial or pilot project that would be returning dollars to the beverage industry. That is where you stand.

Mr CHANDLER: Darwin and Palmerston, the two biggest jurisdictions, already had kerbside recycling. Much of our recycled material, cans and bottles, were already being recycled. You have not produced clear evidence to suggest we are recycling more compared to what we were recycling before. You keep referring to eight million cans and \$800 000.

You have not been able to break down how much of that is going back to Territorians and not through to the clubs and pubs. You have not been able to demonstrate how many things were recycled prior to the system being introduced compared to now. Your evidence is thin on the ground; it is all rhetoric. You keep spinning the same spin. The truth is in your reports. It is not working, minister, and Territorians are paying for it. I would love it to work. I would really love it if every town ...

Mr Hampton: It does not sound like it.

Mr CHANDLER: ... across the Northern Territory had recycling depots. But, you put the cart before the horse.

Mr HAMPTON: That is your and the CLP's view, member for Brennan. It is a pity you are not passionate about it because three months into it ...

Mr CHANDLER: That is the problem, I am passionate about it, but I want it to work and I want Territorians to be ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I suggest, member Brennan, we are back and forth with statements rather than questions. Do you have any questions to the budget?

Mr CHANDLER: When will the CDL program be rolled out in Groote Eylandt?

Mr HAMPTON: There are discussions happening around the Territory in places like Groote Eylandt and Nhulunbuy. They are commercial discussions between coordinators and potential depots. My agency will assist those commercial arrangements as much as we can to encourage more depots. That is our role.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you estimate there will be an increase in the handling charges in remote areas?

Mr HAMPTON: They are commercial arrangements between a coordinator and a depot. We do not become involved in the commercial contracts or agreements.

Mr CHANDLER: You designed a program and you are not going to commit to admitting there will be increased costs, the wider you take this across the Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: Under the scheme, as I said, our role, as government, is to put the framework together - the legislation - get the right model in place, which we have done. The principles behind that govern, in many ways, how coordinators and depots work together - their relationship. We do not get involved in commercial prices or handling fees, and those types of arrangements.

Mr CHANDLER: Have you sought any legal action or legal advice over the threatened action by NTRS and other depots that were forced to close down after they failed to mediate? If so, what was the advice and what has been the cost to the taxpayer so far?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, that is action between a coordinator and a depot, so that is their legal business, member for Brennan. What we have tried to do is mediate those differences and disagreements, as we could, as you have heard tonight - in that, cost to us was from engaging a mediator. Any court would be asking people to go through that process first. That was what we attempted to do: get coordinators and depots who have some disagreements in how there are running their business to get together around a table and try to sort them out. If that has failed - and it appears to have failed - then they go through a court proceeding. The government does not get involved in that court proceeding; it is between the coordinator and the depot.

Mr CHANDLER: I appreciate that, minister. My question to you, though, is have you had legal advice since the mediation has failed?

Mr HAMPTON: Of course, it is within my own agency. You seek legal advice; you have lawyers internally as well as through other lawyers within government. Of course, you seek legal advice internally.

Mr CHANDLER: Has there been a cost associated with that?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to take that question on notice, Mr Chairman.

Question on Notice No 7.12

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you repeat the question?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, have you sought any legal action or legal advice over the threatened action by NTRS and other depots which were forced to close down after the failed mediation? If so, what was the advice and what has the cost been to the taxpayer?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.12.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, just clarification. You said something before - is there something you have now that you wanted to table? Some information?

Mr ELFERINK: Sorry, Mr Chairman, I do not mean to interrupt. Did you just say you had some advice of some sort in your last answer - from departmental lawyers?

Mr HAMPTON: I am saying that is what you do as a minister; you seek legal advice inside your own agency from legal people you have.

Mr CHANDLER: Will you table that information?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I thought that was covered in the last question on notice.

Mr Elferink: What the cost was, not the advice.

Mr CHANDLER: No, it has advice as well - legal advice. Minister, has the federal government, any federal government department, or other NT government department apart from NRETAS, any council, or any other organisation, paid money or assistance in-kind towards this scheme in any way, shape, or form?

Mr GRANT: No, nothing comes to mind, member for Brennan, but we will take it on notice just to be sure.

Question on Notice No 7.13

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you please ask that question again member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, has the federal government, any federal government department, or other NT government department apart from NRETAS, any council, or any other organisation paid any money or assistance in-kind towards this scheme in any way, shape, or form?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.13.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, how much per tonne has this cost the community, and how does it stack up compared with the alternatives modelled for COAG? You would have read that report?

Mr HAMPTON: Whose model was that one? Who presented the model?

Mr CHANDLER: There are a number of models. How does this particular model stack up compared to other models provided to COAG.

Mr DARCEY: I am not sure we have the figures on dollars per tonne, but the fact that the scheme is based on the South Australian scheme gives us some sense of the viability of the scheme in an operating context.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay.

Mr HAMPTON: Can I add to that? The Northern Territory government investigated different models from around the world and, as you have heard, the decision was made to go with the South Australian model.

Member for Brennan, the Territory government's role is to facilitate implementation of the scheme to establish the operating rules and enforce the relevant legislation. The legislative framework of the NT Cash for Containers scheme was modelled on the legislation developed for the successful South Australian scheme. So, why would we try to reinvent the wheel?

Technical and operational details were also adapted from the South Australian scheme. Consultation was undertaken with the industry to determine the industry's preferred model. Industry advised its preference was for a market-based competitive model similar to South Australia's. Other industry-run

models that may have improved the efficiency of the scheme, including the cooperative or single CDS coordinator models, were not considered appropriate by the industry.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. How much has the NT government spent on advertising this scheme? What is the breakdown between TV, radio, newspaper, electronic etcetera?

Mr HAMPTON: For advertising, \$309 000 has been spent on communications and marketing activities for Cash for Containers broken down as follows: \$112 000 for print advertising; \$47 000 for radio advertising; \$47 000 for TV advertising; \$35 000 for printing; and \$68 000 for other.

Mr CHANDLER: What might the other include? It seems a significant amount compared to radio, TV, printing - \$65 000 in other.

Mr HAMPTON: Happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.14

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you rephrase that as a question on notice, member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: How much has the NT government spent on advertising this scheme? What is the breakdown for TV, radio, newspaper, electronic - we had that. There was \$65 000 for 'other'. What is the other?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.14, minister.

Mr CHANDLER: How much did the Ian Kiernan TV ads cost?

Mr HAMPTON: I would be happy to take that question on notice, Mr Chairman.

Question on Notice No 7.15

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you rephrase that as a question on notice, member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, how much did the Ian Kiernan TV ads cost?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.15.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, was a donation or donations made to any businesses or organisations that Ian Kiernan works for, in association with or associated with, in any way?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.16

Mr CHANDLER: Was a donation or donations made to any business or organisations that Ian Kiernan works for or is associated with in any way?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.16.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, did the NT government contact Ian Kiernan to do the ads?

Mr GRANT: On those last several questions, Ian Kiernan was contacted. No donations were made to anything associated him, except for the normal Keep Australia Beautiful grant which had been agreed well before that time.

I also might fill in some of the advertising, if that is okay. It included Facebook, advertising in a stairwell near an eatery, production of fact sheets, promotional materials, piggy banks, displays at shows etcetera. Those were the other types of expenditure. We will get you a full breakdown, though.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. How much is the advertising budget for cash for cans legislation and the program for the 2012-13 financial year?

Mr HAMPTON: It is \$315 000 in total.

Mr GRANT: That is not just advertising.

Mr HAMPTON: That is not just advertising, we do not have the breakdown.

Mr GRANT: That is for running the whole scheme.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, the \$315 000 is the ongoing cost. I believe it is really important to bear in mind when you are starting a scheme, the costs are going to be higher and the returns relatively lower. As the scheme develops, the costs come right down, as you can see, to \$315 000 per year and the recycling rate will be up around 40% to 50%. Making the comparisons on the first three months compared to all of the set-up costs and saying that is the ongoing cost of the scheme is completely inappropriate. It is much better to compare our 40% to 50% rate next year with our costs of \$315 000, and you start to get a very clear picture of the actual costs.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay, thank you.

Mr GRANT: I think those other comparisons are quite inaccurate.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, regarding the government's school trailers program, how much have the school trailers cost? What exactly does that include, and were they purchased locally?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, this is a fantastic scheme. It is a great success - 75 government and non-government schools from across the Territory received \$2800 plus signage for trailers, including 28 schools in Darwin, 22 in Palmerston - I am sure plenty in your electorate - and the rural areas, 17 in Central Australia, seven in the Katherine region, and one in the Barkly region.

I actually went to Larrakeyah Primary School, which is in your electorate, member for Port Darwin, and delivered the trailer. The parents and the kids were absolutely overwhelmed with the trailer they were given. It is put to great use and ...

Mr Elferink: I think 'whelmed' would be more accurate.

Mr Wood interjecting.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, if you were there, member for Nelson, and saw the kids and how excited they are about Cash for Containers, you would agree it is a good word to sum it up. Seventy-five government and non-government schools across the Territory have received these trailers - a fantastic initiative. There is no better way to promote Cash for Containers. This government modelled them with our young Territorians who are becoming involved and getting behind it.

The Cash for Containers Trailers for Schools grants provide one-off funding up to \$3000 for schools in the Northern Territory to purchase a 7 m x 4 m caged trailer to assist with storage and transport of all eligible containers to a Cash for Containers depot. It is part of the Cash for Containers infrastructure grant of \$300 000, which was in the 2012 budget.

Mr CHANDLER: Part of that question was, were the trailers purchased locally?

Mr HAMPTON: I refer you to Paul Purdon.

Mr PURDON: The schools are required to buy the trailers. Government is granting the money to purchase the trailers. Where the schools buy the trailers is up to them, but I imagine they would be purchased in the Northern Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: There was no stipulation on where they purchase the trailers?

Mr PURDON: No.

Mr HAMPTON: The school at Larrakeyah purchased their trailer from within the Territory. This is the model we have. If you have an alternative model, then these initiatives such as Trailers for Schools probably would not happen.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, who will pay for the ongoing maintenance and annual registration of these trailers? If the school pays, then is it not the case that almost 1000 containers will need to be collected to pay for the registration and maintenance of each trailer?

Mr HAMPTON: It is up to the schools to pay that.

Mr CHANDLER: Will these trailers be a viable option for remote and very remote schools, and have estimates been made on the fuel cost versus the value of the cans?

Mr HAMPTON: They are available to every school in the Northern Territory. Seventeen schools in Central Australia, seven in the Katherine region and one in the Barkly region, have received Cash for Containers trailers.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you have any more on CDL?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Nelson has a lot on CDL.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you? The same output group; I was going to move on to plastic bags.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We can stay with the same output but, as a matter of discretion, make sure we do not lose the issues. The minister can deal with it all at once and we normally throw to the Independent.

Member for Nelson, the questions are around Cash for Containers specifically, but not the output in general.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Quickly, I thank Andrew Buick who has worked so hard over such a long time to get this under way. I know he is not with the department anymore, but he will be listening. He is a great bloke and he put a great deal of effort into this.

I cannot find the \$5m figure the member for Brennan referred to. What disappoints me is I am passionate about Cash for Containers too, but you and the department have failed to stand up to the criticisms of the CLP, have failed to stand up to the industry, and have failed to tell your story. You tell me how overwhelmed people are - people are actually underwhelmed. I speak to the people who are sick of sitting at the depots waiting for a long time on the weekends, who do not want to wait anymore.

The member for Brennan mentioned 50¢ as the cost for containers this has caused. I know that is not right. The CLP has mentioned in one of its media releases that beer had gone up by up to \$15. I did not hear anything from you or the CEO to prove that was incorrect, and I wonder why. I found the figures. I rang South Australia, Queensland, and Western Australia. Is it correct that your department collected figures last year on the price of beer in South Australia compared to the Northern Territory before this was introduced?

Mr GRANT: Yes, with Andrew Buick, we looked at price comparisons of beverages in Victoria compared to South Australia, but it was not an in-depth analysis. We, obviously ...

Mr WOOD: I could probably ask you why it was not in-depth because you knew this was going to happen. We knew the industry was not going to cover the deposits and the handling fees as they have done in South Australia. I would have thought you would have had detailed information about what the costs in South Australia and the Northern Territory were before this scheme was implemented.

Minister, I am told that 70% of South Australian beer prices were the same as in the Northern Territory last year. Do you know if that is correct?

Mr GRANT: Yes. When I say not in-depth, we did not go into absolute - but that would be our understanding, yes.

Mr WOOD: Minister, people complained about the price of beer going up because of the container deposits, the CLP claimed it had gone up by 15%, the member for Brennan is now saying containers have gone up by 50¢. Why are you not disputing that? People believe that; beer drinkers believe that.

I have had to chase it up and get on the radio and say this is not true because I have been able to compare the prices for Celebration, Bottle-O, Thirsty Camel. Why haven't you? You are the minister. Why have you not driven this with passion to take on those claims? I have shown it is a lie.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, I have. I have met personally with the beverage industry on a couple of occasions. Leading up to the debate around the legislation, I had talked to beverage industry representatives ...

Mr WOOD: Minister, have you disputed the fact that the price of beer has gone up?

Mr HAMPTON: If I can finish.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but you are going off to personal discussions with industry.

Mr HAMPTON: No, what I am doing is demonstrating what I ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, I would like the minister to answer the question.

Mr HAMPTON: What I am doing is demonstrating what I have been doing in discussing this with the beverage industry: putting forward our model, and why they need to get on board; stating the case for the Northern Territory that this is the best model that fits the Territory. I have talked to the industry directly on a number of occasions, and even met with industry representatives in Sydney and put forward this case.

Mr WOOD: Has it made any difference?

Mr HAMPTON: We always knew we were going to be in for a fight. We always knew the beverage industry had deep pockets, and they have some friends in other places who will do their lobbying. We knew there was going to be a battle on this; it is a courageous and a big reform. We are three months into it, and I have done numerous radio interviews. If you want, I can get together the interviews I have done here in Darwin and throughout the Territory.

I do not agree with you. I have talked up the scheme; I have disputed what the CLP is saying, along with the beverage industry – they are on the same page, and I have disputed that. I disagree with you, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I am worried about the spin. You said a number of times when the member for Brennan asked you about depots, there is only one depot. There are some issues about that depot at Aputula and whether it is being subsidised. There is no other remote depot - that is it.

What is worrying me is this is spin. I will give you some examples. I will read from it, and this is why I worry. For instance, you say that collection depots are currently operating in Pinelands, Katherine, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Finke. Reverse Vending Machines (RVM) are currently operating in Parap and Charles Darwin, and a mobile RVM collection is also in operation. Then it says:

It is at these collection depots where Territorians can receive 10¢ in return for each eligible approved container. RVMs do not take iced coffee containers, nor glass.

So, that is incorrect and that sends out the wrong information.

Mr Chandler: And you do not ...

Mr WOOD: The other one, minister, is you said on page 2:

This growth is expected to continue over the coming months as the scheme continues to expand in new areas including regional and remote areas, with a number of new collection depots set to open in Tennant Creek, Elliott, Howard Springs, Milingimbi and at Karama and Palmerston.

At least three of those places are RVMs, they are not collection depots. However, you do not put that in there; you say they are collection depots. I should turn up with five cartons of beer bottles and know that I will not be able to put them in at Palmerston, Karama, or Howard Springs.

The other thing that worries me, you have said in a number of media releases or flyers there would be something at Elliott. Howard Springs has been on the list since Day 1. It was supposed to open in January, then February, then March. Minister, this is not accurate, not true, and that is what worries me. We are not putting out the facts as they are. Why is this not accurate? I do not want to pick holes in it, I want to support it, but it is very hard to defend something that is not right. Why are those mistakes there?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, this scheme is four months old. The department is working very hard to get depots together with coordinators. Sometimes it is not easy to be too involved in commercial arrangements. In relation to Barkly Metal Trading in Tennant Creek, I understand they are now open. I would class that as remote, along with Aputula and Alice Springs.

Mr WOOD: They are on the highway.

Mr HAMPTON: You tell the people of Alice Springs they are not remote.

Mr WOOD: No, they are on the highway. What is off the highway?

Mr HAMPTON: How far from Darwin and how far from Adelaide?

Mr WOOD: Alice Springs had its own Cash for Containers deposit ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, let the minister ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, I received the message.

Mr HAMPTON: In relation to Howard Springs, we are working hard to ensure the people of the rural area can have access to a depot. My understanding is there is insufficient and irregular power supply and a new three phase power supply is being planned. These types of issues have to be dealt with before we can open a depot and have someone run a business such as that.

Milingimbi, I understand, will be open this month, and that is a collection depot as well. There have to be final arrangements made between the depot and the coordinator; however, we are hoping that will happen in June. It is not easy. I ask people to remain passionate about it and be patient with it. South Australia has had 35 years; we have had four or five months. These things are going to take a bit of time ...

Mr WOOD: Minister, you have said that four times ...

Mr HAMPTON: Well ...

Mr WOOD: I am not disputing that. I am disputing the effort to counteract the industry, to counteract some of the matters the CLP has brought up, and to counteract - not so much counteract - to relay back to you there are many people in my area who love the idea. However, they do not want to sit at a depot for an hour to deliver a couple of empty beer containers. We have a major problem with not enough depots in Darwin. Most people cannot deliver their containers during the day time. They go on weekends, and on weekends they are only open, more or less, from 9 am until 2 pm, or 8 am until 2 pm.

What are you doing to increase the number of outlets - not RVMs, outlets? Why did you not put some seeding funds into some of these places where they could have temporary sorting places at tips throughout the regional areas so people could see you were not only fair dinkum about it, but you were putting your money where your mouth was to make it work? It is a commercial deal, but it is not entirely commercial. It is something you told me you were passionate about, so why could the government not help this get on its feet because it has only been going three months and the other places have been going 35 years? That is the reason you should have been giving it some financial help to get it off the ground. Why did you not give it a bigger boost?

Mr HAMPTON: We have \$300 000 in infrastructure grants. We are trying to give it that boost, member for Nelson. That infrastructure grant ...

Mr WOOD: It is not enough.

Mr HAMPTON: That is something we are going to have to look at. I am happy to look at it to see if we need more.

Mr WOOD: I am trying to win the case that we need more depots. Otherwise, you will lose the people. You will not get your 50%. You will stick on 21% and everyone will throw it in the bin.

Regarding the handling fee, you have the power under the act to stop Coca-Cola, Schweppes, or whoever, from selling their product if they do not have a waste management plan that works. It is my understanding you could withdraw the right of those companies to sell their product if you believe the handling fee to be inadequate. The handling fee is part of the waste management plan?

Mr DARCEY: Part of the arrangement is, as the minister said, the industry wanted a commercially focused scheme. They do not tell us what the handling fees are. Yes, under the legislation we do have the ability to remove the approval of companies.

Mr WOOD: Would it not be fair to say this scheme has very little chance of succeeding if the handling fee is not large enough to bring in containers from out bush unless it was somehow subsidised. If a company wants to operate across the Territory, it has to have a handling fee large enough to bring the materials from Borroloola, Timber Creek, Groote Eylandt. If the handling fee is only suitable for those places on the track, then it is never going to work out bush. Isn't the handling fee the key to the success of this program? If it is not there, what are you doing to make the companies sit down and actually make a realistic handling fee so this works?

Mr GRANT: Member for Nelson, we have written to those companies quite recently explaining their obligations under the act, and we are expecting a reply to that in the next couple of weeks.

Mr WOOD: If they do not respond satisfactorily, will you withdraw their right to sell their product? Woolworths would certainly be knocking on their door, I am sure.

Mr GRANT: There would be a fair bit of commercial negotiation with the department before we got to that point. It would not be our aim to get rapidly to that point but, ultimately, they have to abide by their agreements, yes.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I am just giving you some things that, hopefully, we can fix up, because you are getting more criticism from the opposition. I understand where they are coming from. I do not agree with it, but I understand where they are coming from. The other issue that is ...

Mr Chandler: Sticking up for Territorians.

Mr WOOD: Well, I am sticking up for Territorians because, for 20 years, I have lived with container deposit - sorry, the beverage industry putting every possible obstacle in the way. I have been on the Territory liquor committee, been involved with Keep Australia Beautiful; I know their tactics. I have been around a fair while when it comes to this. One thing I will say on this particular issue, I congratulate the government for having enough guts to do it.

My problem is that is what they have done - and stopped dead, instead of keep going, this is a long fight. It is never going to finish in three months with the industry, and the industry is making sure every time there is a criticism of it, they are going to be writing it down somewhere and saying: 'See, told you it would not work'.

The other thing is, if you were going to fight the industry, why did we not put in here, for instance, the amount of deposit - the actual money Coca-Cola, Schweppes, and all those other companies are making out of the products where the deposit is not returned or retrieved. My figures are that, in three months, those companies made \$3.6m in unreturned product.

Why would you not, as a government say: 'Hey, you cannot afford the handling fee, but you can afford to take \$3.6m from Territorians and not reinvest it'? Why, for instance, do you not say how much money they get from - you have the rates here - the tonnages? It might not have the tonnages, but what about the amount of aluminium, PET, HTP, glass, LPD, and other materials they get free, delivered back to them, to sell as recycled product? Where is the government telling people that is what the industry is getting, and that is what they are doing? Are you fighting for this, or do you hope legislation is passed in parliament and it is always going to be rosy?

Where in this report does it say that? It does not. If you are going to have a report, tell people where the money has gone, and why NTRS and the can man are not in the system anymore? Tell them. That is the report. This is the report for the first three months. Why is it not in that? That is what I am worried about; there is no fight.

Mr CHANDLER: That is where the \$5m comes from, Gerry - what I am talking about, the \$5m people have paid.

Mr WOOD: No, that is not the ...

Mr CHANDLER: We have paid it in deposits and ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Nelson has the call and he is building for a question.

Mr WOOD: I will get that before I comment on the other one, because the member is not right anyway.

Mr CHANDLER: That is 31 596 000 cans ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Nelson has the call.

Mr WOOD: Minister, why can you not fight this mob? Put those details in here! Do not obtain incorrect information about the wrong machines in the wrong places. Tell people! Looking at this graph in the front, the member for Brennan is right; it says it is a quarterly report on the front and any Joe Blow who opens it would think that is a quarterly graph. Why is there inconsistency in the report? I understand where it comes from when it is explained, but this is a poor report from the point of view - I do not want spin I want facts, and there is more spin in here than facts; that is the problem. You need to employ someone with some go in them and say 'Come on, let us get this program going for the next two years'. It will need fighting for at least two years to have this up and running.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, it has been a very good statement ...

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: ... but we need a question that addresses the financial position of the department.

Mr WOOD: Why has the government not said the companies will make \$3.6m? Why has it not stated why two depots are not in the system anymore, and their reasons? Why are there so few remote townships - and when I say remote, not on the Stuart Highway, it is a direct line to Adelaide, that is easy. Borroloola is not on a direct line to Adelaide and neither is Timber Creek ...

A member interjecting.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but it is a straight line; it is a transport corridor. Why is that not happening, minister?

Mr GRANT: I will talk about the case that is before the courts. As a department, people have worked incredibly long and hard; they have not been sitting on their hands waiting for things to happen. People have been working incredible hours for many months.

The reason why we have not commented on those court cases is because all of the players - whether they are depots, coordinators or politicians - have been trying to goad the department into reacting to their program through the media. It feeds upon itself if we start responding to that media. We are very disinclined to respond to those parties who are trying to use the media to receive a commercial response from the department. That has been a very good, solid course.

The recycling rates are increasing. I am convinced we will reach that 40% to 50% much quicker than people think. Some people want to knock the program off before it gets to that 40% to 50%. If we start jumping every time someone gets their face on the front of the *NT News* we will be in terrible trouble.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I am not knocking the departmental people; I am putting the blame back on you and the CEO because you are the face of the department. I am not talking about every time someone puts their face on the front page of the *NT News*, I am asking you to be more proactive. Can you not be more proactive? If you really want this to succeed you have to be able to counteract the industry and the opposition on this.

Mr Chairman, if I am allowed to comment on the member for Brennan saying the money return is part of the 50¢? It is not. What is returned is the 10¢ for the cans or bottles, plus around 5¢ - it could be anywhere between 3¢ and 8¢ we do not know – but say 5¢, . What the industry picks up for nothing is 15¢. That is all. If this is as it says, and if the handling fee is 5¢, and you returned your product, a can of beer should go up no more than 5¢. Again, the department needs to tell people that. I do not hear it.

I am not trying to make statements for the sake of making statement; I want it to work and I want the department to be a little more passionate. This is about budgets, it is about outcomes, and the outcome we have here should be fantastic. At the moment, it is tottering.

You should talk to people in the rural area. They will not take their rubbish to Envirobank or Veola if it takes one hour to sit in a queue. You have to change that - and very quickly - or you will not reach 50%.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Nelson.

Mr ELFERINK: Mr Chairman - oh, sorry, are you finished, are you, Gerry?

Mr WOOD: I have one other question about a different issue, but I will wait until after Peter has done his other issue.

Mr ELFERINK: This is on the same topic. Just a couple of very quick questions, if I may?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My question is to the minister. Bearing in mind we want to roll this thing out across the Territory, if I lived in Fregon, a remote Aboriginal community in South Australia ...

Mr HAMPTON: In South Australia.

Mr ELFERINK: You know it?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: Those of us who have lived there for a while do know it. Could I collect my deposit back if I lived in South Australia and lived in Fregon, from the local Fregon depot?

Mr WOOD: You can now.

Mr ELFERINK: Can I? In Fregon?

Mr WOOD: No, because the system now operates across the border.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay, that is the question. Is there a depot in Fregon that I can pick it up at?

Mr HAMPTON: I do not know. I cannot speak for Fregon, it is in South Australia. But, certainly the labelling ...

Mr Elferink: In Amata?

Mr HAMPTON: ... there is an intergovernmental agreement with the labelling which recognises both.

Mr ELFERINK: These are leading questions, so I am leading you to a place. Can I collect my refund in Amata?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, that would be the same as Fregon; it is in South Australia, but the labelling is recognised cross borders.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, it is not the issue of the labelling. The point I am trying to make is you have now said the scheme is working – what? - 35 years in South Australia?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right.

Mr ELFERINK: I have here a map ...

Mr HAMPTON: It is still not perfect, they still have issues.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, they do. I have here a map which is - and I have only just been idly playing with my computer while I have been listening to this all going on. This map here - if I may table it, Mr Chairman, with the permission of the committee?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, leave is granted.

Mr ELFERINK: Is a map of some, I think, 88 remote depots - or what they call regional depots - on the EPA website from South Australia. What I find curious is I cannot find, after 35 years, a single remote Aboriginal community on that map. There is the Marla Roadhouse, there is Oodnadatta, which is quite remote. Marla Roadhouse is still - what? - 800 km from Fregon. This is the point you were trying to make, I think, Gerry. You have Coober Pedy in the mix there, I think Hawker is there, I suspect that No 8 is Ceduna, looking roughly where that pin is.

For a jurisdiction to have so many remote Aboriginal communities as we do, surely this map, after 35 years, indicates to you the model we are currently using, the one that we have part lifted from South Australia, actually does not provide any depots in remote Aboriginal communities?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, our remote communities are probably demographically, geographically different to those in South Australia. I do not know if you could really compare that ...

Mr ELFERINK: I can happily compare Fregon to Imanpa.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, I look at our growth towns, member for Port Darwin, I look at the size of Wadeye and Maningrida. The model is based around volume. It is about how much volume is going to make a depot viable. You need volume to get through it - whether you are in Alice Springs, Darwin, Palmerston, or out at Yuendumu or Lajamanu. It is based around volume. We have 20 growth towns and, if there is not going to be a collection depot, there is always opportunities to talk, in partnership with coordinators and recycling industry people, about bin collection points. The key is working at the transport and freight issues the member for Nelson has talked about.

Mr WOOD: And the handling fee.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, the handling fee is a commercial arrangement. We do not get involved in commercial arrangements about pricing between two different businesses ...

Mr Elferink: In the report, you refer to ...

Mr HAMPTON: If I can finish, what I am saying is, it is based around volume. You cannot compare South Australian communities through the APY Lands and places like Wadeye where there is 3000 people, and Maningrida. I am not sure - what is the population of Fregon or Amata compared to Wadeye, Maningrida?

Mr ELFERINK: Take your pick. The issue is there is not a single remote Aboriginal community that appears on that map - not one that I can see.

Mr WOOD: We can take it to Aputula now.

Mr ELFERINK: Well, the question I have is Aputula - that has started up, but is it operating?

Just on one other little loose end I would like to ask a quick question on. In that quarterly report, you referred to the four deposits that provide information for the graph. Was one of those providers the Northern Territory Recycling Service, NTRS - one of the four?

Mr DARCEY: Regarding that graph, we are not in a position to be able to release the names of those depots.

Mr ELFERINK: You realise, of course, that will draw criticism for a system which is supposed to be working? Why can you not name those depots? The other day, the Treasurer released any number of details about other firms. Why can you not release the names of those depots?

Mr DARCEY: Because it is a smaller subset of the total, releasing information - the sensitivities around volumes that are being taken by each depot are extreme and ...

Mr ELFERINK: Why? What is so sensitive about that information? Is it commercially sensitive for them?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Mr Darcey has the call.

Mr DARCEY: A big part of the challenge in this scheme is the commerciality between the various depots and coordinators. They are in a competitive environment. Part of the maturing of the scheme will be about shaking out of those arrangements. We use kid gloves on all these aspects with the coordinators and depots. For that reason, we do not want to upset that commercial arrangement.

Mr ELFERINK: One of them could be NTRS, which does not run a public depot any more, only collects commercial amounts?

Mr DARCEY: That is possible.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, what faith can people have in a scheme where the information about particular operators is withheld, particularly when some of the operators only provide part of the service and, possibly, provide the statistical base upon which you make comments saying \$800 000 has gone into the pockets of kids and families in the Northern Territory when, clearly, you supply no information to support that?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, you are looking at bits and pieces; at individual depots. However, I tend to look at the whole picture. The whole picture tells the story of how many containers have been collected and how many 10¢ that adds up to in returns. We need to keep our eye on the big picture. Individual depots have to act within their commercial contracts with coordinators, and we have a charter within the legislation to ensure they are operating properly. If they are not, they need to show cause why they are not according to the approvals they have been given. We have written to depots and coordinators about - sometimes they do not follow the rules and we need to pull them in a bit. That is what the legislation is there to do.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, you would appreciate that when we try to get the big picture we get, essentially, obnubilation. That is not productive; it means clouded over. You understand that whilst we try to get the picture it is not forthcoming. This system requires a credibility to be built around it, not a smoke screen to obscure it. No comments?

Mr CHANDLER: I will make one comment, which will put on the table where I am getting those figures. I could be wrong, Gerry. Minister, your report says \$31 596 443 containers have been sold in the Northern Territory. I have multiplied that by 17¢ - 10¢ for the deposit and 7¢ for the handling fee - and I have come up with a figure of \$5 371 395.31. That is putting a price on top of the normal cost of beverages, of which your own report says \$800 000 has been redeemed. We still have not clarified how much is going to pubs and clubs and how much is going mums and dads.

That is where I obtained that figure. If the price of goods has gone up by \$5.371m and \$800 000 has been returned, it is less than 50¢ per 10¢ being returned. That is how I got the figures. You can deal with it as you wish, but that is putting on the table where I came up with that figure, in the essence of open and accountability.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are still at Output 3.1, Environment and Sustainability. The member for Brennan flagged some question around plastic bags.

Mr CHANDLER: Plastic bags. Minister, you will be glad we are moving on from CDL, What was the tonnage, the actual weight, of single-use plastic bags going to landfill prior to the introduction of the plastic bag ban legislation when people did not have to pay extra for their bags?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, similar to the Cash for Containers question, happy to take that one on notice, Mr Chairman.

Question on Notice No 7.17

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you please repeat the question, member for Brennan, for Hansard?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what was the tonnage, the actual weight, of single-use plastic bags going to landfill prior to the introduction of the plastic bag legislation?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.17.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what is the tonnage, the actual weight of plastic bags going into landfills today?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do want to take that on notice, minister?

Mr HAMPTON: Sure. Yes, I will take that on notice. I am happy to also say it is estimated that every year 40 million plastic bags are consumed in the NT, and that 400 000 of these end up as litter in the NT.

Mr WOOD: Can I just say, member for Brennan, would it be better to ask for numbers? I am not sure they weigh plastic bags.

Mr CHANDLER: The reason I said weight is because, initially the minister was talking about saving weight of litter going to landfills. Hence, I asked for the tonnage weight rather than a number for plastic bags. The legislation was introduced to reduce the amount of weight and litter going to our landfills – volume. So, the questions are volume related. Do I give the second question on notice, or ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want that question on notice, minister?

Mr WOOD: Do you want to give numbers or weight?

Question on Notice No 7.18

Mr CHANDLER: Both. Minister, what is the tonnage – the actual weight - of plastic bags, or numbers of plastic bags, going to landfills today?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.18, minister.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, you have just given me a figure of 40 million bags that are sold in the Northern Territory annually, is that correct?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right.

Mr CHANDLER: Of that, 400 000 of them end up in landfills, or into the environment?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right.

Mr CHANDLER: How did you come up with that figure?

Mr HAMPTON: That is according to and based on a combination of population and recent data of the National Litter Index. Also, the National Litter Index has estimated that approximately 200 000 lightweight single-use, non-biodegradable bags may have been prevented from being littered since the scheme began.

Mr CHANDLER: May have? My question again is: how do they come up with this data? I am assuming there is not someone standing out there counting plastic bags that go into the landfill. How do they come up with these kinds of figures?

Mr DARCEY: Our understanding is the National Litter Index is based on some subsets and counts over certain areas, then it is multiplied by the population. The methodology is not with us, it is done nationally.

Mr CHANDLER: Again, I struggle to understand how you make decisions to develop legislation, when it does not even sound like you are convinced that the figures are accurate. You do not know how the figures have been put together, so when a decision like this is made, what is the rationale behind making the decision?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, not questioning the reputation of the National Litter Index, but we make these decisions as a government, based around good public policy and things that are good for the environment and for the Territory ...

Mr Chandler: Minister, you make good public policy on the back of data!

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, the National Litter Index is based on a combination of population and recent data of the National Litter Index.

Mr CHANDLER: In the research conducted before introducing this legislation, had the department received any information from councils such as the Darwin City Council or the Palmerston Council in regard to the amount of waste directly related to this legislation; that is, plastic bags? How much was going to landfills?

Mr PURDON: I do not believe we have the information specific to plastic bags. We receive information from Darwin and Palmerston councils on the amount of waste going to landfill and the amount of kerbside recycling they recover. I believe that is in the NEPS annual report you have with you.

Mr CHANDLER: We have introduced legislation. It sounds like it is just feel-good legislation. It is not achieving anything if you do not know what you started with, what improvements you have made - if you did not know what the starting figures were. I cannot believe we would not have started with some baseline figures of how many plastic bags are going to landfill and the cost implications of that, then look at what legislation we need to introduce to improve the situation if it is deemed to be as bad as you are making it out to be?

Do not get me wrong, plastic bags in the environment are a pain in the back ... I cannot say that but I know what it was like when I had a boat. You see a plastic bag in the harbour and you turn the boat around and pick it up. It annoys me when I see things like that and I know the ramifications of plastic bags in the environment, particularly on animals.

Much of what was discussed in the preamble to this legislation was about landfill and improving costs associated with running landfills. How does the plastic bag legislation directly save on landfill costs?

Mr HAMPTON: As you have pointed out, member for Brennan, the data is there, 40 million plastic bags sold in the Territory every year; 400 000 of those end up as litter. Out in your boat fishing you see a plastic bag; you pick it up. In the town camp ...

Mr CHANDLER: How do you know?

Mr HAMPTON: The figures are according to the National Litter Index. That is the baseline data we based some of our policy on in banning plastic bags.

Mr CHANDLER: I have mentioned two of the biggest jurisdictions in the Northern Territory, Palmerston and Darwin, yet evidence has been produced today that there was no research or information gathered from two of our largest jurisdictions that are running landfill. Palmerston is not running landfill now but Darwin is. No information was gathered from those agencies prior to the legislation being introduced.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, there seems to be some confusion. When we talked about landfill, it was mostly about the container. The discussion about plastic bags has always been about litter, pollution and the environment. We have not been saying it was about landfill. It has always been about litter. Anyone who looks around Darwin now can see there are far fewer plastic bags than before. There are fewer plastic bags in the harbour. You do not see too many plastic bags on the rubbish warrior's sculptures anymore. He always used to be tied up with plastic bags ...

Mr Chandler: They are all in the cupboard.

Mr GRANT: The plastic bags scheme has been a huge success. Even when those plastic bags were reaching the landfill sites - any landfill sites you see, and the fences around them, are covered in plastic bags. It is about litter and wildlife, and the reduction in plastic bags has been a massive success. The landfill aspects of the container scheme should not be confused with the litter aspects of the plastic bags scheme. It is inappropriate to confuse the two.

Mr CHANDLER: I am assume you will put some kind of measuring milestones in place with this legislation to measure how successful it has been. The CEO has admitted it has been successful. Will we see a report similar to the report on Cash for Containers?

Mr GRANT: Keep Australia Beautiful does litter surveys every year, and they break those down into all the components. It will not be a document from the department. We will see what the Keep Australia Beautiful litter survey says over the next few years because it takes a while for plastic bags to break down. I am confident that survey will show the success of the scheme.

Mr CHAIRMAN: At that point, we will take a five-minute break.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are still at Output 3.1. Member for Brennan, you have the call.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Prior to the break, your CEO, Mr Grant, said plastic bags did not have anything to do with the landfill component with containers and so forth. Your website says: 'Why has a plastic bag ban been adopted?' Dot point two says:

The plastic bag ban is part of the government's \$34m Northern Territory Climate Change Policy and Territory 2030 strategy. The ban will help meet the government's target of reducing the amount of rubbish going to landfill by 50% by 2020.

Mr GRANT: It will help with that target, but it is not key the reason we are saying it.

Mr CHANDLER: But it is a dot point on the website.

Mr GRANT: Yes, and it will help with that target, no doubt.

Mr CHANDLER: All right, very good. As promised, that is the last one in Output 3.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions to Output 3.1?

Mr CHANDLER: No. Sorry, there is, indeed.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mr CHANDLER: Output 3.1, off those subjects, though. Minister, does your department, your agency support photovoltaic solar installations?

Mr HAMPTON: With our Climate Change Policy and renewable energy, solar PVs is a really important way to convert alternative energy. With Alice Springs being a Solar City, it certainly punches above its weight. I am sure you have seen the new solar power station there - I think you went to the opening.

Mr CHANDLER: Uterne, yes.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, Uterne. The town council, places like the plaza, or the Sheraton Hotel in Alice Springs, have gone very much into the solar PV area.

As a government, we welcome those initiatives in alternative sources of energy such as solar. There is no better way to do that than in the Solar City of Alice Springs. Yes, we certainly encourage that initiative.

Mr CHANDLER: We spoke earlier about cross-departmental meetings and so forth. We were talking about water resources at the time. Does that also occur with agencies like Power and Water on solar power?

Dr LEEDER: Member for Brennan, yes, that is the case. The Climate Change Unit actually sits in one of the earlier outputs, but it works on alternative or renewable energy, and works across the whole-of-government under the Climate Change Policy in discussions around that. We have very close working relationships with Power and Water, particularly on the Alice Springs Solar City project, and on

other more community level projects such as the Solar Champions, the installation of PV panels on the Darwin Toy Library, and a few other community organisations.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before you ask your next question, member for Brennan, just a clarification. I have the climate change output for discussion later. You mentioned we had just gone past it, but I actually have it for after Territory Wildlife Park.

Dr LEEDER: Okay.

Mr CHANDLER: I am not actually focusing on climate change at the moment.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It was just a point of clarification because it seemed to be a thought we had gone past it. We have Sports Development, NT Institute of Sport Facilities, Events and Engagement, Territory Wildlife Park, Climate Change, and EPA.

Dr LEEDER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, no worries.

Mr CHANDLER: Can I offer an interesting titbit about solar - I cannot help myself. The fact is the Uterne solar panels cost 70% less than the solar panels which were installed on the Crowne Plaza. So, in that short time period, solar panels have reduced by 70%. That is amazing. Sorry, they told me that on the day, at the opening.

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry, Mr Chairman, regarding the climate change, what output group was that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is the same as last year. It does not have an output, but we negotiated for it to go into the agenda. It is under Parks and Wildlife, Climate Change - if you can see it. We are going to do it the same way this year as we did last year.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, are you aware of any restrictions on urban solar power installations?

Mr GRANT: What output group are we talking about?

Mr CHANDLER: Environment and Sustainability, Output 3.1. The question was, minister ...

Mr HAMPTON: I do not think that is really a question for me. In terms of ...

Mr CHANDLER: It is about solar power.

Mr HAMPTON: Is it a planning or approval issue you are talking about?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am sorry, I missed the question, member for Brennan.

Mr HAMPTON: Can you ask the question again?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, are you aware of any restrictions on urban solar installations?

Dr LEEDER: That is more of a planning question than a question for this output. There have been some issues around building standards and building approvals. My understanding is the appropriate area is working with the Building Board on that.

Mr CHANDLER: That is not the issue I am trying to explore. Minister, 5 KW urban installations would seem like an ideal size for most urban homes, but Power and Water seems to be limiting homeowners to 2 KW systems. I understand the rationale is based around the homeowner's use and how many other homes in the area have systems installed. It is not so much focused on reducing energy costs, carbon output, etcetera. Does not having another agency that appears to be opposed to your push to support solar energy undermine your position? How will the government meet some of its renewable energy targets?

Dr LEEDER: My understanding is it is related to some issues Power and Water have with the grid, rather than to any issue around encouraging or not encouraging solar power. It probably is a fairly specific question for Power and Water.

Mr CHANDLER: I understand Power and Water has some limitations due to energy trickling back into the system. As a minister, as a department, in these discussions you have with other agencies, are you encouraging, pushing, making them move to infrastructure to allow more people to take up solar installations?

Mr HAMPTON: We have a Climate Change Policy that has specific targets and actions. Each government agency has a responsibility to achieve and undertake those actions and targets. As a government, we have a Climate Change Policy.

Some of the responsibilities for looking at renewable energy and harnessing solar energy lie within individual agencies. It is a matter for Power and Water as well, but as a government we have an overarching Climate Change Policy that supports solar energy.

Mr CHANDLER: Back to the relationship - and I am trying to learn more about how these departments interact, that kind of ...

Mr HAMPTON: What output group is relationships - where do you put that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We take that advice from you, minister, if a question is asked that does not fall within your output. We do not always know those things. If it does not go to the financial positions of your department and it needs to be directed to another minister, you can provide that advice.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, this is more about the relationship you have with other ministers and other departments. When you are working on a policy you are passionate about and want to push, when you become aware of something like this where there are restrictions that could prevent you from meeting your targets, and you publish targets knowing you can never reach them because of another agency's inability to be able to provide the services needed to reach them, how do you deal with that? It seems quite disingenuous to say, 'This is what we aim to do, this is an aspirational goal', when you know you cannot meet those targets. Is it wrong to report that you will meet these targets when you know you cannot do it?

Dr LEEDER: Many of the targets in the Climate Change Policy are quite long-term, so moving towards them takes that process of identifying what the issues are and working across government over time to do it. There are very strong working relationships between the technical experts in the Climate Change Unit, relevant people in Power and Water, the Department of Business and Energy, and Treasury, trying to achieve a good, cost effective, long-term sustainable solution on some of these things that are the introduction of change over time.

There are a number of interdepartmental committees which have been established to explore that and work towards that. In the reporting against particular targets, we will often say what has been achieved on the way towards it because, while some of them are aspirational over the long term, some of them actually have clear steps which are governed by legislation, as well as the cost of physical infrastructure, other issues that have to be dealt with. You have to start somewhere.

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, I appreciate that, Dr Leeder, that is quite understandable. Minister, are you aware of anything - I could argue or you will argue this question should be for Power and Water. Are you aware of any infrastructure Power and Water has put in place in Alice Springs that makes it more solar friendly than the Darwin grid?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That goes beyond the operations of this department and directly to the operations of Power and Water.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay. I have a technical question here in regard to RECs. I have had a number of people contact me in regard to what you alluded to earlier about the infrastructure not meeting the guidelines in relation to panel installations. I have a particular case, however - and I am asking for advice here - where there has been an installation, but the RECs that were applied for by the company had never been registered with the Clean Energy Council. This particular set of panels does not comply with the new regulations or guidelines, being for the wind factor. Can you see a problem with those panels being installed and that person applying for the RECs for the new system, given that the RECs were never registered with the Clean Energy Council, therefore, technically do not exist? Would there be any problem with someone reinstalling that system to reinstall a new system that, obviously, will comply?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure if this goes totally to the output group area, member for Brennan. I hope those people have put their complaints and concerns forward in writing to Power and Water.

Mr CHANDLER: To ministers and all. So, this is ...

Mr HAMPTON: I am certainly not aware of that case. They need to follow up with the relevant ministers they have written to. But, I am not sure if it relates to Output 3.1.

Mr CHANDLER: I am finished with that output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thanks, Mr Chairman. Minister, earlier today, we had a discussion in relation to the Department of Resources around a new quarry that is being developed to the east of Robertson Barracks. The questions that were being asked about it were: was there a mining management plan and, if so, was the public allowed to have any say in it? My understanding - and I hope I am correct here - no, it was not deemed big enough for that. But, your department actually commented on the particular quarry, or extractive mining - I am not sure it is doing both - and said it was okay. Is it true your department does have some input into the environmental effects of a quarry?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Matt Darcey to answer that. My understanding - and I am not sure whether it is extractive industries

Mr WOOD: It is a quarry supplying rocks for the INPEX development.

Mr HAMPTON: ... comments – it depends on the level of assessment needed. All right.

Mr DARCEY: We were notified about that development through the Department of Resources. We did assess it, and our assessment was it did not require a formal environmental impact assessment. However, as part of that process, we actually provide comments to DoR, Department of Resources, that we expect they will pick up in their mining management plan. They are the regulatory authority for extractive mining. We certainly have some environmental concerns, and those concerns have been made clear to the Department of Resources.

Mr WOOD: A number of residents have complained about the noise and the operation going 24-hours. Did the department give any consideration to the environmental effects of the noise and the operation of a quarry 24 hours a day on the residents reasonably nearby on Wallaby Holtze Road?

Mr DARCEY: Yes, we did. We recommended to the Department of Resources that there was a community consultation plan for that quarry to pick up issues around noise, blasting, and large increases in heavy vehicle movement. We have an off-site responsibility through the pollution hotline, and we have received a complaint through that facility. We are talking both with the complainant and the Department of Resources about that.

Mr WOOD: You have asked for a community consultation plan. Do you know if that happened?

Mr PURDON: We recommended in our response to the Department of Resources that the mine management plan require a community consultation plan. We have not heard back whether or not that has happened.

Mr WOOD: I asked you because I cannot go backwards to the Department of Resources this afternoon. I will follow that up. It is very interesting that was recommended. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have any other questions relating to output 3.1, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: No, thanks.

Mr ELFERINK: Just a very quick observation, Mr Chairman. I heard the member for Nelson make a comment about the - I do not believe it was intended in a nasty way - CEO of the department. I remind the member for Nelson the CEO puts government policy into place, and it is a little unfair that the member for Nelson thought it was necessary to criticise the CEO when all he is doing - and his whole department is working very hard – is to put government policy into place. I hope the minister would have picked up on that, but he has not. I thought I would make a comment.

Mr WOOD: Can I say I have nothing personal against Jim Grant.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not suspect you do.

Mr WOOD: I was really saying there are two people in charge. The minister is probably more in charge but ...

Mr ELFERINK: He is the one who should be in front of the camera stating his policy, not the department.

Mr GRANT: I did not take offence, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: No insult. I do get a little passionate and enthusiastic.

Mr ELFERINK: There are boundaries of propriety. As the Leader of Opposition Business, that is all I am trying to establish. Thank you, Mr Grant.

Output 3.2 – Heritage Conservation

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are at Output 3.2 and the member for Brennan has the call.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, in 2011, the budget for heritage conservation was in the order of \$3.499m, dropping back to a budget of \$3.097m in 2011-12. This year on page 209 of Budget Paper No 3 there is an estimate of \$3.176m for the current financial year, and the new budget shows an increase to \$3.214m. Given the additional costs, CPI etcetera, and that we had a budget of \$3.499m two years ago, what is the loss in real terms to this output group?

Ms KIRKMAN: I do not have a breakdown of the movement between the 2010-11 to the 2011-12 initial budget. I may have it, if you give me a moment.

Mr CHANDLER: Effectively, the question is: although the budget this year shows an increase from last year - given two years ago it was around \$3.5m and this year \$3.2m - what is the real loss to this output group?

Ms KIRKMAN: I believe it is external funding that has moved, but I would have to get back to you on the details of the external and NT government components to that budget to see what the NT government loss would be - or gain, if that was the case.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, there has been no reduction of staff in that time, if that is the implication.

Mr CHANDLER: No, not at all. I am just trying to work out what the costs this year might be. There could be evidence there was federal funding a couple of years ago that is not there now, which is quite likely to be the case.

Last year, I raised the issue about the current leasing arrangements for the houses on Myilly Point. Advice at the time indicated the houses had already been handed over to the NT government from the Commonwealth, and you were in the process of finalising a handover to the Heritage Council. Has this occurred?

Mr WELLS: Michael Wells, Director of the Heritage Branch. I do not believe that is what we indicated last year. I think we indicated it was in process - and it still is, unfortunately. This is not a matter for us, this is a matter for the Commonwealth. Two of the houses there are owned by the Department of Finance and Deregulation, I think is the name of the Commonwealth department.

Many years ago, they made a decision that they were going to divest themselves of these properties. That process has not been finalised yet - but not through any inaction on behalf of either this department or the NT government.

Mr CHANDLER: At this time last year we were talking about the leases having been finalised for the Heritage Council. Has that been solved at this stage?

Mr WELLS: The Heritage Council actually does not have anything to do with it. The matter is between the Commonwealth government and the National Trust.

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, sorry. The National Trust were having lease issues; they had not been signed off at this time last year. Have the leases been agreed to and signed off now?

Mr WELLS: I am not exactly clear what lease you are talking about, but I can tell you that both of those houses were subject to lease arrangements. They were leased from the Commonwealth to the National Trust, and there was a situation where those leases were going to expire. I am not clear about the dates, but that has happened and the leases were extended. As we speak, they are still leased from the Commonwealth to the National Trust. Change of ownership has been mooted from the Commonwealth to the Trust, but it has not been finalised as yet.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay, advice I received here last year was that the federal government wanted to hand them over to the National Trust but they, in fact, had to be, by some legal process, handed to the NT government for the NT government to hand over to the National Trust.

Mr WELLS: That is correct. At that time, it was thought that was the only mechanism available to the Commonwealth because they did not feel they were able to hand it directly to the Trust. So, they mooted a mechanism where they would be handed to the NT government and then to the Trust.

They changed their mind, basically, and decided they were able to hand over directly to the Trust. We had no problem with that at all because we thought that was the right outcome in any case.

Mr CHANDLER: But to the best of your knowledge that has not occurred at all?

Mr WELLS: I know for a fact it has not occurred yet.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, the only other question I have here is, last year we were talking about sewerage concerns at the Myilly Point houses. Are you aware if that has been rectified at all?

Mr WELLS: No, it has not, but we have made very good progress. It is, obviously, not the sort of thing you can solve overnight. We have been working very closely with Power and Water and with the owners. There was a design done which would have enabled all of the houses to be connected to deep sewer. There was a contribution plan that was calculated by Power and Water. There was quite a lot of money involved - I think it was \$65 000 per property was required to be paid to Power and Water to enable that to proceed.

Since then, an alternative scheme has come to light, and we are just waiting to receive advice from Power and Water, which we expect some time soon. We envisage, under this revised scheme, there will be a contribution plan where the cost per house will be significantly less than the \$65 000. That is what we are hoping for.

Mr CHANDLER: It was indicated to me there could be some financial benefit in waiting for the park across the road to be developed. I do not know how far down the road we are in having that park developed. Is there a way we can ensure the current owners foot the bill so the Territory government does not receive the bill before they hand it over?

Mr WELLS: I do not think so. The Commonwealth has drawn the line on that and said it is not willing to meet that cost. I do not think the NT government will have to meet the cost either. We will see. We need to see what the quantum is in this contribution plan and how it all pans out. We hope the figures will be such that the National Trust can afford to pay the connection fee and it will be resolved that way. After all, when the Commonwealth hands over the two properties we have been talking about, the National Trust will own all five properties.

For your information, we are not waiting for anything to happen over the road. This new proposal is to do with the rising main which is proposed to come from the casino and run past the houses, which is something new but something we can take advantage of.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, since the introduction of the new act, have there been any anomalies or things you can report today that are of concern, or has it been a smooth roll-out?

Mr WELLS: The new *Heritage Act* was passed by the Assembly in October last year. It has been assented to but it has not commenced yet. I am learning there are quite a few things that have to be done in situations like this before an act can commence. In this case, it includes the appointment of the new

Heritage Council and the preparation of regulations, which are required before the act can commence. We have been working on those matters, which are close to a conclusion.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions for Output 3.2, Heritage Conservation?

Mr WOOD: A couple. Minister, I have a map here; could I table it and show it to the minister?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I have a spare. We might give it to Michael. It is in relation to the 17½ Mile. You probably assumed it would have to be a question on the 17½ Mile so-called heritage site, sometimes called Camp Rushmore. The map I have shown was produced around 1945 by the Commonwealth Department of Army and the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing. It is a strip map that is hand drawn and shows where the Howard Springs Road connects to the old highway, which is exactly where it does today - it is the 16 Mile.

Has the department named the piece of land on the other side of the road with the correct name, the 17½ Mile? Virginia Road has a service station called the 17 Mile Service Centre. My understanding is many people used to call what used to be the rice sheds, the 17 Mile sheds. I have to be careful what I say, Mr Trevor Horman is down the back and if I get heritage wrong I will be in trouble later.

Has the department got it wrong? Should it have been, if it was going to be given a mileage, called the 16 Mile? If there was some confusion over what Camp Rushmore is and where it is, why do we not just call it Camp Rushmore and save ourselves many problems?

Mr ELFERINK: The answer is plate tectonics.

Mr CHANDLER: The Earth has moved!

Mr WOOD: A great deal of money has gone into particular site. It is a little like asking if the pyramids are the Eiffel Tower. They are not. We need to get it right.

Mr HAMPTON: It might seem like a pedantic question, but it is a very important one. My department is aware of it and we are looking into it. I am happy to look at any of the suggestions you put forward once I receive the advice from the department. Throughout the *Heritage Act* debate, I talked a little about this site and the importance of it. It has a very strong history and it is important to get it right. Once I have been advised, I will be happy to take your advice as well on more appropriate naming if we need to look at it.

Mr WOOD: One of your own books - I think it is the one that has two CDs, one in the front, one in the back - calls it Camp Rushmore. To some extent, that is a better name, because it represents that area where some Americans were based during the war. That might save too much controversy.

The person who raised it with me lives over the road and has lived there for 30 or 40 years, I gather. He said that land has never been called the 17½ Mile. Considering where the 15 Mile people live, which is 500 m away, I am becoming confused.

Mr HAMPTON: It is important, and I would not want to get the heritage community offside. We will have back to them in some way and ask them what they think. It is really important we get it right.

Mr WOOD: I took a tour of the East Arm industrial precinct with John Coleman recently. He mentioned there is a section of land behind the area where everyone can park their vehicles, just before you reach the port - it is opposite North Cement.

There is land where he said Z Force used to have some embattlements. He approached the department about whether that land should be preserved, because he said it has hardly been touched. If it is not protected it will probably be bulldozed or affected by industrial development. Is the department rethinking whether that area should be protected from development? If not a heritage site, then will it at least be afforded some protection?

Mr WELLS: There is a long history to this. You are quite right, the Z Force base was there. The Z Force was a force of commandos, which were based at East Arm, who fought behind enemy lines in

Japanese held territory to the north. There was also a Catalina base adjacent to the Z Force base. There is a concrete ramp which the Catalinas were hauled up, which can still be seen today. It is a site which has some degree of historical importance.

It was nominated to be heritage listed some years ago. There was a process we went through where the Land Development Corporation made it very clear that land was required for future, and major, development which would involve all of that area being subsumed by landfill.

Mr WOOD: How many years ago?

Mr WELLS: I cannot give you a year. I would have to look that up. It was about five years ago but I would have to check the dates. The then minister made the call that, on that basis, the site should be recorded but it should not be heritage listed.

Going to the point of your question, I am not sure what the current plans are there. They may have changed and the issue may be worth looking at again.

Mr WOOD: Minister, would you revisit that site? Having been used by Z Force, it is an important part of the Territory history. Many of those people, from memory, might not have come back. I am not sure whether it was the group which went to Ambon or to Timor ...

Mr WELLS: Timor.

Mr WOOD: Timor. Would it be possible to revisit it and see whether that land is absolutely essential for the development of the industrial precinct? John Coleman would be the right person to talk to.

Mr HAMPTON: I have made a note of it, and I will request a briefing from Michael.

Mr WOOD: I am still trying to save the front entrance to the leprosarium. Could you ask about that as well? There is only one piece of evidence that the leprosarium ever existed - except for some signs on the other side which most people do not see - and that is the front entrance which still exists. It runs off the road to the port. Could you find out if that could have some protection? The sign that used to be there has been flattened. That is all my questions.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, Mr Chairman, a couple of quick issues. Mr Grant, I read a document not that long ago - I do not have my file in front of me, I should have been alive to this - there is a document with a series of bullet points in it from Arts and Museums saying there was an intention to get about \$1.8m or \$1.5m of external funding. Can you refresh my memory in relation to that?

Mr HAMPTON: What output group is this?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We need more detail, member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I know. I do not have my file with me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you talking about extra money for Heritage?

Mr HAMPTON: Or Arts?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, Arts and Culture.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, Arts and Culture is minister McCarthy.

Mr ELFERINK: No, no, that is completely me. I have stuffed it up. I have my file, isn't that lucky for me? The so-called bomb crater on McMinn Street, where are we at with that?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Port Darwin, in January 2010 a feature thought to be a bomb crater was discovered in McMinn Street during road widening works. An archaeological investigation identified it as a World War II bomb crater.

Mr ELFERINK: Really?

Mr HAMPTON: Comment was sought on 23 March, 2012 on a proposal to declare the bomb crater as a heritage place. Comments closed on 23 April. The Heritage Advisory Council will now consider the matter further and, in due course, make a recommendation to me, as the minister, to have the bomb crater declared as a heritage place. The bomb crater may be one of the last remaining examples of a wartime bomb crater in Darwin.

The site is highly accessible and, therefore, the opportunity to educate people about the Bombing of Darwin is considerable. It has been reported that the discovery of the bomb crater contributed to the delays in the road works. Perhaps that is where you are coming to.

Mr ELFERINK: No, that is not where I am going. Have you read the report that was prepared?

Mr HAMPTON: I have not seen that report yet, member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: It is publicly available. Was there any evidence of shrapnel discovered in the archaeological work?

Mr WELLS: No.

Mr ELFERINK: A crater without shrapnel.

Mr WELLS: I can comment on that if you like.

Mr ELFERINK: Sure.

Mr WELLS: We did look for shrapnel, but there are a couple of issues there. It is well known that World War II bomb craters - in the immediate aftermath of the war - shrapnel was souvenired by troops. That is something we know happened. Nonetheless, as one of the tools we used, we looked for shrapnel using a metal detector, but the site was very noisy. In other words, there was a great deal of metal there. We did not find any shrapnel, but that is not so surprising. We did use other methodology which led us to the conclusion it was a bomb crater. In other words, that diagnosis did not rely on the presence of shrapnel.

Mr ELFERINK: What other metal was detected?

Mr WELLS: To describe the crater to you, what we believe happened when the bomb hit was a whole lot of earth and shattered stone was blown up into the air and then fell back. That is what we call the fall-back layer, and the archaeologist was able to identify that. That was the key diagnostic feature which led us to believe it was a bomb crater. There was a history after that where some earth was pushed back into the hole, as you might imagine. There was a fair bit of rubbish in there. There is a very clear - what the archaeologist would call stratification. You can see the base rock, the fall-back layer, and the later stuff sitting on top, which is full of Coke cans and modern material.

Mr ELFERINK: When I visited the metal I found was half-a-dozen VB cans, a couple of Coke cans and ...

Mr CHANDLER: Did you get your 10¢ back?

Mr ELFERINK: ... and a handful of bladders. Clearly, a happy little drinking spot for somebody. How much of the bomb crater still exists? It is not a complete crater, is it?

Mr WELLS: No, about half, I would say. The history of this is it was not identified until the road works were under way. A large piece of road working equipment drove through it and cut it in half, basically, which seems a pity on one view. On the other hand, it has given us something unique which is a cross-section of a World War II bomb crater, which is unique in the Northern Territory and would be extremely rare anywhere in the world.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Mr WOOD: We can name it after the grader driver.

Mr ELFERINK: You would accept, though, from a layman's perspective, what you actually have is a depression against the side of the cliff. I am not sure if it is half - I would have said about a third, but we will not quibble; half for the sake of the conversation - which is full of rubbish, overgrown with weeds, next to a

footpath, and near a busy intersection. Minister, when you hear it described in those terms, would you consider it as having heritage value?

Mr HAMPTON: I take the advice of people like Michael in my department, and the Heritage Advisory Council. As a minister, you take advice from those people who know a lot more about it than me. I will wait until I get that advice.

Mr ELFERINK: But, ultimately, in the act the decision is yours, yes?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right, but you have to take advice on from people who are the experts and make a decision from the advice you receive. You do not just go ahead without the advice.

Mr ELFERINK: All right. No worries. So, it is still in the pipeline?

Mr CHANDLER: I just had one question, minister, in regard to the same area the member for Nelson raised. I visited the area recently and went for a wander around the new interactive signs and the walkways near MacKillop College. Well done to the department for what is a fabulous little walk; it is very serene to walk around ...

Mr WOOD: Do not connect it with the heritage bicycle path on the lower line.

Mr CHANDLER: Well, this is probably where I am going with this. It appears that the path just stops. You go over a little bridge and around a corner, and it just stops, as it looks like it is going to go somewhere. Is there budget this year to complete the works, or is that where it stops?

Mr WELLS: There are no plans to do anything further at this stage. I have a couple of comments. There is a concrete path which forms a loop through the side, and that is intentional. It is not meant to go anywhere really, it is meant to be your way of seeing the site. We are also very aware there was going to be a connection between the new MacKillop College and the residential areas, roughly to the north, I suppose. Knowing that people would be taking a shortcut through that area, we made a path along the route where we thought they would be walking.

There is a more direct path you can take through the site from MacKillop College - or there will be in the future - to the nearby residential area. We have actually spoken to the people at Road Networks about the possibility of creating a link with the cycleway which, after all, is not too far away if you go up Howard Springs Road ...

Mr WOOD: It is 700 m.

Mr WELLS: Yes. You reach that cycle path, and it would be possible to make that connection. The answer from Road Networks is that is not in their immediate work plan.

Mr CHANDLER: I had the vision, with the new housing development that goes in, if there are parks in part of the development, it may connect on to it and, where the path finishes, there may be some way of connecting on to their path network within ...

Mr WELLS: The whole thing was developed very closely in conjunction with the people who were planning the Johnston subdivision. It does integrate with the suburb of Johnston, and with all the open spaces and the paths that are part of that suburban development. That has been done, I think.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay. That is the only question I had on that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration on Output 3.2, Heritage Conservation. Output Group 4.0, Arts and Culture will be answered by the Minister for Arts and Museums tomorrow.

SPORT AND RECREATION PORTFOLIO

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – SPORT AND RECREATION

Output 5.1 – Sports Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call on questions relating to Output Group 5.0, Sport and Recreation; Output 5.1, Sports Development. We will just wait for witnesses to change over.

Minister, the member for Brennan asked questions around Leanyer Recreation Park. That would be Output 5.3? Just confirming.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Answer to Questions on Notice 7.08, 7.14 and 7.15

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry, Mr Chairman, before we start I want to table answers to questions on notice Nos 7.08, 7.14 and 7.15.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any questions to output 5.1, Sports Development?

Mr ELFERINK: I ask this question in the absence of the shadow minister. Minister, what is the future of the Northern Territory Institute of Sports' position in Alice Springs?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that your only question, member for Port Darwin?

Mr ELFERINK: I have a couple.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Port Darwin. I also acknowledge the opposition spokesperson who is not with us - the member for Drysdale - and his work over the last three-and-a-half years in the portfolio.

The NTIS has a full-time Southern Region Coordinator position based in Alice Springs. The nominal occupant of this position relocated to Darwin in late 2011 for professional development purposes, filling a Strength and Conditioning Coach vacancy until October 2012. The resultant vacancy was filled but the occupant left the role in March 2012 for personal reasons.

As there are currently only six Level 5 scholarship holders based in Alice Springs, filling the Southern Region Coordinator position on a full-time basis at this stage is not warranted. Level 5 athletes are supported by locally-based assistant coaches and are only entitled to receive limited sport site support services on a group education basis.

Funding will now be used through to October 2012 to support NTIS coaches and other service personnel visiting Alice Springs more frequently than originally planned to provide specialised services and education to athletes and coaches in the region. That is also a different output group, but I am happy to answer that.

Mr ELFERINK: The Chairman gave me a slap under the ear. While we are on the subject, can you give provide a schedule of increased attendances by NTIS officers from Darwin?

Mr Wood interjecting.

Mr Elferink: No, no, my mistake ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are being slightly flexible, member for Nelson. That is why I asked if you have any questions.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not have the running sheet in front of me which is why I am fumbling my way through it. Minister, do you have the question?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you need that on notice or do you have the answer?

Mr HAMPTON: No, Mr Rossingh will answer that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Steve Rossingh, Executive Director, Sport, Venues and Indigenous Development. Member for Port Darwin, I was about to say we do not have that information in front of us. We do not have the schedule, but we can provide you with the details of what visits have happened since the position has been vacant and what is proposed.

Mr ELFERINK: I am picking up on what the minister said about more visits. I would like to know how many more visits are going to make up for this loss of the position. Minister, have you received any feedback ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry, go back, do you want to put that on notice?

Mr ELFERINK: No, I will come back to it at 5.2 now I have the running sheet in front of me.

Members interjecting.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We allowed the question through the keeper and we will go to the member for Nelson for Output 5.1, Sports Development.

Mr ELFERINK: I thought this was Sports Development, I am sorry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do you have questions on Sports Development?

Mr WOOD: Yes, I have but I will drop some off because of the time issue. Minister, in Budget Paper No 3 it says about 58 community sport and recreation positions were funded. I will give you the whole question then you can give an answer. Do you employ these positions or do you provide funding to shires? If you fund the shires, does it include funding to cover all the costs for that position - computer, vehicle, phone, etcetera? If not, why not, because the shire will have to cover it from a very small operational budget? If not, what is the location for funding allocation for each of these 58 positions? I ask that especially because of the recent report on the sustainability of our shires.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, you are right, the Active Remote Communities program funds 58 community sport and recreation officer positions across eight local government shires and nine government organisations. Currently, 82% of these sport and recreation officers employed by the shires are Indigenous or Aboriginal people.

The shires and non-government organisations continue to work through the process of obtaining their working with children checks. They are employed through the shire, so these shires are responsible for those resources they need to undertake their role. Through the Active Remote Communities, we fund those positions, but it is through the shires and non-government organisations. The total figure is just over \$2m funded for 58 positions.

Mr WOOD: Which works out to less than \$40 000 per person - would that be correct? My maths, it is around about the thirty-something thousand dollars, for a position?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right.

Mr WOOD: Would it be fair to say the shire has to still top that up, to make it a reasonable wage?

Mr HAMPTON: Sometimes some of those positions are casual, part-time, depending on the person and the job and the requirements.

Mr WOOD: You provide the personnel, the council has to provide the accommodation, the vehicle and all that?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right.

Mr WOOD: Okay. I will not go on, as we do not have much time. I will leave my other questions there, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you sure, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: I could ask one about Central Australian football. Have you held discussions with the football leagues in regional centres in regard to teams from the regional centres travelling to communities which have home games, which would support other agencies; for instance, the police?

Mr HAMPTON: I have a long association with the local league as a player and as a coach. In my current portfolio as a minister, I have recently announced a visitor management strategy, encouraging teams that are coming to Alice Springs to have information about where to stay, about travelling to Alice

Springs arrangements. We want to ensure we work closely with the AFL Central Australia. Those teams visiting from ...

Mr WOOD: The question was really have you been promoting home games back in the communities, rather than having ...

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to say, member for Nelson, I was going to get to it. They are actually playing home games this year in remote communities. That is a great initiative from the League - they doing it this year.

Mr WOOD: There are plenty of other questions on that, but that will do.

Output 5.2 – NT Institute of Sport

Mr CHAIRMAN: Moving to Output 5.2, NT Institute of Sport. Member for Port Darwin.

Mr ELFERINK: I have pretty much done that one to death anyhow, I was just curious about it. Basically, positions being blocked off. We had the promise of attendance of staff from the NTIS and we will get a schedule from the department in due course. Can we have that as a question on notice, perhaps Mr Chairman, so it is recorded?

Question on Notice No 7.19

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, can you provide a schedule of attendance of NTIS staff up to date since the position was last filled, and proposed attendances for the next 12 months?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes. That would be question No 7.19, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: No further questions, Mr Chairman

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions to Output 5.,2, NT Institute of Sport?

Mr WOOD: Just a quick one.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Is there no budget for the Territory Institute of Sport? Page 217, there are no dollar figures for anything.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is in the output agenda, \$3.5m.

Mr WOOD: Oh, I just did not know why you go down the bits and pieces here. Sports Development has a budget, and then you get to the Northern Territory Institute of Sport. Yes, and okay, I will take it that it is elsewhere.

Mr HAMPTON: Budget Paper No 3 has ...

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr HAMPTON: ... \$3.5m

Mr CHAIRMAN: Page 217, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes. Fair enough.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Mr WOOD: That is it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I answered it.

Mr WOOD: You have answered it, Mr Chairman. You are most flexible and knowledgeable at the same time.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 5.2, NT Institute of Sport.

Output 5.3 - Facilities

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will move onto Output 5.3, Facilities. Member for Brennan, this is where you ask your questions about Leanyer Recreation Park.

Mr CHANDLER: Mr Chairman, thank you. Minister, how do the water parks in Palmerston and Leanyer fit into the parks operational model in the Top End? Do they, or is it completely different into sports? Are they considered parks as in the normal term of parks? No?

Mr HAMPTON: No, no. They fit within the Sports and Recreation Division, and that is why they are in this output.

Mr CHANDLER: What is the total budget to run both Leanyer water park and Palmerston water park?

Mr ROSSINGH: In relation to Leanyer Recreation Park, the operating cost for 2011-12 is \$2.07m. The operations are outsourced to the YMCA. On top of that is a repairs and maintenance budget of \$300 000 per year. The YMCA is responsible for the minor plant repairs and equipment maintenance. Anything bigger than that comes within that repairs and maintenance budget.

In relation to the Palmerston water park, which opens this Saturday, the operations have been outsourced to the YMCA. The annual operating cost is \$1.721m and we do not envisage any repairs and maintenance within the first year of operation.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, is there any truth to the rumour that the delay in the opening of the Palmerston water park was due to budgetary constraints?

Mr HAMPTON: It was in the design, getting the park up and ready and ensuring it is done properly. That is where the delays were, unless you want to add anything further.

Mr ROSSINGH: There were probably three causes for the delays. The first was the early onset of the Wet Season. It was a difficult site to work on. There was much erosion which led to safety issues particularly, but also knowledge that earthworks you did would be undermined by the Wet. That was one reason.

There were some issues with the new intersection on Yarrowonga Road and Roystonea which needed to be redesigned quite extensively.

There were also some undocumented fibre-optic cables detected that had to be moved. That took longer than we expected.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, my understanding is the park has been ready for quite a few weeks. Is there any particular reason that date was chosen to open it?

Mr ROSSINGH: The construction work was completed several weeks ago. We have been waiting for the grass to grow. There are extensive planted grass areas which people will be using as traffic and picnic and other areas so we needed that to happen. We also needed to allow time for the YMCA to settle in, to introduce their systems process, and get a hang of the park to be able to run it effectively before it opened to the public.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, why did you run a competition for naming the café using thousands of dollars of advertising for just \$100 in prizes?

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Brennan, are you referring to the Lake Leanyer Café?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes.

Mr ROSSINGH: It was a way to promote to the community a brand new facility that is accessible to them.

Mr CHANDLER: Speaking of prizes, minister, there was much advertising and promotion encouraging people to name the new waterslides in Palmerston. Part of the prize was you would be the first person to ride the slides. I have had children come up to me very excited about putting in names, going in the competition because they wanted to be the first to ride the slide. It is pretty disappointing to discover people have already used the slide. Is it a little dishonest to have a prize to be the first to ride but allow others to use it first?

Mr HAMPTON: Is that a general comment or a question?

Mr CHANDLER: No, it is a question. Do you think it is dishonest to provide a prize where you are offering the first to ride the slide as first prize when, in fact, others have used the slide?

Mr HAMPTON: The advice I have received is it is important we ensure the slides are safe, and you need people to go down them to make sure they are safe before it is open. In formally opening the slides, and it is a safe slide, then those winners will be the first.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, in regard to not only the water park but, in fact, many of the new sporting facilities, they are quite welcome in Palmerston. We certainly deserve them as it is a growing community. Is it a minister's decision or a departmental decision not to invite local members to openings of these facilities?

Mr ROSSINGH: The openings for all the facilities have been publicised, and anyone from the public is welcome to attend.

Mr CHANDLER: Get out the boardies. We could have a race, minister. That would be interesting.

Mr WOOD: Oh yes, the Estimates Committee should move a motion that that happens.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move that the second ride on the slides is Mr Hampton and Mr Chandler.

Mr CHANDLER: That would be unfair to the minister – very unfair. I have a weight advantage.

Minister, who monitors the water quality testing at Leanyer water park?

Mr ROSSINGH: The YMCA under the terms of their contract.

Mr CHANDLER: How often is the water tested?

Mr ROSSINGH: Every three hours by the YMCA. On top of that, a weekly sample is sent to the Berrimah Laboratory for microbiological testing.

Mr CHANDLER: How often has the park been closed in the last 12 months due to poor water quality?

Mr ROSSINGH: I suppose there are two elements to poor water quality. One is water that does not meet the chemical and other standards. There have been no closures due to that sort of water quality issue, but there have been closures in relation to the optic, or cloudiness of the water. That has happened on two occasions. I have the details here, I just need to find it.

The lagoon and wet play area at the Lake Leanyer Recreation Park were closed due to water clarity issues on 27 September 2011, and again from 5 October 2011 to 9 October 2011.

Mr CHANDLER: Mr Chairman, that is all I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Oh yes, the pool. How far has the design work progressed for the developing of the Litchfield pool? There are two things I would like to ask about the design because I have not seen it. Will it be a 25-m, 10-lane pool to FINA standards, because that is originally what we requested? Will the infrastructure - that is the car parks and other roads - be designed or planned in such a way so maybe other sporting facilities could use those facilities?

The reason I mention that is I have been approached about a basketball stadium. The point is, it could be in the future. There is nothing worse than government talking about whole-of-government and then finding out if we put that in another place we could have used it for two facilities. How far advanced are you with the design, and did you pick up on those other two issues I just mentioned?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, you have a great deal of passion, and I look forward to the opening. Will you be wearing the budgie smugglers or ...

Mr WOOD: I do not know about that; that is a worry. You have put up the sign. I did not, ask for the ..

Mr HAMPTON: The Northern Territory government allocated \$1.5m towards the construction of a public swimming pool in the rural area. In consultation with the Litchfield Council and Fred Pass Board, the Northern Territory government will now build a 25 m pool with eight lanes and a wet play area at the intersection of Girraween Road and Stuart Highway.

Mr WOOD: Why are you consulting with the Freds Pass Management Board? It is on your land now. We have been down that path, for two years.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, we have before and we have progressed from that. A project control group will now be established to manage both stages of the project. The project control group will be operational for the duration of the project, meet monthly. It will be chaired by NRETAS, and will include DCI, shire, Royal Life Saving Society and Swimming NT membership. The first task of the PCG will be to develop a comprehensive project plan.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you realise plans were drawn up for the site when it was going to go on the Freds Pass Reserve. I quoted the document from Swim Australia which stated it needs to be 10 lanes if it is to be a short course swimming pool to the standard required for competition. Why would you build an eight-lane course if the experts tell you it will not come up to the standard required for competition swimming? I am looking at the long term rather than the short term. It needs two more lanes and it has to be build exactly. I am told it has to have enough room to take the pads, which are only temporary, but they are used for competition. That has to be exact to the millimetre – maybe even less than a millimetre, maybe nano metres. Will you give us some guarantee you will at least consider that before you design an eight-lane pool?

Mr HAMPTON: You asked that question during the last sittings and ...

Mr WOOD: I only got eight lanes.

Mr HAMPTON: I will take that up with the project control group. We will be able to consider that.

Mr WOOD: Okay. I am not handing the money over to the council for the three other pools that have been proposed. It has to be a good quality pool.

Does the government believe it is a good idea that the facilities they are producing, like the Palmerston water park and the Leanyer Recreation Park, are free? I do not know what numbers you get at the Leanyer water park. I do not know how many it is a year. Except for the hot dog stand or something, you are not going to receive much revenue.

Isn't it a good thing to at least ask people for some effort to ensure the \$2.7m park has some revenue, even if it was \$1 in the turnstile? At least people would realise the world is not free all the time, and they are contributing to the upkeep of that facility. Has the government given any thought to a gold coin donation to help fund the park? They are fairly expensive facilities to run.

Mr HAMPTON: It is up to government to make that decision, not me as a minister. It is a decision made by colleagues around the table in those discussions. I take those comments on board and that is a discussion we can have.

Mr WOOD: Are there any figures for the number of people who go through Leanyer each a year?

Mr HAMPTON: It is 100 000 people.

Mr WOOD: At \$1 each that would be \$100 000 to go towards some of your repairs and maintenance. I do not think it is too much to ask. It is a good philosophy that not everything is free.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, has the Palmerston Magpie's new facility opened yet or not?

Mr HAMPTON: No, not yet.

Mr ELFERINK: Hasn't that been completed for a while?

Mr ROSSINGH: The construction has been completed. We are going through the process of obtaining the Certificates of Occupancy. We believe they will be issued tomorrow by the Development Consent Authority.

Mr ELFERINK: How long since the construction has been completed to the obtaining of the Certificate of Occupancy?

Mr ROSSINGH: We will have to take that on notice. We do not know.

Mr ELFERINK: Was there not a previous building or something existing on the site? A construction somehow incorporated an older building, is that correct?

Mr ROSSINGH: Yes, member for Port Darwin, that is correct. There was an original club house constructed in around 2006-07 which has been incorporated into the new design. Certificates of Occupancy have been required for both the new construction and the existing construction. It is an asset which is owned by CDU, and it has been CDU's responsibility to obtain the initial Certificate of Occupancy.

Mr ELFERINK: Just bear with me. A building built in 2006 has been the Palmerston Magpies' home for six years now. If I understand you correctly, that building has not had a Certificate of Occupancy for six years. Is that correct?

Mr ROSSINGH: Yes, that is correct.

Mr ELFERINK: When did this issue come to light and what has been the response from – did you say CDU has management and control of it?

Mr ROSSINGH: The asset was constructed on CDU land so the asset is their responsibility.

Mr ELFERINK: Who built it?

Mr ROSSINGH: It is my understanding – it was before my time in the role – there was a grant provided to CDU to construct it.

Mr ELFERINK: So I am fully clear on this. A blob of money is given to CDU. It said: 'We need to build this for the Palmerston Magpies'. This money is given to CDU and the Northern Territory government has no more to do with it. It is CDU's responsibility at that point onwards. Is that correct?

Mr ROSSINGH: There is documentation. There were discussions with CDU regarding their responsibility to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy. They took steps, so it is probably not quite correct to say the government provides the funds and walks away. Ultimately, the owner of the asset has responsibility for the asset.

Mr ELFERINK: As a government, you would expect a building constructed as a result of a grant given by government - as part of the acquittal process you would get some notification from CDU that the grant had been expended in accordance with the instructions given by government. Would that be a fair way to describe how the system works?

Mr ROSSINGH: Generally, yes.

Mr ELFERINK: As part of that acquittal process, there would be a requirement that the grant is acquitted at a point along the way - when the keys are swinging in the door, when you get your final engineer's report or your building inspector's report, or when you get your Certificate of Occupancy. In the case of the building in 2006, at what point was that acquittal given? If it was after the Certificate of Occupancy, do you know why the department did not pick it up at the time?

Mr ROSSINGH: No, I cannot answer that. I was not in the role at the time. I am sure there is documentation as to what the process was.

Mr ELFERINK: May we place that question on notice, Mr Chairman?

Question on Notice No 7.20

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you like to phrase that as a question, member for Port Darwin?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. Minister, with regard to the 2006 building for the Palmerston Magpies, at what point was the grant determined to have been fully acquitted? Was it at the point of issuing the Certificate of Occupancy? If not, why not? If it was at the Certificate of Occupancy stage, why was it not discovered the Certificate of Occupancy was not issued in 2006?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.20.

Mr ELFERINK: Minister, has any person, to your knowledge or to your department's knowledge, ever suffered any form of injury in or around that building during 2006 and today?

Mr HAMPTON: We will have to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.21

Mr ELFERINK: If I may, minister, a question on notice? Has any person suffered any form of injury in that building between 2006 and today - and to quality - attributable to the construction of the building?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.21.

Mr HAMPTON: We will have to confirm when that building was built. I am not sure whether it was 2006. We will clarify that.

Mr ELFERINK: I realise you guys are winging it a bit here, and I am not going to be too pedantic. It concerns me you have had a football team operating out of a facility - the Palmerston Magpies have been operating out of a facility which does not have a Certificate of Occupancy, and that has been the case for about six years. It is only now we discovered the Certificate of Occupancy is going to be issued tomorrow.

Mr WOOD: Does that mean the Magpies lose all their points over the last six years and any premierships? Bit like Melbourne Storm

Mr HAMPTON: Only those you umpired.

Mr WOOD: I got dressed in that building which did not have a Certificate of Occupancy.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You took your life in your hands, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: I realise it is nearly 10.30 pm, so I may as well finish this line of questioning. Was the building the property of CDU after this process was completed?

Mr ROSSINGH: After, before and during.

Mr ELFERINK: The building was at all stages - there was not a leasing arrangement or anything else in that time? It was exclusively the property of the CDU and then Palmerston Magpies housed themselves there as part of some arrangement?

Mr ROSSINGH: That is right. The difference between ownership and occupancy, but, yes.

Mr ELFERINK: No leasing arrangement in place between the Magpies and CDU, you are aware of? Was it just a handshake deal?

Mr ROSSINGH: No, there is a lease. There is an occupancy arrangement.

Mr ELFERINK: There is a lease. Palmerston Magpies Inc has a lease with CDU over a building that has not had a Certificate of Occupancy for six years?

Mr ROSSINGH: Yes, that is correct.

Mr WOOD: Mr Chairman, a point of order! Could I say to Mr Grant, if I have offended you in any way, I apologise. I want to make it clear. That will not be being boisterous, but it was not personal; it was about something I am passionate about.

Mr GRANT: Not at all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Port Darwin has made you paranoid, member for Nelson.

Mr HAMPTON: You owe him a can of Coke Zero.

Mr GRANT: Absolutely, not at all. I have had far worse things said about me in this job, I can tell you.

Mr WOOD: All right. Thanks.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It being 10.30 pm, that concludes our time, minister. Thank you for coming along, and thank you to all the witnesses who came along today as well. Thank you also to all the witnesses who came along today but were not called up.

The committee suspended.
