

The Estimates Committee convened at 8 am.

**Mr CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Estimates Committee hearing for Thursday 10 December 2020.

I acknowledge that we gather this morning on the land of the Larrakia people and pay my respects to the elders past and present.

I remind everybody that we have a COVID-19 safety plan. The Litchfield Room has a limit of 20 persons. There are 16 seats in here, which means there is opportunity for media to attend. The COVID safety plan was approved by the Chief Health Officer.

It is important that each question on notice is given a number. At times I will interrupt whenever a question is taken on notice to ensure this occurs. I may also interrupt when answers are given by a minister to clarify the question number it refers to.

## **MINISTER PAECH'S PORTFOLIOS**

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

#### **DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET**

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister Paech, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and note that the responsibility for Local Government sits within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; however, questions for the Minister for Local Government will now be answered.

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

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

**Mr PAECH:** Mr Chair, I, too, acknowledge the Larrakia people, whose land we meet on today for the estimates session, and pay my respects to their elders past and present and their emerging leaders.

I begin by making a brief statement and thank the Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development. With me, on my left, is Maree De Lacey, who is the Executive Director of Local Government and Community Development. On my right is Andrew Cowan, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Chief Minister and Cabinet. Lee Williams from the department in the policy and legislation area is also with us today.

The recent machinery of government changes have resulted in the Local Government and Community Development division transferring over to Chief Minister and Cabinet. The Local Government portfolio regulates and supports the local government to strengthen sustainability, governance and performance. The *Local Government Act 2008* enables councils to play a broad role in promoting the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of their local communities.

Around two-thirds of elected members in the Territory's regional councils are Aboriginal men and women elected by their local communities. Local government is one of the Territory's biggest regional employers. There are 67 local authorities, with over 750 nominated by their communities, that support proactive engagement between councils and local communities. The local government sector is an important partner in the Northern Territory Government's commitment to local decision-making through its locally elected representatives, local service provisions and jobs.

A significant body of work is being delivered by the government under this portfolio. I am pleased to outline some of those priorities.

The Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy has been reviewed and refreshed as part of our focus on local decision-making and good engagement between government and remote communities. Aligned with

the strategy, in August this year the BushTel site hit a milestone, with over 50,000 unique users accessing the remote community information site since its launch in 2017.

The Local Government Act 2019 will commence on 1 July 2021. This new act, provides for a contemporary framework for good governance, transparency and local decision-making. Chief Minister and Cabinet is consulting with councils in the drafting of regulations and guidelines and providing sample policies, information and assistance in preparation for commencement of the act on 1 July 2021.

Six million dollars is available in 2020–21 under two new grant programs. These grants will replenish a portion of rates revenues for those councils who have provided commercial rate relief for businesses in hardship as a result of COVID-19 and support priority infrastructure projects across those councils.

The Northern Territory Government has allocated over \$51m for local government grants in 2020–21. These funds support council operations, local authority projects and other local priorities. The local government council elections are scheduled for August 2021. My team is working with the Northern Territory Electoral Commission, the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory and councils, with a focus on promoting community information about the role of local government and what it means to nominate for elections as a councillor, mayor or president, promoting the importance of voting.

I thank everyone involved in supporting the progress and developing these key priority areas in the Northern Territory. Mr Chair, we are happy to take questions in relation to the statement and then through the outputs.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any questions relating to the statement?

**Mr SLOAN:** Minister, thank you for your opening address. I thank the department for all the work that has been carried out this year. I know from this side, we look forward to working with you over the next four years.

In this year's budget for 2020–21, there is only one output for local government. In previous years, there have been several output groups. Is there a reason for this change?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, as part of the machinery of government changes, we have Output 1.1. That is Regional Coordination, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs. I am happy to refer to the deputy chief executive in relation to why there is only one output but you will note in that output, there are a range of subsections.

**Mr COWAN:** That is correct. With the machinery of government changes we have had a couple of outputs that have come into our department. We have the Local Government portfolio, alongside the Aboriginal Interpreter Services and the community development portfolio. One of the changes we have made to better support regional and remote Territorians, and all Territorians around this tier of government, is to put those different portfolio responsibilities into one output group, which is Regional Coordination, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs.

For the 2020–21 budget, the total output there is \$166.658m for that output group. We feel that we are very well placed to deliver on government's priorities across the Territory having those different portfolios come together, which gives us a greater reach across the Territory and improves coordination.

**Mr SLOAN:** Can you provide me the actual expenses in 2019–20 for the housing services delivery output, the Remote Program Delivery Office, community services, local government and community development, corporate and governance and shared services received?

**Mr PAECH:** Those questions are better left for Remote Housing as they pertain to the budget expenditure there. I am happy to respond to those questions when I have the relevant department with me.

**Mr SLOAN:** As you said before, there has been restructure of the outputs to accommodate the change of machinery of government. The \$166m is a substantial output. Can you please provide an overview of what this output covers, what previous budget lines are incorporated, and what were the actual expenditures for these budgets in 2019-20?

**Mr PAECH:** In relation to the \$166.65m, that includes the regional coordination, the local government and Aboriginal Affairs, which sits with Minister Uibo. I have carriage over local government and the regional coordination, which has developed the regional coordination strategy. The local government portion is \$51m. I am happy to refer over to our relevant departmental staff to respond to your questions in relation to the finances.

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** Good morning. The budget that is included in the 2020-21 for the local government portfolio is \$59.57m, and that comprises of employee and operating costs. The largest component is a grant, \$52.2m, as the minister announced in his opening statement. The majority of this goes to the local government sector. The actual expenditure incurred in 2019–20 was \$62.03m, of which \$54.5m was grants.

**Mr SLOAN:** What does this output cover in terms of staff, infrastructure and services?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** We do not have any direct expenditure for infrastructure, but we did have an infrastructure grant program a couple of years ago. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, \$7.1m was provided to local government councils under a scale program, the strategic local employment and community development grant. That was provided to the local government sector for any kind of initiative to help with COVID-19 and it would include any kind of infrastructure expenditure. As far as the department is concerned, we do not have infrastructure expenditure per se.

**Mr SLOAN:** Going through your budgetary information on page 129 of your annual report, employee expenses for 2019–20 accounting period show an increase of \$17.3m—just over \$350,000 a week. In the notes it mentions it being a structural deficiency due to Commonwealth agreements. Can you expand on that?

**Mr PAECH:** Those figures will be for the whole department. If you request further information I will pass to Meeta. Essentially, the figures referenced are for the whole department, being Chief Minister and Cabinet. The numbers you are quoting are the previous department of local government, housing and community services. As a machinery government change that has come over. We can obtain information about local government, but that would be much smaller.

**Mr SLOAN:** Can you tell me what the difference is employee expenses in 2019–20 for local government?

**Mr PAECH:** I will go to Ms Ramkumar and she will respond to your question.

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** The total employee expenses for the previous financial year for the local government division was \$5.67m.

**Mr SLOAN:** That was the actual?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** Yes.

**Mr SLOAN:** What was the budget?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** I will have to take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.1

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

**Mr SLOAN:** For the 2019–20 financial year, can you tell me what the actual and the budgeted employee expenses were?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 7.1.

**Mr SLOAN:** On the same statement item—I am sure you will give the same answer—it appears there is an increase in expenditure of administrative expenses of \$29m. Can you explain that?

**Mr PAECH:** Again, that will be a similar position. It was the previous department figure. We are happy to take that on notice to provide additional information.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.2

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

**Mr SLOAN:** In the annual report on page 129, it appears there is an increase in expenditure for administrative expenses of \$29m. Can you explain that?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 7.2.

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**Mr SLOAN:** In that case, can you supply me the actual and budgeted figures for administrative expenses for local government in 2019–20?

**Mr PAECH:** I am happy to ask Meeta to respond.

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** The actual expenditure for the local government division for purchases of goods and services was \$1.14m for the last financial year. For the budget I would have to take that on notice.

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#### **Question on Notice No 7.3**

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

**Mr SLOAN:** Following on from page 129 of the annual report, can I request the actual and government figures for local government for administrative expenses?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 7.3.

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**Mr SLOAN:** Can you tell me the employee expenses for July to September for local government for the year 2020?

**Mr PAECH:** No reports have been done because that is part of the machinery of government changes.

**Mr SLOAN:** Do you not know what you have spent in wages in the first three months of this financial year?

**Mr PAECH:** We would have that information, but there is not a report done to highlight those areas. We are happy to take it on notice.

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#### **Question on Notice No 7.4**

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

**Mr SLOAN:** Can you tell me the actual employee expenses for the July–September quarter for 2020?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 7.4.

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**Mr SLOAN:** On page 129, current grants have reduced by \$90m in the 2019–20 budget. The original budget was \$260.994m, actual was \$170.835m. Can you explain the difference in these two figures of \$90.159m?

**Mr PAECH:** The question you asked relates to the previous department. In terms of the local government agency and our grants, from 2019–20 onwards a 3% efficiency dividend has been applied to all categories of expenditure in the budget, including on all grants for the first time.

**Mr SLOAN:** Would you have those figures for local government?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, we do have those figures. I will ask Meeta to provide you with those figures.

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** The local government grants budget from 2019–20 was \$52.5m. For 2020–21 it is \$52.2m.

**Mr SLOAN:** That was the budget?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** Yes.

**Mr SLOAN:** Do you have an actual figure for 2019–20?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** For 2019–20, the actual expenditure was \$54.5m.

**Mr SLOAN:** Can you explain where the other \$2m came from?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** Yes. We had unspent funding from councils relating to prior-year funds which we consolidated and reinvested into the COVID-19 council support package. That money was recovered from councils from prior year unspent funding and redistributed back to the local government sector, which is why there is a difference between budget and actuals.

**Mr SLOAN:** What will the 3% reduction in grants mean for those affected?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** There is minimal impact for the local government sector. What has happened with the 3% efficiency dividend is that in previous years the local government grants budget was actually escalated through parameter adjustments through the Northern Territory's budget process. When the 3% CPI was adjusted on our budget the impact was minimal, which is why there is a difference. The budget goes from \$52.5m down to \$52.2m because we were able to absorb the cuts through prior increases to our grants budget.

**Mr SLOAN:** On page 129, on the income side, we have a 2019–20 budget of \$30,000 and actual income was \$6.5m. What was that other income?

**Mr PAECH:** We are happy to take that question on notice; however, that is a question that would best be directed to the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.5

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

**Mr SLOAN:** In the annual report on page 129, on the income side of the statement, there is an additional \$6.5m income. Where has this come from?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes. But I acknowledge that it is best directed to the broader agency, as it relates to a previous department.

**Mr CHAIR:** The broader agency being Minister Worden's?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 7.5.

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**Mr SLOAN:** Again, on page 129—I am sorry to keep dragging this up—on the expenses side, other administrative expenses you had a budget of \$10.592m. Your actual expenses were \$28.972m. That is a difference of \$18.380m. Can you explain the difference in these expenses?

**Mr PAECH:** Again, that question is best directed to the broader agency of Territory Families, so I encourage you to ask that question later on today when you have the relevant minister before you.

**Mr SLOAN:** In that case, in the local government area, what were your other administrative expenses in 2019–20 and what were your actual administrative expenses in 2019–20?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** There was \$650,000 recorded as an administrative expense for 2019–20 and that related to an accounting adjustment for a loan that was provided to one of the councils back in 2008. It was just to correct an accounting adjustment, but there was no actual expenditure. It was not a cash expense.

**Mr SLOAN:** Can I ask which council that was?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** It was Tiwi Islands Regional Council.

**Mr SLOAN:** What was the purpose of that loan?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** Back in 2008 when the shires reform came into place, the previous council, the Tiwi Islands Local Government Council, which was converted to the shire council, was in financial disarray. A million-dollar loan was provided to the council at that time. It was an interest-free loan and repayment was subject to how they were faring financially. This is the balance of the loan and it is an accounting adjustment.

**Mr SLOAN:** So it has been written off?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** No. It has not been written off. We are adamant that we will not write it off and the council is taking measures to find ways to repay the loan.

**Mr SLOAN:** How much was the original loan?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** A million dollars.

**Mr SLOAN:** I have a few questions regarding the one-off grants on page 29 of the annual report. LGANT was awarded a grant of \$100,000 to host two institute of directors courses. Can you advise how many attended these events and how many people completed the courses?

**Mr PAECH:** That is quite a detailed question so I am happy to take that on notice and work with LGANT and the agency to understand those particular numbers.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.6

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

**Mr SLOAN:** On page 29 of the annual report, LGANT was awarded a grant of \$100,000 to host two institute of directors courses. How many attended these events and how many people completed the courses?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, we accept the question.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly is allocated the number 7.6.

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**Mr SLOAN:** Also on page 29 of the annual report, a grant was awarded to Belyuen council for \$67,500 for the purposes of engaging a consultant to address the issues identified in the report titled *Business Case and Process Review February 2020*. Can you expand on what the issues were and is this a publicly available document?

**Mr PAECH:** In relation to that expenditure, that grant was provided so we could work with that particular area to understand the finances and how that would affect any possible discussions moving forward around the future of local government in that area. I am happy if you require further detail or analysis to go to Meeta Ramkumar to provide any further additional information.

**Mr SLOAN:** That would be great. Can you tell me who the consultant was and if there was an outcome from the report?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** The consultant was Ms Catheryn Hutton. She was engaged directly by the council to identify areas where the council needed assistance. This included a range of governance arrangements. Belyuen council runs a shop at the moment and has a workshop. It was to assist the council in understanding the financial systems to see if there were better ways to help the council improve its financial management and governance practices.

**Mr SLOAN:** This is following from when it came out of administration?

**Ms RAMKUMAR:** No. When the council came out of official management—it is unrelated to that.

**Mr SLOAN:** Thank you. Can you advise what grants were available to local government during COVID?

**Mr PAECH:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, a one-off \$6m support package is available in 2020–21. In 2019–20 all councils adopted a public benefit concession policy for commercial ratepayers. The policy is a consistent approach by councils for commercial rate paying for those experiencing financial hardship. Under that policy councils agreed to provide a 25% rate concession for a ratepayer and deferral for commercial ratepayers facing financial hardship as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In return for adopting the policy and providing the commercial rate concession, councils will be entitled to funding to replenish a portion of the concession provided to the commercial ratepayer in 2020–21. The package provides two grant programs. The first grant for 2020–21 is the Commercial Rate Replenishment program and the second being the Local Government Priority Infrastructure Fund.

**Mr SLOAN:** Were any grants available during 2019–20?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes. The SCALE grant funding program, which is the Special Community Assistance and Local Employment program. It was \$7.1m.

**Mr SLOAN:** How many grants were issued in the 2019–20 financial year?

**Mr PAECH:** Under the SCALE program?

**Mr SLOAN:** Yes.

**Mr PAECH:** I can confirm that every council received a grant under the Special Community Assistance and Local Employment program.

**Mr SLOAN:** You might have to take this on notice, but can you advise how much was awarded to each council?

**Mr PAECH:** I will go to Ms De Lacey to respond.

**Ms DE LACEY:** We have those figures which I can read out to you.

Of the \$7.1m that was allocated across the Territory:

- Alice Springs Town Council received \$761,200
- Barkly Regional Council received \$491,900
- Belyuen Community Government Council received \$100,000
- Central Desert Regional Council received \$369,700
- City of Darwin received \$300,000
- City of Palmerston received \$743,700
- Coomalie Community Government Council received \$128,700

- East Arnhem Regional Council received \$345,200
- Katherine Town Council received \$639,000
- Litchfield Council received \$560,700
- MacDonnell Council received \$377,000
- Roper Gulf Regional Council received \$398,400
- Tiwi Islands Regional Council received \$533,600
- Victoria Daly Regional Council received \$536,100
- Wagait Shire Council received \$100,000
- West Arnhem Regional Council received \$349,500
- West Daly Regional Council received \$365,300.

**Mr SLOAN:** How did you determine each of those amounts? Is there a formula?

**Ms DE LACEY:** This needed to be pulled together really quickly. As you would appreciate, the COVID-19 pandemic created the need to respond quickly. We applied a formula; we basically used the same formula as the operational subsidies, the Commonwealth Government funding, based on dispersal, population, distances and those types of factors.

In addition to that, we also looked at the current financial status of each local government and applied a vulnerability assessment. These amounts were worked up in consultation with LGANT as well.

**Mr SLOAN:** During COVID, how many local councils offered rate relief to residents?

**Mr PAECH:** We do not have the figures on that concession. The Northern Territory Government's priority was working with the local government sector on the commercial rate relief program. We are aware that many regional councils and local government councils across the Territory have offered a zero rate increase as a mechanism, and we have those numbers. But in regard to your question, that information has not been provided to us by those local government entities.

**Mr SLOAN:** Did any councils increase their rates this year?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr SLOAN:** Which ones?

**Mr PAECH:** We would have to take that on notice, but I can confirm that a few councils have had a rate increase. But a large majority of councils across the Northern Territory have had zero increase this financial year.

**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome, Member for Barkly. I had you on my mind.

**Mr SLOAN:** You had him on your mind, did you?

**Mr CHAIR:** I do not want to make a thing about people being late for my meetings, but the member was late.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I was not late.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Daly, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr SLOAN:** My question is, who in this room has the best tie?

**Mr PAECH:** Me, without a doubt.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I think it is the Member for Barkly.



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**Question on Notice No 7.7**

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Daly, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr SLOAN:** Did any councils increase their rates in the year 2019–20? Can you advise which ones?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly is allocated the number 7.7.

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**Mr SLOAN:** An amended *Cemeteries Act* which was proposed in 2019 did not go ahead. Can you advise the reason for this?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes. I am happy to. I will just say, it is broken into two parts. There is the Burial and Cremation Bill, which was put before the House, and the *Cemeteries Act 1952*, which is the current legislation. Do your questions pertain to the proposed bill which was before the House?

**Mr SLOAN:** Yes.

**Mr PAECH:** I will just clarify that the current legislation in place is the *Cemeteries Act 1952*. The Northern Territory Government put forward the Burial and Cremation Bill in the Legislative Assembly. That bill was proposed to ensure that human remains were treated with dignity and respect; to accommodate different practices for and regarding beliefs, traditions and customs with burials; and to regulate cemeteries and the burial of human remains and crematorium facilities throughout the Northern Territory.

The bill sought to repeal the *Cemeteries Act 1952* and on 27 November in response to some concern from Territorians how the bill related to customary decision-making on Aboriginal land the bill was withdrawn from the Legislative Assembly.

Although the intent of the bill plan was to support traditional burials in recognition of cemeteries on Aboriginal land concerns were raised that the offence for burying outside a cemetery without approval had an increased penalty in the bill compared to the current act. An offence of burying outside a cemetery without approval is already in place in the act. The offence was carried over to the bill to ensure that burials did not occur without a certificate from a medical practitioner or coroner in relation to the death, and that the burials outside of recognised cemeteries did not occur without the permission of the next of kin or the relevant landowner—in particular cases in the Northern Territory around the land trust, making sure there was consent from the land trust for that loved one to be buried there.

The increased penalty was the result of aligning the penalty amount with relevant offences across the Northern Territory statute book, and following the withdrawal of the bill, the government has adopted a community-led approach in relation to further engagement. It is our intention to be back out consulting with the four land councils with remote communities and with stakeholders in our larger regional towns across the Northern Territory to work through those issues and concerns.

It is our intention to bring this bill back before the Legislative Assembly this term, making sure that it is culturally appropriate and recognises Aboriginal people and customary traditions. I am a big supporter in representing the Aboriginal kinship system in relation to the next of kin around the authorised approvals.

We will work with all Members of the Legislative Assembly, stakeholders and so forth to make sure that those questions are answered. Ensuring that we get this bill to the parliament and addressed is a priority because the main benefits of this bill are to recognise and respect Aboriginal practices and traditions, and provide traditional owners with authority over burial grounds and cemeteries on Aboriginal lands. I have asked that 'burial grounds' is considered in the terminology in the bill because that is more appropriate than 'cemetery' for some people.

Allowing local decision-making in relation to cemetery management is a very important issue. Across the Northern Territory in our larger remote communities, it is usually local governments that have responsibility

for those cemeteries, but this bill allows for conversations to happen around cemetery management moving forward, and also improve and streamline rules relating to burial, cremation, cemeteries and burial grounds to best support regional communities.

We recognise that under the current law, only cemeteries on Crown land are recognised. This means cemeteries in regional and remote communities that are located on Aboriginal land are currently not recognised and we understand that needs to change and is a component of that bill. Are there any further questions in relation to the bill, Member for Daly?

**Mr SLOAN:** No, thank you. I think you have covered that.

**Mr PAECH:** I will note as well, the *Cemeteries Act 1952* was introduced before the Northern Territory had self-government. It is an old piece of legislation, is not relevant and is not best practice. It is our intention to work with the opposition and Independent members of the parliament to hear the concerns from your communities. This legislation needs to change and, if done right, it will benefit our remote Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

**Mr SLOAN:** Thank you, minister, and I am sure we support getting that happening in this Assembly. Who is responsible for the morgues in the Northern Territory? Is that local government?

**Mr PAECH:** As a remote member, I understand the areas these questions fit. Currently, morgues are with the Department of Health in remote communities and they are usually based—if there is a morgue in a remote community, it would be either connected to or in the precinct of the remote health clinic.

**Mr SLOAN:** Any funding for morgues will come from health?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr SLOAN:** I think you have already answered this question, but I will ask it. The Local Government Act was passed in November 2019. When should it be expected to commence?

**Mr PAECH:** I am happy to talk more on the Local Government Act.

**Mr CHAIR:** I will advise members on the tie question. The Member for Barkly is currently the winner of the best tie today and the minister is second—I have been advised from ‘high’ above.

**Mr PAECH:** I can accept that. I think that tie is from my electorate anyway.

**Mr SLOAN:** I would like to put on the record that I dispute that decision.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Daly, I am sorry but my wife has made that decision.

**Mr SLOAN:** Mr Cowan’s tie is beautiful, too.

**Mr PAECH:** The new Local Government Act comes into effect on 1 July 2021. This has been a result of thorough consultation with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, with local governments across the Northern Territory.

There are some particular highlights that I would like to make mention of. The new regulations and ministerial guidelines to complement the act are currently being drafted, and that is in consultation with the relevant sector. The key changes under the Local Government Act 2019 include strengthening local decision-making; requiring councils to work more closely with local authorities to make it easier for local authorities to make quorum; an independent committee to review council wards and other electoral arrangements for councils; and a clear process for councils to deal with Code of Conduct complaints against council members.

Another feature of the Local Government Act is mandatory training for all elected members. That mandatory training component is being worked on at the moment, whether that is a two-day session for local governments to come together—that is a package that is being developed. We will work in with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory to understand what level of training is required and what the baseline requirements are in terms of good governance practices for local government. We welcome those conversations. The feedback we have had from people in the sector is that they would very much appreciate that level of training.

**Mr SLOAN:** Has there been a cost to the budget implementing this legislation?

**Mr PAECH:** No, that is within our existing budgets.

**Mr SLOAN:** What do you expect the dollar saving to be for the Northern Territory Government with the commencement of this legislation?

**Mr PAECH:** At this stage, in terms of the Local Government Act 2019, it is not anticipated that there will be budget savings. This measure was introduced to the Legislative Assembly to provide a framework to implement good governance practices. To recognise and make it streamlined for local authorities to have a greater say and be more involved and recognised, to bring in the new mechanism in which we work through in local government when complaints arise.

This is a mechanism that has been introduced—more about good governance frameworks than cost savings.

**Mr SLOAN:** When you say streamlining, that does not include financial streamlining, just regulatory?

**Mr PAECH:** Of course, in everything we do, we look at from a good governance perspective. Our officers are working all the time with our local governments on how to enhance financial management practices, but this bill was introduced and passed to ensure that there was a quality governance framework introduced.

**Mr SLOAN:** Is there a mechanism to monitor the performance of local authorities? Does the department set KPIs, and who is responsible for this?

**Mr PAECH:** Our agency, Local Government, does not set KPIs for local authorities. That is an arrangement that is done internally for some regional councils and their local authority. Of course, we have a compliance team within the agency. If there were matters raised by a member of the local authority, the public or the local government in that area, we could then become involved, but we do not set KPIs for local authorities.

**Mr SLOAN:** How many people are in that compliance team?

**Mr PAECH:** We have 10.

**Mr SLOAN:** In the 2019–20 financial year, how many complaints were made to the compliance team?

**Mr PAECH:** We are happy to take that question on notice, but it would depend on what you define as a complaint. Many things come through the agency, so I am curious, to what extent would you define a complaint? Is that referred to a complaints tribunal?

**Mr SLOAN:** Yes, please.

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#### **Question on Notice No 7.8**

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

**Mr SLOAN:** In the 2019–20 financial year, how many complaints were referred to the compliance team?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly is allocated the number 7.8.

**Mr SLOAN:** Are all the councils regularly holding meetings at the moment?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr SLOAN:** Have any councils in the 2019–20 financial year failed to meet?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, they would have all met.

**Mr SLOAN:** Just a quick question in regard to Southport, the ‘dead man’s blocks’ at Southport were sold to recoup the outstanding rates owed to Litchfield Council. It is my understanding that the surplus funds were returned to the Northern Territory Government. Should this money have been used to commence improving infrastructure in Southport?

**Mr PAECH:** I will take that question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 7.9**

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

**Mr SLOAN:** In 2015, the ‘dead man’s blocks’ at Southport were sold to recoup the outstanding rates owed to Litchfield Council. It is my understanding that the surplus funds were returned to the Northern Territory Government. Why was this money not used to improve infrastructure in Southport?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly is allocated the number 7.9.

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**Mr SLOAN:** Following the issues at Southport last year, where residents had to cart water to their properties from alternative sources, has any preparation been carried out to form a long-term solution for this issue?

**Mr PAECH:** In relation to the Southport area, I am happy to take that question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 7.10**

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Daly, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr SLOAN:** Following the issues at Southport last year, where residents had to cart water to their properties from alternative sources, has any preparation been carried out to form a long-term solution for this issue?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Daly is allocated the number 7.10.

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**Mr SLOAN:** Has any costing been done in regard to bringing town water to Southport?

**Mr PAECH:** In relation to infrastructure relating to water in Southport, that would need to be responded to by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. We do not take carriage of those infrastructure projects.

**Mr SLOAN:** Is it possible that the money from the sale of the blocks at Southport could go towards establishing a water supply from the existing bore to existing houses, which could then connect to a future town water supply?

**Mr PAECH:** Again, that is best directed to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. They would have the opportunity to do the design briefs and understand the true cost involved.

**Mr SLOAN:** If Groote Eylandt were to separate from East Arnhem Council, what would be the economic impact?

**Mr PAECH:** The Groote Archipelago is before a local decision-making process. There is currently a transition committee and an implementation plan. On that committee is the Anindilyakwa Land Council, the East Arnhem Regional Council and representation from the Northern Territory Government’s agency of Local Government. Through that outcomes we are working to understand what would be involved if a possible de-

amalgamation of those areas were to exist. Those committees and that plan will articulate what the spend would be in regard to the separation and the ongoing sustainability of both councils—to truly understand that cost.

That work is being undertaken at the moment and all parties are engaged in that process. No decision has been made. Once that is finalised it will go to Cabinet and a decision will be made.

**Mr SLOAN:** Do you know the reason for the proposed separation?

**Mr PAECH:** Certainly. Upon the local decision-making agreement there is a view that many on Groote Eylandt feel that they would be best served if the Groote Archipelago were to form its own regional council and the East Arnhem Regional Council became a Yolngu council. That is part of the decisions they have put forward and why they wanted to explore it further in regard to service.

It is a view put forward by many on Groote Eylandt that if they had their own regional council they would have resources and infrastructure on the island, which would grow the capacity of the local government area.

I want to stress that at this point, no decision has been made. We will continue working with the Groote Eylandt Archipelago, the Anindilyakwa Land Council and the East Arnhem Regional Council. All parties involved will engage in joint consultations in all areas to make sure we know how the communities feel. This is about ensuring there is financial sustainability moving forward which can be supported through the federal government and the NT Government.

**Mr SLOAN:** Are you aware of any other councils that wish to separate or amalgamate?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes. The Coomalie and Belyuen councils are exploring options to amalgamate into a larger regional council structure. Three shire councils—Belyuen, Coomalie and Wagait—face sustainability issues and are experiencing resourcing challenges due to their relative isolation and small populations. The nearby unincorporated areas, such as Dundee, have communities with smaller resident populations. It is important to see solutions that accommodate the aspirations of those communities.

The Belyuen and Coomalie councils have indicated the desire for a sustainable regional council structure that reflects the shared and unique aspirations of their communities. At this point in time the Wagait Shire Council does not want to be included, but we are progressing conversations in relation to an amalgamation proposal with interested parties.

Chief Minister and Cabinet officers have provided advice in meetings regarding the Belyuen and Coomalie councils to support their approach. This is a council-led process and any affected communities will have an opportunity to have a say in what the proposed structure looks like. This is a community-led initiative and we will continue to provide support where necessary for the ongoing conversations depicting what it will look like in the future.

**Mr SLOAN:** But there will be a consultation period?

**Mr PAECH:** Absolutely.

**Mr SLOAN:** You mentioned Dundee in there, is there a plan to join that into the new council?

**Mr PAECH:** We are happy to facilitate those conversations. At this stage is priority is to work with Coomalie and Belyuen councils to come up with a sustainable council structure that suits the needs of the councils and is in the best interest of the people in the area. Throughout all stages we will perform thorough consultation to seek the input and aspirations of the people in those local government areas.

**Mr SLOAN:** Would you have a budget set aside for the consultation process?

**Mr PAECH:** It will be done within the existing budgetary allocation. We will work with the regional shire councils on what the consultation will look like to understand what costs are incurred with the process.

**Mr SLOAN:** What has been the Northern Territory's contribution to the Barkly Regional Deal to date?

**Mr PAECH:** Your question needs to be directed to the previous portfolio holder, Minister Uibo. The Barkly Regional Deal is a question for that agency.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Minister, under the Local Government Act you mentioned there would be mandatory training for councillors. Will that be funded by government or is an expectation that councils will meet those costs?

**Mr PAECH:** We are still working through what the mandatory training components will be. It is our intention that we would like to see something that is possibly jointly funded, but at this stage that will be a result of consultation around the capacity of regional councils to deliver that training. We are working on that with LGANT to make sure we understand what the needs are and the depth of training and what the costs will be. We will work through in consultation with all the local government authorities.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Given that it is mandatory, has there been any thought to what the consequences may be for a councillor who may not participate in that training?

**Mr PAECH:** As a previous elected member on local government, I know that sometimes people do not like to comply. Those who do not would then be subject to a breach of the Code of Conduct and that could result in disciplinary hearings.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** In regard to training, local authorities play an important role in their communities—will the department fund any training for local authority members?

**Mr PAECH:** Certainly. At this stage, that is part of the work we are looking at in terms of the mandatory training for local government elected members. We are also looking at what that means for local authorities. We recognise that whilst they are not elected as elected councillors or aldermen, they do play an important role in our communities, contribute a lot of knowledge and have expertise.

We are working as an agency on what different levels of training will look like. At the moment, in line with the act, we are looking at what that looks like for elected members. Following the completion of that, we will begin a process with local government councils across the Northern Territory to look at what the development of a local authority training package looks like and what the key areas are to assist them better in their role at representing their local community.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** At one point there was a \$3.5m grant sitting with LGANT. Part of that grant was to assist Central Australia to establish a car-crushing facility to help with the removal of old car bodies from all of Central Australia and an opportunity to create jobs. Can you please tell us the status of that \$3.5m?

**Mr PAECH:** The \$3.5m was a previous process which the former Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development gave in-principle support and funding for to establish a working group in Central Australia for the scrap metal recycling project. I acknowledge the councils that were involved: the Barkly Regional Council; the MacDonnell Regional Council; and the Central Desert Regional Council.

There was funding for a project sourced—\$3.5m provided to the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory in 2017–18 to develop a range of initiatives or projects to support council in the broader areas of health, safety and security. I acknowledge that there was a significant volume of work undertaken by representatives from those three regional councils in relation to developing a business plan for the project, including the provision of additional information to ensure that governance arrangements were sufficient to safeguard the Northern Territory investment.

In 2019–20, the Northern Territory Government had arranged and approved budget measure strategies for the Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development. This included the return of the \$3.5m from LGANT and that was as a result of the findings from the Langouant review on how we implement budget repair.

It was originally intended in Central Australia for a vehicle and scrap metal recycling project to partially be funded from the \$3.5m grant that was provided to LGANT; however, the Northern Territory Government saving measures meant that this course of action was no longer possible. At that time the department considered alternative source funding for this project through the Strategic Local Government Infrastructure Fund or the Special Purpose Grant fund.

However, in this instance due to the current environment and the COVID-19 pandemic, the government repurposed all those grants to fund priority areas and that was focused on supporting our regional councils to save lives and protect jobs. As part of this, the Strategic Local Government Infrastructure Fund and Special Purpose Grants were repurposed for a funding support package, and that is part of some of the scale funding.

I can also confirm that government is still very much interested in supporting the three regional councils on this project. We acknowledge that there are ongoing issues. I acknowledge that there are a large number of regional and remote members in this room this morning on the Estimates Committee. We acknowledge that there is an ongoing issue with car bodies in remote communities and town camps. We are committed to continuing to work with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory and the three regional councils on sourcing alternative funding where appropriate to continue that work.

There was interest that accumulated with the Local Government of the Northern Territory Association. We have left that interest with them, with the purpose of them repurposing that to the benefit of local governments across the Northern Territory. We are committed to that project and we will work on sourcing alternative funding. We also acknowledge that with that volume of work we need to progress projects. A result of the three local governments coming together, a car-crushing machine would be set up a subsidiary entity.

We anticipate that that volume of work will take around six to 10 months to formalise. We will continue to support the three regional council in that process to formalise and set up a subsidiary if that is the desire of the three councils still. Once that is set up, we will then commence conversations around looking at alternative grant funding.

I acknowledge one of the issues that we explored with the regional councils, not all of them—but with a car-crushing machine, the technology that was looked at could not leave the bitumen because of the machinery and the mechanisms in place. It would require local councils to bring the car remains in to those regional centres for crushing or scrap metal.

We are continuing a larger volume of work this term to make sure that those regional councils have facilities in regional towns such as Alice Springs and Tennant Creek so that there is a depot where the remains could be held where the car-crusher is, because the car-crusher would be a mobile thing. Does that answer your question?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Yes, it does. Thank you, minister. The \$3.5m was used under the scale funding, is that correct?

**Mr PAECH:** No, that was returned to the broader agency.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Was any of that money committed to be used under the scale program?

**Mr PAECH:** No. The scale program was taken from within the existing grant programs that were provided. If you require further information in relation to the \$3.5m I would have to take that on notice, but what I can say is, the scale funding was taken from the existing grant programs. They were repurposed then that is where we saw the result of the scale program.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr SLOAN:** If I just go back to the morgue issue—sorry to bring the tone down. You said it falls under the parameters of Health, but it was in your budget and annual report last year. There was projected expenditure to construct and refurbish remote morgues of \$83,000 but only \$41,000 was spent. What was the money spent on and where it was spent?

**Mr PAECH:** That was a previous department. It has nothing in relation to local government. We ask that the question is directed to the next agency.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Minister, as you know, working in remote areas means that animal management is an important issue. Is there any funding allocated in this budget for animal management for remote regional councils?

**Mr PAECH:** Local government organisations that are looking to perform animal management practices can apply through the grant systems. This would usually come under Special Purpose Grants. I have met with people from AMRRIC who have raised concerns around animal management moving forward. It is something our agency is continuing to discuss.

Funding is accessible, typically through the two grant programs each year which are provided to local government. Animal management is a matter before local governments. They have the ability to set by-laws that outline animal management practices. This is the way it has been done. We acknowledge that previously

there has been a volume of work, referred to the 'dog act', which is no longer in existence. That mechanism was changed because the issues in an urban setting are different to those in a remote context.

We work within the by-laws and our agency is there to provide support where appropriate to regional councils in how they can develop by-laws for animal management.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** In regard to animal management, dogs are amongst the most common animal management issues. In the remote space, for example in the Barkly, we have horses, donkeys, cattle and cats. I am sure there are camels in your region.

Is there broader work under way between your department and any other government department to look at how these issues can be managed? There have been many occasions where road accidents have been caused by hitting animals. It puts people at risk—pedestrians, vehicles and trucks. Is there broader work under way?

**Mr PAECH:** As a bush member I share your understanding of the diversity of animals in the electorate. I have many homes which would have nanny goats or pigs. In terms of relevant legislation, it is a question that would sit with Minister Manison under the primary industry and agriculture portfolios. Last term we undertook work in relation to the *Animal Welfare Act*, which sets out provisions around the condition of animals and if there are problems with their welfare. It is a reportable matter and will be reported to the animal welfare team.

The Northern Territory Government works closely with our stakeholders, including the four land councils. Where land crosses an Aboriginal land trust we have to work with the trust and council regarding their animal management. This surrounds the provision of brumbies—horses—and cattle.

Those questions would relate to the portfolios under Minister Manison. Local government has the ability to set those matters—not just pertaining to dogs—and outline by-laws which could include any animal in the local government jurisdiction.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** It is an issue that affects many departments. Is your department involved in any further discussions across government and with councils to perhaps look at an overall animal management plan to deal with all of these issues?

**Mr PAECH:** When we work with regional councils, we encourage them or suggest to them that they explore the by-law provision. At the moment there are ongoing conversations. There is not a process that we are looking at for one particular piece of legislation for local government around animal management control. That is work that we would have to look into.

It would be a complex piece of work because it would tie in the municipals and the regionals. The issues are very different around what is allowed and what is not. We encourage regional councils to consider their by-laws in relation to that, where they can be quite particular, if they choose to be, about animal management control. Then they would also have the ability to regulate that process.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Are you and your department open to developing an animal management plan to deal with these issues?

**Mr PAECH:** We are willing to have a conversation with regional councils, municipals and the shires, particularly with LGANT. That is something we would need to have consultation on. As the Local Government minister, I have said to all of the local government councils that it is my intention to visit each of them to attend one of their ordinary meetings. If that is something being discussed at that level then I will bring it back to the agency and look at it further.

**Mr SLOAN:** In regard to waste management, Top Rock have identified a site for the emergency waste management site and are seeking a commitment from the Northern Territory Government to develop the site into a regional waste management facility. Will the government make a commitment to this project?

**Mr PAECH:** In relation to facilities, DIPL has the lead on that matter. I have had preliminary conversations with the relevant councils involved on the work that needs to be undertaken. We will meet with the working group to work through some of the issues and concerns, particularly waste management practices. One of the concerns that we need to look at is that with any area in the proposed site, we have to understand how far under the water table is so that we are not putting the water at risk.



DIPL is the lead agency on that and we are working with the three councils. There is a lot of excitement and momentum to establish this particular facility. I have given an undertaking to meet with them all again and to work with them on what the plan looks like. We will work with our government partner, which is DIPL.

**Mr SLOAN:** Who would be responsible for this site in the long term?

**Mr PAECH:** That is a conversation that we are working through. It would be with a local government entity. Whether that is the Litchfield, Palmerston or Darwin council, again that would be a conversation and would involve a volume of work around the site and which municipal boundary it would be in. I acknowledge that it would be a regional facility, so there would be an arrangement between those councils regarding the ongoing management and contributions that are made.

**Mr SLOAN:** Is there a time frame?

**Mr PAECH:** At this stage, there is no time frame. We need to make sure that we do it right. Of course, we acknowledge the sooner the better and that is what we will be continuing to work towards moving forward.

**Mr SLOAN:** Do you know what the life span of the current facility is at Shoal Bay?

**Mr PAECH:** I congratulate the City of Darwin on the enormous amount of work they have done at Shoal Bay to extend the life. They have taken up a whole range of recycling initiatives, particularly with scrap metals and bottles. They have extended the life. At the moment, the information we have is that the life of Shoal Bay is currently in excess of 20 years. I hope that answers your question.

**Mr SLOAN:** What is your policy in regard to unincorporated land?

**Mr PAECH:** I knew you would ask that. When we talk about unincorporated land across the Northern Territory, we are talking about various parcels of land that have been unincorporated for various reasons. We are also talking about areas such as Yulara, in the southern region; Nhulunbuy; and particularly the greater Darwin areas. Is it any particular area of unincorporated land?

**Mr SLOAN:** No, it was a very general question.

**Mr PAECH:** When we talk about unincorporated land, there is a variety of reasons that the land is unincorporated. As the Minister for Local Government, I believe everything we do should be revised and looked at. I am open to looking at unincorporated land if a volume of work needs to be undertaken—and why that land remains unincorporated.

My position is that people who own land and access services provided by local government should pay their share. Our regional, remote and shire councils do an outstanding job and, for them, many regional, remote and shire councils are pressed for rates. It is very hard for them as they have no rate base.

We will look at that moving forward; it is an important and responsible step to make sure there is equity across the board. Yulara and Nhulunbuy in particular are held as townships by a particular stakeholder, an entity, so they would have a different response. We have no intention, at this stage, to incorporate those townships. I am open to further exploring areas that are unincorporated where there is freehold land and people have secure tenure over.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I just want to go back to the special purpose grants. What is the overall funding allocation for the 2020–21 financial year?

**Mr PAECH:** In this financial year those two grant programs have been merged into one. That will consist of \$6m which will then result in two rounds of grant funding.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has any of that money been expended so far, given that we are in December.

**Mr PAECH:** Not to date, no.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** So, that \$6m will carry through until 30 June 2021?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes. I am sure it will go, though.

**Mr SLOAN:** Is part of your role as Minister for Local Government to represent local government in Cabinet?

**Mr PAECH:** As part of my portfolio, I represent all my portfolio areas and make sure the concerns of our regional, remote, shires and municipals are heard and that they have a strong advocate in me in the Cabinet room.

**Mr SLOAN:** Would you stand up for the Alice Springs Town Council in discussions regarding the compulsory acquisition of Anzac Hill Oval?

**Mr PAECH:** I am not sure if you are aware of the process, but in regard to compulsory land acquisition, that question should be directed to the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. In my responsibility as the Local Government minister, I acknowledge the work of the Alice Springs Town Council. The municipality of Alice Springs is a very well-looked-after municipality. In terms of the compulsory land acquisition, that sits with Minister Lawler.

Due to the compulsory acquisition process, there are legislative changes that would need to be done and there is a legal case before us. Minister Lawler would have carriage of that and I am not getting involved in the legal process. I will represent the interest of the Alice Springs Town Council across many of their concerns.

**Mr SLOAN:** Do you support the compulsory acquisition?

**Mr PAECH:** The compulsory acquisition is a petition of the Northern Territory Government, which I am part of.

**Mr SLOAN:** Do you support it?

**Mr PAECH:** I have answered the question.

**Mr TURNER:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Standing Order 109. He is asking the minister for an opinion.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** Minister, in your opening statement you touched on local decision-making—one thing dear to my heart across the Territory because many of our communities need to be engaged—working with them not doing things to them. How are you driving local decision-making through your ministerial position?

**Mr PAECH:** Local decision-making is very passionate to many people across the Northern Territory. Minister Uibo has carriage of local decision-making. Where a local decision-making agreement is in place, or the statement of intent for one—where that concerns local government we will be involved in those conversations. To date only one has progressed through to an implementation plan and resulted in a transition committee being set up—that is the Groote Archipelago local decision-making position on local government.

We will work across the board where communities come to place around local decision-making that has a component that relates to a local government service. We will work with the community and the local government entity in the area to make sure that we can progress forward in a positive, productive way that suits the community. That is the intent of local decision-making, to ensure that the community has the best chance and mechanisms moving forward to benefit that community.

**Mr YAN:** Following on from local decision-making, you stated the 67 local authorities that you are responsible for. Do you know how many local decision-making agreements have been implemented through those 67 authorities?

**Mr PAECH:** At the moment, the one that has progressed is the Groote Archipelago, which has resulted in an implementation plan and the transition committee.

At this stage there are no other councils that have had that position moving forward. Of the current 67 local authorities we work with, there is a position that if a community which does not have a local authority wants one, we will work with the local government entity in the area. If one is to be established, we will support that aspiration from the community. That will have an impact on that regional council's budget, because there is no additional budget allocations for new authorities. We will work with the existing budgets of those local governments.

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

**Mr CHAIR:** There being no further questions, the committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriate (2020–2021) Bill that relates to local government. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

### **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – ADVICE AND COORDINATION**

#### **Output 1.1 – Regional Coordination, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output Group 1.0, Advice and Coordination, Output 1.1, Regional Coordination, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs. Are there any questions?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** With the amalgamation of local government and the Department of the Chief Minister, can you explain how that will work regionally? Will there be one point of reference where all the staff will be reporting to the regional director?

**Mr PAECH:** With the machinery of government changes and local government coming to Chief Minister and Cabinet, there have been some changes across the board. I am confident in the machinery of government changes. I think it works best and strengthens local government. I will hand over to Andy Cowan, who can provide context in relation to regional area matters.

**Mr COWAN:** The intention with those portfolios coming together is that they will all report to the regional executive directors in our regional offices. There will be a strong connection back to the policy areas of local government. Existing staff in the regions who have existing roles will be continued in regard to the compliance functions. We will work closely with our leadership on policy and compliance areas from a local government perspective.

Having additional resources in regional offices will support improved outcomes with local authorities and local councils within the regions.

**Mr PAECH:** As part of these changes some staff are being moved around where appropriate. It is my intention to get out to even remote and regional shire council and municipal, attend an ordinary meeting, meet with staff of the agency and understand their challenges. We are taking positive steps to make sure this agency is best placed to serve local government across the Territory.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** At the grassroots level, are the staff in those regions and across the Territory involved in the design and input into the new structure of your department?

**Mr PAECH:** It is our intention to always engage with our staff to ensure the culture of the agency is positive. We need positive advocates working with the local councils. I will hand over to Andy Cowan to provide comments in relation to that process.

**Mr COWAN:** With our machinery of government changes—like all government agencies that have had significant changes—we have a change management process that we have been utilising. This is for our whole department in supporting the changes. We are engaging through appropriate channels such as through the EBAs with the unions and are currently working through the change of management process while having settled our regional structures. There has been engagement with all local staff, the Executive Director of Local Government and Community Development, and regional executive directors and their leadership teams across the regions.

We are still working through the processes to bed things down but have engaged with our staff through that process.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** That will create some efficiencies at a regional level. Will it result in any loss of jobs?

**Mr PAECH:** No. If members have concerns in relation to those services or in relation to local government, I urge you to please contact my ministry and we can work through those.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Through natural attrition, will all jobs be filled as they become vacant?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any further questions? That concludes the consideration of Output Group 1.0. Are there any non-output specific budget related questions?

There being no questions, the committee will now consider outputs relating to the minister's portfolios of Remote Housing and Town Camps, Indigenous Essential Services and Arts, Culture and Heritage. That means we will have a short break to allow for the staff change over.

**Mr PAECH:** Thank you, Mr Chair. I also thank the department staff who have been with me today to provide answers to questions from members of the Estimates Committee. Thank you all for those questions. Local government is very important to the Northern Territory and I look forward to working with you all.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, minister and members. Guests and support staff, thank you for your help. Mr Cowan, thank you again for attending. We will back in about five minutes.

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The committee suspended.

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## REMOTE HOUSING AND TOWN CAMPS

### DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome back to estimates. We will now consider Remote Housing and Town Camps, Indigenous Essential Services, Arts, Culture and Heritage. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding your portfolios of Remote Housing and Town Camps, Indigenous Essential Services and Arts, Culture and Heritage.

Minister, you have the call—and a lovely new tie for this second session.

**Mr PAECH:** Thank you. There will be a few more throughout today.

Mr Chair. I acknowledge in the room with me today Mr Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer; Mr Dwayne McInness, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Remote Housing; Nicole Hurwood, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Organisational Services; and Helena Wright, Executive Director, Programs and Engagement. Today, due to the COVID-19 response, we have staff in a COVID safe area—Mr Luke Twyford, General Manager, Strategic Services; and Ms Kim Charles, Chief Financial Officer. We are joined as well today by Danyelle Jarvis.

First, I would like to acknowledge the Larrakia people whose country we meet on today. It gives me great pleasure to speak to my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Remote Housing and Town Camps; Indigenous Essential Services; and Arts, Culture and Heritage.

In appearing before the Estimates Committee today, I acknowledge the partnership I share with the Minister for Territory Families and Urban Housing, Kate Worden. Together we share carriage of the Housing portfolio in the Northern Territory.

Good housing is a right for all Territorians. Our role as the Northern Territory Government is to assist in accessible housing where this is not affordable for Territorians. We are also charged with the critical responsibility to provide services, shelter and support to families and individuals who have become homeless and are sleeping rough.

This government understands the impact of suitable housing on social, health, education and wellbeing outcomes for Territorians. We understand the relationship between overcrowding and poor social outcomes, such as child abuse and neglect, poor educational attendance, domestic and family violence, youth crime and unemployment.

Evidence calls us to action and we are committed to making a difference and improving the lives our most vulnerable Territorians. Proper housing can be a catalyst for positive change. It can change the lives of many Territorians. We are committed to making a difference and improving the lives of the most vulnerable members in our community.

Budget 2020–21 is a testament to this, and the work of this Labor government. Over the past four years it is evident that this approach works. Our government has invested \$1.1bn in to remote housing investment

packages—an investment that represents how serious we are about improving the outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians.

This investment delivers the ‘Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes’ program across 10 years and plays a significant role in improving access to housing and reducing overcrowding for Aboriginal Territorians living remotely. This package consists of \$500m to build new homes through HomeBuild NT, \$200m for Room to Breathe to increase living spaces in existing homes, \$200m to expand government employee housing, and \$200m for repairs and maintenance.

This government has also committed \$432m over eight years from the 2016–17 budget onwards, for preparing land servicing for infrastructure for remote housing works; and \$79.9m to progress headworks to build much-needed subdivisions to allow new housing to be built and deliver critical infrastructure, such as sewerage and electricity, to provide a space for new homes to be built.

The Northern Territory’s matched funding partnership agreement with the Australian Government provides \$550m through the National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory. This agreement provides \$35m annually for remote property and tenancy management, ensuring that public housing services will continue in communities, where leases would otherwise have expired from 30 June 2018. The remaining \$375m in the Australian Government matching contribution provides for much needed new houses over four years from 2019–20 onwards.

The combined Northern Territory and Australian Government investment of \$2.1bn over 10 years is intended to improve the living conditions of Territorians who live in remote areas. Whilst this is an express investment in housing and related infrastructure, we know it also pays dividends in approving health, social and emotional outcomes for Territorians living in remote areas.

An investment in bricks and mortar requires a parallel investment in essential services required to create safe, healthy and functional homes for Territorians. An investment of \$79.3m for Indigenous essential services provides electricity, water and sewerage services in 73 remote communities and 79 homelands across the Northern Territory.

In addition, \$38.8m is allocated to the continuing municipal and essential services and housing maintenance to homelands and outstations across the Northern Territory. I am passionate about finding ways to re-use water, to grow and maintain green spaces in communities and grass, of course, on remote football fields. This will go a long way to helping communities come together as families and as friends to enjoy sport and recreation on country, more positive activities and safe spaces for people to spend time with their families.

This is what we know people are crying out for. From a personal experience, I know that the positive impact this change has on people in remote communities is invaluable. These are practical things that we are doing and will continue to do. We know that nothing can be fixed overnight. It is a process. You work with Parliamentary Counsel, peak bodies, industry groups and stakeholders to make sure you do it right. We listen to the experts and we need to engage with those who have lived experience, those who have been a victim of crime and those who have been identified as offenders.

What happens in the bush or in our towns has an impact on our greater community. The dividends in this investment are threefold in that government’s investment in remote housing is also an investment in buying local and supporting Aboriginal business enterprises. We are proactively putting money back into local businesses, communities and employment. We are helping people find jobs and in doing so, enabling them to achieve a safer, brighter and fairer future for everyone.

In terms of art and culture, I am also privileged to be the Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage. It is with great honour to have leadership responsibilities for the protection, conservation and provision of the Territory’s heritage and cultural collections. Government’s investment of \$44.8m to the arts, culture and heritage sector is the gateway to creating accessibility for Territorians to engage in our unique culture and heritage and meaningfully connect with history that has shaped the Northern Territory’s narrative.

We invest in the preservation of our heritage and in fit-for-purpose, world-class facilities to showcase our rich history. It is with pleasure that I see this government’s investment of \$49.7m for the national Aboriginal art gallery in Alice Springs. This project will deliver a world-class institution dedicated to the display, interpretation and celebration of First Nations art. This facility will also be an economic driver for Central Australia, more people, more flights and more life into the Red Centre.

Our rich cultural heritage is an integral part of the Northern Territory's pride. This government invests in our actors, artists, musicians and cultural groups who create the next chapters of our arts and cultural heritage. It does not matter if we are Indigenous or not. Each and every one of us has culture and a strong connection to that culture. I look forward to continuing to build a strong culture in the Northern Territory over this term of government. It is a celebration of us; a commitment to ourselves that we value our identity and our people in all their forms.

We also recognise that preservation of our history is a meaningful investment in infrastructure to house those collections with \$19.4m in capital to support the proposed national Indigenous cultural centre and \$7.2m to support the operations of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. This is an additional investment into supporting art centre upgrades and gallery extensions—the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art Gallery and Cultural Centre in Tennant Creek, the Mimi Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Centre in Katherine, Godinymayin Yijard Arts Centre in Arnhem Land. It also adds to the \$47m in construction of the State Square Art Gallery as part of the City Deal between the government, the Australian Government and the City of Darwin.

I am proud to work closely with the creative industry sector and recognise that government support is crucial to the development of this sector—a sector that gives back so much to the Northern Territory through its economic contribution and provision of jobs.

It is important to acknowledge that the Northern Territory Government has a creative industry strategy where over \$730m is returned each year from the creative industries. That relates to in excess of 2,400 jobs for Territorians in the Territory.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement. My members and I are now ready to take questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any questions on the minister's opening statement?

**Mr YAN:** I thank the minister for his opening statement. I also share many of your passions about remote housing and homelands. I also thank the public servants here today. As I said yesterday with Health, I know the work that goes into producing some of the documentation for estimates, and I know it is a large body of work. Hopefully, we will get to use some of that work today.

Minister, I noted in your opening speech how housing remotely affects all aspects and facets of peoples' lives, be that health or domestic violence issues, which then lead to offending behaviour and so on. Appropriate housing is central to addressing some of the very complex issues we see out bush.

Recently, federal Minister Ken Wyatt was in town and made a speech about the investment from the federal government into remote housing. He was somewhat critical of the timeliness for delivery of remote housing out into our areas and regions. The Chief Minister provided a response to that speech from federal Minister Ken Wyatt stating that some of the delays were due to a staggered approach to include Indigenous employment in our current processes.

Would you be able to provide me with an update on the status of the Indigenous employment figures for 2019–20 and what you have projected in 2020–21?

**Mr PAECH:** We are continuing to work with the Commonwealth on the significant investment that we are both making into remote housing. The \$1.1bn, from the Northern Territory Government perspective, acknowledges that it is an approach that is staggered.

Our position was not just to build houses but to include Aboriginal people in the design process and ensure that Aboriginal business enterprises were given the opportunity to share in the economic opportunity and development so that we were not building houses and keeping Aboriginal people on the outside, but they were involved.

That process has been staggered. We have had to do some work across the Territory on capacity-building. We are in a very good position at the moment, moving forward. We will see in the following budgets an increase in the funds being released in terms of remote housing because we are scaling the process up. Aboriginal business enterprises across the Territory have demonstrated an outstanding capacity.

The community of Kalkarindji is doing a great job—an area the Member for Namatjira and I share in the Central Australia region. There are enterprises such as Tangentyere Constructions and Ingkerreke Commercial which are doing great work, and of course ALPA in the Top End.

I will direct your question to Dwayne McInnes, who can provide the actual figures that we are looking at. I want to stress that it was never the intention that \$1.1bn would be released from the start. We knew that we needed to help the organisation so Aboriginal enterprises had the opportunity to share in economic development and workforce development opportunities.

As an agency, we work with them across the board to make sure they have the skills. Where contracts are coming up, that is through a tender process and is in line with our procurement guidelines. We are seeing a great number of Aboriginal business enterprises participating. Dwayne will now respond to the actual figures.

**Mr McINNES:** The contracts for Aboriginal employment contain a minimum amount that we expect to achieve for the construction program. For the current year it is 42%, and that escalates by 2% each year capped at 48% towards the end of the program.

In terms of the actual numbers achieved, for 2019–20 we achieved an average of 47% Aboriginal employment. For the life of the program we are currently at 40% or 41%. We have seen a bit of a drop-off, and that is primarily due to COVID, when we shut communities from March to the end of July. That has dropped off, but it is starting to pick up now.

**Mr PAECH:** The 47% was an equivalent to \$83.6m awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises. Mr Ken Davies may want to provide any response to your question.

**Mr DAVIES:** Backing in what Dwayne advised, the new agency of Territory Families, Housing and Communities is looking at how to gear up the housing program. Minister Wyatt was looking at the metrics and the deliverables around the scale of the program, and scaling it up. As part of the work we have been doing with the Australian Government, this financial year we have committed to deliver 112 houses in 2021 using the Australian Government funds.

I am pleased to inform that Dwayne and his team got 37 houses completed, and there are 66 under construction. Minister Wyatt's concerns were about the momentum of the program this financial year. We are well and truly gearing up and will meet that target and deliver the housing numbers he was looking for. While he was here, he was reassured of that.

There was a hiatus during the COVID period, as Dwayne talked about, but the construction program is well and truly on track. We are working very closely with DIPL. As part of that process we worked with our minister and Minister Lawler to set up a program housing office in DIPL to drive the construction program and make sure the metrics the Commonwealth wants to see are delivered along with the employment outcomes we committed to, utilising Aboriginal business enterprises.

**Mr PAECH:** That process has been implemented since the commencement of Minister Lawler and me in those portfolio areas. We anticipate that will streamline the process and, as a result, we will see more homes in communities.

**Mr YAN:** The statement was made that we were staggering the project due to Aboriginal employment. I have been through the annual reports and a number of others, and I am pleased and heartened to see that the Aboriginal employment in this program is up by 7% for 2019–20. I hope that will increase in 2020–21.

The homelands jobs grants—283, when the projection was only 145. That reported increase in Aboriginal business enterprises for 2019–20 was above what was projected. The outputs I am seeing in Budget Paper No 3 and others are very similar to previous years.

The new houses that will be delivered, the houses that will be refurbished, the number of houses that will be upgraded under Room to Breathe—I am trying to determine the correlation between the staggered approach for Aboriginal employment and business enterprises in the project, but I am not seeing specific notations in the budget for increases in outputs for 2020–21. Are you able to explain what those differences are, please?

**Mr PAECH:** I will ask Dwayne McInnes to provide some context. It is important to acknowledge that one of the reasons for doing this is to build the capacity. We know there is existing capacity with a number of Aboriginal enterprises, particularly in remote locations. We do not want to see a process where we could get the houses built tomorrow, but it would involve bringing interstate companies into the Territory, which would result in a workforce that is not Territorian. This is about making sure that Aboriginal people and local, true blue Territorians are involved in that process.

Given the economic conditions we are in, this is about providing not only business opportunities for people to tender and be involved in that process, but Aboriginal people not being seen as people who cannot participate in these industries.

One of the reasons we have looked at staggering and creating pipelines of work is so that by the end of some of these projects—and this is an issue that you, the Member for Barkly and the Member for Mulka have spoken about—we end up with people who exit a building project with a certificate in carpentry or plumbing through the building industry. We can see Aboriginal people becoming apprentices and skilled in those areas.

When we transition to the conversations about ongoing repairs and maintenance that need to be done in remote communities, we have people who have the training and the ability to take on these jobs. That way, remote communities do not see people coming in and taking jobs that should be theirs. We also do not see high costs being incurred for the transportation of a service provider to fix something that could be done in-house in a remote community.

I will hand over now to Dwayne McInnes, the Deputy Chief Executive of Remote Housing.

**Mr McINNES:** In the budget paper indicators you are talking about, in the Budget 2019–20 estimate we had a figure of 42% and we achieved 49%. You are quite right; the number is down to 40% this year. The time they were developed was in the middle of the COVID-19 period when we were not achieving what we wanted to achieve.

That said though, all contracts still had to figure of 42% that we want to keep, and we are at 44% right now. We are achieving that and our aspiration is to at least achieve 49% this year. We will continue to drive towards those targets.

**Mr YAN:** Apart from the employment factor—and I am 100% supportive of Aboriginal employment in the regions and making sure that work goes to Territorians and Territorian businesses.

The other part of my questions is that we have seen a very good increase in Aboriginal business and employment, but on your metrics in the budget paper there is not a significant increase in outputs as delivery of houses. The numbers for 2020–21 are very similar to the numbers for 2019–20. That is the correlation that I am trying to get to.

**Mr GUYULA:** A point of order, Mr Chair! To follow up on that, in my region, I would like to clarify some issues. The employment for ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, sorry ...

**Mr PAECH:** I am happy to respond to the Member for Mulka, bearing in mind I have a response for the Member for Namatjira.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, I ask that if you want to finish your question—we do have a question ...

**Mr GUYULA:** It will be a long one.

**Mr CHAIR:** Can we ask the minister to respond to the Member for Namatjira and if it is on the same line, you can ask your question.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes.

**Mr PAECH:** It is the case. It is based on the budget appropriation that comes to the agency. We anticipate that next year that budget line will be significantly higher, which will result in a higher percentage on the matrix you refer to. That is based on the available funds for the agency to deliver that. We anticipate that in the next budget the number will be different and it will reflect a greater input of Indigenous participation.

**Mr YAN:** I will be looking at next estimates with careful attention for those figures.

**Mr PAECH:** I will ask Mr McInnes to provide further detail.

**Mr McINNES:** To clarify the budget paper numbers around the new bill, we had a budget estimate for financial year 2019–20 of 130 dwellings and achieved 97. The delays from COVID-19 were significant. We have upped the number of dwellings we expect to deliver this year to 190 and are already half way to that target as we



have already delivered 95 across remote communities. We are almost equivalent to what we achieved last year and we have 188 under construction at the moment.

**Mr GUYULA:** We can see in the figures how much money is in the budget for the terms. We have been discussing where the money is going and who is working on the Room to Breathe program. Regarding the employees working on the contracts—like the Member for Namatjira was asking—I would like to know where ALPA is situated, where the funding is going for employment of trainees and local people instead of FIFOs?

When they build the house, maintenance is needed and we have to fly someone in again. We can train the locals so that they can carry on in on their own homelands and communities. Who would be looking after them? In that area there could be YBE, Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, Marthakal Homelands on Galiwinku or rangers who help build homes on Milingimbi. It is about training local people—it might take a two, three, four years to train people—to maintain housing on their country, homelands and in the communities.

It would be cheaper if we use local people in the area rather than fly-in fly-out workers. Do we have any budget estimates or ideas on which body or organisation the money can go to in order to train and employ those workers?

**Mr PAECH:** Every regional and remote member is passionate about how we can look for economic development opportunities in our homelands and remote communities. In terms of the procurement process, there are procurement guidelines in place. We work with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics on those—42% is in there. Preference is weighted in for Aboriginal business, which is part of those procurement guidelines. We acknowledge that there are a range of tenders out at the moment—that is part of the procurement process and we do not get involved in that, but through our agency we look to support and identify organisations we can do capacity-building in.

Homelands is a big one. There is a homelands review which is being released very shortly and we can talk about that later today, but importantly the agency will work with people on how we can build those capacities because it is my intention as the Minister for Remote Housing and Town Camps and homelands to come up with a model where we look at hub-and-spoke in remote communities so they are doing their own repairs and maintenance. This is either through partnering with an Aboriginal business enterprise or with another commercial entity, but we have to work with the community.

We are looking at doing two trial sits across the Northern Territory around this model on repairs and maintenance, but this is also around tenancy management, because the best way forward is Aboriginal people in these remote communities leading charge on this and taking carriage of the issues. It is much better to have an Aboriginal person in a tenancy management position in the bush because they will be able to go to the houses and understand the issues that need to be addressed.

I will not digress too much, Member for Mulka, but as part of the work Minister Worden and I are doing, a regionalisation approach where we are looking at HMOs—housing maintenance officers—going out to the regions, and that will increase the Aboriginal employment in the bush. Kate Worden will talk about that on her portfolio areas—but these are people who will be able to help us identify where there is capacity and where we can continue that work.

We acknowledge that we need to do some work in relation to the procurement guidelines. That does not sit with our agency. It sits with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, but as part of this streamlining process we want to look at encouraging more Aboriginal people to be employed. I do not just want them to be painters or sweepers, they need to be engaged in meaningful employment and actually have certifications when they leave.

**Mr GUYULA:** Getting certifications or training to be certified electricians, plumbers and builders in areas—we have had those people before. Before the intervention happened everybody had all those training certificates. They were plumbers, electricians and boilermakers doing welding and stuff, and now everything has been taken off them and a lot of the people are ready to go back and refresh their minds to get those experiences back again. They will be the ones who can just get on to whatever they did a long time ago.

In communities, when we have had maintenance to build a house or do repairs on housing, we would have to fly somebody in from Darwin or Gove to fix it up, which means people would have to wait a few days or weeks for a contractor to come in.

Plumbing is another thin; people have to be flown in and that takes a few weeks, a fair while, while people are going through the Wet Season. There is running water, a lot of mess on the ground and now there is overcrowding in housing, so we would expect things to be done promptly and fixed on the spot if we had these experienced people living in our communities—through these kind of jobs.

**Mr PAECH:** I share a number of your frustrations. I am hoping that my time as minister, for this portfolio in particular, we can drive progressive change.

We monitor all the contracts that come in. I do not, and will not, stand for black-cladding. I do not stand for an organisation that just employs Aboriginal people to get a contract. I will not tolerate that. We will monitor contracts. Subject to that monitoring, if issues are found we will notify the relevant agencies within the Northern Territory Government and that will impact that organisation's future ability when they are applying for contracts.

We acknowledge that we have to do work. I want to see us get to a position where remote community stores are places where we are buying stoves for houses so they are not spending hours on the road to get to a community. That gives a community economic opportunity through the store and gives the contractors who eventually will be based in these remote communities the ability to go to the store.

Member for Mulka, if I have a door that is broken, I want a new door to be hung in a day. I want a tap that is leaking to be fixed in a day by a local in a community who knows how to do it. That is where we need to get to. We got to where we are and now we need to change that direction. That requires a whole-of-government approach on how we work with things. We are seeing those changes but, of course, we have to honour the contracts that are currently in place.

We acknowledge that our priority is looking at empowering Aboriginal business enterprises to do the work. We acknowledge that there are many service providers out there which have a good record of working and increasing the Aboriginal participation through meaningful employment. We thank them for that work.

I hope that answers your question. I want to put on the record that I never have and never will support the Northern Territory intervention.

**Mr GUYULA:** The reason I pulled this up, about fixing things on the spot, is that I have seen some inspectors coming from Northern Territory Housing to check houses around the communities, and they have asked people, 'What would you like to be fixed around here?' They write things down; people have reported it to them. They waited around and two years later, maybe an election changes things over and somebody else is in charge

Somebody else comes in after two years or so and asks, 'What would you like to be fixed in this house?' They say, 'Well, where is the list that we did last time?' That is the kind of thing that we want to stop and instead have people who can be trained so they can fix things on the spot in communities.

**Mr PAECH:** The department shares your aspiration. That is certainly where we want to get to. Currently, it has been a paper trail and, for some reason, some things get lost. We are looking at changing that. We are going to a contemporary system, where we are looking at having things uploaded online into databases there and then.

This also goes to the point that we are looking at that regional footprint, because we should not have to send staff out to then do a list of things that need to be fixed. There should not be a list in the first place. Having an RMO in a remote community who is regularly talking to people so they feel comfortable to let them in their house is the position we need to be at. The minute that tap starts leaking or that light switch is not working, we should not have to be waiting for a housing officer to come out there, as we have been. We need local recruits on the ground who can work through those issues. This is part of the contemporisation and regionalisation that our agency is doing.

We will work with all members. If you have concerns about some of the service provision that is happening at the moment, you need to report that to the relevant agency that is taking care of that contract management. We want the best providers out in the bush delivering a quality service.

I have heard you, and I will take that on board. We have met with organisations like ALPA—I acknowledge the important work that they do. More importantly, we are running these two trials, one in the southern region and one in the northern region, to understand how these pilot models will work and how we can make sure they are sustainable so we have people and businesses on the ground doing that work.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You spoke about Aboriginal employment, and we have covered a fair bit of that, but I just want to get a better understanding of how you are measuring Aboriginal employment involved in these housing programs. Is it employment with those organisations or is it employment on the ground in the communities?

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer to Dwayne McInnes, who can give you the breakdown of how we do that.

**Mr McINNES:** In terms of the employment numbers, the preference is to have local employment to the extent possible. Where it is not possible, it refers back to Aboriginal employment. During the tender processes that is all taken into consideration and weighted up in the tender assessment process. Those numbers are captured; I do not have them with me. We just have the broader numbers.

We capture the information in two ways. One is on an FTE basis and the other is on a proportion of people employed who are Aboriginal. It is important to record both because the FTE converts to a full-time equivalent position which does not really tell the true story about the throughput of Aboriginal employment in a lot of these contracts.

We measure it both ways. It would take some time to get the break up between local and Aboriginal employment. It is all Aboriginal employment with a local focus.

**Mr PAECH:** We are more than happy to take that component on notice around that breakdown if you require.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I do not require it at this point but I share exactly what the Member for Mulka was saying. We need to be doing more in those communities because we have spoken about this for years and years. When will we see these changes? Is it going to happen in the term of this government? It was spoken about in the last term of this government, but here we are approaching the next four years of this parliament.

What I want to see is jobs in the communities, people engaged in the communities and pathways so people can move from not just labouring jobs, but all of those jobs that we spoke about, such as plumbers, electricians, builders, carpenters and all of those sorts of things. We need to have a pathway so that happens now so we are not here talking about that in four years' time.

**Mr PAECH:** As the minister who has been in for about 11 or 12 weeks now, it is certainly a priority of mine to make sure that we have local people doing the work. I have been out to remote communities talking to people about how we can look at supporting them to reach that position.

It is appropriate that I talk about the Gurindji Corporation; they have partnered with a construction organisation where their local community members are engaged in employment. We are seeing great benefits there. I have spoken to the men and the women who are involved in the construction and it is great to see that they have women participating in the construction industry and the building and renovation works. They are now wanting to progress and turn that into apprenticeships.

I share the views of the members in the room that we need to increase our Indigenous participation. The agency has been tasked with growing that, so hopefully we will see that in the current years. I am sure you will keep onto me following those numbers.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** One of the reasons I raised it is that in my region I have seen more and more houses brought in on the back of truck. That is concerning to me because it eliminates opportunities for people to participate at a local level in those communities with the actual construction of those houses.

Can you explain why we are seeing more and more houses coming in on the back of a truck, rather than being constructed in the communities and creating opportunities for those jobs and pathways into trades for example?

**Mr PAECH:** There is a variety of reasons why that is done. When the consultation is undertaken in those remote communities around housing, there are different variations or models of housing. I am not saying it is in your particular region, Member for Barkly, but as a whole, when people are being consulted, some people are opting for that particular variation of home, which is a modular home constructed in either Darwin or Alice Springs.

There are a range of initiatives. Sentenced to a Job is part of that, where men are involved in the construction of those modular homes in those locations. We have seen a number of people who are in the correctional

facilities who have been part of Sentenced to a Job are actually from those communities; they are participating in those builds.

We acknowledge that people want to participate in the construction of their homes. Part of the agency's work will work with them. Where brick homes are being built in remote communities, we will make sure that every opportunity is given for Aboriginal people in those communities to participate.

If there is any particular concern, Member for Barkly, I am happy to meet with you out side of the estimates hearing to go through those communities so we can ensure that people are fully involved in the consultation and are aware of what homes are going where.

**Mr YAN:** Following on from the question raised by the Member for Mulka, in any of the contracts that you are putting out for housing, have you included making specific training measures available to Aboriginal people on communities so that during construction there is actual accredited training taking place for those people so they can take those skills back to community?

**Mr PAECH:** Following on from the conversations that we have had in the remote community of Kalkarindji regarding their successful project, the identification was raised around apprenticeships. The agency is looking into that to see how we incorporate the Aboriginal employment numbers, but also to ensure there is consideration and appropriate measures for people to have opportunities in training, either as part of the contract or through a local decision-making agreement on remote housing in that community.

**Mr YAN:** I take it there is nothing specific written into the contracts. Is there any consideration in any of your budget lines going forward to include a specific training component for those remote communities?

**Mr PAECH:** Since coming to the ministry, one of my directives regarding property tenancy and management was that all remote contracts, from July 2021, are to focus on those strategy areas and look at how we can see that increase. That is something to watch. I am happy to work with members here on ideas on how we can look at doing that, but that is a directive I have set to the agency, that I want to see that in additional outgoing contracts.

**Mr YAN:** Let us hope that we see an additional activity measure in the 2021–22 estimates for training outcomes, or at least a measure.

**Mr SLOAN:** You said that 36 houses had been built this year?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, that is correct. There have been 37 built under the Australian Government funding.

**Mr SLOAN:** Are they all tenanted?

**Mr PAECH:** The majority of them are tenanted. There are some which have dropped off or are being finalised and are being hooked up to essential services.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You have said a number of times that the government is committing \$1.1bn over 10 years and that commenced in 2016.

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Can you tell us how much of the \$1.1bn has been spent to date?

**Mr PAECH:** Mr McInnes will respond with where we are up to. While he is locating that information I note that as of September we have completed 1,908 additional spaces. This includes 288 new builds, 878 upgrades and 25 for employment and education housing. The National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory, which is federally funded, has provided 37 and 31 new builds for education.

Regarding the mixed Australian Government and Northern Territory Government programs, there are 26 newly built government employee housing and 101 government employee housing upgrades. There were 33 new builds under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. Northern Territory Government funded programs saw 147 home builds, 274 upgrades under Room to Breathe, 23 newly built government employee housing, and repairs and maintenance to 37 houses. That brings the total to 1,908. This financial year we have a number of planned builds as well.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Can you repeat the numbers for the Room to Breathe program?

**Mr PAECH:** It was 274. I now hand over to Dwayne McInnes.

**Mr McINNES:** In regard to the number you are after, the cumulative figure since the program began is \$298m.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Just to clarify, is that at the end of the 2019–20 financial year or as of today?

**Mr McINNES:** That is as of 30 November.

**Mr GUYULA:** A point of order, Mr Chair. Are we anywhere near Output 4.2?

**Mr PAECH:** We are in the opening statement. You can fire anything at me.

**Mr GUYULA:** I am concerned about the time.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, ask any question you would like of the minister. He is at your disposal.

**Mr PAECH:** Be gentle.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes, no worries. Minister, prior to the 2016 election. Labor made several commitments to housing. Could you advise how much of the \$110m per year or \$440m over four years for remote housing was spent? Can you advise whether any underspend is carried over into this budget?

**Mr PAECH:** We will refer that question for a response from Dwayne McInnes. I am sure you will understand, as the minister I make sure that I spend every cent that comes through for remote housing.

**Mr McINNES:** In the expenditure every year, we pretty much spend everything that we are allocated. The program values are larger than the cash allocated to the program. That allows us to do program and commit funds and enter into contracts. Essentially, we spend everything every year. The \$1.1bn has been factored into the forward estimates and we will continue to roll that out in the time of the program.

Also, in addition to the Member for Barkly's question, there is also expenditure of \$72m as of 30 November for the land servicing program.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, the second part of your question was whether or not any underspend has been carried over into the 2020–21 budget.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr McINNES:** While there is no overspend, the program that is submitted in any given year is carried over into the next financial year.

**Mr PAECH:** Member for Mulka, I will confirm that from 2017 to 2025 we are anticipating a \$316m spend in the Arnhem region. That will be for existing homes seeing infrastructure upgrades and new works. Under the Home Build program we are anticipating, through the Northern Territory Government-funded programs, it is \$135m to build 178 homes planned across four communities, resulting in 825 bedrooms. Seven homes have been completed and that is 21 bedrooms. Under the Northern Territory Government's policy program, Room to Breathe, there is \$47.6m to extend 120 homes across four communities resulting in 289 bedrooms.

I understand that seven homes have been completed to date and a total of 345 lots are to be created through the new subdivision. That is estimated at \$127m.

**Mr GUYULA:** Can you advise how many additional rooms were added for bush communities with NT Government funding over the four-year period of the previous term of government? Can you also advise how many additional rooms are provided in this proposed budget?

**Mr PAECH:** In regard to new dwellings and upgrades, over the four-year period from 2016 the number is 5,173. That is a Territory-wide number.

**Mr GUYULA:** Can you advise how many additional rooms are provided in this proposed budget?

**Mr PAECH:** Under this budget we are anticipating 790.

**Mr GUYULA:** Can you advise how many houses have been built for local government employees, and how many local government employee houses are planned to be built out of this proposed budget?

**Mr PAECH:** Can I confirm, are you referring to a government employee housing or housing provided by local government entities?

**Mr GUYULA:** Local government entities.

**Mr PAECH:** That is an arrangement taken by those local governments in regard to housing. If you are after what new housing has been built in relation to the departments of Health or Education, we can give you those numbers. When it comes to housing that is provided to program support through the regional councils, that is a question we would have to refer to ...

**Mr GUYULA:** If you like, can I have those numbers?

**Mr PAECH:** The GEH, certainly. Completed and upgraded from 2017 to now is 101. While we are talking about government employee housing, there is a volume of work that the department will be undertaking on reform in regard to local government housing and entitlement. It is my intention that we will strengthen the government employee housing processes and look at making sure local recruits employed by the NT public service have the same entitlements as the other government employee housing entitlements.

That goes to people who work at the school or the health clinic, or any form of government employment. My intention is that they should be entitled to the same entitlements that the rest of the government employees have.

**Mr GUYULA:** During the previous term of government, how many local Aboriginal people from NT bush communities were employed in my electorate?

**Mr PAECH:** We would have to take that on notice and would only be able to provide you with the number of Aboriginal people who were engaged through the agency of Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.11

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr GUYULA:** During the previous term of government, how many local Aboriginal people from NT bush communities were employed in my electorate?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Mulka is allocated the number 7.11.

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**Mr GUYULA:** Can you advise when overcrowding in homelands and outstations will be addressed, and when an agreement will be sought with homeland towns in relation to building more houses on Aboriginal land?

**Mr PAECH:** Overcrowding is a significant issue across our remote Northern Territory communities. Remote housing is an issue that the agency takes very seriously. We continue to work with people in the remote communities to understand the level of overcrowding and we acknowledge that the numbers fluctuate depending on what is happening in the communities at those times.

We continue to do the volume of work. Our housing program is the single largest investment in remote housing in the Territory's history addressing chronic overcrowding. We are appreciative of the Commonwealth Government's contribution and will continue to work with Minister Ken Wyatt on a proactive and progressive approach to overcome the housing. We will meet with him and his agency regularly to ensure that we have a good program moving forward.

We are looking at and have changed the parameters around Room to Breathe so that we can start the conversation about the program being taken to homelands to address the infrastructure needs and the overcrowding in homelands.

This government recognises the importance of the homelands. We acknowledge that due to the complex land tenure issues and the relationships with Northern Territory Government and the Commonwealth there has not been housing investment of additional infrastructure or renovations for some time. It is work that we are undertaking.

There is a homelands review which is in its final stages. I am hoping to have that out very soon and will have a proactive relationship with Minister Wyatt, the four land councils and the service providers to discuss the report. That copy will be made to every Member of the Legislative Assembly because it is crucial moving forward that this is not seen as a political thing.

Homelands is a great place, very strong in culture, great for the social determinacy of health, education and wellbeing and we need every member of the parliament to work with us on a progressive way forward. I am happy to meet with all members of the Assembly once that review has been released to plan a way forward on the homelands.

In short, we are looking at extending the Room to Breathe program to those communities. As an agency we will go out there to understand the level of overcrowding to determine the priority around which homelands need to be addressed with the Room to Breathe program. That may result in additional bedrooms and additional living spaces, but it also may result in infrastructure upgrades with additional toilet and bathroom facilities or kitchens in homelands housing—and we have seen that with the Room to Breathe program.

The Room to Breathe program is not isolated; it is a bespoke program. We work with individual members in the community when we are working and looking at their house. Some people need an additional kitchen outside for when visitors are camping for ceremony or for visitors—or enclosing verandas into rooms. Some people want their verandas screened for privacy and security and also to act as a place to store things and have them locked.

The Room to Breathe program is very fluid. It does change and it is based on the need of the individual house, and the priorities and demand of that household.

We will continue to have that policy position and when it moves to outstations we will need to work with the local outstation residents to understand their needs and their priorities. But we acknowledge that there is work that needs to be done there.

**Mr GUYULA:** The issue of housing in Birritjimi, or Wallaby Beach, on the Gove Peninsula has been a problem for years. There is still a lot of worry amongst the residents, who are calling for security and certainty for their futures. Many residents have told me that they want to remain in Birritjimi rather than be moved to housing in the surrounding communities.

What is this government doing to solve this housing problem? Why have the residents been told they will need to leave Birritjimi for new housing elsewhere when new housing could be built at this existing site?

**Mr PAECH:** This has been discussed many times. The Northern Territory Government is working on a fix and make-safe program for which, I have made clear, a contribution from the Northern Territory Government will be made to make sure those dwellings are safe and do not pose a safety risk to the people involved. That fix and make safe is in partnership with Rio Tinto.

The broader context of the question is an ongoing conversation with the federal agency of the National Indigenous Australians Agency, Minister Ken Wyatt and the NLC about the ongoing land tenure issues there. We acknowledge that there is a volume of work being undertaken to look at alternative accommodation for the residents who are currently there. That will require a significant investment in housing. To relocate we would be looking at 16 new dwellings and that would be in excess of \$10m. I understand that the conversations between the land council, the NIAA and the Northern Territory Government are progressing.

This is a land tenure issue that ultimately sits with the Northern Land Council, which is very productive in working in this space, and the federal government. We will keep an ongoing brief on what is occurring. We have made a commitment to ensure that it is fixed and made safe in the interim period.

**Mr GUYULA:** With regard to Birritjimi and housing, there have been a lot of arguments—it has been going on between either Northern Territory Housing, Rio Tinto, the Northern Territory Government or the Northern Land Council. It is sitting there by itself at the moment.

People have said, 'We are wondering where we go from here. Who do we see?' These are the stories I have been hearing. People have been told that they need to move from here to over there, but the people are saying, 'This is our home; this is our land; this is where we want to stay and we want housing here. We have nowhere else to go.'

**Mr PAECH:** We are working with them on a contribution to fix and make safe the electrical supply, because that is the priority. That is an area that needs work. If residents are being relocated, we will ensure that appropriate avenues are made for public housing for those residents.

Whether they are recognised or remain is not a jurisdictional matter for the Northern Territory Government. We do not have input into whether or not they can be there. I believe the land tenure issues relate to the Northern Land Council and the federal government.

If people wish to relocate, we will work with all parties on a progressive plan so they have access to safe, secure and affordable housing. We recognise that they are ongoing issues. Our priority was to make the electrical systems there safe in the interim period while those conversations are ongoing with the relevant parties.

**Mr GUYULA:** I have already said what I have heard. People have been telling me that they do not want to relocate to anywhere else. That is their home. People have been telling the Northern Land Council, the Northern Territory Government, NT Housing or people looking at land tenure that Birritjimi is not safe. There is some poison underground—silver, lime or what is going on. This is what they have been told. People have been confused about asbestos in the area and people will have to move from there.

Yesterday or the day before, I heard about the building on Myilly Point—is it Myilly Point or Bullocky Point? The old hospital.

**Mr CHAIR:** Myilly Point.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes. I have heard there has been an asbestos situation there and it has been cleared up. People have told us there are other places which have asbestos that has been cleared up within Arnhem Land or elsewhere in the Territory. They are saying, 'They want us to move because there is poison, or asbestos, in the ground. Why can't they do something about it and move it like they do anywhere else?'

That is confusing for people. The leader living there, old man, says 'This is my land and I want to stay here. I want houses to be built here. We cannot go to another country that belongs to someone else, another clan.' I am sorry to say, but these people are saying, 'We will never move anywhere else; we want to stay here.'

**Mr PAECH:** That is an issue which is on a land trust. In terms of the Northern Territory Government, we do not have jurisdiction over that area for the delivery of housing services. What we can do is engage with the residents in that area to talk through what options we can make available should they wish to move. I acknowledge that is a position and decision they will have to make, but if they are considering it, we will work with them on a plan to make sure that there are housing options for them.

In terms of the ongoing land tenure issues, that sits with the Commonwealth and the Northern Land Council, which have jurisdiction over that area. I will re-emphasise that although it is not our jurisdictional area, we are working on a fix and make-safe program because we value the security of every Territorian.

Those questions are not relevant to our jurisdictional area, but will sit with the Commonwealth and the Northern Land Council around a resolution. If people choose not to relocate, we cannot forcibly remove them but we can have a positive and progressive conversation. If they want to look at relocating into a larger community around the region, we can work with all the parties to provide housing for them in those areas.

**Mr GUYULA:** I had to put this on a record for the people who are wondering what is going on. They are the answers we will work on in the near future.

**Mr PAECH:** If you are talking with those constituents and there are members who are interested in relocating to a larger community, please let us know we can have the agency talk to them about alternative housing arrangements. If there is an issue with asbestos, it is important to report to the relevant agency so that it is not exposed. We do not want to see increased health implications to those people.

**Mr GUYULA:** Last term, the government committed to spending \$440m on remote housing and only spent \$220m. Everyone would like to know where the other \$200m went. That is a big question for people.



**Mr PAECH:** I will refer your question to Dwayne McInnes.

**Mr McINNES:** The \$440m which was committed last term was a program value, \$110m per year, which allowed us to go out there and plan the delivery of housing.

Early on in the program, there was no way we could spend \$110m in the first year as we only had 70 lots available to deliver on. We have had to run two programs in parallel to gear up for the housing program, that is, the land servicing program, plus the new build Room to Breathe programs. That program has now really ramped up, as of today. As we mentioned early, we spent \$298m of the housing program plus a further \$72m in the land servicing program. That \$72m to date has produced 448 serviced lots to be able to progress housing.

As I stated in the numbers earlier, we have delivered 95 this year, with 188 under construction right now. That money will be more than spent.

It is really just a timing issue. Once we have those subdivisions and the land servicing, infills and demolitions are done, we will catch up on that program. The full \$1.1bn will be spent; it will not disappear.

**Mr PAECH:** We have seen, with the land servicing, additional subdivisions. Maningrida was one; in Central Australia, Hermannsburg—that is the first subdivision in the southern region of the Northern Territory of that magnitude in 30 years. That has provided an additional 30 blocks in the community, taking into account the chronic overcrowding.

The land servicing has now provided us with a blueprint map of providing additional housing. There are three houses on the ground, hooked up to Indigenous essential services. It is a good story. For the first time in a remote community, we are having an open day. That open day is about giving Aboriginal people, who otherwise would not have the opportunity, to walk through a home in a remote community that has been furnished and gives them the ability to see what remote housing looks like and what variations of houses there are.

In the community of Hermannsburg we have new housing. There are two different variations of houses, which people are able to look at to see what the future of remote housing looks like. It provides them with the opportunity for a walk-through to see, feel and experience it. That is important. We need to treat our remote communities the same we do our urban centres.

We will have people come to that open day—we have done some landscaping to provide an opportunity for people to see what remote housing looks like. This is a great opportunity for an Aboriginal business enterprise to look at remote furniture wholesaling or a community store to have an arrangement. When we know people are on the housing waiting list, they could enter into an arrangement with an Aboriginal business enterprise to put a contribution of funds away so that when they get the keys to their home they have furniture to go in it.

**Mr GUYULA:** You probably said it already, but the amount of money that was not spent last term—the \$220m, or \$100m—can that be carried into the new budget? If there is a budget here for the term of \$440m, can that \$200m be carried into this budget?

**Mr PAECH:** Any money that is not spent in our area is always carried forward, or revoted, because we understand the importance of remote housing and the need to spend and deliver in that area. If any monies are unspent, it is our intention to carry those forward in financial years.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, can you please explain what the term 'revote' means?

**Mr PAECH:** When we talk in a financial sense about revoting, it is money that is unspent which was allocated for the purposes of a particular project and is carried forward into the next budget cycle and appropriated to that project.

**Mr CHAIR:** If there are no further questions we will take a short break.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr CHAIR:** We have just concluded questions on the opening statement. The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2020–21) Bill as they relate to Remote Housing and Town Camps, Indigenous Essential Services and Arts, Culture and Heritage.

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

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

**Mr YAN:** This may get referred on to Territory Families with Minister Worden. In your annual report, page 129, can you explain why employee expenses budget was exceeded by \$17m last year and why administrative expenses were \$29m over budget?

**Mr PAECH:** That is a matter for Territory Families. Mark that in your book. I am sure the minister will provide you with a response.

**Mr YAN:** Budget 2019–20 also included \$2m profit on disposable assets. What assets were these and was that figure actually achieved?

**Mr PAECH:** That again is a question for Territory Families and Urban Housing. That expenditure would relate to the home ownership program.

**Mr YAN:** Currently, what is your level of Aboriginal employment as a percentage for your agency?

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer that question to the chief executive.

**Mr DAVIES:** In terms of the total Aboriginal employees across the agency, we have 282 employees. That is on a total headcount of 1,582 staff. Our Aboriginal employment is 17.8%.

**Mr PAECH:** We anticipate that as we commence our regionalisation of remote housing, particularly sport and rec with Minister Worden, those numbers will increase. It is an objective of ours to increase Aboriginal employment in meaningful ways.

**Mr YAN:** I note the housing scheme at Hermannsburg was mentioned recently. Can I ask how far behind schedule the housing program is at Hermannsburg? It was meant to begin at the start of this year.

**Mr PAECH:** I am not sure which component at Hermannsburg you are referring to. We are on track and on schedule on the deliverables there. There are 30 lots. As part of that, in the initial round of funding, not all 30 blocks will receive property. It is on a needs basis. There are currently three homes in Hermannsburg that are ready and the tenants will receive the keys next week once the final checks are in place to make sure that is ready for handover.

**Mr YAN:** If there are 30 blocks available, what are the time frames then to look at delivery of houses onto those blocks?

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer you to Dwayne McInnes, who can go through that. We plan for the future. There are 30 blocks. We anticipate that we will continue to work through to develop those blocks and make sure that there are the appropriate recreational facilities in the local area. Dwayne will be able to provide you with the numbers that we have in the current budget and the forecast for housing in that area.

**Mr McINNES:** In terms of Hermannsburg, it is pretty much on schedule. We are currently waiting for an additional elevated water tank to be delivered to support the new subdivision. The existing water supply will not fully support the new subdivision, hence the new tank. The footings for that elevated tank have been finished and we are waiting for that to come in. We do not anticipate any delays in the building program, and currently the building program is set to be completed by the 2022–23 year. That is what we have programmed in for.

**Mr YAN:** How much does it cost to subcontract out the managing of the housing to Ekistica per annum?

**Mr PAECH:** To make sure we get you the accurate information we will take that question on notice.

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### **Question on Notice No 7.12**

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

**Mr YAN:** How much does it cost to subcontract out the managing of the housing program to Ekistica per annum?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, we accept.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 7.12.

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**Mr YAN:** We spoke this morning about the 288 new builds. How many of these new builds were replacing demolished homes?

**Mr PAECH:** When houses are beyond economic repair and deemed to be demolished, we have a conversation with the tenant regarding the possibility of extending the new build to increase the bedroom capacity. If a house is demolished in which two families were living, we are open to exploring the possibility of rebuilding on that site in a duplex model. This would mean two tenancies could exist and the families, who are related, can have some privacy. I will ask Mr McInnes to respond.

**Mr McINNES:** In terms of the 2020–21 we are expecting to deliver 150 additional houses and replace 40. Regarding information about the 200 we talked about, I will have to get that for you but it should not take long.

Regarding replacement housing, we no longer build like for like. We do not replace a three-bedroom home with a three-bedroom home. It is all about the family make-up and we build to reduce overcrowding wherever we can. If we have a family that needs a four-bedroom home and currently have a three-bedroom home, we replace it with a three-bedroom home. We try to take advantage of the lot size to get the biggest yield. If it is a large family and a large lot, we may replace a three-bedroom home with a duplex to cater for that.

**Mr YAN:** I am happy for that to be taken on notice.

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#### **Question on Notice No 7.13**

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

**Mr YAN:** Of the 288 new builds, how many of these were replacing demolished homes?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 7.13.

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**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any further questions?

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

Output Group 2.0 and Output Group 3.0 are the responsibility of another minister.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – REMOTE HOUSING, TOWN CAMPS AND HOMELANDS** **Output 4.1 – Remote Public Housing**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output Group 4.0, Remote Housing, Town Camps and Homelands, Output 4.1, Remote Public Housing. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** Can you please advise the actual expenditure for this output for 2019–20?

**Mr PAECH:** Due to the machinery of government and output changes, we are happy to take that question on notice to provide accurate information.

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**Question on Notice No 7.14**

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

**Mr YAN:** Can you please advise the actual expenditure for this output for 2019–20?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 7.14.

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**Mr YAN:** Now that housing has been divided across two output groups and six outputs, it is difficult to see any sort of comparison. Can you please explain how funding was determined for this output, and from which output in the 2019–20 budget paper it is transferred from, and how the split between urban and remote housing was determined.

**Mr PAECH:** It is important to highlight and acknowledge that we are currently in a transition stage. In future estimates we will be able to draw a comparison on the expenditure. The division between urban and remote was a decision to make sure there are two ministers taking carriage of two very important areas and one is not being forgotten.

We are happy to take that on notice, and can confirm there will be further ability to look at the comparisons in the years to come now that the machinery of government changes have occurred.

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**Question on Notice No 7.15**

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Namatjira, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr YAN:** Now that housing has been divided across two output groups and six outputs, it is difficult to see any sort of comparison. Can you please explain how funding was determined for this output, and from which output in the 2019–20 budget paper it is transferred from, and how the split between urban and remote housing was determined.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira is allocated the number 7.15.

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**Mr YAN:** Is there a waiting list for public housing in remote areas?

**Mr PAECH:** The short answer is yes, there is a waiting list. Each community has a different waiting list. There would be times when people transfer their waiting list to a different community if their circumstances have changed.

We work with the housing reference group in every remote community to understand their waiting list and the challenges as well as the priority areas, which helps us inform our decisions on how we allocate those resources.

The times for a person on the waiting list fluctuate and change depending on the community, the investment and the number of houses going in. It is safe to say there is a sufficient waiting list across the Northern Territory, particularly in remote regions. Our housing reference groups do a great job. They meet regularly and provide advice and recommendations to the agency when the houses are available for who goes in.

Those housing reference groups have a series of priority areas and they determine those aspects. One of the aspects is people who have areas of need, who are suffering or have a family member suffering a chronic illness or who have a disability are given priority. People who work in regional housing networks are also given priority. Those with young children or aged members of their family who need a high level of care are also given priority.

That fluctuates throughout remote communities. The housing reference groups have the ability to make determinations in priority areas. The Housing department works with them on that, but ultimately they have a community meeting and make that determination. The housing reference groups were a result of previous federal government funding to have them established, and they have remained in place. We work with them to make sure there is an even spread of people from remote communities on the housing reference groups.

**Mr YAN:** That leads straight to my next question. How many people are currently on waiting lists for public housing in remote areas? Are you able to provide a breakdown by region?

**Mr PAECH:** We do not have the regional breakdown on us, but as of 30 June there were 2,461 people on a waiting list for public housing in the bush. I want to re-emphasise, that is not per person on the waiting list—people might think that number is either high or low, but it represents a family. Those numbers would be higher in the people it would house.

**Mr YAN:** In effect, it is one application but it may be the primary person in that family?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr YAN:** Am I able to put the rest of the question on notice with regard to the regions?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.16

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

**Mr YAN:** If it is okay, minister, if I leave the first part. You have already provided the number. If you could provide that in the data, that would be great.

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr YAN:** How many people are currently on the wait list for public housing in remote areas? Can you please provide a breakdown by region?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 7.16.

**Mr YAN:** Forty-six per cent of tenancies living in appropriate-size housing is a new measure. How was this figure determined? Is there a reason you have not aimed for an increase in this figure? What are your projections? This is from Budget Paper No 3, page 133.

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer to Dwayne McInnes to respond.

**Mr McINNES:** The measure you are speaking about is one of the measures that were agreed to under the COAG agreement. It is determined by our needs-based data in remote communities, which is revised from time to time as new dwellings come online.

**Mr YAN:** In other state and territory jurisdictions across the country, some housing agencies report on progress every quarter to better inform government and non-government agencies on progress so that they can better inform the public of current and future outcomes. Is this something you will consider so as to better inform Territorians of progress and outcomes?

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer to Dwayne McInnes to provide a further context on that. Our information is updated regularly; it is live data available on the website to have a look at the progress and the numbers of how we are tracking.

**Mr McINNES:** We have embarked on a program of improving our transparency. We have a website that has been established particularly with regard to the remote housing programs. We report live data in relation to overcrowding, monthly data in relation to the capital works programs, and monthly updates on the employment outcomes as well.

We are moving towards that. It is a commitment under the national partnership agreement regarding transparency and the performance of our programs. We have also put that overcrowding overlay on there to get the complete picture of housing in the bush.

**Mr YAN:** I have been on to the website and had a look. For people who are reasonably IT literate it is reasonably easy to navigate, but for those who are not, sometimes a piece of paper or something in the media is probably a little better. It is about making sure we are able to give the right message to all Territorians.

**Mr PAECH:** Certainly. One of the matters I have tasked the agency with is that when they are out visiting a remote community they provide a brief update of where we are at and the housing that is scheduled, planned and being constructed. That can be in the form of a notice which goes on a noticeboard in a remote community so that people are aware. We are looking to provide that advice to the local authorities, who can talk about if they have questions. That will then be filtered through local government into housing if questions are raised.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** So far we have heard complexities regarding the remote housing, homelands, outstations and all those issues. The amount of information that has been shared so far, particularly amongst the remote members—my count is that there are seven remote members elected to parliament, including yourself—who speak to their constituents regarding a range of issues daily.

I propose that you establish a subcommittee of all the remote members to work with you on the remote housing issues identified today and contribute to your thoughts on housing and how to move forward. Would you be willing to establish a subcommittee of the remote members to work with you on these issues?

**Mr PAECH:** I am always open to exploring future opportunities and establishing work. I will not provide a commitment now, nor will I dismiss it. I am happy to explore options beyond the Estimates Committee hearing regarding what we can do in terms of remote housing.

I am happy to talk with all the remote members about these challenges and explore the potential work that you are proposing.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Can I ask a question about your responsibilities as the Minister for Remote Housing and Town Camps? Are you responsible for the housing in the town camps? Is that included?

**Mr PAECH:** We work with the service provider who has the lease arrangements—I acknowledge that town camps across the Northern Territory have different land tenure issues or matters. If you are referring to the town camps in Alice Springs, there are contracts in place for the maintenance of those. As the housing provider there, we look at whether there are additional allotments in the town camps to explore building on to relieve overcrowding.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Is the housing remote or urban in the town camps?

**Mr PAECH:** It sits with me in remote housing.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** That is what I meant.

**Mr PAECH:** We work with the town camps on potential development. The Northern Territory Government made a significant investment into town camps. Alice Springs had the last lots of town camps under the Alice Springs Transformation Plan that received major upgrades.

In the initial investment that was made last term, it was deemed that the infrastructure in Alice Springs was to standard. The other town camps needed it and were prioritised. As a result, we have seen investments in Tennant Creek and are looking at investment in and around Katherine and Bagot.

The town camps review was undertaken by the department and we saw \$40.2m invested. We are doing work with the town camp providers and town campers. If there is available land in the town camps, are the town campers happy to look at additional new housing or not, and do they want to look at infrastructure investments?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** That was my next question. How many new houses have you planned to build in the town camps across the Northern Territory and where will they be built? Which camps?

**Mr PAECH:** At the moment we are in the consultation phase and determining where the need is. We are working with whoever provides the town camp service.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** So you have no plans at this stage to build any new houses in any town camps in the Northern Territory?

**Mr PAECH:** Since coming to government I have asked for an audit on what land is available so I provide new accommodation and houses in town camps. That volume of work has been undertaken now; we know where the land is available. Now we need to work with organisations like Tangentyere, Julalikari and those places to see if the residents in that area are happy for new houses. New houses will mean addressing the overcrowding, but will also mean population growth in that area. Some town camps do not want new houses; they want Room to Breathe and refurbishments.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** When was the last house built on a town camp in the Northern Territory and where was it?

**Mr PAECH:** The last house is currently being built in Tennant Creek.

Just to follow up, Member for Araluen, a total of 18 town camps received capital works as part of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan 2009–14. That was the national partnership. Part of the town camp reform, which was referred to 'Living on the Edge'—\$40m was provided by this government in 2017–19 and was directed town camps that did not benefit from the former national partnership agreement. That was in Alice Springs and it focused on health and safety.

In the 2020–21 budget it was estimated that \$3.8m has been allocated to Alice Springs town camps for the following:

- municipal and essential services
- property repairs and maintenance
- panel contracts
- Tangentyere Aboriginal Corporation and Tangentyere Constructions
- tenancy management delivered by the Central Australia Affordable Housing
- additional funding for rubbish collection in the Alice Springs town camps

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Who is responsible for the roads in the town camps in Alice Springs?

**Mr PAECH:** In Alice Springs? I would have to seek advice from the agency.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Because I have one town camp in my electorate—the roads in Abbott's Camp are terrible and have been for a long time.

**Mr PAECH:** As town camps are not considered in a municipal area, the decision needs to be through the service provider, which is Tangentyere Council, in your instance.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** They provide the roads?

**Mr PAECH:** The maintain the road network and would have an avenue to look at and work with the Northern Territory Government and the federal government on funding arrangements for grant funding to upgrade the road networks. We are working with all town camp services providers, because there are issues given the land tenure. Particularly in Alice Springs they are not considered part of the municipality.

Tangentyere Council, in that instance, does the municipal and essential services. In other areas of the Northern Territory, different arrangements are formed on that service.

We acknowledge there is a need for ongoing investment in that area. Tangentyere Council is working on through a statement of intent for a local decision-making agreement with the Northern Territory Government. The statement is in its infancy stages. It will maybe look at tenancy management ongoing. The grant for the additional funding for rubbish collection has been deemed a priority area.

**Mr TURNER:** A follow up question, please. We keep on talking about how many remote houses have been built. How many remote houses were built between the 2016 election and now? And how many were built in the previous term by the CLP government?

**Mr YAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair! We are speaking about current estimates, not previous 2012 to 2016.

**Mr TURNER:** A point of order!

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Blain, let me deal with one point of order at a time. The minister can answer the question. We have had a wide-ranging estimates; we went back eight years at one stage. We have asked a lot of questions about 2019–20 actuals. The minister can answer the question.

**Mr TURNER:** If the Member for Namatjira would like to raise points of order, can he at least let us know what standing order they will be under.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, can you please answer the question. I draw people's attention to the fact that we have five minutes to go and there are still a number of areas to discuss including Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and, one of my favourites, Arts and Culture. As I am the assistant minister for Arts and Culture, I have a particular interest.

**Mr PAECH:** When we are talking about that, from 2015 to 2016 as a whole, there were 78 houses delivered. Of the final year in 2016 before the August elections, over that financial period there were two houses delivered by the previous CLP administration.

**Mr YAN:** I was hoping we could actually get back to the Output 4.1, Remote Housing. We diverged over into town camps there for a while.

TDC in Wadeye have built eight new houses since March last year which have been handed over to Territory Families—that I am aware of. Can you confirm if anyone has moved into any of these houses yet?

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer that to Dwayne McInnes to respond.

**Mr McINNES:** It is the case that those houses have been handed over to the department for tenancing. We followed that up last week. There remain just a few to be allocated. The issue we have at the moment is there is some unrest in the community and some uncertainty about who will be occupying those dwellings. The regional team is working on a solution to get those allocated as soon as possible, but some of those have already been allocated.

**Mr YAN:** Of those eight houses, do any of those eight houses have tenants in them?

**Mr McINNES:** Yes. Some of those eight houses do. There are three or four that are not occupied.

**Mr YAN:** We have eight houses provided in March—we have overcrowding in the area and we still have four houses vacant. What was the total cost of building each of these houses?

**Mr PAECH:** To make sure we get the accurate numbers, we are happy to take that question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.17

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

**Mr YAN:** Of the eight houses built by TDC in Wadeye, what was the total cost of building each of these houses?



**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 7.17.

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**Mr YAN:** Could you confirm if one of these houses had been vandalised since it was completed, incurring additional costs for TDC to undertake repairs?

**Mr PAECH:** I am not involved in the operations but I am happy to take that question on notice.

**Mr YAN:** There will be an additional question if you take that on notice. What was the cost of repair if it was vandalised?

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#### **Question on Notice No 7.18**

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

**Mr YAN:** Of the eight houses built by TDC in Wadeye, can you confirm if one of these houses had been vandalised since it was completed incurring additional costs for TDC to undertake repairs? If so, what was the total cost for the repairs to that house?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 7.18.

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**Mr SLOAN:** Just following on from this morning when you asked me to refer a question to Remote Housing, I am just after the actual figures for the 2019–20 financial year for housing services delivery, remote program delivery office, community services, local government and community development, corporate and governance and shared services received.

**Mr PAECH:** I am not sending you on a goose chase but the advice that I have received is that is a whole-of-agency question; therefore, I suggest that question is asked of Minister Worden.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any further questions? There being no further questions that concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

#### **Output 4.2 – Remote Housing Programs**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 4.2, Remote Housing Programs. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** I have plenty of questions for this output, but I am going to stick to the pertinent ones. I note that work is under way to demolish some houses in communities that are beyond economic repair. What is happening to the people who are displaced while their houses are being demolished and rebuilt?

**Mr PAECH:** This question has a variety of different outcomes. We work with the residents when they are involved in the relocation. Some people opt to relocate and spend time with family. We provide additional accommodation in remote communities. That may result in a house that is used for the purposes of a transitional accommodation or we bring in transitional accommodation options for people.

We do not like what we saw previously by the CLP government, where people were given tents. We actually make sure that we try to provide them with an avenue for accommodation.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** It has been under your government as well.

**Mr PAECH:** You would know all about the tents, would you not?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I have seen lots of yours, mate. That is exactly what you are doing.

**Mr YAN:** The reason I raise this is because I know some elderly people who are looking after extended family in the house and they are quite worried that their house will be demolished. They are already living in an overcrowded house, and the only option that they have is to move in with relatives and further overcrowding that house, so they have asked about possible demountables and alternative accommodation arrangements for their families.

**Mr PAECH:** It is something our agency explores. Following the estimates position, if you would like to make that case known to the agency we can work with them on those options. In some communities what is referred to as a demountable, or an ATCO, is brought in and hooked up to essential services so people have accommodation. When people nominate to spend time with a family member, we will try to support that as best we can. In some communities we have accommodation kept it as a transitional house which is constantly occupied with people.

**Mr YAN:** What is the current cost of delivering a new residence to a remote community? I will break this down into two—that is, replacing a demolished house and delivering a new house. I am happy to take an average.

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer to Dwayne McInnes so he can provide an overview. Following that, if there is additional information that you feel you need to be provided we are happy to take that question on notice.

**Mr McINNES:** Dwayne McInnes. The cost of new houses varies depending on the type of housing that is utilised, as well as the design that is adopted through the local decision-making process. We have tried to manage those costs as much as we can, and we have some pleasing results when compared to prior construction costs.

Currently, our average across all types is around \$458,000 in the pure construction sense. However, when there is demolishing involved—depending on what is involved in the materials, because if there is asbestos it is a little bit more—that can range between \$30,000 and \$50,000 for the demolition side of things. It also depends on the state of the infrastructure on the land.

The pure construction cost, we are average about \$458,000. Land servicing, depending on the latent structure and whether it needs upgrading or additional services are required, can add additional costs as well.

**Mr PAECH:** Following from Mr McInnes's comments, one of the things we are looking at is the Aboriginal Business Enterprise program, which is—where it is safe to do so and where the skills are—allowing Aboriginal people the economic opportunity to participate in the demolition and remedial works to prepare the site for a new build.

**Mr YAN:** That leads me to another question. What is the value budgeted for 2020–21 for work allocated to Aboriginal business enterprises? How many have been awarded so far this financial year?

**Mr PAECH:** Dwayne can give you an overview, or we are happy to take it on notice.

**Mr McINNES:** We can say that \$86.3m out of the total program has been awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises over the life of the program, or 47% of contracts. We do not provide a specific budget on a per annum basis to target ABEs. We want to maximise that as much as we can so that we do not focus on setting up a percentage of the budget towards that.

**Mr YAN:** The life of program is 2016–17 current?

**Mr McINNES:** That is correct—2016–17 was the early works for the Room to Breathe program and then the build program in earnest from 2017–18.

**Mr YAN:** How many were awarded so far this financial year?

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

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**Question on Notice No 7.19**

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Namatjira, I ask you to restate the question for the record.

**Mr YAN:** I will read out the whole question. What is the value budgeted for 2020–21 work allocated to Aboriginal business enterprises? How many have been awarded so far this financial year?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 7.19.

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**Mr YAN:** Noting that we are talking about an average of \$450,000 to deliver a new residence into a community, there are alternative modular options that are being used in remote areas across the world which are being delivered far cheaper and far easier with appropriate levels of housing for anybody in a modern world. Have you explored any alternative portable modular designs?

**Mr PAECH:** This is an area we are doing a considerable amount of work in with our partner, the Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Logistics. We look at how we can fine tune what contractor are out there. That come in when we look at all our tenders.

Currently, we are delivering modular homes to those communities out bush, as well as homes being built with bricks and mortar. We do not rule it out. We meet with businesses which come forward with plans for potential modular homes and what can be done.

Last term the agency and former minister met with a range of people who presented options that may be viable for those remote communities in the infrastructure of modular home. We are not ruling out meeting with people to discuss those options.

**Mr YAN:** I have researched this and I note that there are some modular designs that you can continue to add on, so you can made it as small and/or as large as you like, which is a very good option, looking at people in remote areas who may have changing needs.

**Mr PAECH:** Absolutely. I am aware of that. We have had conversations with some businesses about what is referred to as a modular panel. Modular homes are capable of having panels that can be added or removed to increase in size for bedrooms and living spaces. They are able to provide granny flat options as well. We are meeting with people regarding these models to understand the costs. These potential models, because they have panels, can be taken out and constructed in community.

**Mr YAN:** We have spoken about the current cost of delivering a new residence, I now move to the current cost—I will use an average because I am happy with that—of delivering refurbished residences in a remote community. What is the average cost?

**Mr PAECH:** I will ask Dwayne to provide information on this. We work on an average because each home is different, so the scope of the home, the time in which it was built and the need for repairs vary across the board. Dwayne will provide a basic average.

**Mr McINNES:** For most refurbished homes under Room to Breathe program—which we have set up guidelines for that are available on the website—we work off averages for two, three and four-bedroom homes. We try to manage within \$200,000 for an additional two bedrooms, \$250,000 for three et cetera. Across all housing types the cost of adding living spaces and upgrading the dwelling is around \$260,000.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 4.2.

### **Output 4.3 – Town Camps and Homelands**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 4.3, Town Camps and Homelands. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** On page 22 of the annual report for Local Government, Housing and Community Development, you reference a homelands policy review which is to be undertaken by consultancy. Who is awarded the consultancy and at work cost?

**Mr PAECH:** Dwayne will provide some information.

**Mr McINNES:** It was awarded to KPMG and the cost for the consultancy was \$79,000.

**Mr YAN:** As per the annual report, what measures have you taken to begin the delivery of those review outcomes? When can Territorians expect to see the results of that review?

**Mr PAECH:** This area is of interest to all the regional and remote members of the Assembly. Since coming to government and the ministry, I have looked at the review and it has taken into account the government's response to the recommendations. In the coming weeks the review will be made public, this being a result of thorough consultation with major stakeholders.

The review will trigger reforms, particularly regarding the grant funding should work in the future to optimise value for money. Once the review is released I intend to work with members of the Assembly, the four land councils and Minister Ken Wyatt—the federal Minister for Indigenous Australians—on a new way forward. The review is solid and goes into depth. I am not interested in reviews that sit on bookshelves and collect dust. There needs to be tangible outcomes and government responses need to be areas we can work towards, not motherhood statements.

**Mr YAN:** I note that the TCFU has invested \$40.9m in housing and infrastructure upgrades in the annual report, page 38. It states that at 30 June 2020, 292 projects have commenced and 277 have been completed with investment in town camps and community living areas in Darwin, Palmerston, Adelaide River, Katherine, Pine Creek, Mataranka, Elliott and Tennant Creek. Why were there no projects for Alice Springs?

**Mr PAECH:** In relation to town camps?

**Mr YAN:** Yes.

**Mr PAECH:** Referring to the comments I made earlier to the Member for Araluen, Alice Springs was the last place under the Alice Springs Transformation Plan, the national partnership agreement, to receive infrastructure when it came to town camps. When we made the decision moving forward—the previous minister and the previous agency—it was of the view that the other town camps had not had significant investment for a number of years. They were not part of that national partnership agreement and the infrastructure there required major work.

Alice Springs town camps were not included in the initial round, but our intention moving forward is that they see that level of infrastructure and we have conversations with them about new properties, if that is a requirement, as well as infrastructure upgrades and municipal and essential services.

**Mr YAN:** I certainly hope so, because the town camps of Alice Springs felt a bit left out. Everybody else got something; word travels fast around the regions. People are seeing upgrades to town camps and community living areas across the Territory and the poor Alice Springs people were missing out.

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, word does travel fast. The remainder of the town camps that were not part of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan did feel left out for a number of years as well. Moving forward we have made that investment across the board with the other town camps. We will make sure now that all investments we make in and across town camps as a result of the town camp review are done in an equitable way. I am sure you will be involved in conversations about those investments with your constituents in those communities.

**Mr YAN:** What pre-employment programs have you implemented to promote greater participation in the workforce by town camp residents?

**Mr PAECH:** That is currently funding through DTBI and that agency and that is an agreement with Tangentyere. It is an area we are looking at particularly in a town camp and a remote context. Currently that runs through DTBI.

**Mr YAN:** Many of our larger regions have lots of visitors coming in and we have visitor parks as we do in Alice Springs. Katherine is seeing an increase in visitors coming in from outlying regions for various activities and appointments. Have you done any work to establish a visitor park for the Katherine region?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, we are aware of that. We have been asked to be involved in a scoping study for a potential accommodation facility like the visitor park in Alice Springs and that is being done with our agency and with

the Chief Minister and Cabinet. We will note that there are different arrangements for visitor parks across the Northern Territory and there has been a role traditionally with Aboriginal Hostels. We are doing a volume of scoping work now.

**Mr YAN:** Just so that I can reply back to the people of Katherine, do we have a time line on when we may look at some of this scoping?

**Mr PAECH:** The scoping work we are engaging in now. We are working with DCMC. This goes to a broader piece of work around temporary accommodation right across the Northern Territory in urban and remote areas for urban and remote Territorians. It is part of a bigger volume of work. I suggest your response is that the Northern Territory Government is currently working on the scoping study.

**Mr YAN:** We do not have a possible time line when we may see something back from a scoping study?

**Mr PAECH:** That is a bigger piece of work and I could not give you a time on when that would be completed. Again, that is working as whole-of-Territory piece of work.

**Mr YAN:** I will follow up on that next estimates.

**Mr PAECH:** I can say that there will be some local consultation with residents in Katherine and in the remote communities just outside of the Katherine region who will be accessing that service.

**Mr YAN:** Thank you, minister, I appreciate that. Action 1.6 on page 16 of the NT Housing Strategy states that you will 'establish an appropriate property and tenancy management framework for remote communities, town camps and community living areas in collaboration with key partners'. Have you established this framework?

**Mr PAECH:** I will ask Danyelle Jarvis to talk. She has done a fantastic job in the Town Camps Futures Unit. That work is being undertaken—part of the reform work that I have asked for from Territory Housing about the remote issues in town camps was moving the infrastructure projects. That will speed that process up, but it will also allow our agency to really focus on sustainable tenancy management.

**Ms JARVIS:** Through the joint standing committee we have governance arrangements across our remote property and tenancy management. That includes the development of a strategic framework. One of the new commitments we need to implement to the new model, as of 1 July 2021, is a preventative approach to our repairs and maintenance, with a strong focus on the nine healthy living principles.

We are in the process of revising our property service model which will incorporate both a preventative approach to repairs and maintenance as well as imbedding a stronger focusing by the trade panel contract workers on the critical areas of electricity, water supply and so on.

We are also integrating a new program for the tenancy program which is looking at living skills. We will, via a contracted model, fund providers to implement a living skills program across all 73 communities as well as the town camps in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

**Mr YAN:** I take it, then, that this framework is established? Or it is to be established and implemented by July 2020?

**Ms JARVIS:** The framework was approved by the joint standing committee in March this year. We currently have contracts in place which will be honoured up until the end of this financial year. They will take effect 1 July 2021 through to 30 June 2023.

**Mr YAN:** I appreciate that.

**Mr PAECH:** Member for Namatjira, following on from Danyelle, full procurement processes will be in place to follow our guidelines. Then, those will be awarded against the model.

**Mr YAN:** I appreciate that. This next one is very close to my heart and you will be aware of it, minister. I have had a number of discussions with Central Arrernte people in Alice Springs about the White Gate camp on the edge of Alice Springs. This has been a contentious issue for many governments over many years. Unfortunately, the central Arrernte people who utilise that area are having the difficulty. It is semi-serviced through Tangentyere which is, I suppose, supported by government. With the work that is being done with Lhere Artepe at the moment—because I believe it sits on Lhere Artepe land—does the government have any

plans to do any work with the people living at White Gate and to improve the conditions of the people who are living there?

**Mr PAECH:** Mr Chair, I will place on the record that the people at White Gate are my family, so I disclose a perceived conflict there.

We will take that question on notice to provide you with a full, in-depth response about what work is being undertaken by the department. It has been an ongoing issue.

There are conversations being undertaken at the moment regarding an Indigenous Land Use Agreement with Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation, which is the native title body, or the PBC, for the area. The government is committed to work with the people of White Gate to find a sustainable solution that increases the infrastructure.

In terms of the investments, I will take it on notice. This work occurred prior to my commencement as the minister, but the government intends to keep our commitment regarding the services for White Gate.

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#### Question on Notice No 7.20

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

**Mr YAN:** There are many, such as the central Arrernte people, people living at White Gate community on the edge of Alice Springs. What work is the government is doing to develop provision of services in conjunction with traditional owners and Tangentyere Council to provide ongoing support for residents?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 7.20.

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**Mr YAN:** I note that there is an advisory group for Town Camps Futures Unit. How many times did this advisory group meet last financial year?

**Mr PAECH:** I will refer to Danyelle Jarvis to respond.

**Ms JARVIS:** We only met twice last financial year. The intended meeting for this financial year was impacted by COVID-19. Having said that, we have regular contact with the expert members as part of the ongoing delivery of housing infrastructure program work.

**Mr YAN:** As a follow up, do you have a schedule for meetings? I understand there was a reduction in meetings in the last reporting period due to COVID-19. Do you have a schedule for meetings moving forward?

**Ms JARVIS:** No, we do not. Having said that, with the establishment of Aboriginal Housing NT we are keen support progressing this work via the newly established peak body.

**Mr PAECH:** Mr Chair, I have an answer to a question on notice. It is number 7.16.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 7.16

**Mr PAECH:** As of 30 June 2020, there are 2,461 applicants waiting on the list and the breakdowns for regions is as follows: Central Australia is 511; Big Rivers is 606; Arnhem is 585; Barkly is 133; and Arafura is 626.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 7.12

**Mr PAECH:** Mr Chair, I have an answer to question on notice number 7.12. For the cost to subcontract out the managing housing program to Ekistica, the contract and business is managed by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics and, therefore, the question is to be directed to DIPL.

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**Mr CHAIR:** Members, minister and guests, that concludes our time for consideration of all the output groups relating to Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

**Mr PAECH:** Mr Chair, I extend my thanks to the remote housing team who have presented this morning, and acknowledge the hard work of the public service in the Art, Culture and Heritage agency, and AAPA, who have not been able to present today, but there is a huge volume of work that they have undertaken—thank you for that time. Thank you to all members for your questions from your constituencies.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. On behalf of the committee I thank you minister for appearing today and all the agency staff. Mr Davies and your staff, thank you for your time and effort and your support of Minister Paech. I will add, in closing, Minister Paech changed his tie and is now the winner of the tie competition. I am sorry, Member for Barkly, but there was an outstanding tie change and he has come out the winner.

The committee will now proceed to outputs relating to Territory Families and Urban Housing after we have a lunch interval and we will return back here at 1 pm. Thank you, everybody.

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The committee suspended.

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## MINISTER WORDEN'S PORTFOLIOS

### TERRITORY FAMILIES AND URBAN HOUSING

#### DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome, everybody. I welcome you, minister, to today's hearing and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you. Once you have done that I will invite you to make a brief statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions and, finally, non-output specific budget-related questions.

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

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement regarding Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Mr Chair, first I will introduce the members of the Territory Families, Housing and Communities executive team who are sitting with me here today or out the back to support. They are Mr Ken Davies, our Chief Executive Officer; Ms Nicole Hurwood, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Organisational Services; Ms Jeanette Kerr, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Family and Regional Services; Mr Jim Bamber will join us a bit later, the Deputy Chief Executive of Urban Housing; Mr Brent Warren, who is the General Manager of Youth Justice; Ms Sasha Dennis, Executive Director, Sport and Active Recreations; Ms Helena Wright, Executive Director, Programs and Engagement; to my left, Mr Luke Twyford, General Manager, Strategic Services; and Ms Kim Charles, the Chief Financial Officer, on my right.

I acknowledge the Larrakia people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we get the privilege of gathering today. I pay my respects to elders past, present and future and recognise First Nations people here with us today.

It gives me great pleasure, as Minister for Territory Families and Urban Housing to provide an opening statement regarding this new broader portfolio with very broad responsibilities and a significant budget totalling \$1.1bn.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities has now been operating for just over two months. Its diverse yet connected functions are responsible for ensuring that Territorians are safe, have a home, remain connected to their heritage and culture, live active lives and can access support services when needed.

Through its whole-of-life approach, Territory Families, Housing and Communities has extraordinary opportunities to make a difference in the lives of all Territorians. This portfolio is an investment in working smarter. Joining together these output groups enables greater sophistication in the delivery of integrated holistic services for children, young people, families, women, seniors and investing in the communities in which we live.

It also creates significant opportunities to create efficiencies in service delivery and, in doing so, a high degree of flexibility and agility to allocate our financial and personal resources where they are needed the most—that is, in achieving economies of scale.

I recognise the achievements the output groups made in their respective agencies prior to the machinery of government changes. Today those achievements that led to better outcomes for children, families and communities will be highlighted. However, those areas where more work needs to be done to reach our budget targets will be transparently acknowledged. We will not lose our focus on those areas which need our attention the most, whilst at the same time turning our minds to innovations and aspirations that the formation of this broader agency offers.

This government's 2020–21 budget of \$1.1bn invests in a full spectrum of complementary programs, services and activities essential to achieving safe, thriving and connected children, families and communities. It invests in Territorians in the here and now, but in doing so is an investment in creating meaningful generational change for the long-term future.

The budget also invests in our people. The workforce of a headcount of over 1,800 is the backbone of our agency and they each seek to deliver high-quality, client-centred service.

It is an investment in good governance to rigorously identify what is working and what is not; in strategic, legislative and practice reform to deliver contemporary evidence-based services; and in infrastructure so we can deliver services in contemporary fit-for-purpose facilities.

This year's budget will implement a range of key priorities to enhance our service delivery to better support Territorians. This includes \$52.2m for the operation of quarantine centres in Howard Springs and Alice Springs, essential to the management of keeping our communities safe.

It also includes \$363.4m in supports for children, young people and families, including family child protection, out-of-home care, youth justice, disability services, and domestic, family and sexual violence reduction services comprising the following:

- \$22m for child protection services
- \$123.1m for the ongoing delivery of out-of-home care services
- \$68.8m investment in the youth justice system
- \$27.9m for domestic, family and sexual violence reduction services
- \$97.9m for the office of disability.

In addition to the above, the 2020–21 budget also invests \$199.7m into urban housing; \$39.5m to ensure that Territorians can participate in sport; and \$1.18m to progress gender equality.

In 2019–20 the output areas now united in Territory Families, Housing and Communities continued to deliver. In that year there was a reduced number of investments substantiating that a child suffered harm, of 19%, and a continued decline in the number of children in out-of-home care by 3%.

These achievements can be attributed to several variables, notwithstanding improved service delivery of early intervention and prevention services.

Implementation of the Signs of Safety practice framework is now in its second year and reinforces meaningful consultation with families and their natural networks in making decisions about how they will keep their children safe.

We continue to invest in the delivery of a quality out-of-home care system. At the heart of this output we have not lost sight of the need for Aboriginal children to be placed with Aboriginal carers. In 2019–20 we continued



to partner with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to identify kinship carers for children unable to safely live with their parents.

COVID-19 restricted travel to remote communities and the number of Aboriginal children placed with Aboriginal carers in 2019–20 declined by 2%.

The intensive therapeutic residential care service has now commenced, ensuring children with the most complex of needs receive the intensity of care they require to reach their personal success. There has been a 19% reduction in the number of young people in residential care.

This government's investment in youth justice is having an impact on reducing youth offending. Since the 2014–15 financial year the daily average of young people in youth detention has reduced from 42 to 24 in the 2019–20 year. In addition, of those young people who completed youth diversion, 70% did not reoffend within six months of completing those programs.

The scourge of domestic, family and sexual violence casts an insidious thread through our community. The number of child protection notifications from our domestic violence link has increased by 26%, from 6,788 in 2018–19 to 8,545 in 2019–20. It is estimated that in 2020–21, over 6,000 women and accompanying children will utilise crisis services.

The 2020–21 budget is an investment in the implementation of the domestic, family and sexual violence strategy, which is a five-year strategy to effect lasting change to increase the safety of women and children and create behavioural change in the perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

Through the Community Engagement and Programs output we continue to provide targeted services and areas of gender equality, equity and social inclusion, including youth services and multicultural affairs. In 2021 we will continue to engage groups and communities in positive events and use grants to support programs that contribute to the social fabric and vibrancy of the Northern Territory.

This output group is well-placed to harness strong connections between the culture, heritage, sport and recreation output groups. On that note, the Northern Territory Government commits \$39.5m to ensure young people can participate in sports through the Sport Voucher Scheme and that the Territory's sporting facilities are maintained.

Too many Territorians do not have safe, secure housing, are homeless, are living in overcrowded homes or are sleeping rough. Under these circumstances, these Territorians experience other adverse outcomes in their health, wellbeing and education. Access to housing must be one of the cornerstones if we are to achieve safe, thriving and connected communities. This year's budget allocation of \$49.7m is integral to combating homelessness and delivering key infrastructure projects to ease the pressure on public housing.

I take this opportunity to refer to the Northern Territory Families housing community workforce which, as at pay 9, 28 October 2020, consists of over 1,800 employees—that is a headcount. I acknowledge that the machinery of government is at a time of great change for all our staff. However, as I have been visiting workplaces and meeting staff it is apparent there is a strong will, drive, enthusiasm and optimism what the future holds with our greater department. It is pleasing to see the people and program areas connections being naturally created across the agency.

It is clear the creation of Territory Families, Housing and Communities presents a wealth of opportunity to effect change and make a real difference in the lives of Territorians. There is a lot of work to implement the machinery of government changes. Together with the executive leadership of Territory Families, Housing and Communities I acknowledge that these changes will take time, but they are well under way.

We will keep a slow and steady hand where it is needed, but be agile and flexible whenever it is called for. Whole-of-agency and sector consultations have commenced to develop the inaugural Territory Families, Housing and Communities strategic plan. The blueprint will unite our vision, goals, values and our work. The core work, the work in progress and the new work this agency, creates the opportunities to progress.

That brings me to the end of my statement. I am happy to take any questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Are there any questions on the minister's statement?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Minister, you mentioned in your opening statement that 70% of youth on diversion did not go on to reoffend. I missed the time frame you quoted.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a manual figure calculated from time to time. I did not state a time frame...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No, you said that they did not go on to reoffend within ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Within six months of completion.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is that figure calculated on? What youth diversion are you talking about where there was a 70% success rate?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Mr Luke Twyford to give some more detail on that.

**Mr TWYFORD:** The case management system that we operate counts active case managements for youth that are managed through our Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Team. There were 309 young people with active case management, 203 of whom completed a conference and of those we were able to manually track against the apprehensions in the police dataset. It is a manual process to link a client ID within our case management system to the police apprehension dataset.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What time period are we talking about, these 309?

**Mr TWYFORD:** That is the figure for the 2019–20 financial year.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** For the 2019–20 financial year, there were 309 active cases; is that across your agency? Is that for care and protection or youth justice?

**Mr TWYFORD:** It is a count of youth who were on active youth case management by our Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Teams. It would be a court-ordered community supervision order for those youths.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The YOREO program.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** These 309 youth are caught-ordered youths engaged with the Territory Families. Of those 309 court-ordered youth, 203 completed a conference; is that the victim-offender conferencing?

**Mr TWYFORD:** There are a range of conferences—perhaps Mr Warren could join and talk to the nature of each type of conference, but it would be a mixture of the youth justice conferencing and court-ordered conferencing.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Opposition Leader, could you repeat the question?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, of course. Luke mentioned 203 completed a conference and I wanted a breakdown of what is a conference?

**Mr WARREN:** A conference can be a victim-offender conference where the young person, their family and the victim come together in a mediated meeting. It can be a family group conference where the offender, their family and a convenor come together to discuss the offending or it can be a pre-sentence conference, which is where a court orders a young person to participate, usually with the victim, in a conference before sentencing occurs.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The family group conference, is that with the victim?

**Mr WARREN:** The family group conference is held when a victim may decline to participate or if it is the kind of offence that does not have an obvious victim.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Whereas the victim offender does.

**Mr WARREN:** Correct.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There are three are types of conferences so then you manually track the apprehensions by police, which I asked police about, of those 203 70% did not go on to reoffend within six months. Do I understand that correctly? Everyone is nodding. Okay.

**Mr WARREN:** That is correct.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you. Is that the only data you are tracking in that way? I ask these types of questions a lot in parliament and we are always pointed towards the victim-offender conferencing. It is held up as a pillar of success by your government, minister. Are you monitoring the effectiveness of your other diversion programs in this same detailed way?

**Mr WARREN:** As was mentioned in the opening speech, we have a range of programs that we have been developing and funding that has been established in the last term of government, which continues. Each of those programs is subject to supervision by Territory Families, Housing and Communities. They each have a slightly different focus and slightly different measures of success.

To give you some examples of some of the challenges, in terms of providing a simple numerical answer to what seems like a simple question, young people participating in case management may need assistance due to a mental health concern. They may need support with developing a training pathway. They may be assisted into a work placement. They may be assisted with crisis accommodation. They could be assisted with a new family placement.

In each of those situations we would count, on an individual basis, a sign of success if a young person has gone from disengagement and unemployment to training or a work placement. If a young person's accommodation has been in jeopardy and they have been placed well, that would be a sign of success.

One of the challenges is merging data sets from different agencies. As Mr Twyford mentioned before, a key challenge for us is to have to constantly manually cross-reference data from the IJIS database, which is the source of truth for courts activity and police apprehensions with our data. There is a lot of work going on at the moment to connect those systems together.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Leader of the Opposition, if you allow me to add some of those diversion programs—you look like you are compiling a list. We have existing programs and are always looking at alternatives, but we have community youth diversion programs which provide early intervention and targeted case management to individual young people and their families.

We have bail supported accommodation services for young people that are aged between 10 to 17 years—you might have heard of Saltbush, which is providing those in Alice Springs. They assist young people to comply with their bail conditions. We also have early intervention services for young people between the ages of eight and 17.

We fund a range of youth diversion programs, specifically the one that Brett was talking about. Around \$8.5m goes into the Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Teams. They do a split of work, one of which is the case management and the other one is the patrol services that we do in Alice Springs.

We have \$3.2m going into eight non-government organisations that do pre-court and pre-sentence youth diversion services—some of those you have just heard about—and that is \$0.7m for the provision of court referred restorative justice conferences, which is a different one offered by the Jesuits. It is a 10-week program that engages young people to look at their behaviours and how they contribute. It brings the family in alongside the victim. There have been good outcomes. The last time I spoke to John Adams in Alice Springs—there is a 75% non-reoffending rate.

There is \$4.1m going to bail supported accommodation for 10 to 17-year-olds so that they do not fail on their bail conditions. There is \$1.5m invested in early intervention wilderness camps, which some call boot camps.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** By 'some' you mean the Chief Minister?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There are lots of words used for them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There sure are!

**Mrs WORDEN:** There are some new and old words. We prefer to call them wilderness camps. We invested \$300,000 into victim support services and \$5.1m for the Back on Track program. There are a range of other programs for youth drop-in centres.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many of the 203 completed conferences were victim-offender conferences?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Warren to answer that question.

**Mr WARREN:** There were 45 victim-offender conferences, 125 family group conferences, and 26 victim-offender pre-sentence conferences in the reporting period.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There is a large number of the family group conferences. Can you repeat why would a victim be absent at that? Is it purely if the victim chooses not to or is it if the offender does not want to face their victim? Can it be both?

**Mr WARREN:** It would be if the victim chooses not to participate or if the crime type did not lend itself to having a victim, such as public order offences.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Okay. That was the one where you said there is no victim per se—an individual you can target?

**Mr WARREN:** Yes, correct.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Opposition Leader, you have taken an interest in data and it is important to note that we are currently investing in a new system. The system by which data is collected is over 20 years old. It is not fit for purpose and we have a new system under way called 'Care' which is being delivered by DCIS in partnership with our agency. It is a \$63m investment. The system can talk across agencies. Over the years there have been discussions regarding data and an interface between different agencies. It is a huge investment and needs to be done.

It will deliver a contemporary child protection and youth justice case management solution. Many of the data sets that you are seeking will be better recorded over time and we will have a holistic view of a child. It will increase the opportunities for early intervention and diversion to effective programs. Data will be shared across government to improve the quality of care and capacity to meet legal obligations. During this estimates you have asked agencies a range of different questions—in the future the data will be centralised.

It will enable frontline staff across our agencies to access important information anytime and anywhere at a point in time when it is relevant. It will also enable them to interface with smartphones and tablets. Over time, it will enable and improve connection to non-government. That is a really important step because a very large portion of our budget goes out to our non-government partners and private service providers in the communities. We will have a government system which will consume and update relevant information related to child wellbeing and support.

In parallel with that we are implementing a new data warehouse which will centralise and enhance our agency's connection with linkages in reporting and analysis capabilities. I thought I would put that up at the beginning of our discussions today because it is a big part of our future budget. All governments going forward will benefit from that investment. We are calling it significant investment as it will change the interface and some of our understanding about tracking some of our young people.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, it is critical. That is why I keep asking, because we do not know if we are on the right track if we cannot source the meaningful data. Often what we end up with is data that means nothing to anyone and does not tell us if we are ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** There is information-sharing. The police have activities under the *Youth Justice Act*, as do we. A lot of that is now being manually counted.

We are also reliant on our service providers. Almost 50% of our budget goes to service providers across the agencies. That is a significant portion of the work with our young people being done but not directly by government, so it is important that we have that infrastructure.

The CEO has just let me know that the procurement has been completed. We have announced that—we are moving forward. It was a tricky time to get a company to do that. Originally, the company that was the preferred provider for that service was not available to do the work, but now they are. It is exciting that we have them on board and that is heading in the right direction. It will help out not just the current government but any future governments as well. It is important IT.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That has gone to tender?

**Mr CHAIR:** Sorry to interrupt. I want to clarify, because we have heard a few times this week about manually extracting the data and counting it. Can I clarify how manually ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Spreadsheets.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am getting to that question.

**Mr CHAIR:** This is my question.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I know, but I am getting to that.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Mr Chair, manual counting is through spreadsheets. I will ask the CEO if he wants to add some more detail about that.

**Mr CHAIR:** There has been some confusion about manual data collection this week.

**Mr DAVIES:** It is a real challenge. As the minister said, getting the right datasets to give us the right set of information to answer questions—both in the public domain and internally about the way we deliver our programs and check the outcomes we are targeting—remains an ongoing challenge.

When we say manual—we have been getting data from the ION system, Attorney-General and Justice and police have datasets. Luke Twyford has been driving this broader strategic approach of sharing data, but it has been very labour-intensive. It literally might mean one computer system and another, and literally the only network you have is to do it manually. I will give you an example.

As the CEO of Territory Families—that component of it—there are about 800 school-aged children in care on any given day. There is no way for me to check electronically whether or not a child is enrolled or attending school. It is still a manual process. We have to get in place a system that is more robust, in time.

This project has been designed by practitioners on the front line with DCIS to put together a system that will enable the people on the front line—police, child protection officers and education officers—to use an interface with it, including health and housing officials.

It is a big investment. In creating greater efficiency it will be a fantastic outcome. The project is actually under way, but we will have to do this segment by segment and it will take two or three years to deliver it in its entirety.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** This \$63m care project has now been awarded, is that right?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is correct.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Was it a local IT company who won that tender?

**Mr DAVIES:** The IT company that won it is LiquidLogic and the Australian partners, SRA Information Technology who have a local office here.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is this part of the same IT project that Territory Families was undertaking after the royal commission with the One Child, One Case?

**Mrs WORDEN:** One Child, One Case is a process, but this is a system. They are not the same.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But there was an IT system being done at that time. I wonder if we are talking about the same one.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, it is a recommendation of the royal commission, but it is a one-by-one case—it is a process. It was under our response to the royal commission.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** This is the exact same database we have been talking about for four years? Will there only be one, because we have talked about other ones before?

**Mr DAVIES:** The royal commission findings are about two-and-a-half years old. This project was funded under Safe Thriving and Connected in relation to government response. It is a big process worth \$63m. We have to make sure that when we procure a service like this it is done properly. With the initial procurement, we went through a couple of stages. It was a very thorough process. We had to get something that the end-users, people on the front line, could utilise and that is why it has taken the time. This is a 20-year project, in effect, and we do not want to make a mistake with it. It has been done assiduously and thoroughly.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** We all lived through AMS, so I understand your exercise of caution. It is critical because if you do not have that oversight in youth justice, you do not have it in care and protection either. What agencies will this care merge? Police, Attorney-General ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will ask Luke Twyford answer that—I have seen a list, so it is a known entity.

**Mr TWYFORD:** I understand the question is on which agencies will be able to access and contribute to the care system. There is a list at the moment, it is forming part of the business requirements for the design, so it is not a completed or finalised list.

We are taking a broad approach to the scope that. In fact, this will be a care system that interacts and records services government provides to families and children. If there is a government department that provides services to children or families, the current design would be that they could opt in. But the security requirements, access requirements are yet to be defined.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That was my next question. There will need to be all sorts of data-sharing and legislation and all sorts of things, because police understandably have a different ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is why it has to be done robustly and all those things need to be considered. Even procurement has had to be stepped through how those things can work, but they will be worked out and that is with DCIS.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** As it stands right now, the intention would be for AGD and police to be part of this system?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Absolutely.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They are on the list.

**Mrs WORDEN:** As is Education. We have some really important partners in other government agencies that would be at the front of mind and they have all been considered from the start.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Going back to the 203 completed conferences, you said something like 'did not go on to reoffend within six months'. What does 'not reoffend' mean? Is that no apprehensions in the six months?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will invite Brent Warren to come back.

**Mr TWYFORD:** While Mr Warren joins us, Leader of the Opposition, I can confirm the counting rule is no apprehensions by police.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Okay, so it is no apprehensions.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Just doing a quick count on the numbers you gave to us before, Mr Warren, I only came up with 196, I was just wondering where the other seven conferences ended up? Forty-five, 125 and 26 is 196.

**Mr WARREN:** That is definitely the breakdown of conferences by category. I would probably have to take on notice if there has been a discrepancy between the first number given and the second, but the breakdown as I have read it is the breakdown.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Braitling, did you want to put it on notice?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes. We will make sure we get the numbers right.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.1

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The numbers given to us of 45 victim-offender conferencing, 125 family conferencing and 26 pre-sentencing conferences equals 196. There were 203 victim conferences held, what are the other seven classified as?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, we accept the question and we will endeavour to get that before the end of the session.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Brainting has been allocated the number 8.1.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is normally the result of the three different conference types? Are there then conditions put on the offender that then have to be completed? Is that often an outcome?

**Mr WARREN:** There can be conditions on a conference. Sometimes it can be things like the offender agreeing to make some act of restitution towards the victim, which could be in the form of a letter or some other act of restitution. Other times there can be an agreement to work to a case plan after the conference which may be a commitment to, for example, re-engage with school, and sometimes the conclusion of the conference could reflect the end of a process.

In particular with those pre-sentence conferences there is a piece of work done before—everyone participates, the conference occurs and then the conclusion of that is feeding back to the court that the young person successfully did what was asked by the judge.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How is the outcome then monitored? I know that is not captured in the data you gave me so I am not trying to suggest it is, but who is then making sure—for example, if it is an agreement to work towards a care plan or whatever other thing might happen. Say, if the condition is that the offender has to go to school, who is then making sure that happens, and what happens if they do not do that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are we talking about conferencing outcomes or court-ordered outcomes?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Conferencing outcomes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Conferencing outcomes, okay. I will ask Brent to answer that question.

**Mr WARREN:** The question, as I understand it, was about who monitors the child post-conference. In relation to the traditional youth diversion conferences we have spoken about that are referred to by police ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The three, yes.

**Mr WARREN:** We talked about three categories of conference today. One, is a court-ordered process—that is separate. In relation to the non-court ordered processes, each of those young people has a case manager who works for a non-government organisation that is funded by Territory Families to case-manage the young person through the diversion process.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The victim-offender conferencing is court ordered, the family group and pre-sentence—no, the pre-sentence is the court ordered one, the victim-offender and the family group—sorry, you confused me.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I might make a note about how youth diversion actually works. The flow-on would be that there would be an incident and the police are then contacted to investigate that matter. They collect the evidence and identify who the offenders are, and then they make a decision where they can offer—in the *Youth Justice Act*—youth diversion. The conferences that we are talking about as part of an order are the ones that police can refer and put them on to a Back on Track program or any other youth diversion—that is their choice.

If the youth offender decides not to take that, because that is optional, it can go to a court. The court then gets the option—if they take that then they are case-managed through our agency, but then if that does not happen they are referred to the court. The court can give them a sentence or put them on remand, depending on the offence. Otherwise the court can order them—when we talk about court-ordered ones, that is where that comes from. There are two different points in the flow ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But the conferences are the same? I am just trying to make a distinction in that data. The 203 completed—is that a mixture of both?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a mixture of both. The big difference is that if the young offender takes the option of diversion before it goes to court, they would not end up with a record. You take your chances on the court. If the court then orders it, there is a court record of that.

There are different options. The police, in the first instance, determine—depending on the severity of the offence or if it is a second or first time offender—what sort of option they will apply at that point. There are two intervention points where these conferences can be put in place.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is there a limit on the number of offences you can have before you are given this option as opposed to a stronger option?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Those details are up to the police. They would make that assessment depending on the offence. It is at their discretion.

**Mr WARREN:** There is legislative guidance on how young people can be referred into diversion by police. It relates to whether or not they are a first timer, or new offender. It also relates to whether or not they have committed a prescribed offence. The police have guidance on whether or not a young person is eligible based on those legislative requirements.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I wanted to ask about the cutting youth crime and supporting our police policy platform that was released on 20 June 2020. Your ministerial colleagues have reliably informed me that this is almost all your problem, minister, which I am sceptical of—but I will leave you guys to fight that out in the Cabinet room.

What I want to know is where these things are up to. I assume you have a copy—I brought two copies, if you did not.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am very clear about what my responsibilities are under that policy, thank you.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The clear and immediate consequences—the establishment of the community work program was offenders cleaning graffiti, clearing weeds and landscaping. Where is that up to?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Pleasingly, pre-COVID we were well on track to deliver on that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You could not have been, because it was announced on 20 June.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Pre-COVID the department was working towards—community work orders can be given by the court already. Community work orders form part of the *Youth Justice Act*, so they are separate. This is a community work program. There are orders available through the courts. The community work program is slightly different. I will ask CEO Ken Davies to add to that.

**Mr DAVIES:** With the community work programs—at least in the public domain—people are keen to see a fairly quick response to a youth committing crime. This means young people cleaning fence lines, painting over graffiti, working in an old people's home and that type of thing. Some organisations are already contributing in regard to the obligations around that.

With regard to community work providers, there are 21 local businesses, non-government orgs and local governments are engaged in working with youth outreach and re-engagement programs regarding community work. I have a list of the businesses here. This goes by region by region—it is quite extensive. The minister might like to take over and run through this.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am happy to. We have a list of community work providers already.

AFLNT assists us by teaching young people knowledge within their organisation. They have lots of hours and days of commitment for community work orders that they help us out with.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** AFLNT is teaching youths about football?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, they help them get certification in umpiring, coaching—it is like a mentorship.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What does that have to do with a community work program?



**Mrs WORDEN:** Community work orders currently exist and we have a range of partners that we work with. What was mentioned in that press release is community work programs, which is slightly different.

That is where a group of youths—at the moment individual young people are placed on community work orders with organisations ranging from AFLNT; Alice Springs Animal Shelter; The Gap Youth and Community Centre; Riding for the Disabled; St Vincent de Paul; the YOREO team in Tennant Creek; the Ali Curung op shop; Barkly Regional Council; Barkly veterinary practice; Northern Territory industry training bureau; YouthWorX; Larrakia Nation; the Youth Mill; Palmerston and Regional Basketball Association; Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Team; McMinns Lagoon Reserve; Kalano, RISE Ventures, Food Ladder and the Katherine Town Council; the Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Enterprises ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Sorry, minister. Are they the ones delivering the court-ordered community work orders.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We partner with them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But that is the court-ordered one?

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are the court-ordered ones; they are the work orders. We are talking about expanding that program. These individuals will be placed with those organisations to pick up skills to be mentored and shown a better path.

The community work program would be a group of youths being organised together, which takes a lot more supervision and a bit more work to pull that together. We are working on that. You will eventually see them out. We are hoping—I do not want to pre-empt here and throw councils under the bus, but they will be a natural provider of that sort of environment. We can get young people out to help with councils or that type of entity.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Let me get this straight; there are 21 entities that delivery court-ordered community programs, which sound like they have nothing to do with giving back to the community in terms of cleaning graffiti, landscaping ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Each of those organisations would argue that is not the case.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** AFLNT is teaching people how to umpire, so it is certainly not ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is about—yes, umpiring other young people and about giving back. Umpires—it is about discipline, having some rigour in young people's lives.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I shudder to think how we are measuring KPIs on this—I really do. Your community work program ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, I can enlighten you on some of the programs I worked with.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am really not interested in talking about AFL—you tell us enough in parliament, thank you.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are talking about engaging young people in positive activities that show them beyond ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is portrayed one way in the media by the government, and in reality it is something completely different on the ground.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are you suggesting that the AFL taking on a young person and teaching them through coaching and participating in a group sport, that it is not giving some rigour and robustness in that young person's life?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am suggesting that it is very different to cleaning graffiti.

**Mrs WORDEN:** All our community partners would be really disappointed to hear you say that. They all take on—like St Vincent de Paul working in ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I do not think St Vincent de Paul or AFLNT will be upset about me saying they are not delivering graffiti cleaning services.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Would you suggest that a young person takes up volunteer work in the Gap Youth Centre?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am the one asking the questions. I am trying to find a distinction between the garbage sprouted by your government and the reality on the ground. You have 21 businesses delivering court-ordered—I have not asked any questions about that.

**Mr TURNER:** A point of order, Mr Chair!

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Here we go. Enlighten us.

**Mr TURNER:** We have already discussed this multiple times, Opposition Leader.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am sure we have. Can we move on then?

**Mr TURNER:** Under Standing Order 109, you should not be using insults, imputations, inferences, arguments or talking in a hypothetical manner. We can do this professionally. We are supposed to be here for estimates.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** As professional as you? Thank you. Excellent. There is the court-ordered ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, on the point of order ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is not a point of order?

**Mr CHAIR:** If I could talk that would be nice, without interrupting ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Sorry, I forgot it was your moment. I am listening.

**Mr CHAIR:** Opposition Leader and minister, could we move back to the question and answer style rather than the discussions and combative nature.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Could I add to that. There is reporting back on those community work orders on the outcomes from those partners to the courts. If you would like more distinction on the program versus the orders, I will invite our CEO Ken Davies to add more commentary to that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I was not asking about the court order, I was asking about what is in the press release, the work program.

**Mr DAVIES:** The community program that we are launching will involve youth justice officers and youth outreach officers. We will be running a program in Darwin. We are working with Palmerston City Council to determine some areas that need work. We will have the appropriate supervision with these young people.

At the end of the day, we will not be taking young people who have been ordered to be in a youth custody setting to do the work. But we will work as an early intervention with youths who get themselves into trouble, in a supervised way, using youth justice officers, a vehicle and youth outreach officers to get them into the community so there is a visible response to kids who are getting into trouble.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is this a voluntary program? How will youths end up receiving this clear and immediate consequence?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Mr Warren to respond to that.

**Mr WARREN:** The referral pathway for young people into work programs, community service options, would be apprehension by police.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It will be a police diversion option?

**Mr WARREN:** Correct. That is the pathway we have identified and that fits within the legislative framework as it stands at the moment.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Does that mean police are then responsible for overseeing this work by the youths?

**Mr WARREN:** In the same way that the current victim-offender conferencing and case management pathway exists. The police make a referral through their office to the provider who then undertakes the activity and advises the police once it has been completed, or if the young person has not complied.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the time frame between apprehension and delivery of this ‘clear and immediate’ consequence?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Can you be more specific about that? What are you grouping under ‘clear and immediate’ consequence?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is what you guys have called it. It is meant to be ‘clear and immediate’. Is this person apprehended and the next day they are out sweeping the street—is it a week, a month, a year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a process and I will ask Mr Warren to add extra commentary.

**Mr WARREN:** The challenge at the moment, and we have been working with police on this, is to make sure that we do not undermine the evidence collection and court process that might occur if a young person fails the program. There is a piece of work going on about how the NT Police can most efficiently hand the file over to a provider without jeopardising a potential court action if the young person fails.

I cannot give you a definitive answer today about how long from apprehension to mowing the grass, but I can tell you that police are working hand-in-glove with us to follow kids that are apprehended from point of apprehension, through their diversion team and across to the provider. That is the same whether it is a victim-offender conference, some other kind of case management support or through to this new program.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you explain why that would impact the collection of evidence, the failing of a program? How are those two things interrelated? If you have been apprehended, you are referred to this form of diversion of a community work program. I do not understand it.

**Mr WARREN:** The challenge is that any young person who does not comply or fails a youth diversion program must be referred to court for the judge to deal with it as a court-based offence. Therefore, there must be sufficient evidence available to present in court as if it would be a prosecution. The challenge is making sure that we are able, as quickly as possible, to identify a young person as the offender, that they have acknowledged guilt and get them into a program, but also recognise sometimes people do not comply with the program and we need to make sure that victims are aware that there will be a court process and a judge will be considering the matter if there is not compliance.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is a really high threshold. If that is the standard being applied then there is no way this can be an immediate consequence. An apprehension is not an arrest, they are two different things. I would love to have the data.

**Mrs WORDEN:** In some circumstances an apprehension is an arrest.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I have been told by police that they are two different things, and I had two completely different sets of numbers on this in January. Oh, the former cop is going to school me on the law.

**Mrs WORDEN:** He would understand.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The Police Commissioner told me himself.

**Mrs WORDEN:** In some circumstances an apprehension would definitely be an arrest, and then there will be options for that young person.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, but it is not necessarily. You cannot say apprehension and say it is an arrest. Sure, someone who is apprehended may be formally arrested but they may not.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not a police officer.

**Mr CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, is there a question?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I did ask a question and they are talking.

**Mr CHAIR:** Can you repeat the question? Minister, do you know the question? I lost my train of thought.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Why does that test have to be so high? It probably does not, it is what you wanted. Is that what the agency wants it to be?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There has to be fairness in a process.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of course. You can be as smug as you like, minister.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not being smug. I am just saying you need to have procedural fairness in everything you do with government, otherwise it can come back and get you later.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is right. If someone is apprehended and released—for example, police can take a youth into custody and hold them only for four hours unless they get an extension. Police can also apprehend someone on the spot, have a chat and get their details such as name, phone number and address, and then the person is sent on their way. They are two completely different things.

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are evidence based. It make sense to me that you would need evidence at that point to arrest the person.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of course you would, but that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about the apprehension.

**Mrs WORDEN:** If they have a young person with evidence that they have committed a crime, then they would arrest them. That is the normal procedure for a police officer. I will ask Mr Warren to provide some rigor around this as he has a background in this area.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Let me explain what I am trying to get at so that Mr Warren knows what I am working through. How will this measure be an immediate consequence? That is what the government has said it will be. If this community work program will be an option for police to divert someone to, how is it going to be immediate? What is the interaction between—for an apprehension it can be immediate but for an arrest there are complications which impact on the court process. If the person fails their diversion then they end up in court.

I would have thought that would be the point, that if you are failing diversion then you should end up before the court because you have not utilised the opportunity to change your behaviour.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are we still talking about work programs or are you talking more broadly?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How on earth is this community work program immediate? How will it apply? At what point will someone be given a community work program?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Warren to answer.

**Mr WARREN:** Opposition Leader, your question was about how immediate is this occurring after police apprehend a young person. The police need to make an apprehension and when they do, they need to be able to identify that that young person is the guilty party. That can occur if the young person puts their hand up and say they did that but sometimes it might require police to conduct more investigation and proffer the evidence first. That is what I was alluding to before.

Once the threshold test has been reached regarding whether there is a reasonable likelihood of proving that that young person committed the offence then they can be referred across to a diversion provider, which can be in this case a community work option if that is appropriate—if the offence is low level enough, if the person is a first or second time offender, and that is the issue about the investigation versus the response.

If a young person committed a low level offence and they acknowledge their wrongdoing and there was relatively little to be done in terms of collecting evidence that would be quite a quick process. Sometimes for more complicated matters there is a requirement to collect more evidence. In some cases that might be waiting for forensic results and things like that.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I guess you cannot punish someone until there is some evidence against them or they have admitted that they have done the act.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Minister, following through with that—we are on the subject of diversion, but what about where a young person is arrested, charged and bailed? Can a condition of that bail be to refer them to a community work program?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Warren. He has been working on the detail of this commitment.

**Mr WARREN:** As it stands, there are two ways that a young person could achieve bail, one would be if the police awarded bail and the other would be if a court did. The way the act is currently structured, if the police issue bail we have limited powers to take intervention action or give direction to a young person whilst they are on police bail.

If they were given bail by a court that bail could be for them to be supervised by community youth justice officer, and that could include other conditions such as participate in a program. Usually the wording that a judge will make is to comply with the directions given by the youth justice officer from time to time. We can use that provision to give people direction to do different things.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is there anything stopping the police from adding a condition of bail for that young person to attend a community work program immediately?

**Mr WARREN:** I suggest that is a question for police ultimately, but I am not aware of any legal restriction on that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Police could bail youths to a community work program but they are not established yet, is that right? Your court ones are all running but this one is not yet.

**Mrs WORDEN:** This one is a new commitment that we are working on. Early next year is the time line we are heading for. Can I also just establish that when people are on bail they actually have not been found guilty. Yes, if you ask someone to do something from ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** They have not been found guilty of diversion either.

**Mrs WORDEN:** But if you go on it voluntarily then that is a bit different, but if you are on bail for an offence that you have not been proved guilty of, you actually cannot force somebody to do something.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Sorry, minister, but if they are on diversion that have not been found guilty of anything either.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not always. Diversion can be provided by the court. If they are put on diversion by the court then they can be found guilty, absolutely.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Minister, what it gets down to is that you have promised clear and immediate consequences and it sounds like you have not met that target at all yet.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That rhetoric suits you, but...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It suits you, it is in your own press release. We are not making these words.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Leader of the Opposition, I will remind you, you are just picking things out of a broader suite ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No, I am not. I have read every single bit. We will go through the whole suite, do not worry. We are going through the whole lot.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, but you are picking things out of a broader suite and saying that that will not happen. Those things are all under way and action is being taken on all of those areas.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Not at the moment there is not.

**Mrs WORDEN:** There absolutely is action on all of those areas that will come within in our ...

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Standing Order 109. The constant interruptions are not allowing the minister to answer the question.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, Member for Fong Lim.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is the community work program only for repeat offenders?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Which part is only for repeat offenders, the immediate part? It says, 'clear and immediate consequences for repeat offenders'.

**Mrs WORDEN:** There is no limitation.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Okay, so it is for any offender.

**Mrs WORDEN:** As either the police or the court determine.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** 'Tough bail and monitoring conditions—increase in compliance checking with youth bail to reduce repeat offending through additional staff in police and Territory Families along with increased funding for alcohol and other drugs testing.' How many additional staff will Territory Families receive as a result of this commitment?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the CEO to respond to that question.

**Mr DAVIES:** Opposition Leader, would you mind restating that question, please?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes. Dot point three in the Chief Minister and Police minister's commitment prior to the election is that Territory Families will receive additional staff to increase compliance checking of youth bail and to reduce repeat offending. How many additional staff did Territory Families get to increase compliance checking for youth bail?

**Mr DAVIES:** The answer at the moment is that we have added additional staff into the youth drop-in centre in Alice Springs and a new electronic monitoring system has been put in place. We have not had a direct input of additional staff here.

The the system we inherited four years ago was literally about compliance. The checking that was done was, 'Have you done your drug test? Are you living where you should be in terms of your compliance order?' We have a much more sophisticated workforce now. I am not being critical of the previous workforce, but those were the conditions they worked under. The layer now is, 'What is the case file we are dealing with? What is the support this person needs? What is the engagement with family?' There is a much more detailed process on compliance checking of young people who are on bail to reduce the repeat offending than there was previously.

I do not think it is all about staffing here. This is all about making sure we have the right systems in place and the right supervision. Where young people break their bail conditions there is immediate advice that goes to police about that.

We have not received direct and additional staffing in that area, but we have trained our workforce and made sure it is distributed in a way where, if a young person is given a bail order, that they are checked up on properly in a remote and regional context.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will add that we have some additional money going into the electronic monitoring because as we are with the Care system, we have just had a new competitive tender process for a new electronic monitoring system, which will be based in the Northern Territory. We are transitioning to a new provider and we are well under way for that.

The most important part of that is that we will have a locally based call centre. Under that new contract we will have a monitoring centre here in the city, which is the local point of contact for our department, whereas the previous was not here. It uses a smart tag system which operates using a GSM signal providing GPS points for young people connected to the system. That will transform a lot of that current outdated work for individual monitoring.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Did the Chief Minister or the Police minister consult with Territory Families prior to making this commitment to give you additional staff? Either that or they are breaking that commitment if no staff are being received.

**Mr DAVIES:** Opposition Leader, as you know, we are running a custodial system as well. We had some pretty tough experiences early on in the piece about supervising very challenging young people with a range of issues in youth detention centres that are archaic and were not fit for purpose, both in Alice Springs and Darwin.

As a priority, we increased the workforce in those facilities to make sure that young people are properly supervised, safe and treated fairly and firmly to expectations inside the youth detention centres. One of the reasons we talk about this new community work order program—and one of the aspects we will utilise is youth justice officers who are currently engaged in the youth detention centres. Part of the workforce is managing our resources within a budget context and redirecting some of those resources into the community work order program that we will be rolling out.

We prioritised where the resources were needed and the additional funding from the government was to ensure youth detention centres were safe and run efficiently. We do not want young people getting out of those facilities if they are inside them. We have managed that.

Where we have officers that can be redeployed given the way they are trained, we look to do that into and will redeploy these programs.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am not disputing any of that or having a go at Territory Families. My point is that on 20 June the Chief Minister put out a press release saying he would give more staff to Territory Families and I am trying to get to the bottom of whether or not you got them. You did not, so the Chief Minister has broken the commitment he made, funnily enough prior to the election.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am curious about where it says he would give them more staff?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** In dot point three it states ‘increasing compliance checking of youth bailed to reduce repeat offending through additional staff in police and Territory Families’.

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are our YOREOs—our youth outreach officers who do a range ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But you did not see any additional staff since June?

**Mr DAVIES:** The Chief Minister was implying that the youth outreach teams did not exist four years ago. We have 60 officers in that space who are available to do that work. That is the implication. There was no expectation on our part that we were to be given additional resources.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I have no doubt there was no expectation but I disagree with your interpretation of the Chief’s position because he clearly says in the press release that ‘these are part of new targeted measures to tackle crime’. I do not think we can hark back to four years ago.

They are getting upset over here, the grumble squad who do not like to hear it. Are there no additional for Territory Families?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Opposition Leader, overall the department has additional staff. We are working through what the new agency looks like.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Under family responsibility agreements in the press release, it states ‘family responsibility agreements and orders were scrapped by the CLP government’. On what basis do you believe that to be true?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I remind you that I was not the minister when this was put out. To be frank, that is not a question that relates to our budget. It would be great if you asked a question that related to our budget.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is. The family responsibility agreements are in Territory Families.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am happy to talk about family responsibility agreements. They are in the act.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They are in the act. Thank you. So they are not scrapped.

**Mrs WORDEN:** They were not done under the CLP. You did not do them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Well, no. You said they were scrapped.

**Mrs WORDEN:** You ceased doing them and we are doing them. You did not do them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They are in the act; you are right. I have the act right here.

**Mrs WORDEN:** You stopped using them. The family responsibility office was closed under the CLP.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Well it does not exist now and did not exist in 2016 when we came to ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** These were brought in ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** If you read the press release it says they were scrapped. Can you read?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You did not use them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Your government said they were scrapped.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Standing Order 109: argumentative. Can the Opposition Leader please ask a question and allow the minister to answer.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I will. Do you agree with the Chief Minister that the CLP scrapped the family responsibility agreements?

**Mr CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, one moment while I deal with the ...

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair! The minister has not finished answering her question.

**Mrs WORDEN:** You are asking for my opinion. I would like a question on the budget.

**Mr CHAIR:** Sorry members, minister and guests. I am slow off the mark, it has been 50 hours here so far. We are going well. The Member for Fong Lim had a point of order, Standing Order 109.

Thank you Member for Fong Lim. Under Standing Order 109(3) it says 'questions should not ask ministers for an expression of opinion or for a legal opinion'. Minister, have you finished answering the question?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** She is sitting there saying nothing.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I do not think there was a question. We are waiting for one on the budget.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are family responsibility agreements still in place?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are bringing back the use of family responsibility agreements.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They are either there or they are not there. Your government is asserting and alleging that they were scrapped by the CLP when in fact they were not. To say that they have not been used harks actually right back to 2010 which in a session in estimates—I have a press release here from Jodeen Carney, who was in the shadow ministry. She was very critical of the then Labor government which had issued no family responsibility agreements even back at that time.

Your assertion that the CLP scrapped family responsibility agreements is absolutely untrue. I am holding the legislation right here in my hand, which has been the law since 2009.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have spent nearly 45 minutes talking about a press release, when we are here to look at the budget. Would you like to ask us a budget-related question about family responsibility?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Forty five minutes, I do not know what point of time zone you live in. This is estimates, it is about policy and the budget. I know you are new at this, but it is about both.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order! Standing Order 109: argumentative. The minister gets to answer a question, the Opposition Leader gets to ask a question. It is really quite simple.



**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Your defence squad. Is it only when there are female ministers in here that you guys are this defensive? It seems every time I am sitting here in front of a female you are very ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** The inference you are making is totally insulting to every female member of our government.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am insulted for you, believe me.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the Opposition Leader to retract that thank you.

**Mr CHAIR:** Excuse me, I am still actually dealing with the point of order from the Member for Fong Lim. I am going to hark back to 8.13 am on day one where I had to remind everyone that we have procedural notes and there is the option of withdrawal for one hour within this committee. Please, I would hate to be the Chair to exercise that during this Estimates Committee hearing. Can we please have some order and nice estimates, as I have called them a few times. Opposition Leader, you have the call.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** We have established that family responsibility agreements have been in place since 2009 and nothing has changed. The next point in the press release is 'strengthening the voice of victims'. This says 'victim-offender conferencing expanded to all regions, increased funding for financial relief of victims' and it lists a number of reasons. How is that tracking?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In that space we are exploring compulsory participation and expanding that through our family responsibility agreements. We are working on that at the moment. It is an expansion of the youth restorative justice program and those conferences. We are trying to tie that in and we are working through how that will work and whether we will need legislative changes to make that happen.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How are they being increased or expanded to all regions? What regions are they currently in?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have a list of the service providers. We have the Jesuits working on that in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. That was the first expansion in Tennant and Alice. Next would be out bush.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When was that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** February this year.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It cannot be what the press release is talking about?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are looking at taking it out to all remote areas. Not just in the towns and Darwin.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When are you looking at to have that expansion complete?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are currently considering this. I cannot give you a time, I am sorry.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Has the funding for the financial relief of victims happened, such as resecuring premises and vehicles, clean up and security assessments?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will be needing new service providers for that which will require a full procurement process. We will have to consider that through future budgets and through the changes that are happening at the moment within our own agency.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You say expanding to all regions, why cannot conferences be conducted in the bush at the moment? What is preventing that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Our current service providers have capability and contract for certain regions—that is where they are contracted. My understanding, in talking to them, is that some are working at full capacity at the moment. That would require additional resources for them to do that.

Those discussions will happen. If we were going to new contracts, you would have to procure those properly to make sure that every provider has the right opportunity to put the bid in. There are a lot of really capable service providers out there. If we are looking to expand the program, as we are, we need to do that properly.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Do police do any conferences out bush?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Warren to respond to that.

**Mr WARREN:** Member for Barkly, that is correct. Police convene conferences under the police youth diversion system. The expansion has been to empower pre-sentence conferencing in the major centres. The next step in that will be to roll that out to remote locations.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** To clarify, conferences are already happening in the bush. Is that correct?

**Mr WARREN:** Some police are qualified to convene conferences. There is a very small pool of police who can do that. We are stepping into this space to bring in expert external providers who can do that work to a high standard.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Sorry, I did not understand your answer. Has funding increased for financial relief of victims?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not currently. Not in this budget.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When will it? Minister, you have said this one is yours.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I should probably have indicated that some components are mine, but the financial relief of victims definitely sits with the Attorney-General.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** This would not be something funded out of Territory Families?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We do not do any of that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** 'Establishment of community accountability boards comprised of businesses, elders and the community to have their say on offender consequences and community expectations.' What is this and when will it be established?

**Mrs WORDEN:** To give you an idea of the time line, because we have worked with this one it will be in the first half of next year when we are looking to implement this. I will ask Mr Warren to add some further detail.

**Mr WARREN:** Opposition Leader, we have done some initial exploration in the southern region on identifying ways we could bring in representative members of the business community and the sector. I have had meetings with the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Central Australia and they have expressed an interest in being part of a process called a community accountability board. We are still pulling the shape of that together. It would be looking at things like what current diversion options for young people are, and businesses and their groups potentially identifying themselves as being able to provide response to work options.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That should be established in the first half of next year? Will they be across the Territory? How many will there be and where will they be?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The intent is across the Territory, yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** In all the major centres?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We would have to start there because that is where your resources are and the concentration of young people you want to provide to. But if there was a need in regional and remote we would look at that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many will we see in the first half of next year? Two—Alice Springs and Darwin?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is reasonable.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** 'Expansion of the Back on Track program—increased boot camps or wilderness activities, on-country work camps across the Territory, behavioural programs, and increased training and education for at-risk youths.' How many boot camps do we currently have?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have some statistics about what we currently have. It is a significant investment for us for youth services and diversion area because these camps are culturally relevant. They provide education, training and employment. Activities are included tailored on country camps. The design, implementation and

delivery of improved community youth justice programs include funding of \$1.56m in 2019–20 and a further funding of \$1.88m for youth camp intervention programs this current financial year.

The youth camps form part of our Back on Track: Cutting Youth Crime Plan. They are intended to reduce offending substance use and at-risk behaviours, increasing educational and vocational engagement, improving the cultural connectedness and identity and enhancing health and wellbeing.

In 2019-20 we funded the Mala'la Health Corporation, creating a safe, supportive environment. I met with people in Alice Springs recently. Operation Flinders—we had two of those camps this year and we have a commitment now ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is that this year—being last financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In 2019–20 and then this financial year we are doing another three of those. With the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation and MacDonnell regional shire, regional council has delivered short-term camps on country in the Northern Territory and in South Australia. In 2019–20 it was a total of 15 camps which incorporated 90 young people.

Then in July—do you want some details of where we are heading?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I might ask, of those 90 youths—what category of youth are attending this range of camps? Are these sentence programs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Brent Warren to give you the detail.

**Mr WARREN:** We have tried to structure these so there are multiple pathways in. There are young people who have been identified by their community as being at risk and have been considered by a referral process and then placed on a camp.

There are young people that have been identified through direct contact with the Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Team or through another government department. There are young people that may have been involved in more serious offending and been to court, and that is particularly the work that CASSE have done for us in Central Australia. We have tried to keep it a bit open so we can find more than one way into a camp program for people.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When you said serious offending and been to court, is that sentenced or the court may have bailed them to the program?

**Mr WARREN:** We have both examples in that 90—people who have been sentenced or people who are on bail while they participate.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do you group them or mix them? For example, on one of the two Op Flinders camps could you have younger people who are at risk referred by government or bailed and sentenced to the camp—you can have a mix?

**Mr WARREN:** Yes, sure. We do group them. The tendency is more to group by gender and age as a primary consideration. For example, with the last group that went to Flinders that was a group of young women. I apologise, that was a group of men, the last group. It was young women the group before that, but it has been based on gender.

Equally, with young people who participated in camps in the southern region there has been a focus on getting young people connected to particular communities, and those camps have been conducted on country linked to the place that those young people are from, and that allows us to introduce community members and elders who have connections to that place and those children.

There are a range of ways we can slice the cake but each camp is very much constructed around a cohort.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many of the 90 youths were sentenced to one of these programs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that on notice, if that is all right. We do not drill down on that sort of level of detail.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many were sentenced, how many were bailed, how many were referred by government and how many were at risk?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It sounds like a manual count to me. We will have to take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.2**

**Mr CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 90 youths who attended various camps for the 2019–20 financial year, how many were sentenced to the camp by the court, how many were bailed to a camp by the court, how many were bailed to a camp by police, how many were referred by either the youth justice officers or other government agencies and how many were referred as at-risk by their community?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 8.2.

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**Mr MONAGHAN:** Just a follow up question on the theme that the Leader of the Opposition asked about the youth justice system.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Fong Lim, as long as it is on line, we are talking about boot camps.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** Yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** We are talking about camps.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** Youth justice system ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No, it has to be about camps. I am talking about camps.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** That is for the Chair to decide.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Mr Chair, a point of order. My question is specifically about camps. If he has a question on camps he can ask at this point otherwise ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** This is not about the youth justice system. My question is very specifically about camps. Mr Chair, I ask your ruling. I am not asking about the youth justice system. We just took a question on notice about camps—that is my question.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** That is in the youth justice system.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But the whole subject is youth justice, she is the youth justice minister.

**Mr CHAIR:** I will make a ruling if I can actually get a word in. We are talking about boot camps, major centres across the NT, funding increases, accountability boards ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** We are talking about camps!

**Mr CHAIR:** I have not heard the question, Opposition Leader. Can I hear the question first before I make a ruling?

**Mr MONAGHAN:** The question was related to the youth justice system and the investment we spoke about. The investment for youth justice system has doubled ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Mr Chair, that is a completely different topic. I ask you to make a ruling on the question.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, Member for Fong Lim. Can you please complete the question.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** My question was, I understand over the last term of government, investment in the youth justice system has doubled. Could you please explain why this is the case, going to the budget?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Mr Chair, I have asked for you to make a ruling on whether or not that is following on from my line of questioning?

**Mr CHAIR:** I am about to. Minister, can you please answer the question.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am sorry, but my question is about camps. That question is about funding over the last four years.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order! Standing Order 109: the Opposition Leader cannot be arguing the Chair.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I have the precedence of questioning as the Opposition Leader and you are allowed to do follow up questions on my questions. Do you have a camp question?

**Mr CHAIR:** The Member for Fong Lim had a point of order which I will rule on, which is the same as your question Opposition Leader. We have been talking about police conferencing, funding increases...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But it is on my line of questioning. That is the rule. It is on the line of questioning. So if he has a question about much camps cost, who the operators are...

**Mr CHAIR:** I am ruling on the point of order. Opposition Leader, can you please allow me to rule without interrupting? The last one ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Was about camps.

**Mr CHAIR:** I will give you a warning now for interrupting me a number of times. I just want to answer the question. If you would like me to answer your question, I will answer your question. Thank you. The last 10 questions have you been yours, Opposition Leader.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, that is how it is, I am the Opposition Leader.

**Mr CHAIR:** About funding, whether it has been increased, major centres, Back on Track, sentencing and mixed groups. Then we had a question around the 90 youth who are in a camp, and we put that one on notice. I will allow the Member for Fong Lim's question.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** Do I need to repeat the question?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am sure you do not, I am sure she has a copy of it right there.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you need the question repeated?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes please.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** I understand that over the last term of government investment in the youth justice system has doubled. Could you please explain why this is the case?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I guess we inherited a broken system which, after the royal commission came about, we had to reroute some significant investment. I will put on record the enormous amount of work that my predecessor, Dale Wakefield, did in this space. It was significant over four years and I thank her.

We have spent around \$68.8m in the system on early intervention and family support services, youth activities, grants and holiday program events—many of which are coming up now in the school holiday period—and particularly in the areas of referral, case management and outreach of youth at risk of becoming involved with antisocial behaviour.

You may agree that those early investments are the most important part. They cost money because you need well-trained staff. It is a referral and case management. We have touched on a number of those things already today, and diversion services for young people in line with the changes to the *Youth Justice Act*,

which came out of the royal commission. There have been things alternative to bail support and the camps we spoke about and they all cost money.

But it is cheaper than a child in detention. It is a rethinking around a whole system, it is putting resources up the front end to ensure that you get less at the back end. In a nutshell that is the significant investment. What 2016–17 looked like—everyone would know it was just investment in programs and staff. We have really highly trained staff now working across our agency from child protection, right the way through. It is not linear, it just had to be done. That is why our budget has been that way.

Did you want to add anything to that at all, Ken? In a nutshell, it just had to be done. It is a significant investment.

**Mr EDINGTON:** Why do we have more crime then, minister?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That was a question for the Police minister a few days ago.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You are responsible for youth justice.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are you saying that every young person is responsible for all the crime?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No, but ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** So, the question where you just said ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is youth justice.

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, I will take his point. The Member for Barkly just said, 'Why do we have more crime?' That is a question for the Police minister a few days ago. That is not a question about young people who require support in our community. That is completely different. It is abhorrent and you keep doing it. You keep vilifying every young person in the Northern Territory. We have heard it before.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Oh, my goodness! Minister, your portfolio is youth justice. By its own logic, it is only youths involved in the justice system.

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, for the record, the Member for Barkly just said that crime has gone up and we are supposedly talking about youth justice. By inference he is saying that all crime is being done by young people.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are you saying youth crime has not gone up? Oh, my goodness.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Standing Order 109. Yet again we are being argumentative towards the minister who is trying to answer questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, Member for Fong Lim. Minister, have you finished answering the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, I will add a little rigour around that. We are the custodians of young people, once they have gone through a process which includes our courts and the police. We are the custodians of them. We are not here answering questions about crime on a broader scale. It really needs to be said repeatedly that we are the custodians. We will gladly take questions about how we are looking after and giving every opportunity to young people across the Northern Territory. That is our job and we take it seriously.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Minister, that highlights the conflict and problem with your agency having youth justice. It is because you are the parent of many children. Unfortunately, there is a point where sometimes those children are interacting with the justice system. That in and of itself is a huge conflict, because you saying, 'We are the custodians of these children', as in 'We are the parent', which you are. But then, also you are the deliverer of youth justice. So, you cannot ignore that.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We can wear two hats. We are not ignoring that, Opposition Leader, but by inference you are saying that because a child is in the care of the CEO they are more likely to engage in crime.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No, I am not.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Or that is the inference that ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You were drawing that line. The Member for Barkly simply asked why crime had increased ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** Well, we are not making the inference. We know that there is a line between the two ...

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Once again, the Opposition Leader continues to make statements rather than do what she is here to do, that is, ask questions of the minister and the minister answers those questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, Member for Fong Lim.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.1**

**Mrs WORDEN:** If I could while we have a slight pause, I have a response to a question that we took on notice earlier. Question number 8.1, conferences for young offenders.

**Mr CHAIR:** Yes, we have 203 conferences with 196 being reported. There was a deficiency in the data. Mr Burgoyne asked about the deficiency in the data.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The answer to that is the link between Northern Territory Police and Territory Families data confirms there were 237 conferences for 203 young people in 2019–20. The figure of 196 conferences is the count of conferences funded by Territory Families. The remaining conferences were not funded by Territory Families and were, as alluded to your earlier question, conducted by NT Police.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you.

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**Mr CHAIR:** That is an opportune time for us to take a quick break. Thank you, everybody.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone. We are still on questions on the minister's statement.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Just going back to talking about the youth camps. You took on notice the question to break those down. Of the 90 youths—I acknowledge that not all of them are sentenced or offending youths, so bearing that in mind—how many who are offending youths went on not to reoffend within six months? That would be good comparative data to your other metric on youth conferencing.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I can guarantee that is a manual count. I am happy to take that on notice. I would not say you will get it by the end of the session ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No, that is fine.

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**Question on Notice No 8.3**

**Mr CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, please restate your question for the record.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 90 youths who attended youth camps for the 2019–20, of the offending youths how many went on not to reoffend within six months of completing the camp?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Opposition Leader is allocated the number 8.3.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are there any boot camps in the Northern Territory?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Boot camps, work camps ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Which one is the boot camp? Are they interchangeable?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have Jarrdimba Bayamuku Aboriginal Corporation at Seven Emu Station, which is doing stock work; B18 in the Litchfield area; and the Balunu Foundation in Darwin River. They all delivered camps for young people.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is 'boot camp' interchangeable with 'work camp'?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes. I prefer to use 'work camp'. Boot camp is something I would do at 5.30 am with my PT.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It seems like the Chief Minister prefers 'boot camp' because it sounds better.

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are interchangeable terms. As long as we know what we are talking about—boot camp or work camp.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is why I wanted to check. It is all the same.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is about youth training and work pathways for young people.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Does your agency keep track of youths breaching their court bail?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, we do.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** So, you would know if there had been multiple arrests within a 24-hour period? You know how many youths have been arrested on more than one occasion in a 24-hour period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** For the last financial year can you provide the data on how many youths were arrested more than once in a 24-hour period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Whilst we might be aware, that is police data.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But you have the data? You must because how is a response being provided if you do not know about it?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Warren to provide details on that.

**Mr WARREN:** Opposition Leader, is the question, how does the Department for Territory Families, Housing and Communities get data on young people who have been apprehended by police?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If the agency holds the data on repetitive offending, is there an alert in your system, a case worker or youth justice officer be notified, if a youth was apprehended more than once in 24-hours?

**Mr WARREN:** It is less connected to 'more than once in 24-hours' and more connected to the reason for the apprehension and prior history. We collect information from and share information with police in a range of ways. The first is through a full-time officer in the Territory Intelligence and Coordination Centre whose role is to review the police database; swap notes with police, the Department of Education, housing staff and Territory Families staff; and prepare a summary report of high level incidents that have occurred across the Territory. This is provided daily to the Territory Families management team.

The second location where we share information through direct contact on the ground. We have staff collocated in Strike Force Orion in Palmerston and Operation Lunar in Alice Springs. In part, their jobs are to share information about young people and to identify repeat behaviours.

The third way we become aware of young people in that category is through direct contact from investigative police each day. The police come to us in each major centre each day and provide a list of the unlawful entries in that area. We provide information about young people on electronic monitoring who may have been connected to the location where an offence occurred.



If a young person is subject to supervised bail conditions, the police will contact an on-call officer if it is out of hours to let them know that a young person has been apprehended. If we have that advice we can provide advice through the police to the judge about our considerations for bail.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If a young person has been brought to the police's attention a number of times in a short period, does that trigger a response? Either a youth justice response or a care and protection response, perhaps both, from Territory Families. Clearly that young person is a risk to themselves and to the community.

Mr Warren, you mentioned that police come to Territory Families every day with a list of property offences and Territory families are able to notify police about the people who are being electronically monitored. That is well after the fact. It shows me that police do not have immediate access to electronic monitoring information, for which I have a strong of questions on.

What is Territory Families' role with that person who has that highly repetitive offending? You must be told about it because even if it is not a justice issue it must be a care and protection issue.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are you only talking about kids in our care?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is a care and protection issue if it is kids who are in our care.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It could potentially be a care and protection issue. If a youth has been apprehended multiple times in 24 hours by police, would that not be something ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** In the *Youth Justice Act* it talks about repeat offenders. Police have different outcomes according to whether it is a first or second offence.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is not a care and protection issue? That part of Territory Families does not look at those youths?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, the police would make a child protection report if they felt there was neglect or something along that line.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But you do not have that data per se? You are saying police hold that data?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Bail statistics are predominantly held by police.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** In a roundabout way it comes to Territory Families, would that be ...

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, we have someone in the TICC, centralised—that is not roundabout, it is why they are in there.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But they report on the major issues for the night—that repeat offending might not constitute a major issue in comparison to all the other things that might have gone on that evening.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The *Youth Justice Act* determines and guides police in their decision-making. If a young person was a repeat offender, they might be held rather than bailed straight back out on that second offence. They are decisions for the police.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am trying to work out the point at which Territory Families intersects that. There are some serious care and protection issues about young people being out—look at Alice Springs as the example, Member for Araluen. Young people—hundreds, sometimes—being out on the streets in the middle of the night is not a good thing for a young person.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The police or courts make a decision, and at that point it comes to us. We are custodial of those children at a point that the police and courts have made a decision.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Not prior to that point?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We run preventative programs, which are broad across the agency. We run programs like child and family centres. That is the type of work we do in that space—generational change. In regard to youth justice there has to have been a determination by the police or court for us to have some sort of

intersection. That is the point I was making earlier—we are the custodians of those young people when they come in to an area that touches the youth justice system, not before.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, if it is youth justice, but if it is care and protection that is separate.

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is child protection. Are you moving on to child protection now?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am trying to understand at what point—if a youth is arrested by police five times in one night, is Territory Families alerted to that fact? They could be, through a number of things you have explained, but not necessarily.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I doubt that a child would be picked up five times in one night, but I will ask Brent Warren to add some more commentary to the response.

**Mr WARREN:** I understand the question outside of the mechanisms I have described. How do police tell Territory Families about young people who are coming to police attention on more than one occasion in a day? The main locations where that is of interest are the greater Darwin region and Alice Springs. We have a range of direct contact points with police.

I have mentioned Orion and Lunar. They are full-time established teams that share information every day about matters occurring in those regions. We have direct relationships with investigative teams from police in each region. That is where the daily sharing of things like the break-in list occurs.

We have a nighttime patrol service in Alice Springs. This goes to the heart of what you are asking. Territory Families has staff on seven days a week until 3 am and once schools holidays start they will be on patrol every night 24/7. They have daily contact before they start their patrol with police officers who are working the youth engagement shift. The purpose of that is to make sure there is direct contact and lines of communication so that if young people are coming to attention at nighttime they can communicate together and come up with a plan of how to respond.

In Alice Springs, when that is working well and we have youth engagement police, Territory Families youth outreach staff, Tangentyere Youth Patrol and Night Patrol and the Looking After the Kids program, plus the Brown Street and Gap Youth Centre nighttime staff working together and sharing information—they are able to develop a plan to get kids onto the transport options and get them home.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will add to that. Police are releasing a child to the responsibility of a family member. If they are taking the child home, which they sometimes do, then if there is no family safe place for that child to be that triggers a report to Territory Families.

The answer for that is a broad range. I have been on the public record over the last few weeks, particularly about the 24 hours. It is not a safe sleeping place. We have backup for that in Alice Springs if a safe sleeping place cannot be found. Anecdotally, speaking to all our service providers in Alice Springs, they tell me directly that they can always find a safe place for those kids. If they cannot, then there are different family configurations. For lots of different kids there are different arrangement. The police and our staff all know those families. They know who they are and the safe places for those kids to go to.

I have been told repeatedly over the last five or six weeks that they are always able to find a safe sleeping space for those kids. If they could not, that would trigger a Territory Families response. Some time ago at the Palmerston youth recreation centre they had one incident where they had a child they could not find a safe place for. That triggered a child protection notification to Territory Families and they followed up later with that family and young person.

**Mr BURGoyNE:** On that, that goes to the heart of a question I have. Will a youth be bailed if a responsible adult cannot be found, or do they end up in the care of Territory Families if that is the case?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, we have bail support run by Saltbush in Darwin and Alice Springs, where they have mentors and work with people.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But that is not compulsory? The question is if there is no responsible adult to look after someone who has been bailed, are they automatically then sent to bail accommodation?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the CEO to give you a more complicated answer on that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** A more complicated answer?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not complicated—it is complex. There is not one straight-up answer. We are talking about individual cases here. All of these young people who come to our attention are all treated individually and the response has to be individually tailored for every kid, because none of those young people have exactly the same family circumstance. I will ask the CEO, Ken Davies, to add more to that.

**Mr DAVIES:** If there is not a place that they can be safely bailed to, the Saltbush bail support in Alice Springs and Darwin is utilised.

It is important to emphasise that the conditions of the young people going in there are really explained to them. They understand exactly what they are going into. They also are very clear that they have to meet their obligations for that bail program.

The bail support centres are not custodial settings where they are in youth detention. If the young person chooses to leave those places, that is a choice they make and they breach their bail conditions. But if there is not a place for them to go to then they are bailed to those facilities. That is where they are required to stay as part of their bail conditions.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is good that their conditions are very clearly explained to them and that they understand their obligations, which further reinforces that if you breach your bail there should be an immediate consequence for that action. Hopefully, out of all the written questions that have been coming back to me, we will be able to see clearly whether or not that is taking place.

Is it still the government's position that it will raise the age of criminal responsibility?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The Attorney-General answered that question yesterday.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** She certainly talked around it.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was a recommendation of the royal commission ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It was an election commitment in 2016.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was a recommendation of the royal commission that the age be raised to 12. There is a lot of work going on. I listened to the response from the Attorney-General last night; it is the same as ours. There is a national discussion and we need to be led by that. We committed to raising the age to 12, which is a recommendation of the royal commission.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you. Yesterday the Director of the Criminal Justice Research and Statistics Unit indicated a paper prepared by Attorney-General and Justice regarding recidivism of youth reoffending on bail and the transition of youths from youth detention into adult custody had been or would be submitted to Territory Families for review. The publication of that information would be subject to Territory Families. Can you give us an update on those papers and whether or not the information will be made public?

**Mr TWYFORD:** We are aware the Criminal Justice Research and Statistics Unit in the Attorney-General's department is doing some data linkage for us around youth apprehension.

It goes to some of the questions we were asked today to identify individuals in individual program—requires a spreadsheet from that program. It then requires those client IDs to be matched to the apprehension data, which is held by AGD. They are doing work into overall youth apprehension rates, but also program by program, which cohorts have been to which programs and what is the reappréhension rate for those programs.

I am aware there is work occurring. I have not seen a final report.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Will that final report be made public?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We do not have the report so we will not make a judgement on that today.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many youths under youth justice were fitted with electronic monitoring in financial year 2019–20? Just to confirm, would this only be court-ordered electronic monitoring, not police-ordered electronic monitoring—you would not monitor that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** As of 9 December we had 13 young people on electronic monitoring. Did you want something beyond that?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That was my next question, so yesterday is the most up-to-date data you have. How many was that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Thirteen on 9 December. We had five in Alice Springs, one in Katherine and seven in the greater Darwin region. Did you have another part?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Would Territory Families only be looking after the supervision of youth on court-ordered electronic monitoring, as distinct from police-ordered?

**Mr WARREN:** Territory Families, Housing and Communities monitors young people on court-ordered electronic monitoring. Police monitor their systems separately.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, that is what I thought, thank you.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have a question on electronic monitoring. You mentioned you are about to buy or adopt a new electronic monitoring system. What is the capacity of that system? How many children can you monitor?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Brent to respond to that question.

**Mr WARREN:** I cannot give you the specific number of bracelets or monitoring slots available. I can let you know that is being negotiated with police and Attorney-General and Justice, or corrections. It is a joint contract; we will be sharing the resources for the whole system and that makes it more effective for each agency.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You do not know the total the government is asking for? That would be great to know.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We are happy to take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.4

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

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What will be the capacity of the Northern Territory Government's new electronic monitoring system?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Araluen of the minister has been allocated the number 8.4.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Just to clarify, that is for the new system?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes, the new system.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Does court-ordered electronic monitoring—usually you are not allowed out at certain times or in different areas, or you have to go to school et cetera. If there is a breach, is Territory Families notified of that breach from the electronic monitoring?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is that breach immediately passed on to police?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Why is it that police cannot be notified straight away?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We hold the contract for that monitoring.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is any work being done to make that process—with the opportunity for this new contract, is it envisaged that police will get that notification immediately?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that on notice; we are not sure on the details.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.5

**Mr CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, please restate the question for the record.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** As part of the new contract for electronic monitoring for the Northern Territory, will police have direct real-time monitoring access to the data?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Opposition Leader of the minister has been allocated number 8.5.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is this correct that at the moment, police cannot check someone's bail conditions, but Territory Families can? If you wanted to see if youth A was at home where they were supposed to be, you could check?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Some of that is tied up with youth justice officers. I will ask Brent to provide the details.

**Mr WARREN:** Was the question, who can monitor a young person on electronic monitoring order by the court?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes.

**Mr WARREN:** The current provider—we are in the process of changing—is G4S, which is the live monitoring provider for the Northern Territory. If there is a breach or an alarm goes off for a young person, they notify Territory Families. For an adult offender they notify Community Corrections. For a police offender they would notify police.

In relation to the checking of conditions, any statutory officers, which would include police, can interrogate the IJIS database and identify the conditions a young person is subject to. A community youth justice officer who identifies a breach can refer the matter to court, as can a police officer.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But the people doing the live tracking is the organisation?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Corrections would do that for adult offenders, police for people bailed by the police and we do it for people under the *Youth Justice Act*.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the process of notification? How does it come through? Does Territory Families a headquartered area where breaches happen? I imagine that some—probably all—happen in the middle of the night.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The process is a phone call.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Someone is on duty to receive those phone calls?

**Mrs WORDEN:** On call.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Someone is on call to receive those calls? Is it one person for the whole Territory?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It would be a roster.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It could be multiple people.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It would be a roster by region.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Different people by region. Okay, a notification goes off at G4S for Alice Springs they will ring the on-call Alice Springs person. Does that person on call have to immediately ring police?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is that process? Do they ring 000 or do they have a better—not that 000 is not amazing, but is there a more specific process for Territory Families?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is through the standard line and then with a follow-up email to a specific address.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Territory Families then ring 000?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Well, 131 444, probably. They could ring 000 for police attendance or an ambulance.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Why is there not some sort of—would the Territory Families person pick up the phone to the superintendent on shift that night or something more immediate?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We cannot speak for police and their operations, but they have to triage the calls that come in to them. If it was a serious offender, you would anticipate that they would respond quicker than they would if it was a lower level offence.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is bizarre that they would have to ring the 131 number and not a more direct route. Does the email have to be sent straightaway, or is that followed up in the morning?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Could you repeat that question, sorry?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They must hang up from G4S then dial 131 444. Do they then sit there on their phone and send an email immediately or can they just wait until the morning to do that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, they do. They send an email immediately

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Ten minutes, done.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Done, yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is what I wanted to know, thank you. Is Territory Families conducting a review of the prescribed and non-prescribed offences under the *Youth Justice Act*?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, it is. There is a broader discussion occurring at the moment on that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Who is having that discussion? Is it interagency? Is it police and education?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, it is interagency. At the moment AGD is leading that, but with input from police and Territory Families.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That will look at whether or not it is fit for purpose and more offences in the not prescribed list need to go into the prescribed list?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not party to the detail of that at the moment. That is happening at the moment. What they are looking at is very detailed. I would rather just let that work occur.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is just that hit and run, recklessly endangering life, threats to kill, dangerous driving during pursuit—all of these things are not prescribed. That means youths have a presumption in favour—bail is geared in their favour.

**Mrs WORDEN:** They are looking at that entire list.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** To see which ones really should be prescribed offences?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Correct. It is work that is currently under way.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When can we expect a conclusion to that review?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You would have to ask the Attorney-General for that—they are leading that work.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They probably said the same thing about you guys.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Are there any other questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, the town bus service which runs in Alice Springs ...

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Sorry, Member for Mulka, did you have a follow-up question?

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes, please. I was listening to the monitoring—talking about a child running off and police and Territory Families. You will have to accept that I want to work with Territory Families and police, but in my electorate we are missing out on senior leaders and elders who can work towards finding those if kids or adults run away with the offenders. There are always the elders there to help us. That is what I have been calling for—Aboriginal leaders and senior elders to be employed as policing officers as well through our Yolngu law system.

They will know where our child is. They will know where an offender is in our region, at least. If we can have use for senior elders in clans—Territory Families go up and find out who the relevant senior elder is—they will guide them to where a child is or where the offender is.

If we can make that connection between Balanda policing and Yolngu policing, working together through elders, we can do things safely in the community. That is where community elders have been all the time to save that.

I do not really like to see people with monitoring bracelets in my electorate. If we can use elders safely, women and men, people can bring offenders to police. People can bring all those children, too, and work with Territory Families together. That is what I know and I believe.

It is not necessary in some areas, like in my electorate, because if it worked through that way, through the system of senior elders working together with the law and order, police, and senior elders as policing officers as well, we can work together for the safety of those children and the safety of those adults.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, would you like to put that as question to the minister?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will speak to that. A bit earlier we were talking about the establishment of community accountability boards, Member for Mulka. The CEO just reminded me that out at Groote Eylandt, they are calling for something quite similar. We will work on that. We are looking to pull together local elders and businesses, and the community to have their say about offender consequences and community expectations.

So, it can be part of those discussions when we get around to establishing community accountability boards. Perhaps, we can look to your area early in the establishment of that. We are expecting that in the first half of next year. I am very happy to keep that discussion open as part of that. Local community accountability boards on the back of local decision-making will be able to get some of those outcomes that you are looking for.

We accept that and we respect that.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes. Personally, I do not want to see my countrymen, my people, wearing a bracelet and walking around when we can be a part of the rescue and try to help and work with elders, Territory Families, and police. We can make the community safe together, if we work together.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Member for Mulka, I do not like to see any young person in my electorate either with an electronic monitoring bracelet on. It is better than locking kids up, I would say that. There is a place for them and, unfortunately, they are necessary at the moment with the system as it is. But we will continue to work with you offline to look at what we can do out in your area with those community accountability boards.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes. I am sorry, but I am strict on this. I just do not want to see our children and elders on bracelets where we can do it through the help of elders and police, and elders and Territory Families together.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, we will keep talking about that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Minister, there are many bus services that operate in Alice Springs. You mentioned the Tangentyere bus service under Territory Families. Are there any other bus services funded through Territory Families or other NGOs that you are aware of operating in Alice Springs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will put that question to Mr Brent Warren.

**Mr WARREN:** Member for Braiting, you mentioned the Tangentyere bus. For clarity, there is the Night Patrol and Youth Patrol service. And there is the Looking After the Kids service which has a transport and case management component. There is the Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Team, who can transport young people home. Each of the drop-in centres—Brown Street and Gap Youth—have the capacity to take young people from the centre to their home address.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is my understanding that when kids are found on the street at night, their names are recorded and they are taken to a place but not left there until a responsible adult can be found. What is the follow-up the next day with those youths—if they have been out at 2 am, I am wondering what process is followed to ensure that parents are notified and people know they were out at 2 am.

**Mrs WORDEN:** You are absolutely correct; they always drop them to a safe place. I spoke to a number of parents while I was in Alice Springs over the last two trips, and the YOREOs were always talking about knowing where those kids should be. In fact, impressively, the public housing safety officers, along with police, all knew the safe places for those kids, whether it was in a town camp or a particular house.

Tangentyere follows the same protocols. They all work together to get that outcome. I will pass to Brent Warren to tell you about the follow-up. I know there is extensive follow-up, but it would depend on the circumstances of that child as to what occurs.

**Mr WARREN:** It depends on the age of the young person and the circumstances in which they get onto the transport network. Young people often leave the drop-in centres and take the facilitated transport home. There is a strong relationship between those providers and the parents. Information we have through our contract management with those providers is that they get regular phone calls from parents checking on young people at the centres.

In regard to kids who get onto transport from a public location, that is more so the Night Patrol, Youth Patrol and Looking After the Kids. They take names and will take them from one location to another until they have satisfactorily identified a guardian or parent, and there is a next-day follow-up.

If the young person is being dealt with by the Tangentyere network, in the first instance Tangentyere will normally do the next-day follow-up unless there was some critical child protection concern. If the young person is being dealt with by police or the Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Team, it would be a government agency response.

The minister is right; we are quite pleased to be able to take multiagency teams to the front door and speak to parents the next day. That is the process that occurs.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For the last financial year, do you have the number of youths who are using that service—the number of youths who have dropped off in the last financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will have to go to Tangentyere for those figures. Would you like us to do that?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Certainly. Do you happen to have the number for the Territory Families bus service? I heard you mention that earlier.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We would have to collect it from all those bus services. Which ones are you interested in?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** If we could have a breakdown it would be good to get an idea of how many youths are using the service.

**Mrs WORDEN:** The Tangentyere service?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Tangentyere and the Territory Families bus service which runs seven nights a week.



**Mrs WORDEN:** That drops individual kids home. We would have a record of that. We can put that on notice, if the Member for Braitling can be very specific about which service he wants figures for.

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**Question on Notice No 8.6**

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Braitling, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For the last financial year 2019–20 can we please have the number of youths who use the Tangentyere bus service, the Territory Families bus service and any other bus service that is directly funded through Territory Families in Alice Springs.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braitling is allocated the number 8.6.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** The 3% reduction in out-of-home care—I am interested in what number of children that represents.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is 1,026 down to 1,014.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you attribute this reduction to the change in bail laws at all, or do you believe other things are contributing to it?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Out-of-home care?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is right. I imagine children are court ordered to out-of-home care in some instances; am I incorrect?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the CEO to give you some more detail on out-of-home care, because it is not necessarily tied up with the youth justice system. You are confusing child protection with youth justice, which has a very small overlay, hopefully, and not in the out-of-home care space, which has several layers of complexity and lots of services sitting under it. I will ask the CEO to add some more detail.

**Mr DAVIES:** If there is anything I need deeper clarification on I will go the deputy chief executive, Jeanette Kerr, who can explain how the out-of-home care system works. In a nutshell, what happens is that young people transition through it. When they turn 18 they move out of the out-of-home care system.

It is fair to say that 70 or 80 of the young people have been in resi-care places, not necessarily placed with foster carers, purchased home-based carers or kin carers. We have taken a very deliberate approach to get young people out who have good support and are on the right path to get them back to their family, kin in particular.

That means some young people are relocating to family back into remote. We set up groups, like the Mikan group in Nhulunbuy, which have worked hard to get young people who had been brought into care from the Arnhem region to Darwin and were here rather than being at home on country, with family, where they could be safe.

It is a targeted approach to try to put a lid on the numbers coming in to out-of-home care. It is a very expensive system to maintain—\$128m a year. Some young people require intensive support. It is very expensive and, in some circumstances, it is much better if the family can be involved in the caring process, rather than putting them into an institutionalised resi-care place.

The reduction has been driven in part by the work we have been doing with families. We have worked deliberately to get the right providers in place to provide the right care for kids so that if we can move them back to family and get them out of the out-of-home care system, that is what we have been doing.

It is not related to bail or the criminal justice system.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** This is very interesting. It has been on a steep trajectory upwards for many years, has it not? Is this the first time it has come down?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have figures from 2017–18 which I am happy to share. It is the ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The first dip?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, the second time. It was 1,061 in 2017–18; it was 1,054 in 2018–19; and 1,026 now. We are consistently heading down, which is a good thing.

**Mr DAVIES:** We are very pleased with that. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia that has been able to put a lid on this. It has been part of the great work Jeanette and her team have done with families, particularly kinship carers and in remote. Jeanette has just been to Borroloola; there is a young person we are very concerned about who we need to get home. We are working assiduously to get him back to family rather than leaving him here in Darwin. It is a deliberate approach.

Although it is small numbers, we are the only jurisdiction to put a lid on it. Sometimes people say, 'These kids aren't brought into care', and I say that there are 40,000 kids in the Territory under the age of 18, and 1,000 of them are in care. It is a big number.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Jesuits conferencing was brought up before—\$700,000. I want to know about the figures we spoke about earlier in relation to conferencing—the 203. The conferencing the Jesuits do—are they separate figures or do they make up that 203 you spoke about earlier?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is part of it. It is a 10-week program.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many of those conferences did the Jesuits take part in?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Two hundred. We will see if we have that figure. Hang on a moment. We gave it earlier but I will get Brent Warren to put that figure again ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Just to clarify exactly what the Jesuits have provided for their \$700,000.

**Mr WARREN:** Of the total number of conferences we spoke about before, the Jesuits managed the pre-sentence amount, which is 22 for the last financial year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** So, 22 conferences were held by the Jesuits. Are there other services provided for that \$700,000 that goes into funding the Jesuits?

**Mr WARREN:** Yes, there are. For example, the Jesuits provide support to Congress health service in Central Australia in relation to conferencing for young people who are going through the Back on Track program.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The community work programs we spoke about earlier—there was a great deal of talk about that. I want to know what organisations—you mentioned a couple in Alice Springs, minister. I want to know whether you have contacted any of those organisations in this early part of the process just to see whether or not they will be taking a part. You spoke about community work orders and those organisations—the Alice Springs Town Council, the Alice Springs Animal Shelter and AFLNT. I wonder whether anyone had spoken to them about possibly taking part in those programs.

**Mrs WORDEN:** In the program versus the orders? As I clarified earlier, we already have community work orders. There are partners in that process. At the moment, we are working towards the program which is the higher visibility groups together. We are looking to partner with councils on projects rather than individual work placements.

The current system with the work orders is a young offender working almost one-on-one probably—there might be a couple of them with an organisation—getting mentoring, work skills and life skills, whereas the work program is more a group that would work—I can foresee that it would be more with councils on a bigger project and more visible in the community, like painting and those sorts of things. We have been talking to the Alice Springs Town Council about that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The organisations that you mentioned earlier, such as the Alice Springs Animal Shelter—how many youth took part in a service in the last financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Their capacity is one participant, Monday to Friday.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Okay. And does that change over time?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, it would change. Can I clarify—because they have a work order it would be time limited. Once they are finished with one person they then have a capacity for another.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you very much, that is good to know.

You mentioned the \$52.2m for quarantine services. The Todd facility and everything that happened there recently—I received a myriad of phone calls in my office. I want to know whether or not Territory Families will be following up with the \$5,000 fines that people were told they may be forced to pay. We spoke about this yesterday. We understand a lot of people there are under the care of Territory Families. I am trying to gauge—that is what we were told yesterday evening.

**Mrs WORDEN:** In the quarantine facility under the care of—no. We have a role with managing and staffing facilities. The health component is the Health staff. We look after the welfare side of it. We are not involved in the billing and following up; that is Health.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many welfare complaints or matters were issued from the Todd facility in the last few months?

**Mrs WORDEN:** One moment. We are jumping around all over the place here. We have gone from child protection to quarantine, so just give us a moment.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you. I will start going through the outputs in a short moment. It will be easier to follow along.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the chief executive to provide you more details.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Braiting, as you know, the COVID-19 facility is the Mercure. It is fair to say the facility has served its purpose. We are continuing to maintain it. We have to maintain it at least until March, and we are in negotiations to do that.

In terms of the complaints, we have a targeted complaints process through the welfare teams. There are people on site—but there was definitely a spike in complaints around what happened with the South Australian hot spot being declared and a large number of people coming to Alice Springs unexpectedly.

There were two flights on foot when that announcement was made by the South Australian Premier. The Ghan was also on its way and a large number of people were crossing the border and coming in. Of course they were all referred back to the quarantine centre in Alice Springs.

Our Health staff, the police and security officers did a brilliant job managing the huge influx there. There was a plane listed to fly down there to relieve some of the pressure and bring people up to the Howard Springs quarantine facility. Unfortunately, it hit a bird and had to turn around, so it took a while to sort it out.

All the complaints that come through are recorded. Some come through ministers' offices, direct to welfare, and some go direct to Health. All of them are recorded and answered. They are not treated lightly. For some people it was a heck of a shock being put into quarantine.

**Mr GUYULA:** Are we on Output Group 1.0 yet, or somewhere down the line?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** We are still responding to the statement.

**Mr GUYULA:** I want to talk about childcare responsibilities. What has been provided in this budget to continue to work with Aboriginal communities to improve kinship care placements?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Jeanette Kerr to respond to your question.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.4**

**Mrs WORDEN:** The contract caters for up to 1,000 individuals, adults and young people, to be monitored at any one time. Since Territory Families, Housing and Communities assumed the responsibility of electronic monitoring of young people, there has not been more than 50 young people subject to electronic monitoring at any one time, which might give the Member for Mulka some comfort. It is not a huge amount but we have capacity for 1,000.

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**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you need the question repeated from the Member for Mulka now that the officer is here?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No. We have the gist of the question. Jeanette Kerr will be able to respond.

**Ms KERR:** In terms of financial support or contractual arrangements with remote Aboriginal communities, we have Aboriginal carer grants under the Aboriginal Carers for Aboriginal Children program. We have contracted seven agencies through that, including Yalu in Arnhem. We also work very closely with the Mikan Reference Group, who have representatives from all the clan groups in the Arnhem region. We give them funding to carry their operations and they support us in child protection investigation and strengthening families matters in the Arnhem region. We have also put a remote family support worker in Lake Evella and we have multiple local staff across the Arnhem region. Some of them are very senior TOs—strong women, strong men.

**Mr GUYULA:** Just following up those organisations like the Yalu and Yirrkala reference group did you say?

**Ms KERR:** Mikan.

**Mr GUYULA:** A Gapuwiyak group that looks after these kinds of issues would be good. They will work very closely with Territory Families and be in the middle, so they can work with the family that the children belong to—so they already know the families know where the children are and they can have some kind of power to say where the children can be safe in whose hands. That is what I would like to see.

When Yalu and Mikan work on that, make sure they do not make the decision on behalf of another clan or family. They need to approach those people and sit down with Territory Families and the family of the child to work out a way that is safe for that child.

**Ms KERR:** Yes, I completely agree with you, Member for Mulka. We are working with a number of other communities to develop care and protection reference groups, or cultural authority groups, on Galiwinku, Maningrida, Tiwi Islands and a range of communities. It is probably reflected where there have been very few children taken into care from Arnhem in the last year—only one, I think. It has been a very successful partnership. We are learning a lot.

**Mr GUYULA:** Just one more while we are on this area. How many children from Yolngu country have been removed during the last term of government? How many of these kids were placed in kinship care and how many were placed elsewhere?

**Mr WORDEN:** We are happy to take that on notice. That is quite a breakdown that you are requesting.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.7

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, please restate the question for the record.

**Mr GUYULA:** How many children from Yolngu country have been removed during the last term of government? How many of those kids were placed in kinship care and how many were placed elsewhere?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Mulka has been allocated the number 8.7.

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**Mrs LAMBLEY:** My questions go back to the Member for Braintree's questions about quarantining and costings. We were told yesterday by the Health minister to ask you some of the questions we asked her, which you might have tracked. What is the total cost to Territory Families so far for providing quarantine?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We can give you the welfare component. I have a total cost up to 30 November: Alice Springs is \$5.4m; and Howard Springs is \$21.3m.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Where has this money come from?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have a breakdown of figures. Some was covered internally originally, and as it has gone along from other areas, as every agency has done—they have moved through a COVID response. I will ask the chief executive officer to provide you with some more detail on that.

**Mr DAVIES:** As you know, the COVID pandemic really got under way in March, which was last financial year. Territory Families stepped in and moved to support a range of welfare-related matters. The agency funded \$4.416m in accommodation support costs for people in quarantine, given that at that point some people were staying in hotel accommodation and people were allowed to self-isolate. This was early in the pandemic. We also assisted on essential items for individuals facing financial hardship in quarantine. Some people got caught up early on in the whole quarantine phase.

We spent \$2m leading up to the end of the financial year on welfare group staffing for the quarantine support services. We also contributed \$1.37m to security to monitor hotel quarantine compliance in conjunction with public health and NT Police compliance teams.

We did that as part of our welfare response. Territory Families is responsible when there is a welfare-related matter. Previously we have funded and supported programs at Marrara and Foske when there have been evacuations during cyclones. This is part of our agency's work.

To offset the costs going in this financial year, we met that within our total agency budget. We did not go back to Cabinet asking for more. Since then we have been appropriated \$43m for the establishment and operating costs of the Howard Springs quarantine facility, and \$8.4m for the establishment and operation of the Alice Springs quarantine facility.

The Alice Springs quarantine facility is not fully occupied at the moment, but we need a plan B in case there is an outbreak somewhere, and we do not want to get caught where we are going around to hotels, cap in hand, saying, 'Can you provide us with accommodation?'

The Howard Springs quarantine facility is resourced and co-funded by the Australian Government, given that people are coming in from overseas, but we have been given an appropriation in addition to our standard agency budget to support the operations and leasing arrangements in those facilities.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Are you paying for the lease of the Mercure?

**Mr DAVIES:** We are.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** How much is that costing?

**Mr DAVIES:** The base cost of that has been \$1m a month.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What about Howard Springs? That is yours, is it not?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, we do the same; we have a lease. It is government; we run the Howard Springs facility, but it is NT Government's.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You are paying Northern Rise Village Services \$24m?

**Mr DAVIES:** That is correct. They are the contract providers there. I would need to unpack those dollar figures. I am not sure if that amount is all for Northern Rise. It is a combination of both running arrangements and staffing from our perspective.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The information I have been given is that Northern Rise was given a contract valued at \$24m to run the Howard Springs quarantine facility and that the contract had a 30-day termination clause. Is that still in effect?

**Mr DAVIES:** That is correct.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Is it just month to month?

**Mr DAVIES:** It is.

**Mrs WORDEN:** For the nature of the quarantine—if there is a vaccine we may be in a position where we longer have the need for them to do such an extensive contract.

**Mr DAVIES:** It is fair to say some of those costs will be offset by the Australian Government being heavily involved in that facility now bringing in international—there is an agreement set up with the Australian Government to facilitate that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What exactly is Northern Rise providing?

**Mr DAVIES:** The facility was built—in terms of scale, it is a \$660m facility. It was built as part of the INPEX arrangement and is a massive facility. DIPL works very closely with Northern Rise just maintaining that facility—getting rooms ready and cleaning, then high-end cleaning when people leave. There is also food supply and the general maintenance of that facility. It is 3,000 units. It is a big facility to run.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Was this service put out to tender or was it selected?

**Mr DAVIES:** No, we had a provision. Because of the emergency arrangements and the Territory control, we had a provision to go direct and they were the providers that were in there originally when it was an INPEX village. When the first COVID-19 outbreak occurred and we had the people from the cruise ship in, they were the ones who geared up early and it was appropriate to keep them in because of their deep knowledge of the facility.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** They are on stand-by for any crisis or major event or something?

**Mr DAVIES:** They are contracted now to run and maintain that facility as long as we lease it.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** But the original—when they were first brought in, how did that happen?

**Mr DAVIES:** They came off one of the cruise ships—the Diamond Princess. They were flown in by the Australian Government. They were engaged to gear up and start the facility.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Northern Rise were?

**Mr DAVIES:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Northern Rise were already at the facility maintaining it before that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** They came off a ship, did you say?

**Mr DAVIES:** No, sorry. The passengers came off the ship into quarantine and we had to gear up.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Northern Rise were already maintaining the facility. They knew the facility intimately and had that knowledge to go straight into what we required. If we had gone to a tender process, as you could imagine, that would have taken some time. We were in a position where we needed to gear up immediately.

**Mr BURGoyNE:** I have had it brought to my attention that a young child of eight weeks old was taken from its mother by Territory Families. I understand that, at times, very hard decisions have to be made in relation to child protection. How many children under the age of one are in the care of Territory Families or have been in the last 12 months?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that question on notice, please.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.8

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many children under the age of one are in the care of Territory Families or have been in the last 12 months? I will take the last financial year if that is easier to find, 2019–20.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the statement?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braiting has been allocated the number 8.8.

**Mr GUYULA:** What is being provided in this budget to assist with youth camps on country? In Arnhem Land, elders talk about *raypirri* camps, meaning respect, education and developing discipline and training. Our elders would like youth justice to be managed on country. Could you advise where this is happening and what funds have been provided for this in the budget?

**Mrs WORDEN:** At the moment, we have investment in intervention programs as part of our Back on Track: Cutting Youth Crime Plan and they are aimed at reducing offending, substance abuse and at-risk behaviours. They are also orientated to improving the cultural connectedness and identity of participants.

Last financial year, we had Mala'la Aboriginal Health Corporation, Operation Flinders, the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation and MacDonnell Regional Council delivering short-term camps on country in the Northern Territory and South Australia.

Last financial year, we had a total of 15 camps. Up front, we do not have any in Arnhem Land at this point—I do not have anything in my budget for that. But we have Seven Emu Station and B18 in the Litchfield area, and Balunu Foundation are geared up to do some camps this financial year.

B18 is delivering a long-term youth training and work pathways camp for up to eight young people between the ages of 14 and 17 who are at risk of entering the youth justice system. Those camps will operate twice a year for four months at a time over a five-year period. The most recent of those camps started on 8 September.

We also have the JBAC engaged in delivering youth training and work pathways camps for up to eight young people between the ages of 14 and 17. Unfortunately, at this stage they are not in Arnhem Land.

The Mala'la Aboriginal Health Corporation ran one camp at Maningrida, but we do not have one there. That does not mean we cannot start a discussion.

We are also working on a youth camp under the Barkly Regional Deal. I do not have the figures for this financial year, but we had \$3.55m in capital funding for that project last financial year. We are moving subject to an ILUA, an Indigenous Land Use Agreement, so it has moved slower than we wanted. We have an additional \$2m this financial year to operate that new service.

We have extensive holiday programs in East Arnhem which will run through from December to January. We are partnering with a number of the Aboriginal corporations out there for the school holidays. It does not mean we cannot have a discussion at some point. My experience is these things take a while. You have to find the right provider, program and services within that. It is not just a physical building, you have to work on it to make sure you have something that meets all the standards. I encourage you to have that first discussion and we can work towards something.

**Mr GUYULA:** Since last term we have been asking for *raypirri* camps in Arnhem Land. There is one across from Melville Bay where this family has been wanting to set up a healing and discipline camp—a *raypirri* camp. Ken would know about this because we have been working together since last term. That one, at a place called Yudu Yudu, across the bay from Melville Bay, have been waiting for the minister and Territory Families to work with them. They are ready to go and set up their camps, waiting for more assistance to be provided. It is there—I have been calling and asking.

There is another one in Galiwinku, up the island, which is a *raypirri* and healing camp that the elders wanted to put up.

**Mrs WORDEN:** To be fair, we cannot solve it today. What I am offering is to have a good look at it and proper discussions. For these young people we need to make sure they are going into the right environment. We

have seen camps in the past fall over because United Nations standards were not met in the treatment of young people. I am not saying that it is not ...

**Mr GUYULA:** That is where we both need to make sure.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, we need to make sure that is done with rigour and agreements in place, such as which kids would go there. That is a bigger conversation. Are you happy to take it offline?

**Mr GUYULA:** I am just saying that there are people out there ready to look after their own families. They are not looking after somebody else's family; it is their own clan group family. The other one you probably know is the VSA camp. This was when the volatile substance thing happened at Galiwinku and parents and family members made a quick decision and took them to an island in the Crocodile Islands, called Rapuma. They have been waiting to try to get assistance from them. The Chief Minister's office in Nhulunbuy knows about it. I have been talking to him about it, so maybe we can do something now. Those people are still waiting.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is important to note that the last four years have been incredible systemic reform. It is not about locking kids up and putting them away. Those camps sound like they have a good fit for the current new system that we have, but we would need to put some rigour and checks around service provision and what would be happening in that program, because we want to make sure it has success. I am not saying those people are not ready to go, but maybe they would need some support from the department and guidance around that. The way that those kids are referred to that is important. We need to work through all of those things. There are a lot of layers to work out to make sure it is done right.

**Mr GUYULA:** They are all ready to go. They are just waiting.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Noted. Let us take this discussion offline.

**Mr GUYULA:** Yes, thank you.

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

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2020–2021) Bill as they relate to Territory Families, Housing and Communities. Are there any related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Output 1.1 – Family Support**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output Group 1.0, Children and Families, Output 1.1 Family Support. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Minister, please advise the actual expenditure for this output in 2019–20?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Just to clarify, for family support?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** For family support, the actual—is that what you are after the 2019–20?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is correct.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was \$28.57m and that was published in our annual report.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, thanks very much. Just to confirm, it was budgeted for 2019–20 to be \$23.5m and the actual spend was \$28m?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Correct.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What was the overspend? Was it \$5m?



**Mrs WORDEN:** I believe there was a lot of COVID welfare expenditure, but if you just give us a moment. I invite the CFO to respond with the detail.

**Ms CHARLES:** The overspend in that output was due to COVID. At the time, that output included all the emergency response expenditure that was unbudgeted to the agency.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Will the new budget for 2020–21, of \$23m, cover that should COVID continue? Is there enough funding in there to cover the ongoing expenses?

**Ms CHARLES:** In 2020–21 there is a new output group called Welfare Emergency Management and that is where the budget and expenditure will be.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Have there been any family support services that were being funded in 2019–20 that are not being continued into this next financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Fantastic. With the focus on the first 1,000 days of a child's life, what family support services specifically target those first 1,000 days? Can you please list them by region?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will invite Luke Twyford to provide a response?

**Mr TWYFORD:** The family support system is quite a broad and complex area. There have been a number of reviews, including a Deloitte review in 2016–17, our royal commission into children in the Northern Territory, and most recently a Productivity Commission review.

The definition of what service targets what cohort of a family—albeit that the first 1,000 days can be highly complicated. In particular, in a family situation where there might be domestic violence impacting on a newborn, the domestic violence service would not be classified as a family support program for a newborn, but would have benefits.

In our annual report we list every family support provider we fund. We would be able to produce a table articulating the NGOs we fund and indicate the nature of the family support they provide. I add that we have recently made that available online for all members of the community to search through the NTCOSS social services directory.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many families were supported in the last financial year? It is a very broad question.

**Mrs WORDEN:** In the last financial year, 779 cases of family support commenced.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How does that compare to the previous financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In the previous year there were 848.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There is a drop there. You want to see a drop, but does that mean there are fewer people requiring the family support services or has COVID-19 affected that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am advised that is the count of what is provided by our workforce. We have outsourced some of that case management, so that is why there is a drop in the numbers.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How much money is being spent on that outsourcing?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask the CEO to give you that response.

**Mr DAVIES:** We spent \$5.5m for intensive family preservation services last financial year—outsourced services.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last estimates, process questions were raised into the number of referrals Territory Families was making to NGOs and the fact that they were not captured in the statistics that showed support cases commenced. Has that statistic been amended to show not only the cases Territory Families undertake, but also the referred cases to NGOs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Twyford to provide the response.

**Mr TWYFORD:** There have been improvements, but not the extent where we can extract the data from a single system. The business requirements for the new 'Care' system that has been procured will provide the best opportunity for us to collect the work of our NGOs in a single system. The business requirements actually include an NGO portal so there will be great opportunities for non-government organisations to enter their work into our system, but also to see information about the families they are working with that we have collected to stop double or triple handling of information.

Our remote family support service has improved through new database design and we are able to articulate the work of our remote Aboriginal workforce in early intervention family support.

To answer your question simply, no, we are not yet ready to articulate outsourced family support cases in raw numbers or with any clear analysis as a whole-of-system approach.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have the support cases that Territory Families has dealt with for the last financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is the number I provided before of 779.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 1.1

### Output 1.2 – Child Protection

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Child Protection. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you please advise the actual expenditure for this output in 2019–20?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The actual expenditure on child protection is \$23.8m.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You know what the next question will be.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes. Would you like me to tell you about the variation?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, please.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I can see that we had an increase of notifications of 8.5% with 5,220 of those going to new child protection notifications—investigations. We overspent in that area.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That 8.5% increase in child protection notifications seems quite high. What have previous years shown in regard to this? Are we seeing a year-on-year increase of 8.5%?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, it is pretty stable. In 2019–20 we had 25,500 and the increase was 23. Over time, since 2015–16 it has always been above 20,000.

It was 20,500 in 2015–16; 22,300 in 2016–17; 24,743 in 2017–18; a drop to 23,482 in 2018–19; and then the numbers went back up in 2019–20.

A lot of that is about the raised understanding across the community about child protection notifications—the mandatory nature of those notifications.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It was my understanding that after the One Child, One Case policy was introduced a large reduction in cases from 2017–18 was sought. I am a little worried to see those numbers increasing.

**Mr DAVIES:** We are working on a devolved model, so most of our investigation process were run centrally four or five years ago. We have now moved to a regional model where we have staff in remote communities. There has been a cost to the attribution of this. I emphasise that when we deal with this in a budgetary sense, part of my job is to make sure the agency budget comes in on budget. We look at it globally as well.

There will be rises. As we grow our service and footprint, we will move money around within our global budget, with the permission of the minister, to make sure that globally the agency comes in on budget. That is part of what we do in terms of operating. The attribution here is that some of what you are seeing is that we are running a remote service we were not running before.

**Mrs WORDEN:** At the end of last financial year the agency had an underspend overall.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.5**

**Mrs WORDEN:** Mr Chair, I have a response to a question on notice. The answer to that question on notice is that AGD manages this contract for all of government, and any questions about the detail of that contract have to be requested of the Attorney-General. My apologies, as I know she has already been here this week, but her area can work with police on a response for that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I think you went over them, but I want to make sure I have them down here. For the child protection notifications for 2018–19, what was the total figure?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was 23,482.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For the 2019–20 period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was 25,500 exactly. I queried that figure because it seemed quite exact but it is spot on. Remember, that is not where the One Child, One Case policy kicks in. That might actually include five notifications about one child.

The One Child, One Case policy comes through in the way that those are investigated. There might be five notifications about one child, but they will be pulled down into one investigation rather than five. Notifications are a completely different thing.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Am I right in assuming that for the last two reporting periods we have had that One Child, One Case in place? As we like to say, we are comparing apples with apples.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, we would. That would be reflected in investigations rather than notifications. Notifications mean you or me making a notification, or a teacher or police officer. In the finalisations of investigations, in 2017–18 it was 10,448. However, in 2018–19 it was 5,811 and this financial year it was 4,833. That is trending down due to One Child, One Case.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** So we are seeing fewer children affected but more individual cases per child?

**Mrs WORDEN:** What it means is that case workers are not all working on five different notifications, they are all pulled together into one. I will ask Mr Twyford to add some more detail around the way that policy is impacting on our child protection numbers.

**Mr TWYFORD:** The roughly 20,000 to 25,000 notifications per annum over the last four years have fairly consistently related to 10,000 to 12,000 unique individual children. As we go through those 25,500 notifications from last financial year we can see in our system that related to 11,696 unique children. You can project from that there were quite a number of children with multiple notifications.

Of those there were 4,437 unique children who had an investigation finalised out of the 5,220 investigations. Again as matters flow through our triage system into investigation they are now finding that One Child, One Case policy kicks in and children with multiple notifications have one case to assess the entirety of their life circumstances rather than multiple investigations relating to single notifications.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Whilst we are talking about cases, on average how many cases does each case manager have currently?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The average is 19.1.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is fantastic to see that number coming down. That average case load work is for the previous financial year—the 2018–19 period? I only have the figure to 31 March.

**Mrs WORDEN:** At 30 June, each Territory Families case manager had an average of 19.1 cases assigned.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How does that compare to the 2018–19 financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is an 11% reduction. In 2017–18 it was 29.79.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** And 2018–19?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The average number of cases—we might have to take it on notice because the figures I have do not make sense to me. We will come back to that in a few moments and work it out rather than put it on notice. I will ask Jeanette Kerr to come to the front.

**Mr CHAIR:** It might be a perfect time for us to take a break.

**Mrs WORDEN:** We would love a break. Can we get the answer on record first, Mr Chair?

**Mr CHAIR:** Do you want the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, the question has been asked about how the average case numbers of whatever it was we have given compare to 2018–19. I will ask Jeanette Kerr to respond to that.

**Ms KERR:** The 19.1 is the child protection caseload. The total caseload for 2020 is 22.2. There is a range of case types that can be in a person's workload.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** So, the average cases across the board ...

**Ms KERR:** It is 22.2. That can include protective assessments, after-care support cases if a young person has left care, parenting support—a whole range of things.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is the 22.2 figure for the last financial year 2019–20 or the 2018–19 financial year?

**Ms KERR:** That is for 2019–20. For 2018–19 it is 24.8.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Trending down.

**Ms KERR:** At the moment it is 20.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can I please have that broken up by regions? Previously, I could see Barkly, Alice Springs, Greater Darwin and Katherine.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Jeanette to read it out.

**Ms KERR:** Average cases held at the end of 2019 was Alice Springs, 22; Barkly, 38; greater Darwin, 24; Katherine, 33.4; Nhulunbuy, 18.2; remote was 0.5 below 18, so it is counted as 18; and an average of 24.8.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I can see a huge reduction in the greater Darwin area from the previous financial year, but a lot of the other areas seem to be trending up except for Nhulunbuy.

**Ms KERR:** That was 2019. In 2020 Alice Springs was 15.8, Barkly was 18.9, greater Darwin was 24.3, Katherine was 27.5 and Nhulunbuy was 22.4 and remote was 23.4.

**Mr CHAIR:** We might take the opportunity now that is concluded to have a quick break and return back here in about five minutes.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome back everybody. We are currently on Output 1.2, Child Protection. Are there any questions?

**Ms WORDEN:** I have the responses for questions 8.6 and 8.8.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 8.6**

**Ms WORDEN:** This relates to the bus service and returning youths home. The Tangentyere Night and Youth Patrol are substantively funded by the Commonwealth Government National Indigenous Australian Agency

NIAA. In 2019–20 the Northern Territory Government funded this service \$210,000 through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. This funding supported 23 additional hours per week predominantly on a Sunday and Monday night. From 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 this service provided a total of 9,820 unique transportations of young people. Of this, the Northern Territory Government funding could be attributed to approximately 3,171 unique transportations of young people.

There were no Territory Families-run bus services in Alice Springs during 2019–20. Territory Families, Housing and Communities funds the Gap Youth and Community Centre to run an after-hours youth service which includes transportation home of young people that attend the activities run at their centre. There is no data collected on specific transportations; however, attendance figures for this service in 2019–20 totally 16,488 unique attendances. From my observations last week, most of those kids go home and rely on that bus service at the end of the evening.

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### Answer to Question on Notice No 8.8

**Mrs WORDEN:** In 2019–20 there were 33 children under one year of age entered into out-of-home care. As at June 2020 there were 15 children under one year of age in care. That means 18 of those had exited.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Minister, are young people under the care of Territory Families who should be in school being made to go to school or is a choice given to them?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There is an expectation that every child who is school-aged in the Northern Territory attends school, including those in care.

**Mr CHAIR:** There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

### Output 1.3 – Out of Home Care

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Out of Home Care. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Please advise the actual expenditure for this output in 2019–20.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It was \$122.132m.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you. That makes perfect sense. Budgeted was \$128m, what was the reason for the \$6m underspend?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That was through improved contract arrangements and care arrangements, so there were some savings.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am glad to hear.

**Mrs WORDEN:** And a reduction in the number of children.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many children under the supervision of Territory Families in out-of-home care have committed crimes in the 2019–20 year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Jeanette Kerr to respond to your question.

**Ms KERR:** I was hoping this would come up. I cannot give you the exact number for the entire year, but on average it is 2.5%. From 1 July to 30 September there were 192 children who were apprehended by police. Five of those were in the care of the CEO, so it is 2.54% I believe. On average it is one or two per month.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is fantastic to hear; that is a good figure. We do not want anyone committing a crime, but yes, it is 2%.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many complaints have been received by Territory Families from foster carers in financial year 2019–20?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Just to qualify that, it is from ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is correct—from foster carers.

**Mrs WORDEN:** From foster carers it was 34. That does include kinship carers—foster and kinship carers. That is as at 30 June.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do we have the nature of the complaints?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, we would not have those available. I invite Jeanette Kerr to talk in general terms about those complaints. I will say that from my experience a good complaints system actually results in system improvement. From my observations, Territory Families has a really robust complaints system which comes through to service improvement. All of those are fed back through the system to understand where there might be issues and highlight those issues early to get ahead of the game.

It is an integral part of the agency—it should be an integral part of any agency because it can really drive service improvement. I will ask Jeanette Kerr to provide some more rigour around the specifics.

**Ms KERR:** Of the 34 complaints, I cannot give you an exact breakdown but the majority in relation to foster carers—a significant number—are in relation to transitions. People get a young child and when a family becomes available, they are not willing to transition. It is completely understandable; it is a really sad situation. We have been putting a lot of work into our transition planning and into our foster carer recruitment so we have categories of foster care, as opposed to, 'Here is a baby for you to look after'. That might go two or three years and it is challenging for people to move on from that.

We will have a distinction between emergency carers, short-term carers and long-term carers. Across the board, we will also get some complaints about payments or about the lack of communication or rudeness from staff members, but that is extremely rare.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That has certainly been my experience hearing about foster carers who are very attached to the children. How many of those complaints have been resolved. You spoke about the process; are a lot of those complaints resolved?

**Ms KERR:** We take the complaints extremely seriously and we go through quite a process, including a resolution process with the Office of the Children's Commissioner. I do not believe any of those complaints are outstanding at present. If they are, they are being finalised.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Of the complaints that we received overall, more broadly than just those complaints, 31 were upheld, 67 were partly upheld, 99 were not upheld and seven had insufficient information or were withdrawn. There were only seven remaining matters of all the complaints, not just the ones you raised. That is actually pretty good.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many children were successfully reunified with family over the 2019–20 period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will just check if we have that information; I do not recall seeing it. We might take that on notice because I am pretty sure we have not seen that number.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.9

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many children were successfully reunified with family in 2019–20?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated number 8.9.

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**Mr CHAIR:** We have concluded consideration of Output 1.3.

### Output 1.4 – Youth Justice

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 1.4, Youth Justice. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Minister, can you please advise the actual expenditure for this output in 2019–20?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In 2019–20 it was \$67.028m.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You know what question is coming. That appears to be just under \$6m overspend in that area. Are you able to give me some advice on why that occurred?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I do not agree with that figure.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have here, budgeted for 2019–20, \$61.18m.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have a final budget of \$64.173m—the final budget figure. It might have been for that year there was an additional budget added. I will ask the chief executive to provide some further detail.

**Mr DAVIES:** The minister is right, the actual figure was \$64.173m. The actual expenses for that year were \$67.028m, so there was a slight overspend there of \$3m in the youth justice budget.

**Mrs WORDEN:** My understanding is that with the transition there were unfunded staff from Corrections, which contributed to that overspend.

**Mr DAVIES:** It is attributable to youth detention centre operations. That is why we got the new budget which is more in keeping with the actual cost. We have moved money around globally, as I explained before, to make sure we got the right budget to run the system properly this year—and an underspend by the agency last year of \$2.2m.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What number of youths are currently involved in the Saltbush program, specifically through the bail accommodation services?

**Mrs WORDEN:** From 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020, 86 young people received bail accommodation.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What was the cost of providing that service?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In 2019–20, \$4.1m was allocated to the bail support program—\$2m in Darwin and \$2.1m in Alice Springs.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What is the most recent program that Saltbush is running—crisis accommodation?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, they provide bail accommodation. We have an agreement with them because they have capacity in Alice Springs if required, but we have not used that. We are already funding them for the beds, so there is no additional cost if we had to use it, but it is my preference that we use ASYASS if we have to.

We have not had the position where we have not found a safe place for young people to sleep.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am glad to hear that. What was the daily average of young people in detention for the 2019–20 period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are we talking about youth detention in Alice Springs and Darwin?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Correct.

**Mrs WORDEN:** You have just gone from Saltbush ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Very true. In the budget papers it was budgeted to be 39 young people in detention.

**Mrs WORDEN:** But 24 is the daily average. That is between Alice Springs and Darwin.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is that for the 2019–20 period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Correct.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That number is now dropping—you have budgeted 25 for the next financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Correct.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Operation Flinders was spoken about earlier. It is often spoken about as a very successful program. You said two programs were held this year; why only two?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Operation Flinders was one of our first programs, but we have other programs, so we have more of a diversity of programs. We have just made an agreement for another three—and during COVID-19; that is a good point.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Certainly. Of the three programs that are run next year, how many children will be involved in that program? We do not have an exact number but going off previous years?

**Mrs WORDEN:** It is 10 per program.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Okay, so that will be 30 children for next financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Correct.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I guess what I am trying to get at is that we seem to be seeing extremely good figures coming out of these with the percentages you brought about earlier. Is there an intent by the department to invest more into these programs or is 30 children a year—I guess with the amount of children that I am seeing in Alice Springs needing those sorts of programs, is there the appetite to increase that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Operation Flinders is a camp that is not just used by the Northern Territory. It is also used by South Australia, so we want to make sure that our programs are being delivered locally. That is why we are working so hard on the Barkly Youth Work Camp. We know that we need to get that up and running and when that comes on, there will be less reliance on all the others.

It is a matter of finding what works and making sure that we are accessing the right camp. As you heard before, Brent provided the information about some camps for young women and some for men. You need the right fit according to the offending of that young person. You might not have enough for one particular program; you might choose another one. It is a matter of getting the right fit.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We spoke about the percentage of youths who went on not to reoffend after attending these programs. Do we have a breakdown per program or not?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are you talking about numbers of kids attending per program?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is right, the number of youths who are attending these programs and not reoffending within six months. You have a number of programs running; I just want to know what is effective.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Brent Warren to address that in a broader sense because we have such a broad range of programs. We have police diverting kids, courts diverting kids and bail accommodation. The success of bail accommodation itself is quite high. There is a whole range and mix according to the offending of the young person.

**Mr WARREN:** At the risk of going back over old ground, the key problem here is matching up datasets from different organisations. As discussed earlier, this is a case of us needing to manually compile lists and spreadsheets of young people attending providers with data from police over different time frames to look for reapprehensions.

We are working through that with them and are looking to identify the reoffending rate for each program so that we can differentiate.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Can I also point out that as at 30 June, the end period, the Back on Track program and all of those programs that sit underneath Back on Track had only been going for 10 months. It is really hard to get that data for that financial year. We expect that this time next year we will have better data. Once we have the system in place, that data will be a lot easier to track, which is why it is such an important project.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Minister, last financial year, how many youth offenders were arrested?



**Mrs WORDEN:** That would be police data. Apologies—only the police could tell you that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** A lot of this information we have asked the Police minister and we have been directed to ask Territory Families.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Police do the arresting. I made it really clear earlier on that we only have carriage of those young people once they have been apprehended and come into the youth justice space, or early intervention when they have had a brush with early offending. Those statistics are purely for police.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Minister, how many youths were refused bail?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Once again, that is a decision for the police, the courts and the Attorney-General.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Minister, last financial year, how many youths in the care of Territory Families were arrested?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I think the number was 2.5% for the last quarter of all youth that were arrested. The Member for Brainting asked that specific question about 10 minutes ago.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** My question related to out-of-home care.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Barkly, you are asking for how many of the kids who are in the care of the chief executive were arrested last year. Is that correct?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** That is right.

**Mr DAVIES:** It is 2%.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Sorry, do we have an actual number.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Of arrests?

**Mr DAVIES:** Five young people for the last quarter.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** That is from 1 July ...

**Mr DAVIES:** From 1 July to 30 September, yes.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How many youths in the care of Territory Families were arrested last financial year?

**Mr DAVIES:** We would have to take that on notice, Member for Barkly.

**Mrs WORDEN:** To be clear, we will have to get the data on the number of youth arrested from the police because that is their data.

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**Question on Notice No 8.10**

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** For the last financial year, how many youths in the care of Territory Families were arrested?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes, with the proviso that we get that data from police to extrapolate that number.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.10.

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** For the last financial year, how many youth offenders were given a verbal or written warning?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is a police decision; that is police data.

**Mr EDINGTON:** For the last financial year, how many youths in the Territory were arrested for new offending while on bail?

**Mrs WORDEN:** That is police data. Mr Twyford has just pointed out to me that it is likely to be in the police annual report.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last estimates it was acknowledged that there were 20 youths in supported bail between three facilities. What are the current figures, broken down by facility?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You are correct in that there is another bail support accommodation facility. That is ASYASS. We have not had any in with them. What was the question? How many young people have been in bail for ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The question was what are the current figures, broken down, by facility, for youths in supported bail?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Saltbush Alice Springs in 2019–20 was 41 and Saltbush Darwin 2019–20 was 42. That is a total of 83.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That number has gone up significantly.

**Mrs WORDEN:** From the year before?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Is that not a good thing—that they are in bail accommodation voluntarily?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I suppose so.

**Mrs WORDEN:** It means that fewer of them are breaching bail. That is the whole idea of bail accommodation. Less time they are out on the street. Those young people are in bail accommodation making every attempt to stay within the conditions of their bail. It is a good thing.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** These young people are not in the bail accommodation for doing the right thing. Am I right?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, I am saying they are doing the right thing according to their bail conditions. The whole idea of bail accommodation is that they are out of the situation that perhaps contributed them offending in the first place and they are able to meet the conditions of their bail.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many youths in supported bail facilities successfully completed their bail in the last financial year?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.11**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Of the 83 youths in supported bail accommodation in 2019–20, how many successfully completed their bail period?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 8.11.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many youths on bail not in supported bail facilities successfully completed their bail?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We only have a more global figure of bail success, rather than separating the two, so we will have to take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.12**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many youths on bail, not in supported bail facilities, successfully completed their bail?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 8.12.

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**Mr COSTA:** I understand that over the last term of government, investment in the youth justice system has doubled. Could you please explain why this is the case?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I covered most of it earlier. Realistically, the royal commission drove a very different response from the government in 2016. It pointed out that there was a broken system with no real circuit breakers in place. There was a cost associated with those circuit breakers. Essentially that is why we had to spend so much money on those reforms.

We have been covering off a whole range of things, including bail support, electronic monitoring and case management on youth and community services all cost a considerable amount as well as the retraining of staff.

Take the YOREO program, for example. It did not exist before the royal commission. That investment for strong case management for individual offenders is where the difference will be, along with bail support and all the mechanisms to give an opportunity to a young person to make a change. It costs. Essentially that is where it is. While we are paying more, the cost over time should go down in places like our youth justice detention centres.

The cost of keeping one person in detention far outstrips our investment in youth diversion, if that makes sense.

**Mr COSTA:** Once they come out of the system, are there any programs set up for them to rehabilitate instead of going back into the system, especially in remote communities?

**Mrs WORDEN:** There definitely is. I will ask Brent Warren to give you details on that.

**Mr WARREN:** Member for Arafura, can I clarify whether the question is about young people in detention or anywhere in the system?

**Mr COSTA:** Young people in detention, coming out of detention going back to communities—is there any place for them to go when they go back to the community?

**Mr WARREN:** There is. Like all things, it is dependent on where they are heading back to, but a young person who leaves detention almost certainly will have a court order that requires them to be subject to some kind of supervision. If they are in a major centre, they will have a community youth justice officer keeping an eye and working with them.

We have a strong relationship with NAAJA who manage the through-care service. They take an interest in every young person who is in detention for more than one day and provides support as those kids leave detention.

The other part is making sure we are planning for a transition out of detention. That is about making sure we have the right location picked for them to go and live. Is mum and dad or their guardian ready for them? Some of those kids might then go on to participate in a more specific program. For example, sometimes a kid might be involved in a camp or some other type of program.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What is the total number of youths in the care of Territory Families?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Youths or children, or the total? Are you looking for the global figure of children under care?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Global, please.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Are you looking for the out-of-home care figure?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am after a global figure of how many young people are in the care of Territory Families. Do you have a figure on that?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I am sorry, that is not in this output. I thought we were talking about youth justice. That is going backwards.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Not a problem. How many escapes from secure detention facilities have been recorded for the 2019–20 period?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Zero in detention.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** And where was the one from?

**Mrs WORDEN:** None out of a detention centre. One from the airport, but not out of a detention centre.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I often hear staff are assaulted at the Alice Springs Detention Centre and Don Dale, Darwin. Are you able to give me the reported level one and level two incidents for 2019–20?

**Mrs WORDEN:** You are talking about notifiable incidents which are reported to senior management to ensure there is a review and responded in a way that minimises future risks. In 2019–20, the number of notifiable incidents was 211. In Don Dale there was 109 and in Alice Springs 102. There are two levels of incidents in that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Are you able to give me the same figures for 2018–19?

**Mrs WORDEN:** In Don Dale it was 130, and 155 in Alice Springs.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many of those incidents in 2019–20 required police assistance?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have not had police respond to any incidents at all in that period.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What about medical—ambulance?

**Ms WORDEN:** I will ask Brent Warren to give you some of those details.

**Mr WARREN:** In regard to your question initially, about the number of times the police have responded to an incident in those recorded numbers, there has been no occasion where police were required to support the response or resolution of an incident. After an incident if there has been a crime committed, for example if someone has been assaulted, as a matter of course we contact police and report that the assault has occurred. Not every staff member every time elects to proceed with a criminal investigation, but we do make notifications as a matter of course.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you, and do you have the data for the level three incidents? I understand they are not included in the figures you have just given me.

**Ms WORDEN:** No, they are not included because they are not notifiable. We can only gather data on what is notified.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** But you do have the number of level three incidents?

**Ms WORDEN:** We could take it on notice, but that is not the data that we gather. It is only notifiable incidences that we gather. We can look at that for you.

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**Question on Notice No 8.13**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have the data for level three incidents that occurred inside a detention centre during the financial year 2019–20?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braiitling has been allocated the number 8.13.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can I please have a breakdown of the numbers relating to assaults between detainees and staff, and detainee and detainee for the Darwin facility?

**Ms WORDEN:** Detainee on employee in Don Dale, for 2019–20, was 17 and in 2018–19 was 25. Assaults detainee on detainee in 2019–20 was four and in 2018–19 was 10.

In Alice Springs detainee on employee in 2019–20 was 20 and in 2018–19 was 19.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can I just get those figures for Alice Springs again?

**Ms WORDEN:** In 2018–19 there were 19 detainee on employee; in 2019–20 there were 20; in 2018–19, detainee on detainee, there were 10; and in 2019–20 there were four.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the Palmerston Youth Skills Centre, how much has Territory Families spent in total to establish this centre to date?

**Ms WORDEN:** We will just find some information. Just to clarify, the youth drop-in centre in Palmerston?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Palmerston Youth Skills Centre, Yarrowonga.

**Ms WORDEN:** I am advised that that is an education facility and would come under Minister Moss.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Who funds it?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Education.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Who recommends the youths and children who go there?

**Mrs WORDEN:** The referral process is through the schools but we would work with them.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Has any Territory Families money been invested in the building?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many YOREOs are there currently employed in the Northern Territory and where are they located?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have seen those numbers somewhere in the briefing; it might be in a broader one. Do you mind if we keep going and I can get you a figure rather than take it on notice?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is fine, minister.

**Mrs WORDEN:** Somebody will be able to find it quite quickly.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Does Territory Families compile numbers on the rate of reoffending following a diversion referral?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Mr Twyford to give you a response to that question.

**Mr TWYFORD:** Not systematically. From time to time we do the data matching that I discussed earlier today. It is a process that we are asking the Criminal Justice Research and Statistics Unit to take the lead on, instituting a systemic analysis program so we are looking, year on year, at programs where young people's identity can be matched to future offending.

There was also a royal commission recommendation asking the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to develop a specific definition of youth recidivism, including national counting and data rules. They are currently working on and consulting with us on. When we implement our 'Care' system within the next two years, having a live feed to that type of performance metric is something we are very keen to see.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I have a response for your earlier question: 65 YOREO positions. I knew we would get to it; I had seen it somewhere.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do we have the total expenditure to run the YOREOs?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Given the short amount of time we have left, we will take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.14**

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Braitling, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What is the total expenditure to run the YOREOs?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated number 8.14.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many YOREOs separated from their position in 2019–20 and how many were recruited?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We will take that question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.15**

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Braitling, please restate your question for the record.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many YOREOs separated from their position in 2019–20 and how many were recruited?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated number 8.15.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have a total number for youths who have attended diversion in 2019–20?

**Mrs WORDEN:** We have made 390 referrals to diversion.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Just to clarify, making 390 referrals—does that mean all referrals were taken up?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Not necessarily. The referral might be taken up but the young person might not participate, which means that they would come back to go through a court process.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do we know how many of the 390 referrals participated?

**Mrs WORDEN:** No, I would have to take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.16**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Of the 390 youths who were referred to diversion in 2019–20 how many took up the diversion?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mrs WORDEN:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Braitling has been allocated the number 8.16.

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**Mrs WORDEN:** I am not sure if the Member for Braitling is interested, but there have been some regional questions.

The YMCA in the greater Darwin region takes those referrals, as does Danila Dilba. In the East Arnhem region it is East Arnhem Regional Council; and on Groote Eylandt it is the East Arnhem Regional Council and the Groote Eylandt and Milyakburra Youth Development Unit.

In the northern region we also have Anglicare, the YORETS in Katherine, Mala'la Health Service in the northern region, (inaudible) and the Tiwi Islands.

In the Barkly we have CatholicCare. We have Yugul Mangi and Kalano in the Big Rivers. In the Barkly region we have Tennant Creek Mob, MacDonnell rangers in the central council and the Gap Youth and Community Centre, RANT and Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation all down in the centre that take those referrals.

Mr Chair, I can provide two more answers to questions on notice?

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.11**

**Mrs WORDEN:** Question number 8.1 related to supported bail accommodation. Approximately 76% of young people who utilised bail support accommodation services successfully completed their bail order.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.12**

**Mrs WORDEN:** Question 8.12 related to youth on bail not in a supported bail facility. In 2019–20, 252 young people completed court-ordered bail at a rate of 76%. The number of young people who successfully completed bail orders continue to rise from 2015–16 where the completion rate was just 53%.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.7**

**Mrs WORDEN:** Question 8.7 was about kinship care arrangements that the Member for Mulka requested. The answer is that during 2019–20 five children from the Arnhem region entered out-of-home care, four children were placed in kinship care arrangements, one child was placed in purchased home-based care in Darwin and two children have since exited care. And that is all in one year but that is all we have currently.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Crossover Families Management Unit in Palmerston was subject to a root-and-branch review, whereby it appears it was recommended a \$200,000 reduction in budget and a reduction in staffing. Can you please issue me with an update in regard to the progress that has been made in both of these areas?

**Mrs WORDEN:** I will ask Brent Warren to respond to that question.

**Mr WARREN:** Can I clarify that the question was for an update on the status of the crossover unit?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In relation to the \$200,000 reduction recommended and the reduced staffing.

**Mr WARREN:** For clarity, the reduction in budget was required before that unit was created—after it was authorised but before it was initiated. It did not translate into a reduction in staff, it was a slight curtailing of the footprint and part of the broader, whole-of-government budget austerity measures applied. That unit has 12 young people under case management.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you very much. Thank you to the minister and everyone.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes our time for the minister's output.

**Mrs WORDEN:** I thank all the public servants who have put in extreme effort. A number of them did not get a chair at the big table today, but they put in an extraordinary effort. I thank every one of them for everything they have done to support the process.

**Mr CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee I thank you, Minister Worden, for appearing today and all the officials who assisted and supported you. Thank you to Mr Davies and your team; keep up the good work.

We will take a break to reset and refresh. We will be back in 10 minutes.

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The committee suspended.

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## MINISTER KIRBY'S PORTFOLIOS

### SMALL BUSINESS

### JOBS AND TRAINING

## DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Estimates Committee, Thursday 10 December session starting at 5.40 with Small Business, and Jobs and Training.

Minister Kirby, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement regarding your portfolios of Small Business and Jobs and Training.

**Mr KIRBY:** Mr Chair, I would love to reintroduce Shaun Drabsch, our CEO of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade; Ms Joanne Frankenfeld, the CFO for the department; and Ms Cathy White, the Senior Executive Director for the department.

Our Territory Labor government is committed to supporting small business. In response to the challenges faced by around the Territory, we acted very quickly and introduced a number of grants to make sure businesses could keep their doors open

Budget 2020–21 continues this with a range of Territory small business initiatives to be implemented to support jobs and the economy. These include \$7.8m into the Territory Small Business JobMaker Booster program; the new \$4m fund for Small Business Pivot grants; \$5m into customer experience grants; \$4m with the package to help improve our wayside inns and roadhouses; \$4m toward Territory Small Business Saver grants; \$2m to Small Business Supply Chain Solver package; and \$2m to help Territory small businesses get to the next level of financial maturity and stability offered through two key programs—the Financial Fitness Fund and a further \$1m to be provided to support Territory small businesses.

As a part of the COVID-19 response efforts, the Northern Territory Government's Jobs Rescue and Recovery Plan helped protect Territory business and keep Territorians in jobs. This included \$103m for the Home Improvement Scheme, \$20m for Business Improvement grants, \$5m for Immediate Works grants, and \$50m for the Small Business Survival Fund.



With a budget of \$50m, the Small Business Survival Fund was up and running in a record time, with the first payments flowing to businesses within a matter of days. We thank all of the hard-working people in the department who were able to make that happen. In addition to an immediate survival payment of between \$2,000 and \$50,000, businesses were able to receive a rapid adaption payment of up to \$5,000, and operational boost payment of between \$2,800 and \$42,000, three operational support payments of up to \$15,000, and a rebound support payment of up to \$15,000.

The Northern Territory Government's three key current programs—the Home Improvement Scheme, the Business Improvement grants and the Immediate Works grants—have a combined budget of more than \$125m.

The stimulus grant schemes have approved more than 18,300 home improvement scheme works vouchers to date, with more than \$90m in committed funding for an estimated \$147m in works. This scheme's direct and indirect economic impact is estimated at \$245m, with a broad distribution across the Northern Territory.

During the 2019–20 period, there were over 2,000 unique one-on-one engagements with businesses and other stakeholder groups across the Territory by small business champions, economic development officers and workforce training coordinators. Exit interviews with businesses supported through the Business Growth Program found that 98% of businesses reported positive satisfaction with the support that they had received.

Local businesses throughout the Territory were supported by our small business champions and the Territory Business Centre. In addition to handling more than three times as many phone calls in 2020 compared to 2019, the Territory Business Centre also serviced 30,000 front counter customers. We thank them for all of their hard work.

Working with the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Enterprise Centre, a business support and advice service was established aimed at small to medium enterprises that required assistance, adapting to the new operating model as a result of COVID-19.

Launched on 1 May 2020, the Business Hardship Register was established for the Territory businesses that have experienced significant financial hardship due to COVID-19. Businesses are eligible to enrol on the register, can apply for financial relief from charges by government, local councils and some utility providers. More than 740 businesses have registered thus far.

The Barkly Mining and Energy Services Forum was held in Tennant Creek in August 2019 to support supply chain participation and increase private investment in the region. The barkly mining projects update report has since provided further insights into the development of 24 mining projects in the Barkly region. Further to this the Barkly Futures Forum is being planned for early 2021 in which opportunities in mining, agribusiness, renewable energy and tourism will further be advanced.

In Central Australia a supply chain and workforce needs analysis into potential major mining projects in the region was also completed. The projects that are in total development exceed \$4bn and have the potential to employ hundreds of Territorians. Work is being undertaken to ensure Territory businesses profit from these developments.

In the Big Rivers region, a regional Defence support task has been established with stakeholders such as Defence NT; the Australian Industry and Defence Network NT; Industry Skills Advisory Council; Indigenous Business Network NT; GTNT and Apprenticeships Australia; Industry Capability Network NT; Chamber of Commerce; and (inaudible) Alliance. Each group will drive local content and supply to burgeoning Defence projects in that region.

Similarly, in East Arnhem and Groote Eylandt where efforts are focused on maximising supply chain and workforce opportunities in new developments such as Equatorial Launch Australia's Spaceport, developments in the forestry and aquaculture and new manganese mining developments.

Our Territory Labor government has invested significantly in job-creating projects right across the Territory. We have been doing this since day one to support Territory businesses, create jobs and look after local jobs. One of the critical levers to successful project outcome is a skilled and capable workforce. Skills training is critical for the delivery of a sustainable and resilient workforce throughout the Northern Territory.

The Territory Labor government is committed to supporting Territorians and businesses to gain skills needed to meet current and future workforce needs through vocational education and training. We invest over \$90m

each year in training and investment, skilling, upskilling and reskilling Northern Territorians. Our commitment to the VET sector has benefited the Territory by facilitating growth in sectors like construction through apprenticeships and traineeship programs, and enhance partnerships with peak industry bodies to research into skills development into skills development in the marine and aviation industries.

Our skills investment is demand driven and industry led. The suite of skills programs and services are designed to support immediate and future workforce needs, small and large employers and businesses. The Territory VET system is very well positioned to deliver skills needed to support a responsive and capable workforce now more than ever. This is extremely vital for the Territory economic recovery efforts and for our future growth.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any questions relating to the opening statement?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Minister, can you please provide a breakdown of how many businesses in the Territory are classified as small, medium and large? In other words, what percentage is in each category?

**Mr KIRBY:** As far as businesses across the Northern Territory are concerned, we know that there are around 14,000 businesses. The absolute breakdown—generically, across the country, over 90% of businesses are classified as small businesses. To break that number down any further we would need some time to do that. I am happy to supply that information if that is something you would like.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** No, but I am interested—you talk about across Australia, generally. Surely you know in the Northern Territory which ones are small, medium and large. Just a percentage roughly of each category—do you have a category for the different types of sizes of businesses?

**Mr KIRBY:** What I was alluding to is that of those 14,000 businesses—as well as the fact that 90% of businesses in Australia are small business—that number is reflected through the Northern Territory. The rest of those businesses would be made up of medium and larger businesses.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Before I decide whether to put that one on notice or not, I will just go to my next question. What is the classification system for determining whether a business falls into a particular category? Is it dependant on revenue, number of employees or some other measure?

**Mr KIRBY:** The CE has some better clarification around that. I will hand to him for some clarification.

**Mr DRABSCH:** The general classification for small business is normally based on employment. Small business is considered employing the number of employees of 1 to 20. Medium enterprises are 21 to 200. And anything above that is considered to be a large business.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The vast majority of businesses in the Territory would be classified as small, would they not?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes. As we said, it is over 90%. Shaun has just clarified for me that 97% of businesses in the Northern Territory are classified as small business.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Just to clarify further, that category would also include sole traders, is that right?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, that is correct.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You said that the rest were classified as large businesses in the Territory. Do you know the number of businesses in the Territory that are large?

**Mr KIRBY:** We do not have that specific information in front of us but are happy to supply it if needed.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** That is okay. I am happy to move on. A company like Coles or Woolworths would definitely be classed as a large business, would it not?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, they would be classed as a large business.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Though it is a bit curious, is it not, that you as the minister for small business would introduce a bill that is directly aimed at a very large company. Would you agree?

**Mr KIRBY:** It would depend on the circumstances and if there are a number of small businesses through the Northern Territory that sought to benefit from a proposal that group was involved in, then that could completely fit with my remit.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Can you help Territorians understand why you introduced the Dan Murphy's legislation instead of the Minister for Health, as the Minister for Racing, Gaming and Licensing?

**Mr KIRBY:** Certainly. As I explained on the night, during committee stage—and I am happy to explain again now—for the proposals that were involved, with the small number of proposals that were involved in that legislation there are a range of benefits for small businesses through the Northern Territory. It revolves around reducing red tape and job-creating opportunities. That is why the opportunity came forward to me to bring that legislation forward, and I did that a number of weeks ago.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you support the opening of a Dan Murphy's in Darwin?

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair. Standing Order 109. The minister is not here to give his opinion on things and that question should not be asked of the minister.

**Mr CHAIR:** Standing Order 109 does state that question should not ask for an opinion—or a legal opinion, for that matter.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The Minister for Racing, Gaming and Licensing directed me to ask questions of the Minister for Small Business on this subject, and that is why I have continued this line of inquiry.

**Mr CHAIR:** Standing Order 109 says not to ask an opinion or a legal opinion.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Will we have a final decision on Dan Murphy's by 20 December, or will we have to wait much longer while Supreme Court challenges play out?

**Mr KIRBY:** My understanding is that the Director of Liquor Licensing has all the information needed to make that decision by 20 December.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you know whether the Director of Liquor Licensing will be taking community impact into consideration while making his decision on the four licences he is charged with considering under the bill that was passed a few weeks ago?

**Mr KIRBY:** As was explained on the floor of parliament in the consideration in detail stage, the Director of Liquor Licensing has all that information and is able to make his decision based on that information.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What was so broken with the previous arrangement and legislation that it was determined that new legislation had to be brought forward so a group of people is no longer making a decision, and it is only resting with one Liquor Commission?

**Mr KIRBY:** As it was explained that night and is on the public record, there was a small number of applicants or proponents who were caught under the 1978 *Liquor Act*, and this legislation was brought forward to expedite that decision.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Is it the Gunner government's policy that the Liquor Commission be a useful mechanism for determining whether a liquor licence should be granted?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, in certain circumstances.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Arguably, the CEO of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade is the most powerful in the Northern Territory Government. How will you performance manage your CEO?

**Mr CHAIR:** Shaun is very interested in the answer.

**Mr KIRBY:** I say from the outset that we have a great deal of confidence in our CEs, particularly Shaun, as CE of one of the largest departments the Territory would have ever seen. There are a range of mechanisms that will be used to do appraisals of people's performance going forward. We heard the Chief Minister's language on the necessity for the Northern Territory to stringently meet its budget requirements.

A range of measures will be put in place to make sure CEs understand how seriously this government will take the necessity to meet its budget requirements. As well as I know Shaun, I know he will have no trouble with that.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Business, Innovation and Workforce has a \$151m appropriation. This is about two-thirds of the total appropriation for 2019–20 of the former Department of Trade, Business and Innovation. Does this essentially encompass most of what used to be DTBI?

**Mr KIRBY:** To clarify your questions—it is about this year's appropriation?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Basically, is the new Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade replacing Trade, Business and Innovation?

**Mr DRABSCH:** I note and understand the basis of the question. The particular allocation for business and innovation is significantly inflated by the stimulus grants programs that we were rolling out this financial year. Any association or comparison with the previous budget of DTBI is not a comparison that can be properly understood in that context. There are specific one-off expenditures occurring as a result of our COVID response.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** If we were to look at the specific areas covered by the new output, what functions of the former DTBI would be included here and which would not?

**Mr KIRBY:** If I am correct in relaying this information, the entirety of DTBI's functions and expenditure has transferred across except for the commercial facilitation and rebound teams that have transferred to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Can I just clarify, you said the commercial rebound teams were the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes that is right except the commercial facilitation and rebound teams that have transferred.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many FTEs will fall under this new output within the new Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade?

**Mr KIRBY:** I will just check that info to make sure we get it absolutely correct. Under the business and workforce divisions that encompass the query that you made, the monthly FTE average is 147.5.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How does that compare to the total for DTBI in previous years?

**Mr KIRBY:** There is a difference of 37 FTEs encompassed within that, but my understanding is they are all temporary and contract staff tied up with the appropriation of a grant—delivering of the stimulus packages.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Thirty-seven more than this number of 147.5?

**Mr DRABSCH:** (inaudible).

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I understand. Minister, what will the report structure be in the new department and who will be the head of Business and Innovation?

**Mr KIRBY:** With a department that large, there has been significant moving of people. We appreciate your patience and theirs. We understand they will be announcing all of those positions in the very near future.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am a very patient person, minister. How many executives will there be in the Business and Innovation division?

**Mr KIRBY:** All those announcements will be made in the very near future.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Minister, do you have a time frame for those changes?

**Mr KIRBY:** The very near future. It will be announced between now and Christmas.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Apologies for continuing down that line, I hear 'very near future' a lot and it ends up being years, so I am just curious.

How will the department deal with the overlap in ministerial responsibilities in this area? For example, will there be a clear line of decision-making and reporting for particular areas or will everything flow to the CEO?

**Mr KIRBY:** Each minister has their administrative orders so the lines of communication and reporting will be succinctly lined up in each department. There will be CEs who have a number of different ministers they work closely with. We are confident through working and aligning strongly with our administrative orders there will not be any confusion and those CEs will work closely with the number of ministers they have to at different times.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** We understand the confusion of the changes of government.

Your department website includes the Territory government payment guidelines for the Home Improvement Scheme. This states all invoices under \$1m will be paid within 20 days of receiving the invoice unless there is dispute over the account.

The written questions answered by you, as the Minister for Small Business, state 40% of the 10,924 approved applications were paid within 20 days. Have the remaining 60%—which is 1,263—of these invoices paid outside of the 20 days been subject to disputes by your department?

**Mr KIRBY:** There was a high percentage of professionally presented invoices able to be paid in that shorter time period. If an invoice had not been paid in that period of time does not necessarily mean that it has been formally disputed. There may have been queries around different details and data within that invoice that needed to be clarified and then it has been paid in the shortest possible time after that.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Would you say that the majority of the 1,263 invoices had some kind of clarification that your department needed to go back to the business?

**Mr KIRBY:** I just sought some clarification. There are no outstanding invoices above the 20 days currently. Whatever those queries were previously, we have been able to work through them and come to a resolution.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You do not think that there was a delay in trying to find the funds to pay those 1,263 invoices?

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair. Standing order 109; the minister is being asked to express an opinion.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many tradies have contacted the department chasing up their overdue payments, requesting when their payments would be received?

**Mr KIRBY:** We will have to take that on notice.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I will not waste your department's time finding that out. We have heard from a lot of businesses saying the whole experience has made them wish they were never involved in the Home Improvement Scheme due to over-promises and under-delivery of the implementation. How do you respond to those comments?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps the first thing I can clarify is that I have not had those comments made to me. I have talked to as many businesses and families who have taken up the opportunity through the schemes. I have no doubt that when you are rolling out a scheme of this size that not every operation may go as smoothly as you want it to go. I encourage people who have had concerns or issues to reach out, get in touch with their local member or department and we are happy to work through as many of those concerns as we can.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Have you as Minister for Small Business not received any information from businesses or your department about complaints to do with the implementation of the Home Improvement Scheme or the payment delays?

**Mr KIRBY:** I just clarified that I, personally, have not had people complain to me.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The criteria is that works must be completed within three months of the date of the voucher issue and that it has just been extended by another three months. Is that correct?

**Mr KIRBY:** We understand, as I mentioned before, that there are some complexities around grants of this size and operationally getting that work done. We understand that people can apply for an extension of three months if that is needed to get the work done in that period of time.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many Territory enterprises registered to be a tradie contractor or supplier for the Home Improvement Scheme?

**Mr KIRBY:** Under that scheme 2,100 businesses have registered.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** Just a follow up question on the HIS, are you able to outline the total commitment of the government to the HIS scheme and the uptake of that expenditure of that scheme?

**Mr KIRBY:** The grant funding that was approved is almost \$93m. It is \$92.855m for that scheme. There were 19,576 applications received and all of those have been assessed or are currently under assessment, with 17,000 of those already been approved.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many vouchers were applied for where the works have not gone ahead?

**Mr KIRBY:** We are happy to supply more detail afterwards if needed. Of the redemption statistics across all of those home improvement, business and immediate works grants, there have been 13,239 submitted, 12,931 already assessed and 12,573 already successfully redeemed.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** When you say 'successfully redeemed', does that mean the works have been completed?

**Mr KIRBY:** Because of the process with the householder releasing the voucher to the contractors that have done the work—that is the number already successfully redeemed by the contractor.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Have any of those that have been successfully redeemed by the contractor not gone ahead with their works?

**Mr KIRBY:** Understanding and stepping through how the process would operate, the householder would have seen the completed works and be happy with the completed works before they forego the voucher, so I could not imagine a situation where those vouchers had been redeemed and work had not been satisfactorily completed.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You have been charged with the lead to reduce red tape for industry and business across the Territory. Where will you start?

**Mr KIRBY:** There is a range of things that we are already enacting for basic and simplified business approvals to set that target of having them done within 30 days. We encourage our small business champions to get out and constantly liaise with businesses. Some of the stats that I read out in my opening remarks give an indication of how effective that group of people has been.

One of the significant things that we are doing—I am more than happy to expand on that more under corporate development banner later in the evening—is to create a portal where businesses can go. We have all heard stories about a business asking for a particular approval and being assigned to a range of different departments. We are currently designing a portal to make sure that businesses have a one-stop shop where they can get a digital footprint made that is reflective across agencies and consistent across agencies.

We are doing a range of things. Some are already enacted and some will be very soon. I understand that you will want to know how long 'very soon' is. I understand there will be some more announcements about how we are assisting businesses, hopefully between now and Christmas.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Some of those initial things you mentioned were about simplifying approvals in 30 days, small business champions and the great work that has already been done in that space, but the new part of what will be done in the digital portal approval system—is that all you are working on in the red tape reduction space?

**Mr KIRBY:** It is fair to say there are a range of things happening across government. With the range of approvals that I used to have oversight of in the resources sector, there is a range of work being done to fast-track things—so certainly not. I am more than happy to explain more about what is happening from that perspective as well as time lines later in the evening, through the digital and corporate space.

There are a range of other things that are happening in that space to try to make things easier for business. A small business, particularly those starting up in the hospitality or retail industry in town, can have a range of different forms for different concerns, depending on what type of business it is. If somebody needs to update a grease trap in a very old building, for example, and they are trying to start a restaurant, then there might be quite a number of issues they need to work through. We are certainly aiming to help people with that.

We will be continuing to evaluate ongoing delivery of the small business support programs that we have in place at the moment. We continue to support local Territory businesses recovering from COVID-19. We targeted a lot of our responses and grant programs to really identify what the federal government has done and added a Territory flavour, knowing the makeup of some of our Territory businesses. We try to ensure that we cover as many gaps as we can. Some of our engagement snapshots that we have done are reviewed to ensure questions are relevant to changing business needs.

From a personal perspective, I know that as soon as next week I will be travelling to Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. We will be engaging with as many businesses as we can. We have reached out to the Chamber of Commerce to make sure that we can catch up with as many people as we can. We will be doing roundtables into the future as well. We definitely want to hear from small businesses to find out what is currently working okay.

In a COVID-19 year like this, it is sometimes—well, it is not difficult to get an understanding. Some businesses are really clear. I have had businesses in my electorate explain to me that they are starting to see better numbers than they have in any other year. It is obvious that there are more people moving through the Territory than there would be in a traditional November and December cycle. We look forward to people staying in the Territory, spending time with their family and spending money over Christmas.

We will be engaging with businesses in a range of different forums going forward.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** I have a follow-up question to that question to do with red tape. Can you explain how the small business champions are supporting the work of making it easier and quicker for businesses to engage with approvals?

**Mr KIRBY:** It was nice to get out to the Territory Business Centre and meet with a range of the small business champions. Some of the data I read out in opening remarks highlighted what their workload has increased by during the COVID-19 months. It has been wonderful to have those people who are at the coalface on a day-to-day basis, whether it means assisting people through licensing applications and approvals or getting out to businesses and speaking to people to make sure the feedback we get, as a government, is not just coming through traditional circles.

We have people at the coalface and know that if we get that information from businesses, it gives us the best opportunity to be nimble and adjust things as quickly as possible going forward, to give small business the best chance they can get. We know it is difficult to survive as a small business at any time, and the coming 12 months will be critical for them.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** It is great to hear your budget is replicating the federal government's budget in relation to those measures. Thank you, on behalf of small businesses in the Territory.

Prior to the future roundtable events, where you will speak to small businesses, who did you consult in the Northern Territory before coming up with the measures?

**Mr KIRBY:** Because those grant programs have been specifically targeted at different areas—different types of grants. Some of the early grants we had were more bricks and mortar-type assistance for businesses. More recently, some of our adaption grants have been for ICT upgrades and making sure people have the capacity to compete and have concise information at their fingertips.

Peak bodies have been consulted. Hospitality NT has been consulted; the Chamber of Commerce sits on one of the bodies we have consulted with; and the Darwin City Waterfront Retailers Association has been consulted. We consult with these people before we put these stimulus packages together.

Having the ability to move around Darwin city on a daily basis, people bail me up if any package we put together has not worked as well as it should have. That gives us the capacity to make decisions and change the grant schemes we put forward so they hit the spot as neatly as they can.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** In 2016 I saw a similar restructure of departments. I want to clarify that back then we saw a loss of jobs, particularly in the Barkly. As a result of this restructure, is the business champion position safe this time in Tennant Creek?

**Mr KIRBY:** Absolutely, yes. I will be pushing to have more of those small business champions out, particularly up and down the track through the regions.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** That is good to hear, because last time that position was scrapped.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am glad you mentioned the peak bodies. From the work that has been done so far, which legislation frameworks will be impacted by the proposed changes with the reduction of red tape?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps it might be easiest to try to explain. Under my remit of this portfolio, we do not have any immediate legislation frameworks that we are addressing. We think we have the capacity to make the changes internally that we need to make. We will review that over the coming weeks and months. As we get back into our legislative framework and cycle and parliamentary cycle next year we will bring them forward if we need to.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Which departments will be responsible for implementing these changes? Will this be coordinated by you, as the minister, your departments or through the Department of the Chief Minister?

**Mr KIRBY:** Without trying to put too fine a point on it or be speculative, if there was definitive small business legislation and benefits flowed to small business that may come to me. Without trying to speculate that may sit with the Attorney-General, depending on how that legislation needs to be framed. It may come from the Chief Minister or Treasurer, depending on how that legislation needs to be drafted. It is a little difficult to give exact examples. We will be, and we do regularly, discuss in Cabinet meetings of what our legislative agenda needs to be moving forward.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** So, the discussion that you have been having and some of the ideas of the changes that you want to make for reducing red tape has not yet led to determining which department will be responsible for making any changes as yet. Is that correct?

**Mr KIRBY:** Given that the TERC report only came out very recently and my inability to speak for other departments, I guess I can only clarify what I have said under my remit with this section. I do not have legislation that we need to bring forward in the immediate future. If that changes in the future we will be more than happy to look at that. We are more than happy to make legislative change if it will be a positive change for business through the Northern Territory. That will come to the fore and be expedited. That will be in the new year.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Just to clarify, you have been charged with the lead to reduce red tape for industry and business across the Territory, but only in relation to the department you are responsible for. Is that correct?

**Mr KIRBY:** Just to clarify the questions we answered earlier, they were from a legislative perspective of the framework we had oversight of. That was the overarching methodology that I was using to explain that answer. If legislation needs to sit with me as Minister for Small Business then we will certainly take that forward. If they sit with other departments, I may not have anything to do with them.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Just like the Dan Murphy's legislation. I get it. What is the time frame for the changes to be implemented for your department's red tape reduction?

**Mr KIRBY:** I highlight the TERC recommendations and what has come out of that. There is a program of change being developed from that so we get a very clear picture going forward about what changes need to be made in what time frames. That body of work will continue so we will get a very clear picture of that into the new year.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Thank you, I look forward to that. Will the red tape reduction changes mean departments will do less or will the small businesses do less? How so?

**Mr KIRBY:** We will be aiming for business to do less. We will be aiming for our department to operate in a smarter way, not necessarily a harder way. The business portal that we spoke about is a really good example of that where a business should then only need to apply once and not make a range of different applications. They should only need to supply their details once. It does not necessarily mean that the department is working harder it just means that we need to do a range of work and get a range of different IT systems that



we currently have available to us to better coordinate and better speak to each other. That is a body of work we look forward to doing in the coming months and years.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The home and business battery scheme which provided the \$6,000 grant for battery installation with the caveat that those businesses and homes would fall to the 8.3 cents per kilowatt feed-in tariff, expired last week. During the life of that subsidy program, how many homeowners and businesses owners took you up on your offer?

**Mr KIRBY:** My understanding is that this question was also put to the minister for Infrastructure and the explanation was that the program had been extended and would now be ongoing. We have 545 applications with 359 under assessment, 279 already approved and \$1.674m of grant funding already approved in that program.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Was any thought given to increasing the amount of the subsidy under this program, and do you intend to do that in the future?

**Mr KIRBY:** As with most grants, if there became a significant reason—we have, in the past, looked at grants and if they have not been taken up appropriately we looked at how we can re-apportion that grant to work better. We want people to have access to them. That is the reason these grants have been made available.

This grant is up to \$6,000. Of the \$1.6m of grant funding approved there is an estimated value of approved works of almost \$5.5m and an estimated economic impact of up to \$9m. With the number of people who have taken it up, the approvals we are working through and the figures being generated out of that, we would assess that grant is working efficiently. We could review if that was to change.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How much does the average home battery system cost? For example, how much would a 13.5 kilowatt battery system, which would be suitable for homes with PV at around 5 kilowatts, cost to be installed?

**Mr KIRBY:** You may find it hard to believe, but I do not have that information in front of me. If you are happy to read those specifics, we can get that information back to the committee.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Thank you, I am sure this one will be easy to find.

**Mr KIRBY:** Mr Chair, if we are able to, we would like to take a question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.1

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

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How much does the average home battery system cost? For example, how much would a 13.5 kilowatt battery system, which would be suitable for homes with PV at or around 5 kilowatts, cost to install?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated the number 9.1.

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**Ms BOOTHBY:** Thank you for confirming this scheme will be extended. Is there an expiry date on when the scheme will finish?

**Mr KIRBY:** It is approved until the end of the financial year. Considerations for that particular grant and other grants will be part of the normal budget process in the lead-up to the end of the financial year.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many FTEs are allocated to the small business champions program for this year? How does that compare to last year?

**Mr KIRBY:** Member for Brennan, can I just clarify, is it operational staff at the front—the numbers of small business champions that you are after, or is it a broader number?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** My interest is the small business champions.

**Mr KIRBY:** I was just reminded that everyone in this department is a small business champion. We currently have 17 small business champions based across the Northern Territory. I have the breakdown in front of me if you would like? That is the same as last year.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Yes, I will get that breakdown of the regions, thank you.

**Mr KIRBY:** The breakdown is four in Alice Springs, one in Tennant Creek, one in Katherine, one in Nhulunbuy, seven in Darwin and three across the Top End, which is the broader Palmerton and rural area.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** While you have those notes there, can you let me know what position levels are each of the FTEs who are small business champions and how many are at the executive or SAO level?

**Mr KIRBY:** The information I have just received is that they are all at AO6 or AO7 level.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How are the small business champions performance rated and who does the rating? Is it the businesses?

**Mr KIRBY:** I guess as far as performance management goes internally within their role, that would be done through normal public sector processes. As far as engagement with the businesses goes, we certainly try to engage with businesses and get assessments from each project and how they have worked, how they have operated and the type of engagement that they have from their small business champions.

One of the things I mentioned in my opening remarks was that exit interviews with businesses supported through the Business Growth Program found that 98% of businesses reported positive satisfaction with the support they received. Given that support is predominantly through small business champions, we can safely assume that the loop is being closed there and they do get that opportunity to feed information back. It is extremely positive information.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Are any of those measures in the way that they are rated as such made public?

**Mr KIRBY:** As with any other public sector, if it is an internal performance appraisal that would not be advertised or explained in public, but we report against businesses reporting the Business Growth Program as useful. We have a target for people to meet—and businesses engaged or supported with development through the program. There are a number line items and key performance indicators that people are assessed against. Apologies—that is reported in the annual report. There is a format for the information to come back and be made public.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How are we ensuring that the Northern Territory Government recruits small business champions who have actually run or worked for a small business?

**Mr KIRBY:** My understanding that it is in the job description. I assume we do not automatically write people off if they have not run a business before. It is, essentially, an advocacy and information-sharing type of role. Given the outstanding feedback we are currently getting about these small business champions, I am confident. I could not clarify if each and every one of the small business champions has previously owned small business. I could not clarify that. I can clarify that the feedback we get about them is very positive, so their advocacy is working extremely well.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The Chief Minister earlier this week dodged questions about the Boundless Possible campaign, instead insisting it was the responsibility of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. The Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet also confirmed that \$2.286m was spent in the 2019–20 year. How much has been spent on Boundless Possible since your government created it?

**Mr KIRBY:** I appreciate your question. We are having a discussion about the Welcome to the Territory package that was put together, which sits with this department. The output does not sit with us, nor is it information that we have readily at hand. We will just check.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** If you could point me to where it sits—because the Chief Minister clearly said on Monday that it was not the responsibility of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet but of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. I would like clarification, please.

**Mr KIRBY:** We are looking through the business grants. The Welcome to the Territory incentive sits with us. There is not an output for Boundless Possible that sits underneath that. If that means that if we need to take a question on notice to seek some clarification, we are happy to do that.

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**Question on Notice No 9.2**

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet confirmed \$2.286m was spent in financial year 2019–20. How much was spent on Boundless Possible since your government created it?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated the number 9.2.

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**Ms BOOTHBY:** Minister, how many people moved to the Territory because of that grant?

**Mr KIRBY:** In the interests of time, that answer has not come straight back to us, so I am happy to either move on and then provide the response through the night or take the question on notice to respond to it.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** If you can get it back before the end of this session that would be wonderful.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Do you want to put it on notice?

**Mr KIRBY:** We have it. The answer that has been provided to me is 132.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** One hundred and thirty-two people moved to the Territory because of that grant?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, that is correct.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What happened to the public servants who worked on the Boundless Possible campaign? Where was their next workplace?

**Mr KIRBY:** As we explained previously, the Welcome to the Territory incentive sat with us. We did not have direct FTEs who sat with the department under the Boundless Possible regime.

Apologies, we have had a clarification come through for the previous question. It was 177 who moved to the Territory and not 132 as I had previously explained.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** With 177 people moving to the Territory, we know the amount of \$2.2m was spent in one year. We are not sure of the rest because that is on notice. Would that be the reason it was scrapped?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Standing Order 109: that seems to be an expression of opinion. Can you please rephrase that question, Member for Brennan.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What was the reason that Boundless Possible was scrapped?

**Mr KIRBY:** My understanding, as it has been explained to me, is that the Welcome to the Territory incentive portion of the Boundless Possible promotion has ceased, but the overarching Boundless Possible promotion has not ceased and there are elements of that that are still live. It is just the Welcome to the Territory incentive that has been ceased.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you minister. As the time has ticked over to 7 pm and bellies are grumbling, we might have a recess for half an hour. When we come back, we will get back into it.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Welcome back, everybody. I hope everybody had a great dinner. We are back for the final quarter. We were up to questions to the minister's statement, are there any further questions to the minister's statement?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Minister, it is not clear to Territorians what parts of the Boundless Possible still exist and what are no longer in play. Can you clearly explain this to us?

**Mr KIRBY:** As we explained prior to the break, the Welcome to the Territory portion is an output for us within this department. The overarching Boundless Possible is not, so it is difficult for us to answer specific questions about that. We can answer questions about the Welcome to the Territory portion of allocations or any other information, but the overarching Boundless Possible does not sit with us, so I can probably offer not much more clarification than what we previously said.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Who is the best person to ask about Boundless Possible?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps I can only reiterate my earlier comment to say that the Welcome to the Territory part of the package sits with us under this department and the rest of it sits with the Department of the Chief Minister.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** So I should ask the Department of the Chief Minister about Boundless Possible?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Even though earlier this week the Chief Minister said we needed to ask the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade? Can you clarify that as correct?

**Mr KIRBY:** Without seeing exactly what the Chief Minister said, I cannot be any clearer than to explain that the remit of Welcome to the Territory does sit with us, but the broader package of the Boundless Possible campaign sits with the Department of the Chief Minister.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You mentioned the Welcome to the Territory incentive is under your remit and output. You also said that has now ceased. Why has that ceased and when?

**Mr KIRBY:** The Welcome to the Territory component finished early this year. We can track down exact dates if that is what you are after. My understanding is that is probably for a combination of reasons. As COVID came about it became apparent that we would want to repurpose money into grant funding. That would have been a part of the reason and the amount of take-up would have been the other part of the reason.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I would like to take that question on notice.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The Welcome to Territory incentive does indeed fall under the output of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, but why did it cease and when?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes. I have had some clarification. We can explain that new applications were no longer being accepted for the Welcome to the Territory incentives program from 3 July. That was the date that program finished up. If there are other portions to the question that are still required to be answered, I am happy to take that on notice.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Are there any other portions to the previous question you would like on notice?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** No, that notice can be revoked. Minister, can you outline your personal experience in small business?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am not sure whether personal questions are part of the remit, but I am happy to answer.

As I explained publicly, I grew up on a farm in country South Australia. My parents ran a number of small businesses and operations, as a lot of parents did in those days. I grew up working with my parents in those businesses. I left school and worked for approximately six years in a small business as a motor mechanic. I moved into the Electricity Trust of South Australia. I moved to Darwin and worked with Power and Water.

Early in my career I worked with small businesses and through this electorate over the last five years I have liaised very closely with small businesses.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Budget Paper No 2, page 15, describes \$10m allocated to digitise business approval processes and support regulation reform to improve user experience. How will this \$10m be utilised?

**Mr KIRBY:** We could take that question under the Department Corporate and Digital Development, which is where that program is being developed and those funds are being spent.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Just to clarify then your opening statement around being the Minister for Small Business and the Minister for Jobs and Training. You talked about the digital business approval process and this would be the reason the red tape reduction would be successful. I am not sure why you are now referring me to a different output.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** A point of clarification: it still sits within that output, Member for Brennan. Output Group 11 covers digital government development; ICT network services; agency business systems and support; across-government systems and support services; digital projects; data services; and digital connectivity and strategy. It will allow the correct adviser to be in the room when you ask that question.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Even though we are still on the opening statement?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Yes, but he can refer it to the correct output, which the minister has.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I have a series of questions about the digital business approval processes and the \$10m allocated. Can I ask any of these questions, or would you like my colleague to ask them in the next output?

**Mr KIRBY:** It would be more appropriate for the people who work in that department to be present when we answer those questions.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am happy to do that. I just wanted to clarify.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** That is Output Group 11, Member for Brennan. If you want to make a note so when we get to it, we can bring the right people into the room. Are there any other questions?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Minister, on page 80 of Budget Paper No 3, a KPI has been set for \$75,000 of contacts with Territory Business Centre for licence and business services. What exactly does contact mean? In other words, what counts as a contact? Is it a visit to the website, an email, a telephone or all of the above?

**Mr KIRBY:** As I mentioned in my opening statement, these Territory Business Centres and small business champions have received thousands of calls—also servicing 30,000 front counter customers. That would encompass front counter visits, business visits and phone calls. It would encompass all of those.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Just to clarify, are these unique contacts with businesses or total contacts?

**Mr KIRBY:** To put some context around it, from July to October in 2020 these Territory Business Centres have answered 22,000 calls, received 8,000 transactions, processed 3,000 licences, printed and issued 4,000 work licences or cards, served 10,000 front counter customers and actioned 10,000 emails.

You can very safely say that encompasses the broad range of interactions that will be spoken about in that dot point in the budget.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** In that case, how many unique businesses would be represented in that number?

**Mr KIRBY:** It would be extremely difficult to breakdown the granularity of that detail. If a business turns up to front counter that might enact one interaction. They might have 10 people with them who need white cards or follow-up information and emails, so that might pan out to be many more interactions than just that one. It would be extremely difficult to try to measure how many business interactions that involves. All we can really do is measure the interactions that our department has.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you have a database of the businesses that would represent that number. In other words, how many businesses have that relationship as a contact with the Territory Business Centre?

**Mr KIRBY:** Just clarifying, every one of those interactions is definitely recorded, so it is definitely in the database with the department. If need be just to aggregate an amount, that could certainly be done.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Yes, that would great thank you.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Take that question on notice minister? Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Brennan please restate the question for the record.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many unique businesses would be represented in this number?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Perhaps you could ask—without having the exact number—how these numbers are compiled from what sources.

**Mr KIRBY:** Over and above those dot points that I have just read out? Essentially, that answers your question, unless there is some more context to your question that I do not understand.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** My previous question was about how many unique businesses there were. Now I am asking how those numbers of unique business is compiled and where the source is.

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps the best way for me to explain it is that each and every interaction with a business is recorded. Whether that is through those front counter engagements, phone calls, emails, issuing of licences, issuing of work-ready cards or white cards, there are a range of different ways those interactions can occur and are recorded.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you have the number of businesses that received services from the Territory Business Centre in 2019–20?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Can I just check that is not the same question that was put on notice about the number of businesses ...

**Mr KIRBY:** The question asked previously could not relate to the year 2020–21 because we would not have that information, because we have not related to all of those businesses yet. Assuming that the question you asked previously was for the 2019–20 year then that is probably covered in the question we just recorded.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Brennan, are you happy with that or do you want to ask a further question of clarification and get the minister to answer it?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The clarification is that my first question related to a KPI that has been set of 75,000 contacts. My question was, of all of those contacts how many of those businesses would be unique business in terms of a KPI—that is looking forward.

Now I am asking—looking back at 2019–20, what was that number of unique businesses that have received a service from the Territory Business Centre?

**Mr KIRBY:** The details I have in front of me reflect the 2020–21 budget cycle and it is measured under 'Contact with Territory business centres for a licence and business services'. That 75,000 is an estimation that we are hoping for.

We have actuals from the 2019–20 years. That was 94,363 for contacts with Territory businesses in that period of time.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I realise that there is the contacts from that year, but I would also like to know the unique businesses that number of 94,000 would represent.

**Mr KIRBY:** How many?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Yes please.

**Mr KIRBY:** How many actual unique individual type of businesses that that 94,000 represents?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Yes.

**Mr KIRBY:** I am seeking to clarify. Is that the question that we have taken on notice or is that a set ...

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** My understanding is that it is. No? The question we went to put on notice is about the database of businesses that represent that contact cohort.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** That is of the 75,000 that is in the KPI. I would also like to have the same answer but looking backwards—75,000 unique businesses looking forward in the KPIs is what we had on notice. I am also asking the same question but for going back to 2019–20.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** On the notice statement, I do not think we mentioned a number. It was 75,000. That was not in the question. Maybe we restate all of that and we will see if the minister is happy to take the question.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Sure. I will state the context. That is okay.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** One moment please. I will get some advice.

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### Question on Notice No 9.3

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record specify the question so it stands alone.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Sure. On page 80 of Budget Paper No 3, a KPI has been set for 75,000 contacts with the Territory Business Centre for licence and business services. Of the 75,000, how many unique businesses would represent in this number? And I can give you the time frame because it is about the KPI: 2020–21.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Okay. Since that was not the previous one we had, I will put that to the minister. Minister, do you accept that question?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to accept the question under the understanding that the 75,000 is an estimation.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated the number 9.3.

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### Question on Notice No 9.4

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I will help with the explanation because it was a further question—the annual report shows that there were 94,363 contacts last year. How many unique businesses did that represent?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated the number 9.4.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Thank you. Minister, on that, given that the annual report shows that there were 94,363 contacts last year and you have estimated that there will be 75,000 going forward for 2020–21. Is that right and why is that KPI set much lower this year?

**Mr KIRBY:** It probably ties in neatly to some of the explanations that we have given earlier and some of the things that we are discussing. The reduction in KPIs is just purely a recognition that there should be a decrease as a result of the service efficiencies through the increase in and availability of online self-service

products. We are aiming to have people need to contact those business centres less and to get the right answer the first time.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What services are provided to these businesses?

**Mr KIRBY:** There are a range of programs assisted or presented by the Territory Business Centres. I guess that would range from assisting with workplace licences, with ensuring that people's licences are up-to-date. I know they print cards for people and offer explanations on what grants are available around systems and processes for people to be able to work their way through in the most streamlined way. If we are after a more succinct list of exactly what the Territory Business Centres or small business champions do, I am sure we will be able to work through that.

The CE has just reminded me it is also detailed in the annual report—exactly what their functions are.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** From all these contacts you have with the small businesses, what does success look like for a business that has had a contact with the department? Is there any uniform measure for success?

**Mr KIRBY:** Can I just clarify, if we are talking about a successful interaction with the Territory Business Centre or the small business champions—and I will hark back to those results, the 98% satisfaction. If it is in regard to satisfaction with how their business is running then that is probably a different question. We will not have access to aggregated data about all that information.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Of the businesses the department supported in 2019–20, how many business are still operating today and how many have closed their doors?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps the best way for me to explain that would be that there is no system, process or necessity for a business that closes their doors to contact the Territory Business Centre and alert them of that, so it would be difficult to try to aggregate that data.

In a proactive sense, the Territory Business Centres and the small business champions put their effort and energy into that. The figures for businesses—small businesses in particular—that do not last longer than the first few years are particularly high, so we put a lot of time, effort, energy and programs in place to make sure each of those businesses gets the best opportunity not to fail in those first few years. It is a very high statistic. We would not be able to aggregate that data through the Territory Business Centres.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you know, of those businesses the agency supported in 2019–20, how many employed more staff after the contact or support?

**Mr KIRBY:** It would be quite subjective information. It is not a KPI that the Territory Business Centre readily extracts from each and every business that they meet. Perhaps just one of the interesting statistics is that a business acceleration program that is offered through our department, and there are a range of very mature businesses that have taken that offer up over the last couple of years. In talking with those businesses around their improvements since they have been through that advanced program, they have all been able to grow in the realms of 6% to 8% on the back of those programs. While that is not a specific number that relates to the Territory Business Centre, it encompasses what we are aiming to do through the Business Centre and the small business champions, which is to increase people's capacity to survive, thrive and grow.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Aren't those numbers quite important? Should you be including those sorts of numbers of business closures or whether they indeed stay open or if they have employed more staff or even increased revenue? Are those metrics important and should they be included in the KPIs?

**Mr KIRBY:** It is extremely subjective. I am happy to give a couple of examples. Just because the barramundi farm doubles in size and doubles in output does not necessarily mean that it doubles the staff that it is taking on at that time. We are offering a lot of ICT types of grants to businesses at the moment and there might not necessarily be more people employed because people have improved their ICT structures, but it will certainly mean that they run more efficiently.

It is quite a subjective measure and it is not currently recorded through the Territory Business Centres.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Given these numbers after a business has had a contact with the Territory Business Centre are not recorded in this way, and these measures are not collated as such, how do you bring about policy changes or reforms which put our small businesses in a better place so they can grow and improve and grow our Northern Territory economy?



**Mr KIRBY:** The proactive nature of the Territory Business Centre and the Small Business Champions is probably the best way to answer that. As we mentioned, instead of relying on businesses that were no longer functioning, or subjective data around FTEs, we find that face-to-face engagement through our small business champions and our Territory Business Centres and those tens of thousands of engagements during the year assists us to define and ensure that we have the right information to target those programs going forward.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You are only gathering data from businesses that are currently still open, not from ones that have closed?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** On page 77 of the budget agency statement, 500 is the number set for the KPI of businesses engaged or supported with development. Just to clarify, does this mean 500 Territory businesses will be engaged or supported in 2020–21?

**Mr KIRBY:** That is the target set for making sure that is the number of businesses we can engage with, conversations we can have and support that we can offer.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Can you tell me which industries these 500 businesses would fall into in terms of the type of business?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps the best way for me to explain that is, as small business makes up 97% of Northern Territory businesses, we do not discriminate across those businesses. We will aim to have those visitations, engagements and interaction play out across as broad a spectrum of our small business community as we can.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The government has announced the gross state product is estimated to have grown by 4.8% for 2019–20. The government has also indicated that the population will grow, although Treasury only estimates a 0.2% growth for 2020–21. The 4.8% growth in GSP is mainly attributable to LNG exports. Is that right?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** You have asked an opinion of the minister. Can you rephrase that to ask a question?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to save a little time. It is a Treasury and a resources question; it is not a small business question.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Does the increase to the GSP relate to new small businesses starting up? If so, what industries will you expect these new small businesses to be in?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps the best way to generically explain that is that we do not discriminate. There is a range of projects on the table that the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister have spoken about in detail this week. There will be a range of opportunities—anything ranging from international students to our marine industry, aircraft industry and the ship lift industry. We will be expecting and setting targets around engaging with all of those levels of businesses.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** When do we expect to see the targets that you speak of that will be set to make sure small businesses benefit from all of those projects you talk about?

**Mr KIRBY:** We do not have specific targets apart from the KPIs that we discussed very recently. We have an expectation as new businesses start up that we have advertised well enough for the Territory Business Centres to be taken advantage of by those businesses and that small business champions are readily available. As businesses start up, we expect them to be engaged with from the very start.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What are the existing industries that you would expect new small businesses to expand in?

**Mr KIRBY:** That can be a pretty broad question and I am more than happy to explain from the portfolios that I have been involved with previously. There are very strong plans about growing our agriculture sector through the Northern Territory. There have been releases around that—aquaculture is a burgeoning industry in the Northern Territory and there are some exciting times with that. We will work hard to make sure those industries progress.

We have discussed at length—both through the election and post the election campaign—more mines through the Northern Territory. You can safely bet that any downstream mining-related activity will increase through the Northern Territory over the coming years.

The onshore gas industry also has a range of large downstream businesses that will be associated with that. Under the digital and corporate space we have a range of projects happening at the moment that require a high number of specialised to be in the Northern Territory. We will encourage those people to stay beyond that. Into the future through some of the business trips I have been able to take with the Chief Minister and discussing data centres, there will be a range of options available in the near future to people in data centres.

We have an abundance of land and energy that we will be able to supply at a very competitive price. We know that renewable energies and solar will be energies that grow into the future. It all beckons for a very exciting time for the Northern Territory.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Why did it take four years and a global pandemic for you to finally focus on measures that could help small businesses grow and expand? This is a legitimate question that Territorians would like to know the answer to.

**Mr KIRBY:** I respectfully disagree with the premise of that question that it has taken four years. Under my previous portfolios, I had the opportunity to travel overseas and discuss business matters with people overseas. It took a long time for overseas businesses to engender some confidence back in the Northern Territory after the 2012–2016 regime.

We got on the front foot straight away to make sure that we had acceleration programs in place for businesses. There were a number of stimulus packages that we put in place as a Northern Territory Government. I know the minister for Infrastructure speaks extremely passionately about the Territory's largest ever infrastructure programs to make sure we can keep as many people employed in the Northern Territory as possible. I do not accept the premise of the question that it has taken four years to get started.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You speak of a plan that you have to get small businesses growing again. Can you detail that plan for us?

**Mr KIRBY:** The most succinct way to do that is to allude back to what we have recently discussed in the last couple of answers about all the plans for the Northern Territory from renewable energy to agriculture, mining and development, and the gas industry. We acknowledge that on the back of those projects small business will flourish in conjunction with the support this government is offering with acceleration programs, grants and upskilling programs to make sure Territorians are as proficient as they can be in their small businesses.

**Mr COSTA:** What support has been provided for regional and remote businesses to start, run and grow? I have been sitting here for the last couple of hours listening to business to deal with the urban areas. I want to know, in relation to that, what about regional and remote? What support is being offered to them?

**Mr KIRBY:** As I was discussing earlier, we have small business champions in all the remote centres. In my time as Small Business minister we have already met with the Arnhem Aboriginal business corporation to make sure we can best understand what opportunities are available in Arnhem Land.

We have met with ALPA to understand the best opportunities that they have out there. We had some very frank and fearless conversations with them about policy settings, whether that is for procurement, Buy Local or Indigenous employment to encompass all that information into our decision-making going forward.

As you know, we have made a point over the last four years of making sure that our ministers regularly get out into remote locations to hear from the coalface exactly what opportunities there are. We know that aquaculture in a lot of those regions and in your electorate is extremely important to people and we will work very hard to grow those opportunities into the future.

We do engage the Territory Engagement and Delivery team that provides a dedicated workforce to small business and economic development services across the Territory with locations in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Jabiru. We engage as much as we can.

We have the business growth programs that have been spent in each regional location, if you would like me to break down into that level. I am more than happy to do that.

**Mr COSTA:** Yes, I would appreciate that.

**Mr KIRBY:** We have a range of programs. The three most prolific programs are the Business Growth Program, the Aboriginal Business Development Program and the Smarter Business Solutions. This is on top of every other grant we have put on the table this year that is available to people up and down the track. We do not discriminate.

The uptake in Alice Springs has been to the tune of \$981,000, \$163,000 in the region, just over the \$2m in Darwin, \$134,000 in East Arnhem, \$482,000 in Katherine and \$108,000 in West Arnhem. As you can see, there is a significant uptake in remote and regional areas. That is an aggregate over the last two years.

**Mr COSTA:** You mentioned \$108,000 in West Arnhem. Can you tell me where and what that is used for or how it is used?

**Mr KIRBY:** For the West Arnhem area, the Business Growth Program was almost \$51,000 in the 2019–20 year. The Aboriginal Business Development Program was \$50,000 in the 2020–21 year. It was \$3,000 for Smarter Business Solutions in the 2019–20 year. It was \$54,000—that is the total—in 2019–20. A range of different businesses would have taken up those programs on top of the grants that have been offered across the Territory.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Further to that question, of those business opportunities have some of those come out from the local decision-making process in those remote communities. If they have, which ones? Does Groote Eylandt have economic development as one of those components?

**Mr KIRBY:** There are a number of projects where we can measure—LDM forms the policy and practice of this government. It is information that we can break down. I am not sure that we have it readily available in front of us now, but as I alluded to earlier, with conversations with the Arnhem Aboriginal business corporation and ALPA in conjunction with our remote housing program that we are focused on.

In post-COVID times, any employment that we can generate in those remote regions will be extremely important. We know it is a major focus for getting kids who are fresh out of school and want to stay on country—the more of those people we can have in jobs the better off we will be.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many of the grants introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019–20 were for our Indigenous-owned businesses?

**Mr KIRBY:** We have the data, just bear with us and we will access that. We have generic percentages for our Business Growth Program. There were 8% that took those programs up which were specifically Indigenous businesses.

I have some regional distribution numbers I am happy to share around. There were 207 businesses in Alice Springs that received the Business Improvement Grant: 64 in the Daly, Tiwi, West Arnhem areas; 746 in Darwin; 139 in the Darwin rural area; 31 in East Arnhem; 77 in Katherine; 141 in Palmerston and suburbs; and 21 in Tennant Creek.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Those numbers you read for us were the Aboriginal-owned businesses, is that right?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to clarify that. The 8% figure I mentioned at the start is attributed to Indigenous businesses.

The regional distribution—I do not have the breakdown in front of me as to which of those numbers were specifically Indigenous businesses.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** They were the COVID grants per region, for all types of businesses, is that right?

**Mr KIRBY:** That is correct.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** If I was to say 8% of those were the Aboriginal-owned businesses, as the total ...

**Mr KIRBY:** We are happy to take that on notice if you would like the precise data.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** That would be great, thank you.

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### Question on Notice No 9.5

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many of the grants introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019–20 were for our Aboriginal-owned businesses?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated the number 9.5.

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** Thank you for that overview of the Business Growth Program. You said 21 businesses in Tennant Creek received some sort of support. What funding was attached to those 21 support packages?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps the best that I could do for a very specific Tennant Creek update is explain that under the Business Improvement Grants, the data we have in front of us explains that of the 21 that received support there was \$71,000 in approved funding for works that contributed to \$95,601 in the Tennant Creek area.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What support is given to remote locations such as Borroloola?

**Mr KIRBY:** I just wanted to clarify that the small business champions regularly visit Borroloola in conjunction with the workforce people. The data I read out before specifically discusses the Katherine region, so if we were to break it down we would have to get that data broken down to share with the committee. For the Katherine region, the improvement grants that we discussed before—there were 77 in the Katherine region. Approved funding was \$599,000—nearly \$600,000. What portion of that would be attributed to Borroloola area, we would have to take on notice to break down the data and information to another level.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Would you like that on notice, Member for Barkly?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Yes, I would like to put that question on notice.

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### Question on Notice No 9.6

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Barkly, please restate the question for the record.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Can you please advise what portion of the Business Growth Program was delivered in Borroloola?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 9.6.

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** You said the business champion and workforce people go to Borroloola regularly. How often are they going to Borroloola?

**Mr KIRBY:** I will just check the detail of that question. An estimation would be quarterly, but we do not have that detail in front of us.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The Business Growth program supports all businesses including tourism operators, is that right?

**Mr KIRBY:** That is correct. Those grants are available to tourism operators as are a number of other grants and some that are specifically related to the tourism industry.

I have just had some information relayed to me. About 18% of our Business Growth Programs relate directly to tourism. It is a generic figure across the board, but it gives you some understanding of the high level of uptake by the tourism industry.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I know we have touched on Borroloola and the small business champions, and I am not sure who the workforce people are that you mentioned, but are they visiting all remote locations?

**Mr KIRBY:** Our understanding is that they are mobile and actively meeting people in remote communities and locations across the Northern Territory. As we alluded to in a previous answer, we do not have specific detail of their travel itineraries in front of us, but we are confident they are spreading their wings far and wide.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Given that this is all about trying to grow business, you said you would get back to me about Million Dollar Fish in Borroloola. Can you tell me what is happening with that?

**Mr KIRBY:** My understanding was that information had come to you. Apologies if it had not. I know that King Ash Bay—there were some queries around why the Million Dollar Fish was not being advertised in that region. My understanding was that is it purely and simply related to COVID and the shortened amount of time that they had the opportunity to catch a fish and put them back out. We will do all that we can to make sure that King Ash Bay and Borroloola get the Million Dollar Fish next season.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Next season? There is plenty of time to do it now.

**Mr COSTA:** Can you make sure Tiwi Islands is included in Million Dollar Fish as well?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am more than happy to make sure the Tiwi Islands are included.

**Mr YAN:** If we are putting in bids for Million Dollar Fish—maybe Alice Springs as well, please?

**Mr COSTA:** Yes, let us go fishing in the Todd.

**Mr CHAIR:** You could put a couple of fish out at Ellery Creek Big Hole but also Emily Gap. I have caught fish at Emily Gap.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Lake Mary Ann has plenty of room too.

**Mr COSTA:** Now back on the serious track. What are small business champions actually meant to do? For an example, if a young couple wants to set up a business on Tiwi, back on country, can they assist them with setting up that business? What is their role? I have had inquiries from people in my electorate.

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, that would be a key part of what the small business champions undertake and it is their role. Aboriginal enterprises are looking for assistance and mentorship to start, run and grow. We know it is difficult, and not just in the remote Northern Territory, for any small business to get up and running and keep going beyond that four-year mark.

The small business champion will have a range of programs to offer and assist with—some start-up programs so that people can better understand how complex business can be, and how professional their record-keeping and their data and analytics need to be. That is a big part of what we have set up these small business champions to do—to step through that.

The Top End Team is very much assisting the Tiwi Island-based enterprises to strengthen bid and proposal capability with the goal to improve tender success rate. We know it is difficult for people to get their heads around procurement and tendering if that is a part of the business that they need to get off the ground to start with. Our small business champions would enjoy the opportunity to get involved with that, Member for Arafura.

**Mr COSTA:** Which department do we go through? Do we go through your department or the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet to engage these champions?

**Mr KIRBY:** The small business champions sit with us.

**Mr COSTA:** Okay. I will refer over 2,000 of my people to you if you do not give us the million-dollar barra.

**Mr KIRBY:** I am more than happy to try to help 2,000 businesses in the Tiwi area.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Biz Secure has been an initiative available to Territorian businesses now for some time. How many businesses have applied for the funds to undertake an audit that is valued at \$2,000 per business over the financial year 2019–20?

**Mr KIRBY:** We have some stats on that; we will just get them for you. Applications in the 2019–20 period?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Yes, please.

**Mr KIRBY:** Since the inception of that program, as at 10 December 2020 there has been a total of 2,288 individual and a number of other cluster business grant applications. There were 85 of the cluster business grant applications that were received. Of the 2,288 applications, 2,224 were assessed for stage one security audits; 1390 applications have been assessed for stage two security improvement works in line with that.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What is the average amount of time a business waits after their audit has been conducted for approval to be granted for those works in stage two to begin?

**Mr KIRBY:** We are just checking as we have some data around the victims of crime portion of that, with payments and funding being immediate. We have some other data on respondents not experiencing break-ins or attempted break-ins—but the specific data that you have asked for around approval times, we are trying to chase down at the moment.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Maybe I will just ask a couple of questions. If you are gathering the data these questions might be useful. What has been the total spend for the last financial year for this program? I am conscious of time, so I am not sure if you want me to put a few questions together or put some questions on notice? I am not sure what you would like to do as there is a lot to get through.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, the Member for Brennan is offering to put a number of questions together if you would like to consider them and then potentially take it on notice.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Or you may be able to answer them in a batch, if you wish.

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, I understand that. We have reasonably specific data around the overall funding for the Biz Secure program. We have data on 2019–20 actuals, which is \$4,856,000. To break it down further than that will take a little bit longer.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** That is okay with the total spend for last year. Just to clarify, you are still coming back to me with the average amount of time that it takes, or did we get to that? Apologies, now I am trying to batch my questions together and getting lost.

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to deal with the approval times now, if I may. For stage one it is currently around two to three weeks and for stage two is approximately two months. That is the information that has been relayed.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Have you surveyed the participants of the program as to how beneficial the program has been? If so, what were the results of this survey?

**Mr KIRBY:** The department conducts ongoing surveys post works completion. It shows that on average, four months after the works have been completed, 80% of the 218 respondents had not experienced any break-ins or attempted break-ins after they had availed themselves of the Biz Secure program.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you have the data on whether these same businesses have improved their business—for example, increased their revenue or remained neutral since participating in the program?

**Mr KIRBY:** Given the nature of that grant is reliant and dependent upon security matters, the turnover of the business is not a question that gets asked while people are helping work their way through the Biz Secure grants.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you have the data of the types of businesses that apply for this program, for example different industries, business sizes or any kind of data like that?

**Mr KIRBY:** We have the information by region. We do not have it on hand for types of businesses or size of businesses. I am happy to take that on notice if that is specific data that you require.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you record that data? Is it data that you can pull up quite quickly without drawing on more resources within this department?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Yes, I would like to take it on notice then.

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**Question on Notice No 9.7**

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

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Of the businesses that participated in the Biz Secure program, what data can be provided about those businesses, such as the industries those businesses are in, the size and the region?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated number 9.7.

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**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am conscious of time, so I will try to group these questions together and get your team to pull around you there. In regard to the business re-secure program, I would like to know similar data—how many businesses have applied, the total spend for the year 2019–20, the results of those surveys that you touched on with the previous grant, and the data about those businesses, region, size and industry.

**Mr KIRBY:** I understand you are asking a similar question, for the detail in the questions we have just dealt with. The terminology of the package you were talking about—was it business re-secure?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Yes, it is business re-secure program. There is a reference to victims of crime on the website, but it is under the business.nt.gov.au—it is one that has been operating for a while. The grant offers \$750 per business to re-secure their premises.

**Mr KIRBY:** We have some information at hand on victims for crime—I will perhaps just run through that, understanding that it means that you still wish to have a question put on notice. Victims of crime has had 598 business engagements and completed 376 re-secures. A total of \$227,733 in grant funding has been issued and businesses may receive support up to three times. I understand there may be other detail.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The only detail missing from those set of questions was the data on the types of businesses that indeed have applied for those. Is that easily accessible by the department without draining further resources?

**Mr KIRBY:** Okay, there is a slight variation with the response to this one. My understanding is that the department for the broader Biz Secure program measures by business to give the type of detail we were talking of before. But for the victims of crime and re-secure they do not measure that type of data for that package.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How many small or medium-sized businesses exceed the \$1.5m threshold for payroll tax and therefore were able to have their payroll tax waived?

**Mr KIRBY:** Those types of concessions will be a question that Treasury will be able to answer, but we will not have that information.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The Territory businesses that demonstrate potential hardship for the Coronavirus crisis on the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade's website—that is not for the Small Business minister?

**Mr KIRBY:** We operate the register, but we do not have ownership of that specific data or that tax-related data. Treasury has that.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** So you have the information, but you cannot release it to us?

**Mr KIRBY:** The payroll tax information is not kept with this department.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Can you tell me how many small and medium-sized businesses exceed the \$1.5m threshold for payroll tax?

**Mr KIRBY:** This department does not have payroll tax information, so no. We would not be able to supply that information.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** With the other Coronavirus measures—one of them was power, water and sewerage bills cut by 50% for all businesses for six months—how did a business apply for this reduction or was it enacted automatically by the utility provider?

**Mr KIRBY:** The businesses purely need to nominate to go onto the hardship register. That triggers the process so that Power and Water can identify that they have registered and those savings flow from there.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Automatically once they have been accepted onto that hardship register, the power, water and sewerage bills are provided directly by the utility provider of that discount?

**Mr KIRBY:** Just to clarify, there are terms and conditions they need to meet once they nominate to go on the hardship register. If they meet the conditions they need to meet ...

**Ms BOOTHBY:** It is automatic though? It is not an extra step for that business to undertake, is that correct?

**Mr KIRBY:** They have to apply for the hardship register.

**Mr COSTA:** Maybe that is a question we could ask Power Water tomorrow morning?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** In the interests of time I will bundle up my questions and go to the Business Hardship Package. How many businesses applied to be on the hardship register between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020?

**Mr KIRBY:** There were 1,396 businesses that applied for the Business Hardship Register. There were 1,331 under assessment and 1,115 were approved.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Of the \$108m allocated for the Business Hardship Package to continue in this year's budget, how much was already paid out in the period 1 April to 30 September 2020?

**Mr KIRBY:** I have just been informed that Treasury administers those funds, so it is not information we would have ready access to. It would be a matter for Treasury to answer.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am conscious of time. I have more questions, but I would like to go to the outputs now.

**Mr CHAIR:** Very good. Are there any further questions relating to the opening statement?

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

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2020–2021) Bill as they relate to the Small Business, Jobs and Training. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND WORKFORCE** **Output 4.1 – Business and Innovation NT**

**Mr CHAIR:** Output Groups 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 are the responsibility of other ministers; therefore, we will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Business, Innovation and Workforce, Output, 4.1 Business and Innovation NT. Are there any questions?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Minister, what system will be used by the Northern Territory Government to administer the Small Business JobMaker Booster?



**Mr KIRBY:** That fund starts in mid-February in conjunction with the federal government. The terms and conditions and details of apportioning the funds is still being developed and should be done over the coming weeks.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Will it be a new online system or plugged into an existing one?

**Mr KIRBY:** There are a range of things being taken into account to try to work out the most streamlined and efficient way to do that. How that finishes up will be decided in the coming weeks.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am conscious of time, so I do not have any further questions on that output. I asked a lot of them on the opening statement.

**Mr COSTA:** What support has been provided to small businesses through 2020 and COVID-19?

**Mr KIRBY:** We recognised very early in the piece that businesses would need a great deal of assistance. We knew that we could either do that proactively or we would be spending the same amount of money reactively and a lot of people would be unemployed. We know from the conversations we had with businesses—not only those that operate in the Territory but also businesspeople who have interests interstate—that there was no other state or territory that really dug in to support local businesses as much as we did in the Northern Territory.

Very early in the piece, in late March, we put together Small Business Survival Fund and we made sure that fund comprised a number of specific components such as immediate survival payments, rapid adaption payments, operational boost payments, operational support payments and rebound support grants.

We had some discussions tonight about the Home Improvement Scheme and the success that has been, making sure our tradies are working. We note that work will spill out into next year as well. Business Improvement Grants opened on 13 April and a large range of people took those options up. We also had Immediate Works Grants and the Home and Business Battery Grants, which we have also spoken about.

Looking ahead, as we have just discussed, we are still developing terms and conditions around the Small Business JobMaker Booster to make the absolute most of filling in any gaps that any of the federal grants might miss. The Territory Small Business Pivot Grant creates opportunities for people to spin and pivot into new markets if they can.

The Territory Small Business CX Grant is available for people when they know they need to enhance their customer experience. Similar grants to those have been important in the past. Small Business Financial Fitness funds makes sure people are as proficient, experienced and as professional as they can be.

There are a range of small business savers and Roadhouse to Recovery grants—supply chain solvers that we will be concentrating on this year. I am more than happy to explain in more detail how all of those can be accessed and rolled out and more than happy for people to approach us or the department for any more information on those.

#### **Output 4.2 – Workforce NT**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 4.2, Workforce NT. Are there any questions?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I just have the one question for the minister on this output. Which Northern Territory Government department is primarily responsible for administering Study NT? And are you the minister responsible?

**Mr KIRBY:** Study NT sits with our department. The international student component sits with Minister Manison.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Will there be some clarity around how it would split up in the future between the two ministers? I would just like to know who to direct the questions to.

**Mr KIRBY:** The program sits with this department but not with me under the skills or training portfolio that I hold. It is directly with Minister Manison.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Thank you. I do not have any other questions on that output.

**Mr COSTA:** What support has been provided to help apprentices and trainees to stay in touch with workplaces and continue their training throughout 2020, now that we are coming into 2021?

**Mr KIRBY:** It has been a tough time on apprentices in the Northern Territory. We will do all we can to help apprentices get through this.

A range of things have proactively happened on the back of COVID-19, and one of those is that the federal Skills ministers meet every three weeks or so. We have very good relationships with the federal, state and territory ministers. There is a strict regime—an almost audacious amount of agenda items that we are working through there as well as some reforms. The underlying fact is that we all want to support trainees and apprentices across the board.

There has been a great announcement by the federal government regarding support payments for trainees and apprentices. We have dug in behind that. Through those meetings, where we do video hook-ups, we have explained to the federal minister the importance of us being able to—originally they were quarantined so that no government agencies could access that assistance. It was important that we explained that regional and remote areas and regional councils—which are significant employers in remote areas—could access those apprenticeship and trainee assistance distance programs. It has been extremely important in those areas. We had a significant uptake of those already.

We are working very stringently the federal government going forward. As far as our trainee numbers for 2020, I know we have had good numbers and good uptake because we bounced back and rebounded very strongly while some other regions are still languishing and well behind in their uptakes. You will be happy to know we are tracking very well and, in some areas we are even in front of our uptakes from last year.

Aboriginal people in training and apprenticeships is something we concentrate very stringently on as well. We are tracking well and above last year's numbers, region by region and overarchingly to get Aboriginal people in training. It is something we look forward to concentrating on diligently into the future. We know that those young men and women are the future of the Northern Territory.

**Mr COSTA:** In regard to what you just said, job seekers will be supported back into the workplace from our government and the federal government?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, absolutely. The JobMaker scheme and the commitment from our government is to accentuate that as much as possible, enhance what the federal government has put out and give as many people the opportunity to get into work as we possibly can.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 4.2.

Output 4.3 is the responsibility of another minister; therefore, that concludes Output Group 4.0.

Output Groups 5.0, 6.0, 7.0 and 8.0 are all the responsibility of other ministers; therefore, that concludes consideration of outputs relating to Small Business and Jobs and Training. On behalf of the committee, minister, I thank you and the officials who have provided advice to you today. Thank you to Mr Drabsch and Ms White—great to see you—and Ms Frankenfeld for coming in at a late hour. We will have a short break for the changeover and return back here soon.

**Mr KIRBY:** May I just echo those comments. I thank everybody for all their hard work to pull all these folders together, particularly the people at the table at the moment, many of whom have had very long weeks—as you have. Thank you all very much.

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The committee suspended.

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## **PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT**

### **DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET**

**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome back, everybody. We are on the home straight, as the Member for Namatjira just alluded to. Welcome, minister. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement regarding the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

**Mr KIRBY:** Mr Chair, the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment is responsible for managing the legislative employment arrangements for the Northern Territory public service relating to employment policy, strategic workforce planning and development, appeals, grievance reviews and Aboriginal employment strategies. As part of the recent machinery of government changes, the office was transferred into the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and as an independent office, it is now identified as an output group of the Chief Minister and Cabinet 2020–21 budget with four stand-alone outputs.

This year and into next, responsibilities of the office include:

- developing and implementing a five-year strategic plan for the public service, designed to build and shape the whole-of-sector leadership, management and workforce planning capability
- developing and implementing the new 2021–2025 Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy
- launching the 2021 People Matter Survey for public servants to gain an understanding of their perceptions about how their agency is performing across a range of employment activities, including the employee engagement, satisfaction, productivity, attraction and retention. The results of this survey will contribute to the development of the five-year strategic plan and assist agencies to develop a roadmap to focus their efforts on performance improvement and devise workforce development initiatives
- commencing negotiations for seven of the 13 public sector enterprise agreements from the first quarter of 2021 which is a significant undertaking, particularly within the current fiscal climate, continuing its good work in building inclusion and diversity in the public service. Currently 1.5% of public servants identify as having a disability, and Aboriginal employment is sitting at 10.5% with representation in senior and executive roles at 5.7%. Under the Disability Employment Program for the public service there are currently 15 participants; three who are undertaking traineeships, four have secured further employment on completion of their contracts under the program and seven who are continuing onto a second year under the program
- events such as Hands Up for Inclusion Week, which is managed and coordinated by the office, continue to educate the people about the importance of having an inclusive and diverse workforce. This highly successful event received a highly commended award for the category of Excellence in Strategy that Improves Access and Inclusion at the 2019 NT National Disability Services and Inclusion Awards, continuing to recognise and celebrate the good work of NT public servants.

In June this year, the commissioner's office publicly recognised the Territory's public service unsung COVID-19 heroes on UN Public Service Day by publishing their stories on the OCPE website and as extracts in this year's *State of the Service Report 2019-2020*. The office also contributes to the recognition of service milestones for NTPS employees across the Territory and to the annual Chief Minister's Awards for Excellence in the NT Public Sector, which recognised the extensive contribution of public servants to the Territory COVID-19 response which continues to maintain the Territory's reputation as one of the safest places to be.

I would like to acknowledge the Commissioner for Public Employment, Vicki Telfer who is attending today's estimates proceedings with me.

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Are there any questions relating to the opening statement?

**Mr YAN:** Thank you, minister, for your opening statement and thank you to the commissioner for being here late on a Thursday. I also pass on my thanks to all the public servants within your agency who have been working hard to put together all the data and things we will need for this evening's estimates. As I have said to a number of other agency chief executives, I am very much aware of the work that goes into compiling the data for estimates. It is a long and tough job, and sometimes thankless.

Minister, you mentioned the public service employment survey in your opening remarks. What were the outcomes of the most recent employee survey?

**Mr KIRBY:** It is quite a complex survey. To best understand the detail, I will hand to the commissioner.

**Commissioner TELFER:** The last major People Matter Survey was conducted in 2016 and it had a range of results. I will be able to get that information to you in a moment. My colleague is finding that for me.

In 2018 there was a check-in survey, which was a smaller set of questions. In 2021 we intend to ask a full survey, consistent with other jurisdictions, and it will primarily go to—and this is what the 2016 survey did—questions of engagement, behaviour, leadership and the training and development that employees of the Northern Territory public service were getting.

It is important we do this survey. We intend to act on the results. As a sector, I hope we can do what I call two or three dial-turners—those things really make a difference, and if we implemented them it would mean we get higher engagement of our public servants. We know from that we get higher levels of productivity.

I am just checking to see whether or not the outcomes from the 2016 survey are available. If they are not available in a moment we might come back and provide that answer rather than wasting the time ...

**Mr YAN:** I would be happy to take those on notice, commissioner. I have seen some of the results from agency. Minister, as a follow up, from that survey, what are some of the highlights?

**Mr KIRBY:** I will hand over to the commissioner to give some feedback on that.

**Commissioner TELFER:** We will need to get those answers and provide them to you. I am happy to take those questions on notice if the minister is keen to do that.

**Mr YAN:** I have a couple other questions on the report so it might be expedient if I ask those now; we might take them all on notice.

**Mr CHAIR:** Then we can group them together if that works.

**Mr YAN:** Let us bundle it up. I agree with you. My other question would be, on the flipside, what are the lowlights? Are there any major discrepancies? What might be your advice to agencies?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to pass that over.

From my perspective—an acknowledgement of the public sector and the work they have done through COVID-19—particularly for myself at the time, being Minister for Primary Industry and Resources, knowing that the Northern Territory had to have mines continuing to operate. Otherwise, from a gas side of things we would have been without power fairly shortly. From a mineral side of things, we would have been in the depths of despair of not being able to have people working in the Northern Territory.

It was extremely important to keep our economy ticking over, put together safe plans and make sure people were able to do the work they needed in the public sector. I would like to go on record to thank them for all their work through this. I am happy to hand over to the commissioner to see if there is any other detail she would like to add.

**Commissioner TELFER:** We will take the information about the 2016 survey on notice.

The highlights from the 2018 survey report—noting this was before I joined as commissioner—were as follows:

- we had extremely high levels of engagement, at 65%—quite a high figure around the states and territories, and we should be really proud of that
- satisfaction was 67%
- change management was 49%—somewhere we want to do more work. It is not necessarily a terrible figure but I want to see some improvement. I am very interested to see the outcomes from the survey we do in early 2021
- performance planning—some people call it performance management—was 64%. Again, not a bad outcome, but I would like to see it incrementally improve over time.

We know the high levels of engagement we have makes a step-change into how people feel at work and therefore their discretionary effort and productivity. This is something we are keen to drive. We will provide the details via the minister to the committee.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you want to take them on notice?

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

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**Question on Notice No 9.8**

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

**Mr YAN:** What are the outcomes of the most recent employee survey? What are the highlights and lowlights? Are there any major discrepancies to previous surveys? What advice has been sent to agencies?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for has been allocated the number 9.8.

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**Mr YAN:** According to recently delivered public service figures, the public service has not seen a reduction or any stability of numbers and in fact, it has increased significantly. What are the current public sector employee numbers?

**Mr KIRBY:** It was reported at the time there was a significant increase. We asked questions at the time. I will flick to the commissioner for a more fulsome explanation on those numbers.

My recollection of the data at the time was that it was comparing full-time to a nominal headcount of employees. The explanation to me was that the nominal headcount can include contractors or part-time staff. From having responsibility for the primary industry sector previously—a range of people were involved and employed in the citrus canker programs that still showed up on the books but were not traditionally FTEs.

**Commissioner TELFER:** In the recently published *State of the Service Report* we had a couple of figures. The first was about full-time equivalent employees. That figure, as at June 2020, was an average of 21,836, which is an increase of 76 from the June 2019 quarter.

We also publish another number, and I know it can make things confusing. It is important to publish it because it tells us what is going on beyond the full-time equivalent. The headcount as of the end of June 2020 was 23,590. The reason for the difference is a number of people who work part-time, so it is quite an important figure for us to publish.

In September this year, the average figure for full-time equivalent was 21,969. I was watching when the Treasury portfolio was examined on Monday, and I know that was explained at that time—21,969 is a small increase but it was due to the fact that a number of frontline services to do with COVID in particular, had their staffing numbers increased.

**Mr YAN:** I do have a question about that coming up, so you will be able to explore that a little bit in detail, thank you. Based on those figures, and I am happy to use the headcount for June 2020, could I get a breakdown of the employees by FTEs, casuals, temp, contract, part-time—a breakdown of the types of employment. I know that would be difficult to get now, and I am happy to put that on notice

**Commissioner TELFER:** I may have it broken down into some of the detail. I have it on FTE, but I do not have it on headcount—if that could be taken on notice?

**Mr KIRBY:** We are more than happy to run through the figures that we have available in front of us now. By the same token, we are happy to take it on notice.

**Mr YAN:** For expediency and being on the headcount, because the headcount will show up some of those COVID numbers too. I would prefer to take it on headcount, it just gives us a fulsome figure.

**Mr KIRBY:** The commissioner is explaining that she has the percentages of the full-time equivalents. If you wish to run through that now, I am more than happy to detail the question on notice.

**Mr YAN:** I would prefer to do it on notice if I can. We are running out of time and I have a bit to get through. I am happy to look through the figures later

**Mr KIRBY:** I am more than happy with that.

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**Question on Notice No 9.9**

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

**Mr YAN:** Based on the headcount provided for June 2020 of 23,590, could I have a breakdown of the FTEs into the various types of employment, as in full-time, casual, temp, contract, part-time?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.9.

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**Mr YAN:** As per the Langoulant report, there was to be a reduction in ECOs. Has there been a reduction of ECOs in the last financial year?

**Mr KIRBY:** We will have some information on that. You are right, there was a plan off the back of the Langoulant report to make sure we got a better handle on our ECOs. The wage freeze has been quite well documented and advertised. By the same token, I know some agencies have done a particularly good job at restructuring and reducing the number of ECOs that they needed available to them, but for some fulsome information on that, I will hand to the commissioner.

**Commissioner TELFER:** The information I have available to me is that the number of executive contract officer numbers have decreased by 53—paid headcount—or 8% since 2019. The greatest decrease is in executive contract officer numbers occurred in the ECO1 and ECO2 designations. There were significant decreases in Power and Water in the ECO4 and executive manager numbers.

**Mr YAN:** Power and Water was ECO4s and ECO5s?

**Commissioner TELFER:** And executive managers, yes.

**Mr YAN:** What is interesting is that I know, being in government, there was reduction in ECO1s and ECO2s and an increase in SAO1s and SAO2s. I will save that for next estimates. There is a heads up for you.

**Mr KIRBY:** I will take note of that.

**Mr YAN:** Based on our previous discussion on FTEs, what additional public sector employees are attributable to COVID-19? I suppose from February 2020 to the end of June, as a reporting period.

**Mr KIRBY:** Through our forensic evaluation of the numbers—we set stringent targets for ourselves—there were some frontline workers that increased. I am happy for Commissioner Telfer to explain further. My understanding is that the majority of them were frontline workers.

**Commissioner TELFER:** The staffing caps that were implemented two years ago—the total quarterly full-time equivalent staffing numbers for June 2020 were 399 above the staffing cap. That was not unexpected as a result of the Territory's COVID-19 response, which required additional frontline staff to keep Territorians safe and the Territory COVID free.

The most significant increases occurred in the frontline service agencies such as Health, Education and Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services. I have some figures but not the total amount to break that down. Some additional figures include in the former department of Trade, Business and Innovation when they were managing the grants programs—45—and Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services of 32. There were some increases, unsurprisingly, so those people could deliver what was needed to manage COVID.

**Mr YAN:** Thank you, commissioner. Based on the increase of 399 which we attribute to COVID, can I get a breakdown—again, similar to the types of FTEs that we are talking about—as in permanent, casual, part-time and temporary contracts?

**Commissioner TELFER:** I will need to take it on notice. I do not have the breakdown in those categories with me today.

**Mr KIRBY:** To clarify, that is of the 399?

**Mr YAN:** Yes, just what we were talking about. The increase in FTEs for COVID between February and June of this year. I will state that in my question.

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**Question on Notice No 9.10**

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Namatjira, could you please restate the question for the record?

**Mr YAN:** Minister, what additional public sector employees have been attributable to COVID-19 for the reporting period February 2020 to end of June 2020? And could I have a breakdown of the types of employment attributable to those COVID-increases, as in permanent, casual, part-time or temp contract?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 9.10.

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**Mr YAN:** The Langoulant report was clear in its recommendations to put a freeze on public sector employment. I note the responses from the Chief Minister on Monday that there was an increase to some of the caps due to some specific points, and I understand that, but I bring attention to some figures.

At the end of June 2016, public sector employment was at 20,596, and at June 2020 we are looking numbers of 21,836. That is an increase of around 400 FTEs per annum. Are you going to follow the recommendations provided for budget repair in the Langoulant report in relation to public sector employment?

**Mr KIRBY:** The simple answer to that is yes. We will be aligning with those recommendations from the Langoulant report. The Chief Minister has been really clear, as mentioned earlier this evening, in his expectations of CEs. Headcount is a reasonable reason why people, at times, blow their budgets. The enthusiasm that we have put on the CEs of each department is to make sure that those budgets are stringently met.

Yes, you can expect that those recommendations from the Langoulant report about keeping our public sector numbers where they need to be are followed.

**Mr YAN:** Minister, that is a bit difficult to stomach. If you comply with the recommendations of the Langoulant report—you stated yes, based on the current expansion of 400 FTEs per annum. I agree with what the Chief Minister said. We had to staff the Palmerston hospital and we needed more police, but I do not know if those two measures—the Palmerston hospital and the NT police increases—equate to 1240 FTEs.

I have no more questions on the opening statement, Mr Chair.

**Mr COSTA:** How is the Northern Territory Government recognising the vital and important work undertaken by the Northern Territory public servants?

**Mr KIRBY:** I recognise that through COVID-19—and reiterating what I said before that most people acknowledged the amount of work that was done by the public sector—there was a massive amount of change done in a very small period of time across the board. It was explained as trying to build a plane while we were already flying it. It was a very tumultuous time. Our thanks go to our Northern Territory public service workers in a very heartfelt manner.

We want to do all that we can. We know that we have a number of enterprise agreements up for discussion. We have done absolutely everything we can do to keep Northern Territorians safe and to keep them in their jobs. We will be looking to make sure that those public sector numbers, whilst not going above where they need to be, do not go below where they need to be either.

We are respectful of our public servants and the hard work they do. We will not be cutting our public sector in any way, shape or form.

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

**Mr CHAIR:** There being no further questions, the committee will now consider the estimates and proposed expenditure in the Appropriation (2020–2021) Bill as they relate to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

### **OUTPUT GROUP 9.0 – OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT** **Output 9.1 – Employee and Industrial Relations**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output Group 9.0, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, Output 9.1, Employment and Industrial Relations. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** It has been widely publicised that all public servants will be subject to a pay freeze and instead a \$1,000 bonus will be paid to all NTG employees. Will this apply to the ECOs who signed onto your wage freeze on their contracts?

**Mr KIRBY:** I apologise. As a point of clarification, can you reiterate the detail? I understand we are talking about the \$1,000.

**Mr YAN:** It is stated that all public servants will be subject to a pay freeze and instead they will receive a \$1,000 bonus. Will this apply to the ECOs who signed onto your wage freeze on their contracts?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to answer that. I believe that the ECOs you are talking about are not covered by that provision of the enterprise agreement. Their wage freeze will stand as it is—the enterprise agreement and the negotiations that revolve around that will stipulate the terms for the thousand-dollar payment.

**Mr YAN:** As far as the \$1,000 bonus and wage freeze goes, was advice sought from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment on the practicality of a pay freeze prior to the government making the announcement?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes. There were discussions between our offices, even with the previous minister and Chief Minister, whether the \$1,000 annual bonus was a realistic offer being made to public servants.

**Mr YAN:** Additionally, who was consulted concerning the pay freeze before the policy was announced? For instance, were there any unions, IR specialists or others with specific knowledge of employment contracts and conditions consulted?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to put some context to that. My understanding from my involvement, and that of the Chief Minister and Commissioner for Public Employment—I am happy for her to expand if necessary—is that there were conversations regarding the \$1,000. It was the Langoulant report that first floated that as a possibility going forward. I stress that it is not unusual for the government to make an offer at the start of negotiations.

You do not want to pre-empt negotiations and what discussions take place at the table. I can explain that the consultations that took place in those early days were quite basic consultations and conversations. The detailed consultation, conversations and bargaining, in essence, takes place during the negotiations.

**Mr YAN:** My question, minister, was about who was consulted concerning the pay freeze before the policy was announced. Do you have any information on who was consulted?

**Mr KIRBY:** I understand that there were conversations held with unions. The level of detail of those consultations and conversations may have been reasonably basic. As for outside of that, you have alluded to other IR specialists. I cannot comment on whether other department such as the Chief Minister's department or other people held conversations. By the same token, whether Treasury has spoken with other people. I can only answer for the conversations I had been involved in and what the commissioner had explained to me that she knows had taken place as well.



**Mr YAN:** Based on that, you may not be able to answer this question, but the commissioner may be able to. What modelling, if any, has been done concerning the pay freeze?

**Mr KIRBY:** Perhaps in broad terms I can explain that with any enterprise agreement negotiations whenever financial positions are put together, Treasury does modelling for that for costs. There is also post-Langoulan—a budget review subcommittee within the Northern Territory Government, as a subcommittee of Cabinet. I know that those two bodies would have been involved in some modelling ...

**Mr YAN:** I am sorry, minister. I probably should have made myself a little clearer. When I was speaking about models, I meant industrial relations modelling. We are talking about employee and industrial relations for the output. That is my mistake and I apologise for that.

**Mr KIRBY:** That is quite all right. Are you seeking clarification on who else outside Treasury might have been involved?

**Mr YAN:** I was asking what IR modelling, if any, was done concerning the pay freeze?

**Mr KIRBY:** As far as the financial side of it goes, Treasury would have been involved in that. The rest of any of the implications—industrial relations—will play out during the negotiations.

**Mr YAN:** You have not done any IR modelling for the pay freeze? As you said, that will come out during the negotiations.

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy to clarify exactly what you mean as far as industrial relations modelling term—if I understand ...

**Mr YAN:** I am talking about anything you do about wages—particularly when we are talking pay freezes—that will affect the *Fair Work Act 2009* and enterprise agreements. I am talking about modelling, what you would be looking at and taking into consideration by implementing a pay freeze, without taking due note for what effects it may have on the *Fair Work Act 2009* and your negotiations going forward with the various unions. I know the CPSU EBA is coming up this year or early next year.

**Mr KIRBY:** I will give some overarching clarification on that. Treasury takes into account when offers like that are initially made. If there are any implications of an industrial nature that they are aware of straight away, that would be taken into account. Clarifying my earlier statement in regard to what you have just explained in detail, yes, some due consideration of industrial relations implications would have been taken in to account. Commissioner, would you like to clarify?

**Commissioner TELFER:** As you alluded to, Member for Namatjira, we have enterprise agreement negotiations for a number of agreements coming up in 2021. There are seven, so it will be a pretty full-on year. In any consideration of what might go into an enterprise agreement we have to weigh up a number of factors and risks. That is something we keep at the forefront.

We have already started work to have some administrative meetings with unions—not to start bargaining—and we have been very clear that we have not been talking about what might go into a log of claims, but we have been talking to unions about how we will conduct ourselves in all things.

The *Fair Work Act*, which is the act that governs our employee relations and workplace relations in the Territory, requires us to bargain in good faith. That, in essence, means we need to be prepared to bargain, listen to what each party says and take into account the operating environment. It does not mean there has to be moderation of demands—they can be pretty rugged—but we have been looking at the *Fair Work Act*.

What might be a complicating factor is that this week the Commonwealth Government introduced a number of amendments to the *Fair Work Act*, including the notification rights. As I understand it, it was introduced into the federal parliament yesterday and will go to a Senate inquiry over the summer break.

We are not sure when that legislation may be passed or come into effect. We will need to take that into account as we are bargaining because if things change—if the legal situation changes—we need to make sure we are abreast of that. We will be bargaining in good faith, as we are a model employer. It does not mean everyone will love what we do, but we are a model employer and we conduct ourselves professionally in accordance with the act.

**Mr YAN:** The Chief Minister said in the media that all the public service will be taking the pay freeze. Is this pay freeze a breach of the *Fair Work Act* as it is not in line with enterprise bargaining agreement arrangements, considering the statement has already gone to public servants that they will be taking a pay freeze?

**Mr KIRBY:** The difference between a pay freeze and a one-off bonus is a technicality that I will not enter into discussing tonight. Some industrial advice was sought, along with Treasury advice, on that initial offer. If there is more advice that needs to be sought, as the commissioner just explained, we will avail ourselves of that as negotiations progress.

**Mr YAN:** I have been on both sides of a number of enterprise agreements, on the government side and the employee side. I know it involves negotiations, the proposal—not negotiation—of no pay increase but a pay bonus could be seen as not bargaining in good faith. What will you do if the government is found to be in breach of the *Fair Work Act*? Will public servants revert back to their EA bargaining? Would you look to implement other restrictions?

**Mr MONAGHAN:** A point of order, Mr Chair!

**Mr MONAGHAN:** Standing Order 109 please. I know it is getting late, but it is hypothetical.

**Mr KIRBY:** I am happy—there is a very easy and straightforward answer. We are bound by the same fair work laws as every other entity, so if at any time there are concerns or breaches, either party can refer things for advice through the Fair Work Commission. It is a normal part of the process.

**Mr YAN:** Has any legal advice been sought, either from SFNT, the Solicitor-General, or from legal entities interstate since the announcement of this policy?

**Mr KIRBY:** I can only answer on behalf of myself and the commissioner, who has just also indicated she has not sought advice like that from other entities locally or interstate.

**Mr YAN:** Have you considered the decision may have serious industrial relations repercussions and there may be resultant industrial action?

**Mr KIRBY:** In my experience with enterprise agreement negotiations, you enter into all of them understanding if parties cannot reach agreement, it can end up in an industrial dispute. In the country we live in, it is a party's right to head down that track if negotiations cannot be resolved. We hope we do not get into that situation.

**Mr YAN:** I agree. It is not a great situation to be in for public servants, the government or the rest of the Territory public. Did you achieve the 250 voluntary redundancies announced as savings measures in the 2018–19 budget?

**Mr KIRBY:** That is quite a specific question. I will give the commissioner a couple of moments to find the information. Our understanding is that target was reached. We may not have any documentation in front of us to reiterate that.

**Mr COSTA:** How is the government ensuring a fair and efficient bargaining process with Northern Territory public servants?

**Mr KIRBY:** We know that in COVID times and with the Territory facing a tight economic future there will be a tough set of negotiations that happen with the unions. We acknowledge and respect the hard work they do in representing their members. There is more than one of us in the room that have sat on both sides of the tables of those negotiations. There are a number of us who understand the negotiations that take place this year.

We have explained to the unions, as the commissioner has said, that we are happy to start some pre-discussions regarding the format of negotiations next year. We will try our hardest to ensure outside of the fiscal parameters that have been set that we secure the best outcome we can for our public servants. We rate them highly and this has been shown on the national stage in how well they do their job. We will do everything we can do present the best offer we can.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 9.1.

### Output 9.2 – Workforce Planning and Development

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 9.2, Workforce Planning and Development. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** When are the quarterly public service employee figures normally uploaded to the OCPE website? The figures for the September quarter of 2020 are yet to be uploaded and we are now in December.

**Mr KIRBY:** That is a technical question. I will seek advice from the commissioner on that.

**Commissioner TELFER:** We publish figures on a quarterly basis. We have the figures for the end of September on an FTE basis. We also publish, to assist in transparency, a breakdown of the FTE positions that are internally funded from the Northern Territory Government and those funded externally.

Because of the machinery of government changes that happened in September and were implemented through changes in the personnel systems, we have not yet been able to get the breakdown of internally and externally funded roles. We have the overall figure for the end of September, which I have in an earlier response.

**Mr YAN:** Yes, you did. I have that figure.

**Commissioner TELFER:** I hope we can get the split shortly. I am keen to be as transparent as possible.

**Mr YAN:** Commissioner, would you say the MOG changes were the cause for the delay?

**Commissioner TELFER:** Yes. We have been working through to ensure we can work out what is internally and externally funded as people were moved into different agencies. What might not be apparent to many, but is apparent to me as the commissioner, is that there is a lot of work from our office to ensure that the figures we publish are accurate. That is manual work and we need to cross-check it with agencies.

**Mr YAN:** What is the current average employment separation or turnover rate for the public sector? I am happy to take the figure as of the end of the financial year.

**Mr KIRBY:** I appreciate your patience. We will take a moment to chase that detail down. We are happy to take on notice.

**Mr YAN:** I am happy for you to take it on notice.

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### Question on Notice No 9.11

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Namatjira, can you please restate the question for the record.

**Mr YAN:** Minister, what is the current average employment separation or turnover rate as of end of financial year 2020?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.11.

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**Mr YAN:** I have a question that is very dear to the heart of most people in this room. Of course, some time, the government announced a pay freeze for politicians and public service executives. How much longer will this last and what cost savings have been made for that pay freeze? You may not actually have that costing, because that may sit with Treasury, but you may have an idea of the time frames.

**Mr KIRBY:** My understanding is that the pay freeze was enacted until 2022. Discussions between now and then will take place depending on the Territory's fiscal position at that time. The breakdown of exactly the economic advantage to the Territory from enacting that pay freeze, we would have to follow up. I am more than happy to take that on notice

**Mr YAN:** That would be good.

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**Question on Notice No 9.12**

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

**Mr YAN:** Minister the government announced a pay freeze for politicians and public service executives. How long will this last for, and what cost savings have been made to the end of the financial year 2020 from that pay freeze

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr KIRBY:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.12.

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**Mr CHAIR:** There are no further questions. That concludes consideration of Output 9.2.

**Output 9.3 – Aboriginal Employment and Career Development**

**Mr CHAIR:** We will now consider Output 9.3, Aboriginal Employment and Career Development. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** In June 2016 Aboriginal employment increased to 10.7% in the Northern Territory Public Sector. It is well on its way to achieving the target of 16% by 2020. Four years since that date we are still sitting on 10.9% and that figure has increased by less than 1%. What is being done to rectify this and increase our Aboriginal employment target to 16%?

**Mr KIRBY:** I am certainly happy to hand to the commissioner for any other detail. In my time in the Northern Territory, with Indigenous Territorians you do get an amazing level of respect for their understanding of the Territory and for their understanding of systems and processes. In the fields of work I have been involved in, their technical capacity—I can hand on heart say that we have worked with some amazing people.

The Commissioner for Public Employment will expand on special measures and some initiatives that we do have in place. In one of my previous answers I mentioned working with the federal government in the federal Skills ministers meetings. I explained to them that for us to pursue employment and trainee apprenticeship programs in remote communities we had to be able to align those with regional and remote councils, and we were successful in that.

There is a body of work going on. We know that there are refinements and better ways that we can target special measures approaches to try to get more Aboriginal people into the public sector. To be honest, for me as skills and Jobs and Training minister, it is not just within the public sector that we will be aiming to do that over the term of this year. In relation to the NTPS, I will pass to the commissioner for a little more detail.

**Commissioner TELFER:** I might have misheard the figures that you said. Just to clarify, the Aboriginal Employment Career Development Strategy started in June 2015. The figures that I have over the period is that at that time the percentage of Aboriginal Australians in the Northern Territory Public Sector in June 2015 was 9.1%. In June 2020 it was 10.9%. Whilst that might only seem a small-step change, we think it is quite significant. I am looking here at page 16 of the *State of the Service Report 2019–2020*. It is in figure 12 for reference.

Since June 2010 where the percentage was 8.1% to June 2020, we have had a 34.57% increase in the number of Aboriginal Australians in the Northern Territory Public Sector. In June this year, 5.7% of senior employees in the Northern Territory Public Service were Aboriginal. That might not seem very much, but I have to say that is quite a significant increase. In relation to the strategy, it is coming to its final year of implementation this year.

Since the end of restrictions in biosecurity zones my team has been out consulting about what gains were made through the previous strategy and what the new strategy could look like. I am told that we will draft that strategy in late January.

We think it has been very successful. We set up an excellent Aboriginal employee mentor program and that just completed. There was 27 mentees completing the 12-month program. The second program commenced on 16 November, with 17 mentees being matched to mentors. We also have been running Aboriginal forums, which have been a great place for people to come together and provide support.

One of the big issues for us is—we are good at recruiting people, and I want to make sure that we retain the Aboriginal employees that we recruit, so a lot of the focus that will be in the next strategy will be about the retention issues. That is very important, but it is also very important that we continue to grow our senior Aboriginal workforce. As we go to more local decision-making we need to make sure that we have good, capable leaders. I am very committed to that, as is the office and the Northern Territory Public Sector.

Those are the things within my area, but there is a lot of it going on right across the Northern Territory Public Sector—work on First Circles and a whole range of strategies that are adding together. The minister mentioned trainees and growing early entrants—I will work with my colleagues in the Department of Corporate and Digital Development, and the Department of Education and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade to get a joined-up process so that we can grow the early entrants into the public service. I am sorry, I am probably unstoppable on this one.

**Mr YAN:** Thank you, commissioner; I applaud your passion. The figures I stated were from June 2016. The employment strategy was introduced by the CLP government in 2015 when it was 9.6%. That grew in 12 months by over 1%. We have since seen a stagnation. It only achieved less than a 1% growth between 2016 and 2020. I am with you, commissioner. We need to address it, considering the levels of Aboriginal unemployment in the Territory.

I am hoping the review that you do early next year has some good outcomes. I desperately look forward to reading that review because, again, this is very close to me and my electorate, and through my previous employment as well.

**Commissioner TELFER:** I should add that one thing we have done quite recently is review special measures program. I recently wrote to all of the chief executive officers, encouraging them to renew their special measures programs. I am delighted to be able to say that all the chief executive officers are on board. We are up to 85% of roles now open to special measures. That is an increase. That is really significant. I am keen to push this along because we have a responsibility to make sure we do all we can for all of the talent we have in the Territory.

**Mr MONAGHAN:** I have a follow-up question on that to the minister. What types of roles are not available under special measures? You said that there is probably about 15% that were not.

**Mr KIRBY:** We have seen an expansion over recent years. I will let the commissioner explain. There are very few roles that are not encompassed by special measures in this day and age.

**Commissioner TELFER:** There are very few roles—I will look at the special measures plans as they come through from the chief executive officers. Some of them might be in extremely technical areas, but as we all know, under special measures every person who is recruited needs to meet the merit test. They need to meet the selection criteria to a required degree.

Perhaps with this comment being on the record, that will assist a couple of people—not the chief executive officers—who think it is not an important thing to do. The chief executive officers are very committed to it. We get some flak from some members of the Northern Territory Public Sector community. That has reduced quite significantly. We need to ensure that people know that anyone who is recruited needs to meet the merit tests and the selection criteria to the required degree. We will continue to work on that.

**Mr COSTA:** I am glad you are saying that, commissioner, because for too long I have seen in some remote communities where you have staff members there where Aboriginal people can be doing those jobs. One of the big things I am pretty keen on—and I am sure the Member for Barkly as also seen this—is section planning in a lot of our places and communities. I am glad of the direction you are going. I am pretty keen to hear the outcomes to it as well.

**Mr YAN:** One final question. It will be the last question for the evening of this week. It is a positive question. It is a very self-serving question as well ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Question 1,625 by my record.

**Mr YAN:** I note that the 2020 Alice Springs Northern Territory Public Sector Aboriginal Employee Forum and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aspirations Program was cancelled due to COVID-19 which is a shame. Do you plan to try to run this in Alice Springs in 2021?

**Mr KIRBY:** Without even looking to my right for acknowledgement I know that we certainly will be looking to run that program in Central Australia in 2021. We understand they were very good programs and they get good engagement and we are looking forward to that opportunity.

**Mr YAN:** I look forward to attending, minister.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes the time we have this evening for our Estimates Committee. Thank you, minister, for attending. Thank you, commissioner, for attending, and to your staff for the hard work that they have done.

**Mr KIRBY:** I thank the commissioner and all of the staff that have done their hard work, and to everybody in the room for all of your hard work. I know that there is a few hours to get through tomorrow as well. I understand how rigorous it is.

I would also like to pay an acknowledgement to the wonderful people from the Corporate Digital Development team who have sat in the room next door. I can guarantee—while most people would be disappointed if they have to come into this room—the people in the Corporate Digital Development team are that professional, they will be disappointed that they did not get the opportunity because they do such fantastic work. We acknowledge them.

I finish off by acknowledging Warren Snowdon in his retirement from federal parliament—a career that harks back to the 1980s—and wish him all the best beyond the next parliamentary cycle. Thank you, Mr Chair.

**Mr CHAIR:** As a quick recap of our four days here, I thank the committee members who have all partaken in our lovely mornings and late evenings.

I quickly say, by my count—and this will not be completely accurate—we have had 1625 questions. The Chief Minister took 11% of the questions; the Health minister 11%; the Education minister 9%; the Deputy Chief Minister 12%; Minister Lawler 14%; Minister Paech 8%; the Attorney-General has topped out at 15% of questions; Minister Worden 11%; and Minister Kirby 8%.

You did have limited hours, minister, so your questions per hour were better than the Chief Minister, the Health minister, the Education minister and the Deputy Chief Minister, but not any of the other ministers. The minister of the best tie—if you check your Twitter accounts you will see that Madura McCormack from the *NT News* has published that.

Thank you, everybody, for your attention and your indulgence in me falling asleep from time to time. The last thank you must go to the DLA staff. Mr Keith and his team are absolutely sensational. We appreciate it no end. We look forward to a shorter day tomorrow, a 9 am start with questions of Power and Water Corporation.

I reiterate the minister's sentiment about Mr Warren Snowdon, a friend of mine, a friend of the family's. Farewell, Warren. Good luck and thank you for your service.

Good evening, everybody.

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The committee suspended.

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