

The committee convened at 8 am.

## MINISTER POTTER'S PORTFOLIOS

### ALCOHOL POLICY VETERANS' AFFAIRS

#### DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

**Madam CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to today's Estimates hearings. I acknowledge that we meet on the land of the Larrakia people and pay my respects to the First Nations elders past, present and emerging.

Minister, I ask you to introduce the officials and then come back to me before an opening statement.

**Mr POTTER:** Madam Chair, thank you for having us here today. On my left is Tom Leeming, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Policy and Reform; David Ah Toy, Acting Senior Executive Director Priorities Delivery Unit; and on my right-hand side Chief Executive Officer DITT, Shaun Drabsch; and Deputy Chief Executive Officer Tourism and Hospitality, Scott Lovett.

**Madam CHAIR:** I invite you to make a brief opening statement, then I will call for questions relating to the statement. The committee then will consider whole-of-government budget and fiscal-related questions before moving on. The shadow minister will have the first call. I understand the Member for Araluen may jump in on that line of questioning. We will then go to other committee members before we move on to outputs.

Do you have an opening statement?

**Mr POTTER:** I will not be making an opening statement.

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

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 relating to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, Alcohol Policy and Veterans' Affairs. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

**Mr MALEY:** Can you outline your government's policy in relation to the PALIs on bottle shops?

**Mr POTTER:** Our policy has not changed; we will continue to keep PALIs on bottle shops.

**Mr MALEY:** How many PALIs are currently on bottle shops?

**Mr POTTER:** I am more than happy to answer that question related to PALIs when we get to the police outputs.

**Mr MALEY:** I am talking about the policy in relation to it. In your policy settings, how many will you put on bottle shops? I want to work out what the policy is. You said that it hasn't changed. I am trying to drill down to what your policy is. Your first answer was not helpful, so I need to ask more questions to try to work out what the policy is in relation to PALIs on bottle shops. To get there I need to ask how many you have now and what is the plan moving forward. These questions are directly related to the policy. I need to get these answers so we can work out what the policy is.

**Mr POTTER:** The policy has not changed; we will continue to keep PALIs on our bottle shops doing point of sale. Point of sale intervention is the policy you referred to. The asset that does the point of sale is the PALI. We can talk about that when we get to police outputs.

**Mr MALEY:** If your policy has not changed why did you take the PALIs away from the bottle shops in Alice Springs?

**Mr POTTER:** PALIs have not been removed from bottle shops. There is still point of sale being conducted in Alice Springs. In fact, there are joint operations with licensing ongoing. I am happy to talk about anything related to PALIs when we get to the police outputs.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the policy about PALIs, you are saying they were never taken away from bottle shops in Alice Springs over the last 12 months—this financial year?

**Mr POTTER:** I am relaying to the Estimates Committee that the position on PALIs has not changed. They will continue to be on our bottle shops.

**Mr MALEY:** Were they taken away over the last 12 months? If so, what was the policy behind that?

**Mr POTTER:** I am more than happy to talk through how we converted 25 PALIs to constables. The policy for keeping PALIs has not changed. There will be PALIs doing point of sale intervention on bottle shops. We will use a mixture of PALIs and constables when available. We can talk about those when we get to Police.

The point-of-sale intervention through PALIs which is the policy—that is the difference we need to be talking to—has not changed.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are discussing Alcohol Policy and Veterans' Affairs. This is the whole-of-agency here. The answers are starting to get repetitive as to the question. I will not intervene at this point, but I am cautioning with the line of questioning. The minister has answered the question and has indicated that he is happy to discuss it under the appropriate portfolio.

**Mr MALEY:** I worry that when we get to the Police portfolio the answer will be, 'You should have asked that under policy' because that seems to be happening a lot here. I want to drill down now to make sure we get the answers.

**Madam CHAIR:** He has been clear. I will make sure that this can be discussed at that output. As will my Deputy Chair, in case something happens to me in the next couple of hours.

**Mr MALEY:** When the PALIs were taken away, how many police worked on the bottle shops during that time?

**Madam CHAIR:** That question is not under this policy area. You should save it for the minister, as Police minister. Are there any other questions for this output of whole-of-government?

**Mr MALEY:** Just to be clear, any questions on PALIs in relation to bottle shops—I have questions regarding Tennant Creek and Katherine—cannot be asked now? Do I need to wait until the Police outputs?

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister has indicated that it would be the best ministerial portfolio to ask those under.

**Mr MALEY:** Minister, can I make sure? If I have questions in relation to PALIs in Tennant Creek should I ask them now or in Police?

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to answer them in the Police output. I more than happy right now to talk through the policy regarding alcohol, as well as trading times and restrictions, because they fall under policy. But anything relating to PALIs doing point of sale intervention needs to be the Police portfolio.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that the same in relation to PALIs in Katherine?

**Madam CHAIR:** Correct.

**Mr POTTER:** Anywhere there is a PALI on a bottle shop, I will answer that under the Police output.

**Mr MALEY:** Okay. I will just make a note of that. We will come back to that.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am happy to pause Member for Nelson so that you can make sure that your notes are in order.

**Mr MALEY:** No, I am fine. What is the amount of money your government will spend on alcohol policy in the next financial year? What did you spend last financial year?

**Mr POTTER:** The budget going into 2024–25 is \$17.01m. It will go to the overall strategic policy coordination engagement unit. I will hand over to the deputy chief executive officer to talk through the licensing component.

**Mr LEEMING:** Regarding the total expenditure by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet on alcohol policy coordination, the \$17m the minister referred to is the total budget for the Strategic Policy Coordination Engagement output of which alcohol policy coordination is one task or role of the broader Strategic Policy Coordination Engagement output.

**Mr MALEY:** I want drill down to how much money is on alcohol policy. Are you saying that \$17m is for the whole unit? You just said alcohol policy is one part of that. In your answer, can you focus on ...?

**Mr LEEMING:** The Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet's expenditure on alcohol policy coordination is predominantly related to the cost of liquor licence buybacks. That information is commercial-in-confidence. Employee-related expenditure has not been calculated yet. It is one of several core roles of the priorities delivery unit rather than a separate work unit. The priorities delivery unit, overall, has 4.6 FTEs but those employees have a range of tasks and roles, only one of which is alcohol policy coordination.

**Mr MALEY:** You cannot tell the committee how much money is spent on alcohol policy because it is a small bit, but you have 4.6 FTEs and only one person works on Alcohol Policy?

**Mr POTTER:** I will hand to Chief Executive Shaun Drabsch from DITT to give you the licensing component. Alcohol Policy is with the Chief Minister and Cabinet, but the licensing component of alcohol sits with DITT.

**Mr MALEY:** Before we get onto that, in your policy unit you have 4.6 full-time employees, but only one person works full-time in Alcohol Policy; is that correct?

**Mr LEEMING:** The broader Priorities Delivery Unit has 4.6 FTEs, but not one of those FTEs works full-time on alcohol policy coordination at any one time. All five people in the Priorities Delivery Unit might be working on alcohol policy and at other times they might not be. There is not one dedicated resource which works on alcohol policy coordination; there are the five headcount people in the Priorities Delivery Unit all of whom have a role in alcohol policy coordination, but none of whom work full-time on alcohol policy coordination.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give us an estimate of those five people working in that unit, a breakdown, of the percentage they spend on alcohol policy? What time do they spend on alcohol policy?

**Mr POTTER:** As has been articulated by the public servants, the 4.6 FTE is broken up across multiple priority areas. As the minister, I set the priorities on how much work they will do in those spaces or the requirements with the Commonwealth Government. To ask them to give you a hypothetical on the percentages of that work rate is unreasonable.

**Mr MALEY:** I will not talk about hypotheticals. Last year how much time was worked on alcohol policy?

**Mr LEEMING:** I would estimate for the year to 31 March, in the reporting period, of those 4.6 FTEs plus a portion of my time spent on alcohol policy coordination, approximately two FTEs' worth of time.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that full-time?

**Mr LEEMING:** Yes, across a range of people a total of two FTEs' worth of time would be spent on alcohol policy coordination by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

**Mr DRABSCH:** Licensing NT sits within my Tourism and Hospitality division of which Scott Lovett is the deputy CEO. While there is a team which works in DCM on alcohol policy, they work closely in collaboration with the Licensing NT team who operationalise and implement alcohol policy.

In terms of our licensing activities we have a budget of \$43.67m this year and an FTE of 62. That includes the Licensing NT ...

**Mr MALEY:** Could I ...

**Madam CHAIR:** We have a long day ahead of us, if you could allow the chief executive to finish answering. You know I will come back to you for any comments or questions.

**Mr MALEY:** The reason why I am jumping in is that I have questions later on the operation. We are talking about policy, but the minister has jumped to the operational side of it. I do not want to talk about that yet.

**Madam CHAIR:** Have some respect to let Mr Drabsch to finish and then you can continue your line of questioning, noting that we will come to licensing after.

**Mr MALEY:** I am noting the time.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have a long time to go, so do not worry about the time.

**Mr MALEY:** The time goes quickly and I do not want to talk about stuff when I have other questions on that. We are talking about Alcohol Policy and I want to make sure we drill down on what the policy is.

**Madam CHAIR:** Let Mr Drabsch finish and not waste our time discussing between ourselves as committee members.

**Mr DRABSCH:** I clarify that the work that we do across government in Alcohol Policy is strongly supported by the Licensing NT team and the Director of Liquor Licensing. We work in close collaboration as we seek to implement that policy. That is a better understanding of the scale and scope of resources we apply to the Alcohol Policy activity.

**Mr MALEY:** Crime has been a major issue right across the Northern Territory. How much has that affected your decision-making in relation to alcohol policy?

**Mr POTTER:** Hugely. A bunch of reforms have been done by our government in relation to combating alcohol harm. As of 1 July we brought in the legitimate reasons clause across the Top End, which has expanded, and we will talk about it later; the use of the BDR has expanded, which has been quite successful with police; and the rollout of OC spray at bottle shops. We will continue to do more. Enforcement and licensing is one large component of that. The policy framework is in place, and we work with the feds in that respect.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give us a breakdown in the last financial year of what the cost of crime was in relation To Alcohol Policy?

**Mr POTTER:** That question does not relate specifically to alcohol policy. I can tell you that we spent over \$1.2bn a year dealing with crime and antisocial behaviour, of which alcohol is a large contributing factor. Yesterday we heard about the incidents of domestic, family and sexual violence and that alcohol is a large contributing factor of that. It is exactly the reason we have rolled out legitimate reasons clause in Darwin to make it harder for people to access alcohol. We have expanded the use of the Banned Drinker Register to include seven-day banned drinker orders for drinking in public in prohibited places, but also increased the pathways for people to be put on the Banned Drinker Register.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you not give us a breakdown of how much the cost of crime has on Alcohol Policy? You said that it was \$1.2bn for a whole range of things but can you not give the committee any more of a breakdown on that in relation to the cost of crime on alcohol policy?

**Mr POTTER:** Alcohol policy, as you have clearly heard, the cost in FTEs being 4.6 for the overall policy and an estimation of two people in the last financial year. You have heard the numbers that are placed into the department of Innovation, Tourism and Technology's licensing team for compliance, but our government spent a significant amount of money on addressing these issues, and we will not stop doing that. The \$1.2bn—we will get to it shortly—increase in police budget goes a long way to addressing that.

**Mr MALEY:** I am still trying to drill down to the actual cost of crime on Alcohol Policy because crime has escalated through the roof over the last eight years. I am trying to work out what the cost of that is on our budget, because if we are spending money dealing with the cost of crime issues it could be spent on other issues like education and health. How much money has the government spent on crime? We have asked this question over a range of topics, but I am trying to drill down on Alcohol Policy, in fixing the problems over the last eight years, how much have you spent for the last financial year? If you can, how much are you planning on doing it next year?

**Mr POTTER:** We spent \$1.2bn across multiple agencies to address crime, and there is a \$17m budget alone in the Alcohol Policy Unit. If you would like to use those figures that is a good start to understand what the Territory government is spending to address crime. No-one has shied away from the fact that alcohol is the main contributor to the crime in the Northern Territory.

**Mr MALEY:** You are saying that you are spending \$17.1m fixing the crime crisis across the Northern Territory on alcohol policy?

**Mr POTTER:** Member for Nelson, you verbalise me, I said we spent over \$1.2bn in the current budget going into 2024–25 to address crime, of which the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the priority policy unit has a \$17m budget to deal with alcohol policy.

**Mr MALEY:** How much does crime cost you in relation to time and effort spent in Alcohol Policy because the crime rate is so high across the Northern Territory?

**Mr POTTER:** I have just answered that question the same way three times.

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister indicated he has answered the question. Do you have any further questions?

**Mr MALEY:** I want to clarify, is \$17.1m is the cost of crime on Alcohol Policy?

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, the minister just mentioned you verbalised him. Alcohol is a huge contributor to crime in the Territory, and having strong policies can stop that crime from happening. He has indicated ...

**Mr MALEY:** Can the minister answer the question, because ultimately ...

**Madam CHAIR:** He has answered the question about four times.

**Mr MALEY:** He has not answered the question; he has given us figures of \$1.2bn and \$17.1m on cost of crime across all agencies. I want to know, the committee wants to know and Territorians, more importantly, want to know. Crime has gone through the roof over the last eight years. It just so happens that you have been in government for the last eight years. What is the cost of crime? If you are spending all this money fixing the crime issue that has occurred on your watch, what could you have done with that money in relation to health and education and police because crime has gone through the roof? How much money are you wasting dealing with the problem that you caused?

**Madam CHAIR:** That is not a question for this area, but minister I will allow you to respond. Then, Member for Nelson, would you like to move on with your line of questioning? I know that the Member for Araluen has a lot of questions that she wants to ask.

**Mr POTTER:** The Member for Nelson answered his question: it is \$1.2bn as the whole of government on fighting crime and dealing with the causes of crime. That is separate to the Health budget, but you specifically asked for the Chief Minister department. The Alcohol Policy area is \$17m of the \$1.2bn spent on dealing with crime.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the three-year review of the *Liquor Act* can you confirm that Alcohol Policy is an important part of your policies moving forward?

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not sure how the three-year review and moving forward relate, but, minister, you can answer the question.

**Mr POTTER:** The three-year liquor review sits under the Chief Minister's portfolio, but it is a staple of Alcohol Policy going forward. We made changes to the legislation in the last term of sittings in relation to the three-year liquor review.

**Mr MALEY:** If it is such an important issue and it is meant to be a three-year review why did it take four years?

**Mr POTTER:** Good consultation and making sure we get it right.

**Mr MALEY:** Alcohol is such a major issue—you said you spent \$1.2bn on crime and alcohol and \$17m—yet you delayed a report, which is helping move forward and make policy decisions, for one year. In one year there has been lots of victims of crime, lots of abuse and lots of people hurt through alcohol. One year has put those people in the situation where they have been abused, hurt or killed. Why would you let that happen?

**Mr POTTER:** I think I answered that question. You want to make sure you get this policy right and not rush it through. We are comfortable that we have done it.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you say to Territorians that a one-year delay is okay and those victims of crime can just suffer?

**Mr POTTER:** No, that would be your commentary for the record, Member for Nelson. The point I am making is that while we were doing the review there were many other reforms that we were doing; for example, the seven-day banned drinker order rollout that we did, the increase to police, we changed bail around the use of a weapon. There are plenty of other measures that we have done to deal with crime. In relation to Alcohol Policy we have taken the time and diligence required to make sure we get it right.

**Mr MALEY:** Have you adopted all the recommendations in relation to the liquor review?

**Mr POTTER:** This was an area the Chief Minister has responsibility for and that question is best directed to her.

**Mr MALEY:** I am trying to get back to the policy side, which is what you are the minister for. You are the Minister for Alcohol Policy. This is a review that deals with Alcohol Policy. In relation to your ministerial responsibilities have you adopted the recommendations that relate to you?

**Mr POTTER:** You were in the Chamber the other day when I passed legislation related to some of those recommendations. There are more recommendations to be implemented in the next term of government, but I hand over to Tom to talk you further through Alcohol Policy.

**Mr LEEMING:** The three-review commenced at the end of 2022, just a month or so after the third anniversary of the *Liquor Act 2019*. The review took about 10 months of consultation and submissions and detailed discussions with NT Government agencies, stakeholders and community groups. The final report was tabled, I understand, in the October 2023 sittings.

As a result of that extensive consultation process after the review commenced on the three-year mark, the final report found that overall the policy objectives of the act were valid but there were some improvements identified to the legislative framework, including some potential amendments identified through the report.

The first tranche of those changes were in the amendments to the act that the minister referred to in the March 2024 sittings. The first tranche related to the establishment of ex officio liquor inspectors, increased penalties for the re-entry of those removed from licensed premises and some clarifications around producers' authority in specific instances.

Work continues across the NT public sector in defining the second tranche of amendments with our colleagues and friends at the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. We are working on exactly what that second tranche of reforms coming from the three-year review of the *Liquor Act* look like. Those are our plans for the next term of government and what happens then. The preparation work will be done so that amendments recommended in the three-year review can be picked up and progressed.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell us what the cost of preparing that report was?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, you are always welcome to take it on notice; it is probably a retrospective question. Any information would be appreciated by the committee.

**Mr POTTER:** That is fine, Chair. That costing for the report was in the previous financial year. In relation to the external costs, I will have to take that on notice if that is what you are asking. In terms of the FTE cost within the agency, that is an assumed cost to the baseline FTE.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.1

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please tell the committee what the cost of preparing the three-year *Liquor Act* review was?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Not in its current form. To clarify, I said that I am happy to do external costs, so any reviews done by external agencies to fund that, but with internal, it is a sum cost of the FTE that we already pay for.

**Mr MALEY:** I will change the question to the external costs.

**Mr POTTER:** I accept the question.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.1.

**Mr MALEY:** We are on the opening statement still. Some of my questions can relate to the opening statement or policy coordination engagement—for example, secondary supply and minimum floor price. If you are willing to take those questions in that output, I am happy to move on.

**Madam CHAIR:** You are happy to move on to Output Group 1.0?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, do you have any questions on whole-of-government budget and fiscal about Alcohol Policy and Veterans' Affairs?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No. I will wait for the output group.

**Madam CHAIR:** You took me by surprise, Member for Nelson. That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – ADVICE AND COORDINATION** **Output 1.1 – Strategic Policy Coordination and Engagement**

**Madam CHAIR:** We will now move on to Output Group 1.0, Advice and Coordination, Output 1.1, Strategic Policy Coordination and Engagement. Are there any questions?

**Mr MALEY:** I want to move on to some questions about the minimum floor price. How do you measure the success of the minimum floor price?

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**Mr POTTER:** Measuring success in alcohol is not just one in relation to minimum floor price as an example; there is a bunch of harm indicators that the Department of Health, police, Chief Minister's and licensing use to determine harm reduction. I am happy to get through those if you so choose.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes, please. We want to work out the KPIs and how you measure the success of the minimum floor price.

**Mr POTTER:** I will hand to Tom Leeming in a second. As an example, one of those may be the per capita consumption rates of litres per person in the Territory. We have seen a steady decline in that. In 2022, it was 11.5 compared with the year before in 2021 being 12.28. I am happy to hand over to Tom now.

**Mr LEEMING:** There is a range of ways in which the impact of various alcohol policy reforms are monitored and evaluated, including but not limited to the minimum floor price.

The first one is we have an alcohol data monitoring group which is chaired by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, with a range of government and non-government stakeholders involved in the alcohol data monitoring group. They look quarterly at various alcohol harm indicators across the NT and assess and analyse, where possible, the impact of the various range of policy initiatives that are in place to manage alcohol-related harm.

That group meets quarterly and discusses the data which is published on a quarterly basis on the alcohol policy website of the NT Government. There are quarterly updates provided on all the main agreed indicators of alcohol-related harm the minister referred to. That is all on that website. Regarding the minimum unit price specifically, there has been evaluation of that.

**Mr MALEY:** When was that done?

**Mr LEEMING:** It was finalised in July 2022 and is also published on the website. All of this is done with stakeholders through coordination groups and, for transparency, published on the website. That is available on the Alcohol Policy website. If you google 'alcohol policy', all this data and evaluation reports are available there.

**Mr MALEY:** The last review relating to the minimum floor price was completed in July 2022?

**Mr LEEMING:** The last evaluation—to be specific with my language—was done in July 2022. Reviewing and looking at data is an ongoing process which occurs through the alcohol data monitoring group who are, on a quarterly basis, meeting to discuss the indicators of alcohol-related harm, the trends and what that means for the impact of various policy settings in alcohol policy.

**Mr MALEY:** Is the minimum floor price based on these quarterly meetings moving forward restricting the sale of alcohol, like standard drinks?

**Madam CHAIR:** Are you planning on scrapping it?

**Mr MALEY:** Are you?

**Madam CHAIR:** Are you?

**Mr MALEY:** I am asking.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Chair, please.

**Mr POTTER:** No, we are not planning on scrapping it. It is a continuation of policy. We will continue to work on the BDR, police ex officios, OC spray etc cetera. There is not a policy change on the minimum floor price.

**Mr MALEY:** I am going back to measuring the success of it. We had an evaluation in July 2022, and you said there is ongoing review and quarterly meetings. When was the last time that review committee met?

**Mr LEEMING:** I understand the last meeting was in the last month, but I do not have the date.

**Madam CHAIR:** It sounds like they meet quite regularly. Do you want—are you comfortable? You trust them?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

In that review in relation to restricting alcohol, how does it restrict the sale of alcohol per standard drinks?

**Mr POTTER:** One measure is increasing the cost burden for those who intend to consume high volumes and quantities of alcohol.

**Mr MALEY:** How is the policy monitored?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think we have been talking about that for the last 10 minutes.

**Mr MALEY:** We are talking about a review; they meet every quarter, but we have not actually worked out how they monitor the success of it. I am trying to work out the KPIs in relation to if this works or does not work. That is what I am trying to get to.

**Mr LEEMING:** All the major alcohol policy reform initiatives, including specifically unit price, when they are first designed and implemented, there is an evaluation plan developed, including a program logic which specifies the various indicators which will be tracked to assess the impact of that policy initiative and other policy initiatives. The evaluation released in 2022 includes analysis of those indicators and the extent to which that policy initiative has impacted KPIs, recognising that in a complex policy space like alcohol policy, there are many different things that impact some indicators—being specific about which policy initiative impacts which outcome indicator can be a complex task, which is why we need to go to the depth of doing a full-scale evaluation like we did with the minimum unit price.

**Mr MALEY:** In 2022?

**Mr LEEMING:** That was the last one for the minimum unit price, yes.

**Mr MALEY:** When is the next planned evaluation for that?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you have a formal date set?



**Mr POTTER:** There is not a specific date set, but the review is quite in depth. I will hand over to Tom to talk about some of those recommendations from that review.

**Mr LEEMING:** There is no specific date for a follow-up evaluation of the minimum unit price. In terms of the high-level findings of that evaluation. It is a long report, but I can provide the findings, which are available on the website.

The key findings were:

- a reduction in alcohol-related harm resulting in the minimum unit price
- a reduction in the supply of low-cost high alcohol products such as cask wine
- no evidence to suggest the minimum unit price had any negative impacts on industry, tourism or the NT economy
- declines in alcohol-related harm occurred across a range of areas since 2018, including a 19.4% reduction per capita related to emergency department presentations.

The evaluation met a number of recommendations to improve the policy and further reduce alcohol-related harm.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you have any follow-up questions, Member for Nelson?

**Mr MALEY:** No, but my colleagues do.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The liquor review states, on page 22, that drinkers have shifted to other products. Why are you continuing with this policy?

**Mr POTTER:** Are you asking why we are continuing the policy on minimum unit price or BDR?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The minimum floor price.

**Mr POTTER:** Because it is one of many policies and tools that we use to reduce access to alcohol for those who intend to cause themselves harm. There has been an escalation since the COVID pandemic with early access to superannuation and hardship payments, and arguably the secondary supply market is taking people to spirits. We still need to have a minimum floor price to address those easily accessible low-cost substances.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The review also found the minimum floor price rules are confusing. What are you doing about this recommendation?

**Mr POTTER:** They are not confusing for the department and myself as the minister. We will continue to keep the minimum floor price.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, do you have a question?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes. I cannot remember if you were around in 2022–23 when the Stronger Futures legislation expired? Where you a member of parliament?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You remember the carnage that it caused, particularly throughout Central Australia?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes, I remember the effects of the removal of Stronger Futures.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You are potentially embarking on a two-year project to open the rivers of grog again. I think you were looking at 35 Aboriginal communities which have put their hand up to develop community alcohol plans. How much have you allocated to this piece of work?

**Mr POTTER:** I am not seeking to create a Stronger Futures river of grog as you articulated. My position is clear, and I heard you on the radio last night ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I heard you, too.

**Mr POTTER:** Yes, you got me; correct—ABC radio. The point I make is that at some point we need communities to learn to live with alcohol, and the best form of that is community-informed consent of how to do that.

People are coming from outstations into Alice Springs to access alcohol which is manifesting in antisocial behaviour within public places. I am not intending, as you put it, to reopen rivers of grog but to work with community members on what alcohol outcomes they seek. For example, community clubs with wraparound services which is potentially linked to school attendance, health outcomes and employment. We need to have those discussions now and nothing will be rushed.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** How much are you allocating towards this work? Is it over two years?

**Mr POTTER:** Correct, it is federal funding.

**Mr LEEMING:** In terms of the funding through the Community-led Alcohol Harm Reduction agreement, which is an agreement with the Commonwealth Government for \$8.1708m over two years, that agreement is about—as the title suggests—alcohol harm reduction in various forms. Community alcohol plans are a key vehicle for communities to work with stakeholders. They are coordinated by the Department of Health, where communities need support to articulate their aspirations and needs to reduce alcohol harm in their community in various forms and through various means of support and statutory instruments.

The funding breakdown is:

- \$250,000 for a data portal
- \$400,000 for a communications plan
- \$612,000 to support communities' legal expenses where they require legal advice
- \$1,734,000 for community-led consultations to develop community alcohol plans
- \$5,174,800 to support community-led solutions, so effectively to implement the initiatives and solutions that communities identified that they want to implement in their community to reduce alcohol-related harm.

There is almost \$5.2m in that funding agreement to back communities to help them implement the things they want to do to reduce alcohol-related harm.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Given what happened in 2022–23, particularly in Central Australia when the rivers of grog flowed freely for seven horrific months, is there planning regarding alcohol policy to ensure that you have enough liquor inspectors in those remote communities to ensure compliance?

I asked the minister for domestic violence prevention about her input in terms of women's shelters and domestic violence services to deal with the inevitable carnage that will occur because of the relationship between alcohol and violence.

What else are you doing? We cannot ask anything about police because that is in approximately 60 minutes' time. What other work are you doing to prepare for the very high potential of carnage to flow from this ideological position that your government has taken? Keep in mind that the Prime Minister called you out in January 2023 when he came to Alice Springs, saying that it was an ideological problem for this government, and he told you to effectively wake up to yourselves.

**Mr POTTER:** In terms of how those CAPs will be assessed and what services are in place, they will be individually based in every community. I heard you talk yesterday about my commentary regarding police in every community. We are not able to have a police officer in every community.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** We cannot talk about police yet.

**Mr POTTER:** The point I am making—we will talk about it when we get to police—is that every individual community will develop its CAP in relation to the circumstantial environment within that community. They will be assessed against that. Domestic, family and sexual violence will be a consideration, as will the Department of Health.

When we talk about ideology, it is the position of this government that we see it as a health response to dealing with alcohol and substance abuse, not a punitive, criminal one. Therefore, the response needs to be led by Health.

We have gone to private consultants to lead the development of the CAPs and the consultation. That is good policy because previously it was the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and other agencies working with those communities to develop the community alcohol plans and then they were the ones assessing their own homework.

We have now separated that. We have a separation of powers, for lack of a better term. As an example, Barunga has done one. I do not know where that is at in terms of its progression, but it was very well done with the consultant they used there. It has gone through to the department to be considered. That is the process we should be taking forward—individual outcomes for individual communities so that everyone can learn to live with alcohol and normalise it.

I will hand over to Tom Leeming to talk about how we will go through the assessment and to set the conditions. Arguably that will be a bit hypothetical, noting that we are not talking about a specific community.

**Mr LEEMING:** Community alcohol plans can be about anything a community sees as aspirational or the means for achieving its aspiration in terms of reducing alcohol-related harm. A community alcohol plan does not necessarily talk about revoking interim alcohol protected areas status, it can talk about...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** But most probably will, will they not? Why bother if...

**Madam CHAIR:** Can an alcohol plan allow takeaway but not have an outlet in that community?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Why bother if you do not want the grog turned on?

**Mr LEEMING:** The short answer to that is because there is a \$5.2m bucket of money from the Commonwealth Government that the community can access to support other initiatives other than allowing access to alcohol to reduce alcohol-related harm in its community. The vehicle to have access to that fund is the community alcohol plan.

There may be reasons other than revocation of an interim protected area to do a community alcohol plan because that is also the vehicle you can have to receive funding for your community for other forms of alcohol-related harm like investing in some infrastructure or some program delivery in the community.

**Madam CHAIR:** If a community was near another town, and they were having an awful problem with people drink driving, for example, could you use this program for them to get support to do something in that community? It does not necessarily have to be a takeaway liquor licence?

**Mr LEEMING:** Yes. The community alcohol is there for a community to define whatever it wants to do relation to reducing alcohol related harm. The scenario you paint is a realistic one. Also, revoking interim alcohol protected areas is a status, so the community alcohol plan...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I was not born yesterday. Most of this will be about turning on the grog. It is a bit of a furphy to say that in most cases it will not be about turning on the grog, if that is what you are implying, Mr Leeming.

I know that you are a bureaucrat and you are probably just trying to do what the minister wants you to do.

**Madam CHAIR:** Let us refrain from the commentary. Minister, would you like to respond?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You just gave commentary, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes but your commentary is not really appropriate.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** My commentary is more offensive than yours?

**Madam CHAIR:** You are calling people bureaucrats and it sounded derogatory. Minister, would you like to respond?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I certainly did not mean it to be derogatory, Madam Chair, and I do not need your subtext to everything I say and do in this context.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, you can respond or I know that the shadows are sitting very patiently.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You have a conflict of interest here, Madam Chair. You should not even be in the Chair. You were the Minister for Alcohol policy six months ago. You should be stepping down and walking out that room if you had some integrity, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for your commentary, Member for Araluen.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** But it is true.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Nelson.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes, I have some questions. Since we are talking about alcohol management plans I might go to those questions because I have more questions about ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Is that under this output, Minister?

**Mr MALEY:** Still under the same output, yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** No. I am just checking.

**Mr POTTER:** I am sorry, I was not paying attention.

**Madam CHAIR:** Please pay attention. We are an important committee, and we would appreciate it.

Member for Nelson, rephrase your question.

**Mr MALEY:** We were talking about the minimum floor price, but I would like to go to alcohol management plans whilst we are on that. I think you mentioned there being \$5m of commonwealth funding. How much of that is being spent in relation to developing alcohol management plans? Was it more than \$5m?

**Mr POTTER:** No. There is \$5m for the execution of approved caps for those communities and whatever activities came out from that. I will hand over to Tom as he had some fine clarifying remarks related to the Member for Araluen that will lead exactly to your question.

**Mr MALEY:** My question is how much money is being spent on developing alcohol management plans?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I did not mean to be disrespectful. A bureaucrat is not a disrespectful word and I take exception to that.

Mr Leeming, I did not mean to be disrespectful by calling you a bureaucrat. Maybe I am old fashioned but that is what they used to be called.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, we appreciate your reflection and your clarification.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Thank you for appreciating that.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes. Tom seems happy; he is smiling so we will go to the question before us.

**Mr LEEMING:** I am a long-term bureaucrat, Member for Araluen.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** May it is you who has the problem, Madam Chair.

**Mr LEEMING:** I apologise for my framing earlier. I wanted to make it clear that the community alcohol plans are not necessarily just about the opt out.

Getting on to the point about opt out, the community alcohol plans can be, and often will be, used as one element of the process for opting out of being an interim alcohol protected area. There are two ways that can happen, both of which require a community alcohol plan.

The first is that the interim alcohol protected area is revoked by the Director of Liquor Licensing and all restrictions removed. The second one is a general restricted area for the community is declared by the Liquor Commission and the community can then apply to manage access, whether it is through a community club or a permit system.

There are two routes of doing it. The revocation through the Director of Liquor Licensing comes under the amended legislation with several criteria, not just the community alcohol plan. The criteria are that the community must have a satisfactory community alcohol plan; at least 60% of adults who reside in the area have to support the community alcohol plan; the application has to have the signed consent of the registered owners of the land; and the Director of Liquor Licensing must be satisfied that, based on the information provided, the revocation of the interim APA is in the public interest and will not have significant adverse impacts on the community.

There are four tests there, of which the community alcohol plan is only one. The four tests have to be passed for revocation of the interim APA to be granted.

**Mr POTTER:** Sorry, we still have to answer the question asked.

**Mr MALEY:** It is about funding ...

**Madam CHAIR:** The \$5m.

**Mr POTTER:** I will let Tom get to those numbers. To clarify on both points, there are significant checks and balances in place for a community to move from an APA and go through to the CAPs. As you heard, it is an overwhelming 60% support. I note the comments made yesterday. This will not just be a cessation and they go forward; there is a significant body of work that must be met and approved before we go anywhere.

**Madam CHAIR:** Did you want to follow up, Member for Araluen?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will now respond to the Member for Nelson's questions about the breakdown of the cost.

**Mr LEEMING:** To clarify a couple of things; these are our community alcohol plans. The language of an alcohol plan is old Stronger Futures language. We now talk about community alcohol plans. The \$5.2m is for the solutions that are identified in community alcohol plans. There is \$1.7m to provide external support to community-led consultations to develop a community alcohol plan. That is in the agreement with the Commonwealth. There is then \$5.2m to implement those once they are developed.

The \$1.7m to support community-led consultations is the options the communities have to use external support. The Department of Health is also there, and has eight FTEs who work continuously with communities, and have worked on alcohol action initiatives in the past for many years. The \$1.7m we get from the Commonwealth under a two-year agreement is not the only way in which a community is supported to think about how it wants to reduce alcohol-related harm in its community. There are permanent staff in the Department of Health who have done, and continue to do, that work.

To date, because the Commonwealth funding agreement was only signed in November, none of that \$1.7m for external consultants to support communities has been spent as yet. Because that is a new thing the contract and tendering for that is ongoing. However, that does not mean the communities have not been supported to develop community alcohol plans because that work is ongoing and is part of the Department of Health's ongoing work.

**Mr MALEY:** Was the \$1.7m allocated two years ago?

**Madam CHAIR:** No, he just said it was signed in November.

**Mr POTTER:** It has just been signed.

**Mr MALEY:** In November. Has none of that been spent yet?

**Madam CHAIR:** Correct.

**Mr MALEY:** Will that money be used to engage consultants or external providers to help develop the community alcohol management plans?

**Mr POTTER:** This line of discussion was triggered because of the EOI process that was released in relation to having a standing panel of consultants to do that work. The panellists have not been selected yet.

**Mr MALEY:** These questions come under Output 1.1. We are talking about Alcohol Policy and this is Alcohol Policy. That is where this line of questioning is coming from.

**Mr POTTER:** I am agreeing, but I am making the point that we do not know who the consultants are yet, and the panel is still being selected.

**Mr MALEY:** In 2017 the Riley report recommended that there should be consultation with the community, way back then. That was six-and-a-half years ago. What has been done in relation to the Riley report?

Stronger Futures came into play and there was no work done in relation to those alcohol management plans, and then that created six or so months of rivers of grog in Alice Springs. Why did it get to that situation? Why did you not start work on the alcohol management plans in 2017? Considering there is \$1.7m which has not even been spent now, why has it taken so long?

Why did you allow this situation to get to where it was when the rivers of grog flowed into Alice Springs, with harm all over the place? The Prime Minister had to come to the Northern Territory to tell you how to do your job. Why did it get that way? What work has been done over the last six-and-a-half years?

**Madam CHAIR:** That was a lot of commentary, so I will allow commentary from the minister. I will then come back to you, Member for Nelson, but let us not interrupt each other.

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify and correct the record, because they are your words not mine, work has been ongoing since 2017. There are eight FTE that have been allocated to work through the Department of Health, Chief Minister and others to get the old alcohol management plans you referred to, which are now called CAPs. To say that work has not been occurring is incorrect and untrue, so I have set the record straight. However, to expedite this process so that we have plans in place come 28 February 2027, we have engaged—there is a standing panel that will be engaged—to work through the community alcohol management plans. That expression of interest is currently open. To set the record straight, work has been occurring since 2017.

**Mr MALEY:** How many community alcohol management plans are in place now?

**Mr POTTER:** Before I hand to Tom and the others, the next line of questioning that I will answer—what is to be your next question—is that a lot of those alcohol management plans sat stagnant with the previous Commonwealth Government, hence why we find ourselves in this position.

**Mr LEEMING:** Where we are at the moment is continuing the transition from the old world of Stronger Futures to the new world. The old world was alcohol management plans and the new world is community alcohol plans.

**Mr MALEY:** You have changed the name.

**Madam CHAIR:** AMPs to CAPs—very bureaucratic.

**Mr MALEY:** I fully accept there has been a name change, but how many CAPs are in place now?

**Mr LEEMING:** There are 102 communities that have expressed interest and are talking to the NT Health harm minimisation unit in developing a community alcohol plan. Of the 102 expressions of interest, NT Health through the eight FTE, is working with 35 communities and outstations to progress developing a plan. Of those 35, four are in the process of the last stages of finalising and lodging their plans.

**Mr MALEY:** The answer to my question is that there are no CAPs in place at the moment. You spoke about over the last six years eight full-time staff have been working. There have been 102 expressions of interest, 35 have been working to develop a plan and there are four in the final stages. Over the six years no plans have been put in place, whether you call them alcohol management plans or CAPs. There are none in placed now. Over six years there has been no result; is that correct?

**Mr POTTER:** It is worth clarifying for the record that under the old alcohol management plans there were 35 that were engaged to get an alcohol management plan. Fourteen were submitted to the previous Commonwealth Government that were never progressed. I am not shirking responsibility to the federal government, because arguably at that point you never advocated for the 14 ...

**Mr MALEY:** It is your responsibility.

**Mr POTTER:** I am not shirking the responsibility of what my portfolios are, but 14 were submitted to the federal government to progress them and they went nowhere. Only one, at Titjikala, was approved during that period of time.

We have subsequently moved to community alcohol plans. We are working through those now. There are 103 that have mentioned interest. We are actively working with 35 communities and four communities and outstations are yet to finalise.

We can talk about what has happened under a previous Commonwealth Government, which I have no control over, or we can talk about what we are doing now to address to looming deadline in 2027, which is expediting those community alcohol management plans through a standing panel of consultants which then frees up Health, Chief Minister and Cabinet, Licensing and others to assess those community alcohol management plans.

**Mr MALEY:** To answer my question, are there no community alcohol plans in place at present?

**Mr POTTER:** In terms of CAPs, there are none.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Does this project, community alcohol plans, include town camps?

**Mr POTTER:** It can include town camps if they come to the table.

**Mr MALEY:** You said there are four in the final stages. When do you expect those to be completed, considering you have had six years? Is it the next day, next month, next year?

**Mr POTTER:** It is best to ask the Department of Health that question as it leads that engagement and when that will come through.

Of the four that are remaining, it will be at the discretion and, arguably the timeframe of that community on their journey in accessing or potentially getting an approved CAP.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do they have to meet the requirements that Tom said before?

**Mr MALEY:** The CAPs is one part of the requirement of the four.

**Madam CHAIR:** The CAPs is the end result.

**Mr MALEY:** No. It is not.

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee is confused.

**Mr MALEY:** Removing the interim liquor restriction is the end result. The CAPs is one part of the four tests that need to happen to be able to remove that interim order which is the old restricted area.

**Madam CHAIR:** You are saying that to get the equivalent of an AMP they have to agree to it.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes. And you have to do the 60% support, have signed consent and you have to have a CAPs. We are focusing on CAPs here which is only one of the four to be able to lift those restricted areas to be able to opt in or opt out, whatever they might want to do. We have none of those yet.

We have had six years working on it and there are none. It does include town camps. Nothing has happened.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I will allow you to respond to the statement.

**Mr MALEY:** I can rephrase it to a question.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is okay. The minister got what you were saying.

**Mr POTTER:** Just to correct the record, the information provided is incorrect, as 16 February 2023 is the date the CAPs model commenced. It has only been over 12 months. We have four that are close to lodgement. What you are referring to prior to February 2023 is the old model of alcohol management plans and 34 that sat with the previous federal government that arguably did nothing with them.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** With the possibility of the grog being turned on in town camps, for example in Alice Springs, you would know that the 15 town camps in Alice Springs do not sit in isolation. They are not remote communities. They are part of a broader community called Mparntwe—Alice Springs. With the potential turning on of grog in those town camps, which are notorious for crime, antisocial behaviour and domestic violence, will the broader community of Alice Springs have any say in the matter? The broader community of Alice Springs, no matter what side of politics they are from, will not be in favour of this.

**Mr POTTER:** I have been very clear in my public commentary in relating to town camps and takeaway alcohol. My personal opinion is that, first and foremost, we should be looking at those outstation communities to access community clubs. Right now the town camps have a line of access to alcohol through licensed venues, which is the safer mechanism to access alcohol.

First and foremost, and from a personal position as the minister with the portfolio, takeaway is not the first thing we should be looking at. There would need to be some very strong measures in place in Alice Springs holistically for that to be considered.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Of the four close to lodgement, please tell me if they include any Alice Springs town camps?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, can you provide a breakdown of the four for the member? You can take it on notice if you wish.

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot give you the specific camps or locations.

**Madam CHAIR:** Would you like to take it on notice?

**Mr POTTER:** No, thank you. The two we are working with now are in Central Australia, and they are not town camps.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** With the town camp community alcohol plans, will applications come as a whole from all the town camps to potentially lift the grog, or will they be individual town camps. The government has a local decision-making agreement with Tangentyere Council which runs the town camps. Will Tangentyere speak on behalf of all town camps or each town camp individually?

**Mr POTTER:** It will be up to the individual community. However, there will be consultation for things like town camps and Tangentyere and consideration about the surrounding town camps and the impact of one having takeaway alcohol—if that happened—and how that would impact the wider town camp community. Until there is a camp which comes to us to work through the CAPs process, my commentary would be hypothetical, but the intent would be to look at it holistically because the area is intertwined.

**Mr MALEY:** You said earlier that four are in the final stages and that I should direct my questions to Health to find out when they would be completed. When was the last time you spoke to the Health department about the final stages of the alcohol camp CAPs.

**Mr POTTER:** It was during Estimates preparation.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is your response that you speak regularly with Health?

**Mr POTTER:** No. My response was the last time we did Estimates preparation, which was last week. That was the most recent time we spoke.

**Mr MALEY:** As at last week, they could not tell you when the four will be ready to go?

**Mr POTTER:** It is not whether they could tell me; it is whether I have the consent of the community to tell you their time line. It is the same reason I cannot tell you which communities are working through it, as it is confidential. They will get there in their own time and space.



**Mr POTTER:** When was the last time you spoke to your federal counterparts about this?

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not sure it is about the budget, but I will allow it. We are going on a line of questioning which is probably not before us.

**Mr POTTER:** I will need to come back to you on the last date that I had a conversation with our federal counterparts on this issue.

**Madam CHAIR:** Can you provide the committee with any indication; is it regular or a range of communication methods?

**Mr POTTER:** It is regular, but on a needs basis.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the tenders for consultants to develop the \$1.7m, will they be advertised tenders or select tenders?

**Madam CHAIR:** They will have a panel and then the community could decide which person might be best or grouping for them. Minister, can you provide more detail?

**Mr POTTER:** The EOI is in relation to establishing a standing panel, and from there, as we understand standing panels, they will be allocated work by the community.

**Mr MALEY:** So, there will select tenders? They will not be publicly advertised.

**Mr POTTER:** You get onto the standing panel arrangement, which is no different for any contract you would be aware of. From there, they are allocated the contract.

**Mr MALEY:** Why are you going through consultants? Why are you not doing it in house, considering we have an \$11bn debt?

**Mr POTTER:** I answered this earlier. We are doing it in house and have been. To the scale and volume we need to get those CAPs done—there are 102 communities that have registered interest. We have a looming deadline of 2027. It made sense to go to consultants externally to have the capacity to move that along faster.

**Mr MALEY:** You said you are working with 35, and there are four to go. We are talking about not 102, but 35. Why are you doing that in house?

**Mr POTTER:** No, that is incorrect. There are 102 who expressed interest. Arguably, at any point they could progress quite quickly to get in their CAPs in progression. There are 35 actively working through those now, and there are four that are close to submission.

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister has provided the committee with quite a good explanation of where things are in the processes. Are there further questions? The Member for Brennan is looking at me eagerly.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes, there are further questions. We have some ...

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I have some but after Gerard.

**Mr MALEY:** The former Chief Minister announced there would be a new community-based alcohol permit system which was trialled in Gove from October 2023 to March 2024. A media release on 26 September advised that the trial would be evaluated. It seems a little like going over old ground. We know that in 2011 a Menzies team led by Peter d'Abbs completed An evaluation of the Gove Peninsula Alcohol Management System which operated in 2008. That study concluded:

*On almost all of the indicators considered, introduction of the permit system in March 2008 was followed by a decline both in apparent liquor sales and in alcohol-related harm—specifically in Indigenous alcohol-related emergency department presentations and hospital separations, injuries ... disturbances ... for public drunkenness. These declines have been sustained. In several of these instances, however, the decline commenced between one and two years prior to introduction of the permit system ...*

In 2019, another result of research was published by Dr d'Abbs and Crundall which talked about individual liquor permits helped Indigenous communities manage alcohol. They found:

*Effectiveness of liquor permit systems is a product of five factors: permits themselves; agencies and procedures for issuing and managing permits; agencies and procedures for supplying liquor; enforcement of permit conditions, and the presence of other agencies ...*

Such as police.

*Liquor permits continue to be valued by some Indigenous communities for managing alcohol. This study suggests that they can do so provided: (i) agencies administering permits have adequate support; (ii) controls over non-legal purchasing and consumption of liquor ...*

We have already had two research projects. Why are we trialling it again?

**Mr POTTER:** It was a long-winded question. I can tell you that I recently signed an extension on the Gove permit. That has arguably worked due to a couple of reasons you rightfully pointed out, which are a reflection of the hard work of the agency, but more importantly of the community members in Gove. We have seen a decline in alcohol harm there.

We called this 'managed access' when we talk about permits. It is working. I have been clear on the public record saying that I support any measure the community wants that addresses alcohol harm and works. It is a great success for this government to see that permit system continue.

**Mr MALEY:** The trial was concluded two months ago. What were the outcomes of the evaluation?

**Mr POTTER:** While the department gets the information, we have seen an overall decline in alcohol harm there. The police have accredited that to the permit system. That is why I signed off on the extension. I will Tom and his team a couple of minutes to bring up the work.

Member for Nelson, I am happy to take that on notice and come back to you with the stats.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.2

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

**Mr MALEY** What are the outcomes of the evaluation of the trial concluded two months ago?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.2.

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**Mr MALEY:** We have taken that on notice about the outcome. Can you tell us what work was done leading up to the evaluation? How was the evaluation conducted?

**Mr POTTER:** I will take that on notice as well, because it will come as part of our overall outcome for the stats in how we got there, what we saw and who was on the panel, et cetera.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.3

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

**Mr MALEY** Can you please tell us how the evaluation was conducted—what work was done to come up with the evaluation?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.3.

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**Question on Notice No 5.4**

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

**Mr MALEY:** How much did that evaluation cost?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.4.

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**Mr MALEY:** Why did you extend it?

**Mr POTTER:** Because the information provided to me was positive in the decline of alcohol harm and it was a recommendation of those members involved in that review. Where something is working, I will continue to double-down on that and support them. I think we have seen permits work well when you have strong leadership in the community and overall buy-in, so it was an easy decision to continue that success.

**Mr MALEY:** How long is it being continued for?

**Mr LEEMING:** The trial of the latest design of the permit system in the Gove Peninsula has been extended by six months at the request of the Gove Peninsula Harmony Group.

**Madam CHAIR:** At the request of the community.

**Mr MALEY:** What are the steps between now and when that expires? You are saying the evaluation is completed and you are working through the results; is that right? Has the evaluation been completed?

**Mr POTTER:** It will be ongoing through the next six months and it was ongoing for the last 12.

**Mr LEEMING:** The questions about the detail of the evaluation, the process and the cost I think we will need to take on notice.

**Mr MALEY:** We already have that. I am asking about what is happening now. It has been extended, but what is happening in relation to the next steps? There is the review. When do you expect the evaluation to be completed?

**Mr POTTER:** We are happy to add that to the written question, but the metrics that we use around alcohol harm for that geographical location will continue to be monitored over the next six months. I am happy to include that in the written question.

**Mr MALEY:** Can we do that?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think he is saying that he will include it, but if you do not trust him you can put it on the record.

**Mr MALEY:** No, I trust Mr Potter.

**Mr POTTER:** Thank you, Member for Nelson.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is good to see that we are building camaraderie across here. We will be comrades soon!

**Mr MALEY:** We are not doing that; we are building a bit of trust.

My next question is in relation to the liquor buyback.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is this your responsibility, minister?

**Mr POTTER:** I will be answering questions about the liquor buyback.

I clarify for the record that the Gove permit was extended by 12 months not six. We will provide a further response to your written questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is a unique system out there. I once visited, and you must have a permit to purchase alcohol. If you are a visitor, is there a mechanism to get a permit to purchase?

**Mr POTTER:** Member for Nelson, it will run through to 31 March 2025.

Madam Chair, yes, there is.

**Mr MALEY:** How many businesses took up the offer to buy back their liquor licence?

**Mr POTTER:** I looked forward to getting this question.

It was voluntary, so there was never an intent from government to forcibly acquire any grocery store takeaway licences. As of now we have had four licensees surrender their licence and we have numerous in negotiation. At the start we had 51 grocery store licensees express their interest to participate.

**Mr MALEY:** Four surrendered. What was the cost of the buyback?

**Mr POTTER:** I will not be answering questions about the cost of the buyback. I will explain to you why for the *Parliamentary Record* and for those listening. What we do not want to do is play the commercial hand of government in this negotiation because there are still people negotiating with us. If we were to articulate what we have paid thus far, you could rightfully point out that with four people you could work out how much it has cost government and therefore it would give an unfair negotiating position as we continue with the remaining members.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You said that 51 showed interest in the buyback scheme. How many grocery licences are there out of that 51?

**Mr POTTER:** There are 51 grocery store licences, and a proportion of those showed interest.

**Madam CHAIR:** It was about 40% from memory.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What was the number of interested parties who showed that they wanted to find out about this liquor buyback?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you want to give the committee a clear breakdown?

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot give you how many showed interest versus how many progressed into a negotiation because it is commercial-in-confidence for those who expressed interest. I cannot give you those numbers, but I can give you the number we have secured as a buyback.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Could you just give us the number of those who were interested rather than the ones who were going through a process?

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot because that may open up those who have engaged in conversations with us and articulate to others who are savvy enough to figure out who was talking to us, so I cannot.

I am informed that potentially the Chief Minister in her Estimates gave you a number. You can go back and use the number in *Hansard*, but I will not provide one just around the commerciality of it.

**Mr MALEY:** How many people in your department worked on this scheme?

**Mr POTTER:** We will split the question. We will go to DITT first and then to the Chief Minister's department. They can talk to their individual roles.

**Mr DRABSCH:** I indicated during Chief Minister Lawler's Estimates hearing that there were three staff involved in the delivery of the buyback and the administration of the buyback scheme—one from my agency, one from DCMC and I think the other one was from Treasury. They were senior managers with commercial expertise who were involved in the negotiations.

**Mr MALEY:** Can we put a cost on it, or will that be in the second half?

**Mr POTTER:** When you refer to 'a cost' do you mean a cost as in FTE sunk cost?

**Mr MALEY:** Were there any external costs?

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot answer that. Are you asking me about the external legal fees?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

**Mr POTTER:** External legal fees were \$11,900.

**Mr MALEY:** How much research was done to ensure that the scheme would reduce the amount of harm caused by the sale of alcohol?

**Mr POTTER:** There has been lots of research done into the volume of outlets and access based on the volume of outlets. It is a fact that the more access points we remove—the reduction of alcohol harm we will see across the community. In terms of what an individual business ...

**Mr MALEY:** Can you point me to evidence that shows that?

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to finish answering the question.

In terms of the value weight placed on individual licensees and their value to buy back, I am happy to had that to the department to talk about generally.

**Mr DRABSCH:** Regarding the process we undertook to progress this, the policy was announced on 30 March 2023 for a voluntary buyback scheme of grocery liquor licences across the Territory. This forms part of an ongoing suite of reforms being made to cut alcohol-related harm and antisocial behaviour in our community.

The purpose of the buyback scheme is to reduce the number of alcohol takeaway outlets across the Territory, as evidence shows that the density of liquor outlets contributes substantially to alcohol-related harm and takeaway outlets pose the highest risk. I think there was a substantial amount of anecdotal evidence which was also in the public forum about the prevalence of takeaway liquor outlets in communities, the number of outlets that were available and the activities that occurred around them. That was very much a part of the analysis which informed the policy.

**Mr POTTER:** We cannot talk about the value placed on individual licences, but anywhere where there is a PALI on the bottle shop—we will get to PALIs later—there is also additional value placed on that.

**Mr MALEY:** Could you explain your policy in curbing the secondary supply of alcohol?

**Mr POTTER:** When talking about the enforcement piece we can talk about licensing compliance, but if anything relates to Police, I will hold over until that output.

In terms of policy setting, the Banned Drinker Register is one mechanism and tool to mitigate secondary supply, in line with the APN and GRA restrictions or the managed access, whether a permit system as we have in Gove and Wadeye.

The BDR is one of the main tools and with the expansion of those pathways onto the BDR last year and earlier this year with the seven-day banned drinker order initiated by the police, there has been a significant increase on members being allocated a seven day banned drinker order. Arguably, they are not captured in the overall year-to-date number as they are only on for seven days and then they may be pulled off. I am happy to hand over to Scott to talk about what the licensing team does in identifying secondary supply.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr POTTER:** We have some clarifying comments regarding the buyback and how that linked to the Riley review regarding the target of buybacks.

**Mr LEEMING:** To build on what Mr Drabsch said earlier regarding the evidence base behind the buyback scheme, the alcohol policies and legislation review, otherwise known as the Riley review, marshals and summarises the various forms of evidence that exist to show the density of liquor outlets contributes substantially to alcohol-related harms and that takeaway outlets pose the highest risk to that. A summary of all that evidence is in the Riley review.

**Mr LOVETT:** In relation to the secondary supply question regarding how that works, our Licensing NT team has a compliance area. There are 15 staff who work within that team. They are spread across the Territory—Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

They work continually with the 603 liquor licensees across the Territory in making sure that they are aware of their obligations. They become aware of secondary supply issues and licensees in the bush network. We are aware of that. Our team is constantly monitoring through patrollers network. They are feeding that back in each of the regional coordination committees as well. They are our boots on the ground, eyes and ears and are feeding that intelligence back for police to take further action.

**Mr POTTER:** To add some points, I spoke about the Banned Drinker Register which will be a policy of this Labor government to continue. We see value in it. Regarding the legitimate reasons clause that comes in on 1 July, there is also a requirement for retail assistants to deny service when they believe there is an offence about to be committed.

There are training packages that are being rolled out to staff regarding what potentially constitutes, or identifies, secondary supply or what may justify denying service. It is not just a compliance from our licensing inspectors. Our retailers and larger chains have stricter, stringent measures in place to identify secondary supply. We have seen that with some retailers in Coolalinga that have developed some packages they have given to the department. They are now being rolled out.

**Mr MALEY:** How much money is being spent by your department in relation to curbing secondary supply?

**Mr POTTER:** We have spoken about the budgets for the Alcohol Policy unit, which encompass policies regarding alcohol harm reduction and secondary supply being one part of that as well as Licensing NT and the total FTE in its budget. When we start to talk about the alcohol and policing unit and, my favourite, the Territory Safety Division, which we will get to with the other outputs, we can probably talk through the operational frontline piece with the commissioner.

**Mr MALEY:** Recently, you increased the penalty for secondary supply under the *Alcohol Harm Reduction Act*. Why did you do that? What evidence did you have for that?

**Mr POTTER:** I will give you a summary. It was basically a recommendation from Police to increase that. We are happy to talk about the point of view of Police when we get to the output.

**Mr MALEY:** Was it a Police recommendation that you took on? There has been no-one charged for a secondary supply for the last three years. Three people were charged in 2001.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is a question you could ask Police.

**Mr MALEY:** This is a written question, so I know that is the answer.

**Madam CHAIR:** I apologise.

**Mr MALEY:** I am going to the policy behind it. Money has been spent on it and we have heard there have been 15 staff, yet there have been no prosecutions in the last three years. Why is that?

**Mr POTTER:** Prosecutions would have been a better discussion with the Attorney-General. However, I will be answering it in relation to police and how they operationalise secondary supply interdiction and what is and is not an effective tool to deter secondary supply. Arguably, the tip out, seizure and destruction of alcohol is the largest deterrent, but I am happy to talk through that discussion when we get to Police.

**Mr MALEY:** Does the policy behind secondary supply sit with you?

**Mr POTTER:** A part of that policy does. What is and is not prosecuted sits with the Attorney-General. The law is there and provides a provision for prosecutions to prosecute those who engage in secondary supply.

**Mr MALEY:** We said earlier that secondary supply is a big issue. Mr Lovett talked about 15 staff and what they have been doing to curb it. Through the answer to written questions we know that no-one has been prosecuted. Do you think that is a failure on behalf of you, minister, as a policy for alcohol in the Northern Territory?

**Mr POTTER:** No, I would not call it a failure. In terms of successes we see the largest single investment into police over the next four years to deter secondary supply. Since I have taken the portfolio, we have seen the seven-day banned drinker order, which arguable falls under Alcohol Policy; the OC spray rolled out to transit safety; and now the ex officio ability for those officers to search, seize and destroy alcohol in the course of their duties, which they did not have before. It has been rolled out to public housing safety officers to have the search, seize and destroy powers.

Arguably, the greatest deterrent for anything related to secondary supply is the seizure and destruction of alcohol.

**Mr MALEY:** Over the last three years no-one has been charged for secondary supply under the *Alcohol Harm Reduction Act*. Why do you think that is? It is a big problem. You mentioned today that secondary supply is a big issue and you are taking all these steps to curb it, yet no-one has been prosecuted or charged.

**Mr POTTER:** I would never be a sitting member to tell a police officer how to do their job. Ultimately ...

**Mr MALEY:** I am asking you about your job.

**Mr POTTER:** Member for Nelson, let me finish.

It is at the discretion of the police officer engaging in the secondary supply operation at the time how they decide to lay charges. Seizure and destruction are the biggest deterrent. You may say that members may not end up before the court for secondary supply—that is a question for the Attorney-General—but those members will go on the Banned Drinker Register. That is a deterrent. If we can deny a person the ability to purchase alcohol in the first instance we remove and reduce the second and third order effects of harm later down the track.

**Mr MALEY:** Ultimately over the last three years no-one has been charged. We know that through the rivers of grog in Alice Springs, and the member would be able to talk about that. Secondary supply of alcohol is a big concern, yet no-one has been charged, so there is no general deterrent and they continue to do it. What steps have you taken to stop secondary supply, considering it has not worked for the last three years?

**Mr POTTER:** I will talk through the measures that this government and I as minister have taken to address alcohol harm and crime more generally.

The Territory Safety Division has been established with 52 officers. We will get to this when we get to Police, but we like to talk about it and you like hearing about it as well. Those officers are there for antisocial behaviour alcohol enforcement.

We have greater numbers of licensing and compliance. We have the risk-based licensing framework. We have the voluntary liquor buyback scheme.

There is the rollout of OC spray to transit safety officers and the rollout of OC spray to private security for those who wish to uptake it. There are the tip-out powers, search and seize for transit safety, public housing officers and ex officios.

We have the implementation of the paperless arrest for those who fail to provide their name and identification to a police officer who is engaging in alcohol tip-out activities so that we can see greater compliance with those who have domestic, family and sexual violence orders in place and those who are on parole who should not be accessing alcohol.

These are some of the measures that we have done. We have the seven-day banned drinker order that has been highly successful, and we can talk about how that is implemented when we get to Police.

The one I look forward to on 1 July is the rollout of the legitimate residence clause that will deny those who do not have a legitimate place to consume alcohol the ability to purchase alcohol.

In my electorate that has been highly successful in addressing public drinking. Not one measure resolves this issue; there has to be a multitude of them. Mere criminalisation does not deter. If legislation and penalties were a deterrent, we would have no criminals, but unfortunately that is not the case, and it requires a bunch of measures in the toolkit to address it.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are getting a little repetitive.

**Mr MALEY:** I will go to a different topic. Two voluntary rehabilitation of alcohol facilities have been shut down. Could you explain why you have done that?

**Madam CHAIR:** Does this question fall under this output or a question for Health?

**Mr POTTER:** I was about to say that question should be directed to Health.

**Mr MALEY:** As the Alcohol Policy minister, have you made any submissions to Health that they should remain open?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, the question is not under this output; this line of questioning should have been asked of the minister last week. I will allow some latitude.

**Mr MALEY:** I am talking about the policy as you are the Alcohol Policy minister. Have you spoken to the Health minister about ...

**Madam CHAIR:** That question has changed. I will allow the minister to respond, but this question does not fall under this output.

**Mr POTTER:** Could you restate the question?

**Mr MALEY:** As the Alcohol Policy minister, have you made any submissions to the Health minister in relation to the closing down of the voluntary alcohol rehabilitation facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin?

**Mr POTTER:** I engage with my Cabinet colleague regularly on the requirement to have access to the sobering-up shelter and rehabilitation facilities. We are not closing them down, as you like to perpetuate; we are relocating them. We need beds for prisoners, which is no shock to anyone, and we are finding the most cost-effective fast solution to do that. We will be relocating the SUS in Darwin, and that will be a mechanism which will continue. The evidence is abundantly clear—the experts are clear on this issue—that mandatory rehabilitation does not work or change the addiction behaviours of the individual, and it ultimately costs the taxpayer money.

**Madam CHAIR:** The Deputy Chair has reminded me that these questions were discussed in detail the other day and I am not sure if you were present at the committee for that part of the hearing. Do you have questions on a different topic area under this policy output?

**Mr MALEY:** Could you give an update on the rollout of the OC spray?

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not sure that is under this output, but I refer to the minister and his officials.

**Mr POTTER:** Could you clarify your questions as it may relate predominantly to the police?

**Mr MALEY:** What is the policy relating to OC spray, and do you think it has stalled?

**Mr POTTER:** Absolutely not.

**Mr MALEY:** The questions on OC spray should be asked of the police?

**Mr POTTER:** It depends on the context of the question in terms of policy.

**Mr MALEY:** How many OC licences have been issued?

**Mr POTTER:** That will be under the Police output.

**Mr MALEY:** Applications approved or awaiting approval?



**Mr POTTER:** Anything relating to applications, approvals or use and deployment will be under police.

**Mr MALEY:** What about the cost of rolling out the OC spray?

**Mr POTTER:** In terms of the legislation and the policy framework to set up?

**Mr MALEY:** The policy framework.

**Mr POTTER:** In relation to that for retail staff, that will go to police.

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister has assured us he will respond to this committee at that output. Do you have further questions, Member for Nelson?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes. Could you give a rundown of how many de-escalation training courses have been offered?

**Mr POTTER:** It is important to clarify that there were other courses funded through Hospitality NT and ones provided by private providers. When your team made assertions about how many were provided, many private security companies were frustrated because there are many providers delivering. For example, Neptune provides their courses to many retailers outside of government funding.

**Mr MALEY:** Could you outline what you have done in the previous 12 months and what you are changing in the next 12 months?

**Mr POTTER:** That is a fantastic question. In terms of alcohol policy more holistically for a new term of government with me as the minister, you will see no change. The BDR will continue. We will make pieces around the functionality change to that, but it will be a staple of our policy. We will continue to have the sobering-up shelters and voluntary rehabilitation and expand the pathways under the Banned Drinker Register. That is a primary function measure to mitigate alcohol harm.

We know if that was your move—I believe it has been a policy of yours if successful in forming government—there would be no deterrent or ability to deny people who should not be accessing alcohol.

We will continue to have the PALIs in our bottle shops in Alice Springs for the foreseeable future. We will continue to find new ways to hire local workforces in Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek. We can talk about that when we get to police.

We will continue to expand the Territory Safety Division with those 52 officers in Nightcliff and the 18 officers in Alice Springs. We will talk more in detail about those numbers. They are primarily focused on antisocial behaviour, alcohol harm and bail compliance.

We will see the rollout of the community alcohol plans. There is a clear indication that the policy will continue—that has been the standing EOJ panel that is currently under review now because we know there is a looming deadline coming up in 2027 where we need to have these plans in place.

We will not be criminalising the act of having an open container in public. However, I have been clear on the issue in the public domain that the behaviour of an intoxicated person—disorderly conduct—is criminal and is the mechanism for police to engage with those acting in that manner. We have given police the powers for paperless arrest for those who fail to provide their name and identification during the act of tipping out alcohol.

We have given the opportunity for OC spray to be rolled out to retail venues or takeaway licence venues through security to get the appropriate approvals. It was a commitment we made and I made to the industry when I took over the portfolio to deliver that and get the legislation passed before the end of the year. I did that and we have subsequently opened applications.

There has been the rollout of OC spray to our transit safety officers, who arguably deal with a lot of alcohol-related violence on our public bus network. There are ex officio powers for search, seizure and destruction of alcohol that are now being delegated to our transit safety officers and public housing safety officers.

It is not just about the punitive measures or controlled harm-reduction measures; it is about supporting industry and those in the hospitality sector. The small producers authority change came in, in the last term of government, which helps our small gin distilleries and small breweries. That was a big win for Hospitality

NT. I thank Paul Palmer and Alex Bruce for the work they did with me on getting that legislation through, because it was important work that supports many mum-and-dad small businesses in the Territory.

**Mr MALEY:** You just mentioned work on the CAPs. We know there are only four. We cannot have a time frame of when they will be in place. Do you agree that alcohol policy and the consumption of alcohol is a large concern for Territorians?

**Mr POTTER:** Absolutely in terms of alcohol consumption. There is no denying that alcohol plays a leading part in the crime we are seeing occurring across the Territory. I am unsure of the first part of your question in relation to CAPs.

**Mr MALEY:** You mentioned OC spray. I will ask a few questions about that. You told me to go to Police, but how many have been rolled out? How many licences ...

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister made it quite clear that in the next ...

**Mr MALEY:** He mentioned again that they are rolling them out. He spoke about it. I am asking him to explain that.

**Madam CHAIR:** He also made it clear to you that it is in the output coming up later this morning. We can move straight on to it if you would like.

**Mr MALEY:** No. The minister said something and I am asking him to explain what he said.

**Mr POTTER:** I can answer a little more. The government made a commitment after Declan Lavery to roll out OC spray at the request of Hospitality NT. To be honest, Member for Nelson, we do not make a commitment and not deliver. When I took over the portfolio the commitment I made to Hospitality NT was to get the legislative framework in place in the December sittings. That is what we did.

We then developed the policies and processes required for those to apply for the licences, which is through police. There is a strict process in place for those who use the OC spray. To date there has been no use of OC spray by private security at our takeaway licensed venues.

In terms of those who have applied, how many have been approved and how many individual licence and permits holders there are, that is a question for when we get to the Police output.

It was a commitment that we made to the hospitality and retail sector in response to the tragic circumstances we saw with Declan.

**Mr MALEY:** There have been some changes to the liquor permits at Wadeye. Is that under your alcohol policy?

**Mr POTTER:** The change to permits are at the discretion of the Director of Licensing. They were in direct response to an influx of alcohol into the community.

**Mr MALEY:** Was there is a direct response to an influx of alcohol brought into the community under those permits, or was that secondary illegal supply of alcohol?

**Mr POTTER:** That is a great question. We can ask that when we get to the Police outputs and they can answer in relation to police operation. When we see a spike of alcohol-related harm in places like Wadeye, it is not just one tool that we can use to address that.

**Madam CHAIR:** Will you provide some more details in the Police outputs about that?

**Mr POTTER:** The question he asked me was in relation to—was it because of a secondary supply incident and therefore the permit changed. That is an operational question for Police, and I am more than happy to answer it when we get to Police.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you accept that the change in liquor permits has upset a lot of people who are permit holders in Port Keats, to the effect that it is hard for people to get employees because they are not going there due to that change?

**Mr POTTER:** Whenever a government makes a decision there will be people who are unhappy with it. It is incumbent of a government to make decisions in the best interests of the majority of people. In this instance, the decision was made to protect people in Wadeye and remove the disturbances we see caused by alcohol, and to support our frontline police officers there.

**Mr MALEY:** Who made that decision?

**Mr POTTER:** The Director of Licensing is the one who varies or changes the terms of permits. I am happy to hand to Scott for any clarifying comments.

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister has also indicated that you can ask Police because it is operational.

**Mr LOVETT:** The minister is spot on; it is the Director of Licensing who makes these decisions using delegated powers, but they do not do so without consultation. They did that with a broad range from the community. It takes into consideration the police OIC, the broader community and the business community out there. We are well aware of the disquiet that the change in the permit systems caused. We have been back out there a couple of times to talk to the community about the permits and the changes.

In regard to the business you referred to that is most impacted by that, we are working closely to ensure we can get a workable solution that police, the community and the broader community in the Wadeye and surrounding areas are comfortable with.

**Mr MALEY:** When you talk about the licensing inspector—who was it?

**Mr POTTER:** The Director of Licensing is the authorised member to make that variation as a delegated power.

**Mr MALEY:** I understand that. Were you aware of that before they made that decision? Were you briefed on it?

**Mr POTTER:** I get briefed after the decision is made by the Director of Licensing.

**Mr MALEY:** Were you not aware of that decision until after it was made?

**Mr POTTER:** It is not a decision for the minister to make; it is a decision delegated to the Director of Licensing. I have been pretty clear and said that once that decision was made, I was made aware of it.

**Mr MALEY:** And you approve that decision? Do you think it is the right decision?

**Mr POTTER:** I will leave commentary on decisions made by public servants to other people. I support my public servants.

**Mr MALEY:** I am asking what your view was. I also support public servants.

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

**Mr MALEY:** In the budget paper the revised budget for 2023–24 was just over \$20m for this output, and now it is back to \$17m and a little bit. Why is that cut?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think the minister explained that in his opening statement.

**Mr MALEY:** I do not think he made an opening statement.

**Mr POTTER:** No, I did not make an opening statement. This is mainly relating to one-off funding for the priorities delivery unit, carryover of unspent funds in 2022–23 in relation to the federal funding agreements—Disaster Risk Reduction, Living Safe Together and Closing the Gap initiatives, sea country management and the McArthur River region.

As we have said, the strategy policy coordination engagement team and the Priorities Delivery Unit work across multiple priorities of government.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you explain what was cut from the \$20m down to \$17m? What projects were cut?

**Mr POTTER:** Just to clarify for the record I have been clear that there was a carryover of funds, so to use the word 'cut' is incorrect. What you could say is 'a reduction in funding due to a one-off or time lapsing'.

**Mr LEEMING:** As the minister said, the Strategic Policy Coordination and Engagement output is a broader output that covers all forms of strategic policy coordination and engagement. Alcohol policy coordination is one of many policy coordination functions. The trends in the budget for that output are determined by many things and not just alcohol policy coordination.

The movement from 2023–24 budget from \$13.984m has increased in the 2024–25 budget to \$17.029m. The revised estimate for 2023–24 relates to a range of one-off funding injections and carryovers which are in footnote one on page ...

**Mr MALEY:** You said one-off projects. Can you outline what they were?

**Mr LEEMING:** I refer you to footnote one on page 13 of Budget Paper No 3 which talks about what is behind those things.

**Mr MALEY:** For the record can you read it out?

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister and his officials have directed you to the budget papers. You have them in front of you. If you want to ask further questions you are welcome to or the official can keep articulating.

**Mr MALEY:** Keep articulating; sorry.

**Mr LEEMING:** Do you have a question about one of the specific things in that footnote?

**Mr MALEY:** No, I do not.

**Mr LEEMING:** All but one of those things in the footnote do not relate to alcohol policy coordination; they relate to other projects and initiatives within the Strategic Policy Coordination and Engagement output.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I have a point of clarification for Output 1.1. Is that where I can also ask questions about Veterans' Affairs?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr POTTER:** If you want to go to Veterans' Affairs, we will need to change public servants.

**Madam CHAIR:** Just to clarify, we are on Output 1.1. You also have Output 2.0, which is Investment Territory. Under Output 3.0 you have major events. The shadow is requesting where she would ask questions on veterans.

**Mr POTTER:** It would be in Output 2.1.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

I thank the officials who have joined us here today. The committee will pause until 10.10 am.

**Mr POTTER:** I thank Tom and David for their hard work that goes into Estimates. Thank you very much for your time.

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The committee suspended.

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## **OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – INVESTMENT TERRITORY**

### **Output 2.1 – Major, Significant and Government Facilitated Projects**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 2.0, Investment Territory, and Output 2.1, Major, Significant and Government Facilitated Projects.

**Mr POTTER:** Before we start, I will introduce the panel. I have Mr Alister Trier, Lead, Investment Territory; Mr James Bear, Senior Director, Defence NT; and Mr Ray Martin, Director, Defence Veterans Engagement.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do the veterans living in the Territory have confidence in you after it was revealed in March that you posted to Facebook a quote from a senior ranking Nazi general during World War II and then went on to blame being in the ADF for having these views?

**Madam CHAIR:** I will allow the question and the minister to respond but if there is a line of question, I may rule it out of order.

**Mr POTTER:** I would hate to talk on behalf of every veteran and what they think or do not think. I have been very clear in my response to my previous behaviour on Facebook and it is on the public record.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** It is relevant in that he is the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and is representing veterans living in the Northern Territory. Minister, why did you not step down as Minister for Veterans' Affairs when the reactions from veterans across the Territory showed they were highly offended by your comments and that, subsequently, you blamed your time in the ADF?

**Madam CHAIR:** The question is not relevant to the output. Do you have further questions that are relevant to the output?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Will you let the minister answer the question?

**Madam CHAIR:** No. The question is not relevant to the output before us. If you would like to ask questions that are relevant, you are most welcome. Otherwise, we will move on to the next output group.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Does the minister not want to tell veterans about why he should remain the Minister for Veterans' Affairs?

**Madam CHAIR:** I have articulated that if you have no further questions, we will move on to consideration of the next output group.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I have further questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay. If it is on that topic, it will be ruled not with this output and we will move on.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** How much of the budget allocated in 2024 will be spent in an effort to restore your disgraced reputation as Minister for Veterans' Affairs?

**Madam CHAIR:** The question is creative in your attempt to link it to the output but it is the same line of questioning that I have ruled out of order. If you do not have questions on different aspects, we will move on to a different output group.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I have plenty of questions regarding veterans' affairs and I would like to continue.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, but if they continue along this line, they will be ruled out of order and we will move on. I will give you one more chance. Otherwise, I will conclude this consideration of output.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** As in debates, does not want to talk about it.

Of the 32 doctors you announced would be trained as part of Operation Thrive in November 2023, how many have completed that training to specialise in veteran health and wellbeing and are now able to support veterans living in the Territory?

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify for the record there is \$850,000 allocated into the Defence NT sector to support veterans. Operation Thrive has been the operational plan of our Northern Territory veteran strategy. We were the first government to implement a veteran strategy to show our appreciation and value of those members who have served and continue to serve and the family members who supported them during their service and now support them during their transition.

I am fortunate, as the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, to have served. More than anyone in this House I understand the struggles and tribulations that veterans go through. I do to confess to talk on behalf of all veterans, although the commentary you make insinuates that you are ...

**Ms BOOTHBY:** It is Territorians who speak to me.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Brennan, I am happy to come back to you if you have further clarification of your question. If you could allow the minister to answer the question uninterrupted that would be appreciated. We have been doing so well this morning.

**Mr POTTER:** Stating for the record, I would not be the one to speak on behalf of every veteran, as you put on the Parliamentary Record.

I commend the department. As I look to my left, I look at Ray, another veteran who has a significant service within the Defence Force who now serves veterans in Defence NT. I will get him to talk through the specifics of the GP training, an initiative that we rolled out under my time as the minister for veterans to better support our veterans. When they go to a general practitioner, there are complexities that come with service. It is not merely attending and getting an assessment; there are other complexities through the Department of Veterans Affairs. We see that in the royal commission at the moment.

It was a great initiative. I will now hand to Ray Martin to talk about it more.

**Mr MARTIN:** In relation to GPs trained so far, Operation Thrive was launched on 8 November. On 11 November, three days later, we did one day's specialist training for GPs in the Northern Territory. The aim was to engage up to 30 GPs; 23 GPs attended on that day and received specialist training about veteran health.

Those 23 GPs were mostly Darwin-based GPs across 11 clinics. It was an effective day. The GPs said it was the most effective training they had on veteran health. In broad terms, GPs do not receive any training on veteran health nationally.

That program was so successful that we are running a second one, probably in September or October. The aim of that program is to make sure we reach out to the regions and remote areas. The aim is to pick up another at least 20 or so doctors during that process.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** To clarify, the training was one day for the health wellbeing. Is that correct?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes, I believe so.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Has there been subsequent training of that one-day course for those other doctors you mentioned?

**Mr POTTER:** I hand to Ray.

**Mr MARTIN:** There is not further training yet. The next planned training will be around September or October.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** What is the cost per doctor to undertake the training? How much is paid for by the taxpayer versus the doctors?

**Mr POTTER:** I will hand to Ray.

**Mr MARTIN:** The cost for the training for that one day was \$65,000. Part of what we are doing under Operation Thrive is joint investment. In the end the NT Government only pays \$10,000; the major contributors to that was the NTPHN and some funds from Mates4Mates. It was a relatively small amount of money for a significant return.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Just to clarify, \$10,000 for the 23 doctors for the one-day training. Is that correct?

**Mr MARTIN:** Correct. There was no cost to the doctors or the clinics for the training.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The \$10,000 was the funds from the NTG, for the Chief Minister's department. Is that correct?

**Mr MARTIN:** Correct.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** On page 14 of BP3, the Defence veterans strategy, Operation Thrive, allocates \$850,000. How much of this amount is for wages of department staff?

**Mr POTTER:** It is actually \$2.55m over three years, which equates to \$850,000 next year. In relation to the specific FTE count and the costs, I am happy to hand over to James Bear to talk through.

**Mr BEAR:** Of the \$850,000 for the next financial year, zero of that is towards personnel. It is purely operational funding. We have two FTEs in our Defence veterans team, supplemented by the broader Defence NT team, which is a total of eight FTEs, including me. Our personnel budget is completely separate from the \$850,000 a year for the next three financial years.

**Mr POTTER:** It is worth noting that the Defence NT team has steadily grown under our government. The two members that James spoke of, one being Ray and the other I will not name without permission, are also veterans. When we talk about the veteran strategy and the implementation of Operation Thrive along with known and lived experience, you can see the department is well abreast of the issues we face.

Arguably, as the minister having served overseas, like many of my former colleagues who are now members in the Northern Territory, I understand the struggles they go through.

**Madam CHAIR:** This committee acknowledges you and the other veterans in the room and listening.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Can you help me understand what the \$850,000 per annum over those three years will cover, given there are no wages involved in that number, as you stated, and it was a \$10,000 one-day exercise for the doctors to undertake the health and wellbeing training for veterans. What else will that money be used for?

**Mr POTTER:** It is good to be able to talk about the work we are doing in the veterans space, because too often there is the misconception that it is the role of the Territory government to deal in the concession space when, arguable, we have a very strong concession scheme as it is and the Department of Veterans' Affairs is there to compensate and support veterans during their transition after their service. We see work from Defence Families of Australia, and I thank them for the work they do, as well as DHA and all the other agencies.

The direction we give to the agency in the Northern Territory is to retain people and make it a posting location of choice, and we support veterans and their families to remain in the Territory. We saw that with the development of the Northern Territory Defence Veterans Strategy and the target set for veterans to be employed within the public service. We have exceeded that.

Operation Thrive, which we launched last year, was the execution plan for that strategy. Like all good military pieces, the name Thrive is an acronym. I will go through that now because you asked what we will do with the money. Transition employment and education—there is the T. We know that veterans transitioning from the ADF can find it difficult to find employment and, arguably, many of them have never done a job interview before, so the skills do not necessarily correlate with the public and commercial sectors. We see that being a focus of the Northern Territory Veterans' Affairs Ministerial Advisory Council and the agency to deal with that transition and make it easier to find employment in the Northern Territory.

There is a Northern Territory Government partnership that we have enacted; I announced that recently with Sitzler and Soldier On to fund a position to continue to provide employment services to veterans across the Territory. That will produce the goods, for lack of a better term, to support veterans here, in the public service and in the public sector. We see that with the Defence Strategic Review, released last year, and the significant investment that will be coming to the Northern Territory. We need to retain those members who have served before, because the skills and expertise they provide to the Defence industry sector and overall national security are invaluable. They have moved to the Territory and we should retain them.

That 'T' under Thrive is squarely focused on keeping people here and making the transition easier. It also focuses on education and how we can support not only the member to get additional qualifications and tickets through Charles Darwin University and other training and RTO providers, but also their children when they post into the location in getting access to priority schools in the catchment area.

The Member for Brennan may not be aware of this, but a posting every two years is a disruptive process for families, especially youths' education. When we had the GP training I bumped into two young military GPs who also run a private practice. Anecdotally, they said that there is a correlation between the posting cycle and behavioural issues around learning that they see with Defence family youths. There is a part for us to play in that.

There is a health and wellbeing focus. That was squarely with the 32 members provided for the GP training package, which Ray had rolled out previously in Queensland and brought it to the Territory. A significant proportion of GPs who attended were ex-serving members who had either transitioned out and become GPs or who were fortunate to have transitioned to become general practitioners, or RMOs as we call them at the time, whilst still in uniform. That was a worthwhile activity, one that was a key pillar of Operative Thrive.

We see our respect and recognition component of that continuing. Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and Vietnam Veterans' Day are in relation to acknowledging the service of many veterans and families and delivering those commitments in hand with local councils and those that government runs, in and of itself.

This year will be the anniversary of INTERFET. Whilst I am the minister for Veterans, we will do something for those members who served.

The inform and communications promotion component of Thrive is about awareness and how we can get all the information and access to those members about what is available to them and what we do in the Territory. Arguably, many veterans go off the grid, for lack of a better term, when they transition. We see a lot of veterans out in remote communities, such as Dundee, Bynoe Harbour and Berry Springs. It is about making sure that they are aware, because not all of them use multimodal communication platforms such as Facebook or TikTok. It is about catering to that group of people and getting that information out to them.

Veteran data, which is probably the most important piece for the government, is about understanding how many people identify as a veteran, whether they have done one day of service, which is the Commonwealth classification, or those who have served multiple back-to-back deployments in Afghanistan, Somali, Rwanda or other places. That information is extremely important to government.

There are approximately 20,000 people, about five and five who have served or are currently serving and then there are the 10,000 or so who are family members of those respective 10, living across the Territory. That fluctuates based on posting cycles and what capabilities are deployed to the Northern Territory. Shortly, there will be new amphibious littoral vessels moving to the Territory and more people will be coming in.

Lastly, it is about evaluation reporting to make sure that we are spending and acquitting money correctly, that is being used and achieving the outcomes we desire from the strategy and its implementation.

I will hand to James and Ray to provide any qualifying comments.

**Mr MARTIN:** To expand on that a little, Operation Thrive consists of three campaigns: transition, employment and education; health and wellbeing services; and respect and recognition. It also has three supporting plans: inform, communications and promotion; the veteran data; and evaluation and reports.

We have already delivered a number of small projects under Operation Thrive: the specialist GP training; and two CheckYourMates wellbeing and suicide prevention campaigns, over the Christmas period and recently over the Anzac period.

As part of respect and recognition we launched the inaugural veteran employer and employee awards recently during NT Defence Week. There is a veteran information page in the NT Government. We will do more work on that. We have commenced the service mapping that the minister referred to.

We have the second-highest proportion of veterans per capita in the country. Most of us—I am a veteran myself—70% of us are in the north of the Territory and 30% in the other regions. We know the focus has been mainly around this end. We are looking at how, in the service mapping exercise, we find where the gaps are, how to better support the veterans in the remote community areas and how we come across that.

There will probably be approximately 20 new initiatives. We are looking at programs and initiatives across Operation Thrive. I will give you a few of them. Across employment and education, they are looking at an NTPS employment program for veterans coming into the public service. We are already trying to track better how many are coming in for the police, for instance. Every time they do a course, there is about a dozen or so veterans coming into police. We are setting up with OCPD and DCDD a better mechanism to be able to attract veterans coming into the Territory.

Veteran partners are under-employed across the country. We are keen to employ veteran partners in the public service and in other sectors. We are establishing a veteran business alliance, partnering with Defence industry. To do that and support veteran businesses we did a deep dive into the federal Census and have



recently found out there are 300 veteran led businesses in the NT. We want to find out more about them and how we can support those businesses.

We will be setting up a range of extra offerings for veterans and partners with CDU looking at a significant research project probably regarding health and wellbeing. In the NT public service, we will be setting up a mentoring and peer program for those coming in. We have spoken about veteran health; the other thing we will do in health and wellbeing—which I saw work effectively in north Queensland when I was there—is community grants to support connection and wellbeing programs for the veteran community. That would be a series of grants relatively small amounts of money; it might be \$10,000 or more to support veteran and other organisations who are supporting veterans and families in the community. They could range from art programs to different wellbeing programs and a whole range of initiatives. We expect to be rolling those out within the next six months or so.

In respect and recognition, the minister spoke about the things we are doing. We are doing the big commemorative days and, as the minister pointed out, this is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the initial deployment to Timor. Nationally there has been a decision taken to hold a national commemoration. The Territory also will be doing a commemoration, probably involving a memorial service of some description on the Esplanade and some function for veterans who served in Timor, not just during INTERFET but during the whole Timor operation.

Another new thing we are looking at doing is better recognition for other elements of the veteran community, including war widows. We have approximately 100 war widows in the Territory. We are looking at having a national war widows' day. Two or three other jurisdictions are already doing that. We are looking at doing our own war widows' day probably in October. Surprisingly to me as a relatively newcomer to the Northern Territory, there was no Indigenous recognition project for veterans, and it is likely that we will pick one of those up as well.

The great thing about Operation Thrive from my perspective is that this has not been planned in isolation. Veterans have been involved in this from the beginning so the minister's advisory council, the different ex-service organisations, individual veterans and family members have contributed ideas to this. It will be a living program. We will do different projects and initiatives and then other things will pop up that we will give a go. I think the key thing is that we will have the ability to empower veterans and families to reach forward and recommend to us things to be doing. We now have the funds to do a range of activities over the next three years.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Thank you for the thorough detail. I am sure the minister would appreciate having such lived experience on this type of work because veterans and their families are incredibly important in the Northern Territory.

You mentioned training, education and employment and how veterans often struggle to get employment. The Defence Veterans Strategy highlights the objective to increase employment in the Northern Territory public service. How many new NTG employees identified as veterans under the Defence Veterans Strategy?

**Mr POTTER:** The target we set was 20. In the last police graduations that I have attended since being the minister we have exceeded that.

Regarding the specific breakdown that identify as veterans we can get to that with OCPPE because they correlate the data and are responsible for that. Our target was 20 and we hit that, and I will be looking to increase that target next year.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Is that a target that you set as the minister, or does it come through a different department?

**Mr POTTER:** This target was set by our department during the strategy. The number was set and has been achieved, and I am grateful to the department for achieving it.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You mentioned that you will be setting a new target. When will the veterans strategy be updated?

**Mr POTTER:** We will do that in the new term of government. We will see what last financial year targets have been exceeded and we will make a reasonable increase based on the achieved targets.

**Mr KIRBY:** I thank everyone involved, James and Ray in particular. Ray, your input over the last year or two has been peerless around the nation for your investment into veterans, ensuring care and compassion and—

more importantly, from people's perspective who have not served but badly wanted to do the best that they could—your ability to explain to us how we can best help. I thank you for all the work and hard yards you have done. You are desperately trying to retire and do less work, but we appreciate the work you have done in the Territory, and I have no doubt it contributes to saving lives. Thank you for your service and for your time and work with the Northern Territory Government.

**Mr POTTER:** I thank those with me today for the work they have done and the work they continue to do. I cannot sum it up any better than that, Ray, so thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0. This also concludes the consideration of all output groups relating to the Alcohol Policy and Veterans Affairs portfolios.

On behalf of the committee, we thank the agency officials who have assisted the minister.

## MAJOR EVENTS

### DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Major Events portfolio if you wish.

**Mr POTTER:** I have with me Shaun Drabsch, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade; and Scott Lovett, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Tourism, Services and Hospitality. I will not be making an opening statement, but there will be some clarifying remarks by the chief executive.

**Mr DRABSCH:** As I indicated last year at this point in the Estimates, before we start, the Northern Territory Major Events Company is a corporation that the government funds. It is not subject to the Estimates process. Although we might be able to talk about events in general, the operations of NTMEC and particular funding and expenditure elements are not subject to the Estimates process.

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

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 that relates to the Major Events portfolio. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Minister, are you okay that the shadow asks the questions here?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Was it your decision to move the fireworks away from Mindil Beach?

**Mr POTTER:** We are thrilled that the annual Territory Day fireworks are going back to Mindil Beach. I was advised at the time that there were some issues with the ARPA certificate, which are clearly on the public record. There was some informal complainants. It was a decision of NTMEC. As you heard it is an independent company running under the *Corporations Act*.

It was doing a risk assessment individually. The decision was made and it is good to take it back to Mindil Beach.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** To clarify, you said that it was the Major Events Company that made that decision?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Who did you or your department consult with on moving the fireworks away from Mindil Beach?

**Mr POTTER:** It has been clearly made on the public record that ARPA was involved. There was a TO custodian individual—who I will not be naming—and the Major Events Company.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Did you or your department estimate the potential cost to local traders at Mindil Beach as a result of your decision?

**Mr POTTER:** I can tell you—I will hand to the chief executive shortly—is only discussion I had which related to the ARPA certificate and the complainant.

In relation to the specifics of business investment, the economy and small business, I am happy to hand over to the chief executive.

**Mr DRABSCH:** These decisions were a matter for the NTMEC. There was no involvement by us and the department in relation to those processes.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** To clarify, you did not have any discussions with the department or Major Event Company about the potential cost to local traders at Mindil Beach as a result of that decision?

**Mr POTTER:** When a decision is made—whether by government or an independent company in this instance—there is a variety of features that are weighed up in making that decision. One of those, in this instance, was the potential for litigation in not having ARPA and individuals making formalised complaints.

That was a decision that was made by the independent company which has a board of directors and operates under the *Corporations Act* and, therefore, needs to comply with the board in making sure it is adequately protected.

In terms of the additional cost to move it to the Waterfront—which may be your next question—that was never raised with me because it was to be absorbed internally into their budget.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You were more worried about legal ramifications than Territorians enjoying Territory Day at Mindil Beach?

**Mr POTTER:** That is a comment you have made, not one that I ever made. I have been clear in the previous outputs. We weigh up a multitude of factors when making decisions. It is incumbent on any good government and minister to make decisions that are best informed with information they are provided.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** As Minister for Major Events, you did not speak to the traders at Mindil Beach about what that move could potentially cost them in lost opportunity?

**Mr POTTER:** That is the decision of the independent company and discussions it would have with the traders. It is not the department. If it was the department, that would be a different outcome. It would be something that the chief executive officer would be briefing me on regularly and, potentially, I may be involved in.

From my knowledge, I never had a request from those businesses to meet. You would know this better than anyone, Member for Brennan, that anyone who asks to meet me gets a meeting. It was never raised in my office. I am happy to stand corrected but that was never the information provided to me.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Did you not get a meeting with Major Events either, in this case?

**Mr POTTER:** That is incorrect. I meet with Major Events regularly as I meet with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. The point I made to you just then was that I never had a request from any of the Mindil Beach traders.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do they have to come to you before they understand that a decision has been made for them to have a say whether they would be trading at Mindil Beach for fireworks? Do you understand where I am going with this? They did not know it would be changed. You are trying to tell them that they have to come to you before they know it will be changed?

**Mr POTTER:** I would never try to tell you anything or put words in your mouth. I am saying that there was never a request made to me to have a meeting. As I have said very clearly on the public record, the decision ...

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Why would they make a meeting if they did not even know something was happening?

**Madam CHAIR:** We have been doing so well. Member for Brennan, let the minister finish. I will come back to you even if it is not a question but for further commentary so that you can get it on the record. We will let the minister speak uninterrupted.

**Mr POTTER:** You asked me if I had met with the Mindil Beach traders and I responded, saying, 'No, I have not and nor was a request put to me to meet with them'. It is the responsibility of NTMEC, the independent, standalone company that answers to a board of directors under the *Corporations Act* to do that stakeholder engagement, as it does for BASSINTHEGRASS or Million Dollar Fish or Parrtjima in the Red Centre. That is all the events that we fund and will continue to fund under the Labor government.

It was not a discussion that was had with me and the traders because there was no meeting asked for. I cannot answer any more than that.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** That is because they did not know about it, nor did Territorians, so it was after the fact. That is why there was no request.

What was the estimated cost to move Territory Day fireworks away from Mindil Beach?

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister answered that previously. I will let him rearticulate that.

**Mr POTTER:** I did answer that earlier. It was never cost that was raised with me. Therefore, I assume, having not been provided with the specifics, that it was absorbed within its end-year budget.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Do you not know what the estimated cost was to move the Territory Day fireworks from Mindil Beach?

**Madam CHAIR:** That is not what he said.

**Mr POTTER:** I have been very clear on the public record. It is an independent company that answers to a board of directors under the *Corporations Act*. The chief executives are clear on what can and cannot be answered in this instance.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Under commercial-in-confidence, Territorians will not know that cost?

**Mr POTTER:** You verbalised me. That is incorrect.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am trying to understand.

**Mr POTTER:** It is a standalone company. I cannot talk on behalf of an independent company.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The bottom line is that Territorians will not know that cost. I am asking questions on behalf of Territorians. I am not able to give them that answer because you are not able to give me that answer. Is that correct?

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister has answered the question. You may not like the answer, but it has been answered. I will hand over to the minister, then we will move on to a different line of questioning considering that we limited time with this minister.

**Mr POTTER:** Normally the total cost of events will come after the event has been concluded when we know all the costs and the invoices have come in to be paid. The time to pay the invoices and the like is a policy for the independent company.

I will hand over to Shaun to talk through this and answer any clarifying comments.

**Mr DRABSCH:** The issues of the individual costs are a matter for the company to manage through its board of directors and its operational executive and their assessment of the risks. As I indicated in the statement that I made at the beginning, that is not a matter open to the Estimates process.

The government provides \$41m towards the Events Corporation. What we can discuss is that this is clearly directed at supporting a range of events which support the activity and attraction of the Northern Territory to holiday visitors, other visitors and Territorians to maintain and improve the liveability of the Northern Territory.

It is things like Million Dollar Fish, Parrtjima, the NRL games, Bassinthe grass and the supercars which just happened on the weekend. Territory Day is happening at Mindil Beach and those costs would have been budgeted, I am sure. There is the Red Centre NATS and the Alice Springs Masters Games.

These events attract a vast range of people. For example, Million Dollar Fish attracted 61,000 registrations, up from 47,000 last year. Parrtjima, encouragingly, had 21,300 this year, compared with 20,200 last year; the NRL; and BASSINTHEGRASS had 16,000, up from 13,800 last year. The Supercars was close to last year, with just under 40,000, compared with 42,000 last year.

The economic contribution of these activities and the importance of maintaining this independence and strict commercial focus of the events company goes to the economic value it has delivered to the Territory. The economic contribution of Million Dollar Fish is estimated at \$70.8m; Parrtjima, \$14.9m, most of that for Central Australia; NRL, \$4.8m; BASSINTHEGRASS, \$13.1m; the Supercars on the weekend, \$27.6m in economic benefit. These numbers were from the 2023 calendar year.

Just those and the Red CentreNATS total \$138m of economic benefit. These are valuable contributions to the economy of the Territory. The events company needs to have that clarity, certainty and focus on delivering these events, which are substantial events attended by the public. There are key security issues that relate to them, which is why we have that independent structure so they have a clear focus on management of those activities.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the changing of the venue, did you approach the company and ask them to change their mind?

**Mr POTTER:** I do not direct the company to do anything in relation to that. With the information provided to me and to them at the time they made the decision, they had to weigh up the risk profile and exposure to the board, the company and potential litigation, and they did that. Once we got clarity from the Estimates process about it not being a mandatory requirement, and identifying who the potential complainant was, the government was able to risk-mitigate and get Territory Day back to Mindil Beach, where it should be.

**Mr MALEY:** You said government did that; I thought you said it was a private company's decision to move it. Whose decision was it?

**Mr POTTER:** In relation to it moving to the Waterfront, Major Events makes those decisions. In relation to moving it back to Mindil Beach, there is a level of exposure that needed support, and government is able to provide that, so we moved it back.

**Mr MALEY:** Who is 'we'?

**Mr POTTER:** I think the Chief Minister and I have been clear in our press conferences with the events company and provided the assurances they needed to take the event back to Mindil Beach?

**Mr MALEY:** Who made the final decision?

**Mr POTTER:** Major Events made the final decision to move the event; where it needed support it come to government. We provide Major Events a budget line item, and when it had potential shortfalls et cetera, it come to government, but ultimately it is a decision for Major Events.

**Mr MALEY:** On 11 June you went on radio and said that you were glad the department did the right thing. What thing did the department do?

**Mr POTTER:** Took the fireworks back to where they should be, which is Mindil Beach.

**Mr MALEY:** But it is not your decision to make, as you just told the committee.

**Mr POTTER:** Correct, and you just said that I clearly made the point that Major Events made the decision to go back. They engage with government for additional support so they could take it back to Mindil Beach, but the ultimate decision rests with the Major Events company.

**Mr MALEY:** What extra support did you provide them?

**Mr POTTER:** As we articulated in Estimates last week, there was uncertainty about the AAPA accreditation requirement. AAPA made it clear that it was non-mandatory, which then gave the mandate to go back to Mindil Beach. We have been clear in this instance that there was miscommunication concerning the requirement for the AAPA certificate. There was also concern around informal complainants. Once it was made clear that there was not a mandatory requirement and it was still within the scope to do it, NT Major Events made the decision to go back to Mindil Beach.

**Mr MALEY:** It was not your government's decision. It was the private company who made the decision.

**Mr POTTER:** Member for Nelson, the decision to expend NT Major Events company money to direct Major Events personnel to establish and set up a fence is at the discretion and decision of NT Major Events Company Chief Executive, the board, Chair and others. It was made clear and clarified during the Estimates process last week what was and was not mandatory, therefore we were able to move the event back to Mindil Beach.

**Mr MALEY:** I am still confused. Who made the final decision?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think we are repeating ourselves. I will let you ask another question.

**Mr MALEY:** The minister said there would be some support. What support did you give them? AAPA had already told them that they did not need it. What support did your department give them?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, you have already answered the question. If you wish to provide additional information to help the Member for Nelson, feel free, but if you feel you have answered the question, I can call other questions.

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot clarify the cost to move it to the Waterfront, as an example, because it was being absorbed within their budget. To move back to Mindil Beach there would potentially be a cost; it was a risk to them because we are getting close to the end of the financial year. What they needed to do was to get assurances that if there was an assumed cost that they would be able to deliver Mindil Beach. Again, we gave them that assurance so the decision still rests with them. It is a financial one because we fund the Major Events Company, and it will be in terms of the risk profile and decisions that rest with the independent company.

**Mr MALEY:** You offered them more money to move back?

**Mr POTTER:** Member for Nelson, we do not know what the cost is yet. When events are completed, we can receive the true cost. There was a discussion regarding an assumed increase in costs to move back and if there would be an ability to access funds. It is going back to exactly where it should be which is Mindil Beach.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Minister, going back to your radio commentary on 11 June where you said that you were glad the department did the right thing, why are you blaming our hardworking public servants when you are the minister responsible for the decisions ultimately for having Territory Day here?

**Mr POTTER:** Member for Brennan, I have never blamed our public servants.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** You were glad that they did the right thing. What was the meaning of 'right thing'?

**Mr POTTER:** To return and keep the fireworks at Mindil Beach—to insinuate that by saying 'doing the right thing' is to blame our public servants; they are your words, not mine.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Who is to blame here? You are not taking responsibility.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have a big afternoon, using the opposition's own words, and the portfolio coming up is important. We can get into the ins and outs. I will let the discussion go, but I think everyone is excited that the crackers are back at Mindil Beach. Everybody in this room loves Territory Day crackers ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Commentary, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** You do not like crackers, Member for Araluen. I think you ...

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Territorians want to know about this cracker debacle.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No. I object to you gagging debate.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not gagging the debate.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I object to you giving commentary when you have the minister sitting in front of us. This is one of the most extraordinary stories I think we have heard in the last two weeks of Estimates. The fact that

he did not influence a decision, then he did influence a decision, he cannot share this, and he cannot say that is nonsense, and you are trying to gag it. It is extraordinary.

**Madam CHAIR:** No, I am not. I said we can keep going with, to use your words, nonsense questions.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It needs to be clarified, Chair, and that is exactly what the opposition is trying to do for the benefit of Territorians. If you want to gag it, that is your call.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, please be respectful. We can continue with this.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I think you should be respectful, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am being respectful.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** This is what Territorians want to hear.

**Madam CHAIR:** We can keep talking about firecrackers. I think we are all excited by Territory Day coming up. Member for Brennan, you can continue with your line of questioning and keep getting the same answers, or I can ask if you have any different questions under these outputs.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** It sounds like the minister does not want to talk about this because he keeps repeating himself.

**Madam CHAIR:** He has been open with the ...

**Ms BOOTHBY:** And then you are trying to stop the debate from happening.

**Madam CHAIR:** No, I am not.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** This is important to Territorians, and I think they would appreciate that we can go through these questions. I am aware of time as well, and there is an important output coming up, but there are important questions that Territorians have asked of us to make sure that the minister is able to provide answers.

Minister, regarding the Masters Games, how much has been spent to date?

**Mr POTTER:** In relation to the individual expenditure for the Masters, I cannot give you the breakdown at the moment. I will hand to the department, if they can. It will be good to bring back the Masters Games this year to Alice Springs. This will be a test case for ongoing Masters Games. We need people to turn up to the events because it is important to Central Australia. I have been very clear with the department that we need to see this through and then have a review and make sure that if it is not the event of for Central Australia what is the event for Central Australia to give them what they deserve in lifestyle amenity.

One that we have brought into the Territory and recently announced is the Motocross GP. This will be the first time it has come back to Australia. Since the early 2000s over 700 million people viewed that competition across 180 continents, with about 18 individual riding events. It will come to Darwin in September or October next year. We anticipate it will generate over \$20m of economic benefit into the Northern Territory.

The Member for Brennan and Member for Nelson and others have seen the video on the Chief Minister's Facebook page. There is significant interest for the event, not just from Territorians but Kamfari and the Finke Desert Race, which are fantastic Territory events. We are bolstering that from the Lawler government to include Motocross GP. It is the third most watched motor sport in the world. The women's current world champion is a Kiwi, so to have this event so close to New Zealand will be a huge event for the Territory. It will back into the off-peak season, and it will supplement our V8s, Finke Desert Race and Kamfari.

**Mr DRABSCH:** We cannot talk about individual expenditures on events, but I can confirm that the Alice Springs Masters Games will take place from 12 to 19 October this year. Two new sports events to the games are AFL Nines and triathlon. Unfortunately, swimming has been cancelled due to the reduced local club base to manage the program. We have had a lot of interest and desire, particularly in Central Australia and Alice Springs, to bring back the games. It is important that we give them the opportunity to present the games and no doubt the NTMEC will review the performance of the games and its contribution to the local Alice Springs economy. We will find out more about that as we go into the next calendar year.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Why was there no Northern Territory flag flown at the Supercars over the weekend? There were multiple Australia flags, Aboriginal flags and Torres Strait Islander flags which were flown down the straight, but there was no Northern Territory flag, why is that?

**Madam CHAIR:** I will jump in, as there was another question from the Member for Araluen on the Masters.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You just said that swimming has been cancelled because of the inability of the local club base to manage it. Can you explain that? I thought it was because the numbers were so low.

**Mr DRABSCH:** The advice I have is in relation to the support available for the local club base.

**Mr LOVETT:** I believe it is because there is another national event for swimming being hosted by the Northern Territory in Darwin at the same time. I think that reduces the capacity.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** A swimming event in Darwin affects the Alice Springs Masters Games.

**Mr LOVETT:** It is a national event being hosted in Darwin. That is my understanding.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is a real shame because Dawn Fraser was heavily involved in the masters ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** There is a lot of real shame surrounding the Alice Springs Masters Games, Madam Chair, and probably the biggest one being that you have canned them for the last six years. I was asked if I am participating by the Member for Port Darwin. It has been six years and I am a bit seized up since I last participated, and I cannot guarantee I will be running anywhere. Maybe to assist someone as they fall over the line—someone else, perhaps.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do not look at me.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I am not looking at you. I am talking about a very important event ...

**Madam CHAIR:** It is a wonderful event.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** ... as you say, very important to the Alice Springs economy, very important to our 'lifestyle amenity' you just said, minister, but it has been six long years and we are told that it may not even happen, and if it does it will be a much diminished, depleted version.

Can you tell me exactly where we are at with the Alice Springs Masters Games? Will it definitely proceed and what events will not be included at this stage? You mentioned swimming, because of a national swimming event apparently being held in Darwin. What else will not be included in this event that we have not had for six years?

**Mr POTTER:** I share your concern about how long it has taken to get the Masters Games back. To be fair, for two of those years COVID restricted the ability to run major events like that. That is not an excuse; it is just an example as to why it has taken so long.

What I can tell you is that the only event I am aware of that has been cancelled is swimming. We also have AFL Nines and triathlon coming into play there. I can give Alice Springs residents assurance that if it does not go ahead it is not because of the government changing its position. We are funding this and moving forward, but the only thing holding it back would be volunteers and participants, and unfortunately I do not have control over that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You just said, 'If it does not go ahead', so it is possible that it will not go ahead, is that what you are telling me?

**Mr POTTER:** What I am telling you is that if people do not sign up for sports, the sport cannot go ahead because there is no-one playing. If we do not have the volunteers, that would be another barrier, delay or shrinkage of the program offered. As a government, we provided the money and the intent, and the Major Events Company is delivering on that.

From my point of view as minister, it is all guns go and full steam ahead to get this going. I cannot influence who signs up and who volunteers.



**Mrs LAMBLEY:** There are other sports that were announced as not going ahead, but I cannot remember what they are. Maybe someone else sitting with us today can?

**Mr POTTER:** I do not have those in front of me. I am happy to take it on notice and come back to you.

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**Question on Notice No 5.5**

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

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What sports at this point will not be included in the 2024 Masters Games in Alice Springs?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.5.

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**Madam CHAIR:** We will move on from Masters. The Member for Brennan was asking a question about the V8s and flags.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Why were no Northern Territory flags flown at the Supercars? There were multiple Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags all down the straight, but no Territory flag.

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot answer that. I do not have any information on it. I am happy to come back to you, but we would love to see the Territory flag flown at all our events.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Can I put that on notice?

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**Question on Notice No 5.6**

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

**Ms BOOTHBY:** Why was no Territory flag flown at the Supercars? There were multiple Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags all down the straight, but no Territory flag.

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.6.

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**Ms BOOTHBY:** I have lots of questions, but I will wrap up now so that we can go to the next output.

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

**OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – TOURISM, SERVICES AND HOSPITALITY**  
**Output 3.2 – Events**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Tourism, Services and Hospitality. Output 3.1, Tourism, is the responsibility of another minister, so the committee will now consider Output 3.2, Events.

No questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0. It also concludes consideration of all output groups relating to the Major Events portfolio.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the agency officials who assisted the minister. The committee will break for five minutes before we move on to consider the Police portfolio.

**Mr POTTER:** I thank Scott and Shaun for their work today, and congratulate Shaun on retirement shortly. This is the last time you do Estimates with me, so thank you for your service to the Northern Territory Government.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Before we move to the next portfolio, minister, you have an update on Question 5.6, the flags at the V8 supercars.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 5.6**

**Mr POTTER:** Madam Chair, to clarify and correct the record, there were Northern Territory flags flying. I have photos from pit lane of at least four of the Northern Territory flags.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will make sure the Member for Brennan ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Speaking to that answer, she asked specifically about down the straight.

**Mr POTTER:** Those are on the straight where all the flags are flying. I am happy to get those printed and send them to you.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** On the side of the straight where it was the Australian flag, the Aboriginal flag, the Torres Strait Island flag?

**Mr POTTER:** There were Northern Territory flags flying along the straight.

**Madam CHAIR:** Before we all flag over this issue, just table the document.

**Mr POTTER:** I will get the document printed and table it.

**Madam CHAIR:** Great. For Question on Notice 5.6, the minister will provide a picture of the Northern Territory flags on the pit straight, to answer the Member for Brennan's question.

**NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE**

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

**Mr POTTER:** I have Michael Murphy APM, Commissioner for the Northern Territory Police Force; the new Deputy Commission, Martin Dole, to my left; Paul Kelly, the Chief Financial Officer; Lisa Wilson, Executive Director; and Catherine Weber, who is still the Deputy Chief Executive Officer Corporate. We have all the assistant commissioners behind us the commissioner will pull forward as required.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are on our best behaviour; there are an awful lot of officials. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr POTTER:** No, I will not be making an opening statement.

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

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 that relates to the Northern Territory Police. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is disappointing but also telling that you are not making an opening statement today. We have men and women in blue across the Territory leaving their families every day to protect ours and

you cannot bring yourself to string a few sentences together to either thank them, acknowledge the hard work they have done and that under eight years of your government crime is through the roof ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Spillett ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** ... and they are the ones on the front line ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I ask you to stop, Leader of the Opposition. Some ministers made a statement—you criticised them for time wasting. The minister chose not to make a statement, I am sure to allow lots of questions. You do not appear to be asking a question related to budget and fiscal strategy. I will allow some latitude for commentary. Could you please refrain at this early point and ask a question under the output we are at?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am sure, Madam Chair, that he is a big boy and can handle it himself. He has made a big-boy decision not to give an opening statement thanking our police, outlining their hard work over the 12 months. It is astonishing when crime continues to be the number one issue that Territorians care about. It is the number one issue that our police have to deal with and he has nothing to say about it.

We have plenty of questions to ask ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, he knows it is an important issue to you. He is allowing the maximum time ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is not an important issue to me ...

**Madam CHAIR:** If you keep interrupting me I will put you on a warning.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** ... it is an important issue to every Territorian ...

**Madam CHAIR:** All right. Member for Spillett, I am formally warning you that you are not conducting yourself in the spirit of the Estimates Committee. We have seen it over many days now. If you continue to disrupt, you will be asked to leave for an hour.

We are saying that this is an important area to you, and he is allowing the maximum time for questions. Instead, you keep avoiding asking a question and are on a rant, rather than directing your questions to the minister, the commissioner, the deputy commissioner and the other officials who have taken the time to brief you on anything you want. Do you have a question?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I have multiple questions, which will go over many hours, Madam Chair. I wanted to make it clear—because you said twice this is an issue important to me—that it is an issue important to every Territorian. Make no mistake about that.

**Madam CHAIR:** You do not have a question? Do we have any other questions under the output of budget and fiscal strategy?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Madam Chair, you are gagging ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Sorry, we were on the whole-of-government ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** ... debate. Let her ask the questions she needs to ask. Territorians will not be impressed by this performance.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is the performance of the Leader of the Opposition I am sure they are judging. I asked multiple times for questions. No-one as yet has asked a question. If that concludes consideration ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I have questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** Terrific. Let us get to them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** As I was saying, you could not find it within yourself to make a single statement about our police, despite being the Police minister. I am sure that has been noted by the hardworking people in the department who have prepared all your briefs for you and by all the men and women in blue on the roads fighting your government's crime crisis.

Crime is worse than ever before. In the last eight years of Labor, robberies and other offences are through the roof. Car thefts in Alice Springs are up 350% and robberies and other related offences are up 133%. In Darwin they have doubled. Territorians are paying the price for your failures to deliver a safe community. Our police are paying the price for your failure because it has increased their workload and it has increased the severity of what they are experiencing and what they endure every day. It is pushing them to the brink, to the limits of what they can physically, humanly possibly do with the limited resources that your government has given them.

How many homes of Territorians have been broken into in this reporting period?

**Mr POTTER:** Thank you, Leader of the Opposition, for the opportunity to finally speak. You are correct, Chair ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You had an opportunity to speak, and you gave it away.

**Madam CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, you are on a warning. I have made it clear through my chairing that you can ask a question uninterrupted, and the ministers and the officials get the same respect. If you interrupt once more, I will ask you to leave. I have warned you multiple times now. We have had a very productive Estimates hearing, which has been respectful. You have been able to get your points across, as have others. That is a final warning. Anyone who interrupts anyone I will not be accepting it.

Minister, please respond. Leader of the Opposition, he will be uninterrupted.

**Mr POTTER:** It is correct that I chose not to make an opening statement. I do not need to provide an opening statement when you are correct; it is the number one issue that faces Territorians, and rightfully so.

The Member for Brennan ceased asking questions in Major Events to get to this output. Regardless of whether I made an opening statement or not, I would have been criticised either way. I give my thanks and appreciation to the frontline officers whom I meet. I do not do it for the cameras because that is disingenuous. They know where I stand in supporting them.

In relation to your commentary on crime, it is the number one issue that faces Territorians and I have never shied away from that. We have done a body work to address it over the last eight years, especially in the last six months.

I will hand over to the commissioner to talk through the stats in relation to property offending that you had a question on.

**Mr MURPHY:** In relation to your question around Northern Territory crime statistics regarding offences against property, I have to caveat it with this. We had an information management system change in November that transitioned from PROMIS to SerPro and our collection of information changed. There has been some transparent media around the different collection of how the data settles. I have a high level of confidence in the data for December, January, February and March this year in the reporting period since the new system has come into play.

For offences against the property—unlawful entry with intent across the Northern Territory—in December 2023 there were 483 offences recorded; in January 2024, 653; in February 2024, 391; and in March 2024, 352.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When it is property offences is it not broken down into commercial and domestic; it is just all property?

**Mr MURPHY:** That is all property-related crime. It does not include theft and related offences and criminal damage—the theft damage to property. That is a separate category. With the figures I have given you that is a change between December and March of 131 accounts have dropped, so a change in 27% downturn.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are you saying that is when you compare it with December, January, February and March last year?

**Mr MURPHY:** No, across those rolling months. We cannot compare with last year because it has a low level of confidence using the PROMIS data compared with the SerPro data.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What are you comparing it with?

**Mr MURPHY:** Just the data we are collecting with the new system since November ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are you saying that from December to March it has dropped?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do you have separate data for how many businesses have been broken into?

**Mr MURPHY:** No, I do not have the data in relation to commercial or residential in front of me.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is it part of those figures you just gave me?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes, the collective unlawful entries or burglaries includes residential and commercial.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can I ask on notice to see whether I can get that data separated?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes, I am happy to take it on notice.

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#### **Question on Notice No 5.7**

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Please provide data broken down into business/commercial and domestic premises that have been broken into for December 2023 and January, February and March 2024?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 5.7.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many cars have been stolen over that period?

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify, are we talking NT-wide?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes.

**Mr POTTER:** While the Commissioner is finding those statistics, I can tell you that there is a body of work being done by general duties and, more importantly, Strike Force Trident and Viper in Darwin and Alice Springs.

**Mr MURPHY:** We have a bit of data on the stolen vehicles, Northern Territory-wide:

- December 2023—106 stolen, recovered 72 and not recovered 34
- January 2024—124 stolen, recovered 89 and not recovered 35
- February 2024—82 stolen, recovered 58 and not recovered 24
- March 2024—113 stolen, recovered 68 and not recovered 45.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you repeat the number stolen for December?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes, 106.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you confirm that is vehicles?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes. I can confirm that is stolen motor vehicles.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many Territorians have been stabbed?

**Mr POTTER:** This is probably a mixture of health and police. We can probably report those which were reported to the police, because that is a call for assistance.

**Mr MURPHY:** I do not have that information in front of me, because it is collected as aggravated assaults or the seriousness of the crimes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Could you go through what is included in aggravated assault?

**Mr MURPHY:** It breaks down into the offences against the person with acts intended to cause injury; sexual and related offences; robbery and extortion-related offences; abduction, harassment and other offences; dangerous or negligent acts; and homicide and related offences. I can give you a total figure for those offence codes, but it may not direct the information to stabbing because there are other forms of assault to facilitate the commission of crimes as well.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Assault against a person could also include a fist or something else.

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes. When it is an aggravation, it could be an injury.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What do you call that category?

**Mr MURPHY:** Offences against the person, which is broken down into subcategories defined under the codes: acts intended to cause injury; sexual assault; robbery; extortion; abduction; harassment; dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons; or homicide and related offences. I can give you a total offence for all of them across each month.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It might take a couple of minutes, but I do not mind if you read out December, January, February and March for each of those separate categories.

**Madam CHAIR:** You will need to ask that as a question through the minister.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, I think he heard me.

**Mr POTTER:** I have the same numbers in front of me and I am happy to read them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you.

**Mr POTTER:** Just to be clear, they do not break down as per stabbing in SerPro.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No, that is fine.

**Mr POTTER:** Acts intending to cause injury for the December 2023 was 707; January 2024 was 686; February was 644; and March was 669.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Each of the categories? I think there was about five or six the commissioner mentioned.

**Mr POTTER:** I will go through the remainder. Sexual assault and related offences for December 2023, 20; January 2024, 34; February, 27; and for March, 48. For robbery and extortion-related offences, December 2023 had 21; January 2024 had 18; February had 29; and March had 23. Abduction, harassment and other offences against a person for December 2023 was 16; January 2024 was 17; February was 11; and March was 12. For dangerous or negligent acts endangering a person, December 2023 had 15; January 2024 had seven; February had 11; and March was eight.

Homicide and related offences for December 2023 were one; January 2024 was five; and February and March were zero. To put some clarifying remarks there this will settle in SerPro, it may not be the final number for that at the time as they move through the process.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do you know when that will be settled in SerPro?

**Mr MURPHY:** Leader of the Opposition probably as we are navigating through SerPro we have a high level of competence the older the data is. March will still have a level of confidence, but it is about updating jobs and navigating the SerPro system. PROMIS was more responsive where SerPro take more time for the data

to settle. I think Caroline White from Attorney-General gave an understanding of what that means for Territorians. The data change and break change will have a high level of competence year on year or next year.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is domestic violence counted separately by Police?

**Mr POTTER:** That is correct, and I will hand to the commissioner to talk through.

**Mr MURPHY:** The incident reports for disturbance domestic in December 2023 were 3,451; January 2024 was 3,320; February 2024 was 3,086; and March 3,330.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Extraordinary. Speaking about SerPro and the impact that it is having on crime statistics, it says as part of the crime stats that they could be under-reported by up to 15% because of the SerPro system. Can you explain what that means?

**Mr POTTER:** I am unfamiliar where you got the 15% under-reporting from. I would be happy to have that clarified. I can tell you that there is a differentiation between the data provided in PROMIS and what we see in SerPro. We have been clear with the public that we can only compare data provided in SerPro now, and that is why you can see December through to March statistics. There are promising indications that the hard work that police are doing and the policy setting that we have is seeing a decline. We saw offences against the person across the Northern Territory decrease by 11.2% from 1,858 in December to 940 in March, which has been articulated. The same against offences against property decreased by 24.6% for same period. Acts intended to cause injury to the person decreased across the Territory by 11%, but then overall—and I think this is significant for Territorians—a decrease in victim-based offences across the Northern Territory by 19.9%.

Some of that will be in relation to the change from PROMIS and SerPro, but a large proportion of that, I suspect, will be due to the hard work of the Northern Territory Police Force and the additional resources that they are receiving.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There is no percentage error that you are expecting from data collected by SerPro?

**Mr POTTER:** I would not call it a percentage error. What I am referring to is the way that the system interprets and spits out data will be different to PROMIS. We have been clear on that. As we have more months into the SerPro system we will be firmer and more certain on how the system interprets data. I am happy for the commissioner to provide clarification.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I do not understand what that means, and I do not think anybody does. If data is going in, how can it then change over time and give you more confidence? You have given me a bunch of months—pick any of them. Property offences for March was 352. How can there not be certainty about that? There is either a margin of error that you have factored into this part of SerPro, they are accurate or they are inaccurate.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will pause. Minister, I will go to you and the commissioner to respond. I would like it to be uninterrupted.

**Mr POTTER:** There is a level of certainty that comes through the greater use of technology by the members and their understanding of how the system works. It is simple for those who are listening—when you use a Mac it is different from using a normal Microsoft system.

We are talking about two different systems—PROMIS is different from SerPro. The way you work through the data input is different from how it was done in PROMIS. The training and corporate knowledge of the members is different. PROMIS had been used for many years and members understood that system intimately.

We are rolling out a digital transformation to the agency, which does not come without its barriers and frustrations. I thank the members for the work they have done in that space working through it. It will better the Northern Territory Police Force in the long run. It digitises a bunch of their processes and will give better data outputs.

We are saying we cannot quantify for you how the ones and zeros of the system engineering works compared with the ones and zeros of the system engineering for PROMIS. We have been clear with Territorians about that. We have never shied away from that fact.

There will be a margin of error; there is no doubt. To quantify and put a hard statistic or percentage on it—we cannot provide that to you.

**Mr MURPHY:** Since the implementation, obviously there is a lot of work being done in the background on SerPro. Significant work and investment has been done by the digital transformation team supporting the workforce to understand and navigate through the new system. The implementation, training and the familiarisation is becoming a lot better. That is loud and clear from the workforce.

We will probably see the data move a bit quicker. We need to treat it with the settling for the first quarter for this data until we get a high level of confidence. I honestly cannot say what percentage we may see of the correction rate required because it will fluctuate.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It sounds to me more like the concern is not with the IT system but the data input. You do not have confidence that members are fully using the system because it is new to them. Are you more concerned about data going in as opposed to the system incorrectly producing datasets?

**Mr POTTER:** There is an element of that but, more importantly, the 64 new officers who will graduate on 28 June and the ones before that have only known SerPro. They understand that system and that is all they will ever know. There are members who have had PROMIS who are now transitioning to SerPro, so there will be margins of errors.

How the information flow works through the system is different from PROMIS. That is where the ambiguity comes into it. We need more time and data to get certainty.

**Mr MURPHY:** Some of the data is updated too as court cases progress. The data occurrences can fluctuate month on month. That is why it is important for us to revisit—looking at months in advance. The team will look at trends to better provide that governance over the top of the accountability of datasets. The importance of the datasets to inform operations and tactical options and policy is loud and clear in the police review.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What work is being done to make new data from December comparable with previous years? It seems convenient for your government that, all of a sudden come December, there cannot be year-on-year comparisons.

**Mr POTTER:** We do not do this for convenience, Leader of the Opposition. We work with what is provided; that is the new system. We have been clear and forthright with Territorians about how the data would impact on comparisons with previous years. Unfortunately we can only compare it month on month until we have a full year's worth of data which we can compare against.

We use other avenues—those assistance calls for the JESCC, attendance by members et cetera, and admissions to hospital, as we spoke of earlier in Alcohol Policy.

There is no convenience here. It is unfortunate, but it is not done for any outcome other than to give the Northern Territory Police Force the best technology it needs to police in a modern world.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Has any work been done to find a solution so that there can be the comparison of crime statistics prior to December last year?

**Mr POTTER:** Earlier in the week the Department of Attorney-General and Justice gave a fairly detailed response to who owns the crime statistics.

**Mr MURPHY:** We are reliant on the dataset from the Department of Attorney-General and Justice. That is really rich and long term. We can still see what crime types are occurring and frequency. It is just a differentiation of recording in the new system. The longer-term trends are still available through the Department of Attorney-General and Justice. It is important to get the dataset right.

We are heavily reliant upon our operational experience from our command teams in the field who know that we have seen unprecedented demand in the last couple of years on police resources, calls for services, youth crime and houses being broken into and their businesses. There are road crashes and lives lost. That is a wealth of experience across the front line that we are relying on to direct policing operations.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The issue is, though, that Territorians need confidence in the system. You have a government that has overseen the highest rates of crime that we have ever seen and has ignored and



neglected our police over a long period of time, a period of which you were the police adviser to the then failed Police minister. Come December, all of a sudden for there not to be a chance to check year-on-year statistics is something that Territorians cannot believe. You have no credibility to be able to say to them, 'Sorry, it is an IT issue'. People do not believe that there are no IT solutions to be able to crunch this data.

Is there an IT solution you could have adopted? Did you explore one? How much did it cost? Was it that you just decided that there is a line in the sand come December and we are moving on?

**Mr POTTER:** In terms of the procurement for the ICT systems, that was best directed to DCDD. It runs major ICT acquisitions. It would have been best directed to them.

Territorians are commonsense people. They would understand that if you go from one service provider and their technical solution to another, then it will not be as simple as you make it to be. That is not the case. We have tried where we can with the Attorney-General's department regarding comparison statistics. The best we can offer is long-term trend analysis.

As this system rolls out, it will futureproof the organisation.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Will you answer whether you actually explored if there is an opportunity to go back and crunch this data so that people can see previous years?

**Mr POTTER:** In terms of the acquisition of the product, that rests with DCDD and not with Police ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That was not my question.

**Mr POTTER:** You are asking whether we would go back and crunch the data if there was an alternative off-the-shelf option. That question needed to be directed to DCDD as it does major ICT infrastructure. It was a question best related to them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** As Police minister, did you ask the DCDD minister or any other minister or make any direction or asked for any work to be done to explore how we can present transparent statistics to Territorians which shows the comparison from December with previous years?

**Mr POTTER:** I had those discussions with relevant Cabinet colleagues and with the department as to what could be done to give transparency and better fidelity on comparison of data. The solution is not there, although you propose that it is. We had an option to alert Territorians to the fact that we could not compare data with priors or we could have continued to run it and say nothing. That is not what this government does. We have been open and transparent regarding crime statistics because they are of significant concern and the focus of many Territorians. I have been honest as the Police minister from day dot around this issue. I cannot change the way the system operates, but it was a change that the organisation needed to do to futureproof it.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do you think it meets the expectations of Territorians that they can no longer compare crime statistics prior to December?

**Mr POTTER:** The one thing I have learned in this job is not to speak on behalf of the majority without knowing. There will be some people who are disappointed, but it does not change—as the commissioner rightly pointed out—that we have other mechanisms and ways to identify crime trends. One of those is calls for assistance and where we see those escalating, hence why out of the police review you see an additional 25 call-taker operators funded; over 200 officers being funded by this government; a \$571m investment into police; and the Territory Safety Division, with 52 officers in Nightcliff and 18 in Alice Springs. We understand the drivers and the calls for assistance are increasing and we are allocating the resources to do it.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Why would Territorians have confidence in your new crime stats, compared to the old ones, given that after eight years of having crime trending upwards and carnage across the Territory you did nothing? Why should people have confidence that now, because you have a new computer system, that from December you will somehow now magically actually respond to ever-increasing levels of crime?

**Mr POTTER:** I am not asking or telling Territorians to think one way or the other. I am saying that the system we have is the system we have now, and we cannot compare it to PROMIS. We have delivered more officers over our term of government than the previous Country Liberal Party's term of government. We have committed to delivering more officers and we are dealing with alcohol being a leading cause in domestic,

family and sexual violence being prevalent among most of the jobs that the Northern Territory Police face. To say we have done nothing is incorrect.

Unfortunately, this is the system, and how it integrates with the old system and the comparison cannot be changed. We needed to make this system change so that we did not have a system failure, which would have impacted more Territorians.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There is more crime and more calls to 000 and the 131 number, which is putting huge pressure on the JESCC. How many 000 calls have been received over the reporting period? To confirm, does that go for the whole reporting period or does your JESCC data only start at December?

**Mr POTTER:** We can provide the data from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024, as is the mandate of the Estimates Committee. You are right that the calls for assistance have increased to the 131 444 and 000 call centre. That is why we have invested 25 extra call takers over the next year's budget and over 200 officers over the next four years. We know we need more people to answer the calls for assistance. I was clear, when I took over the portfolio, that a measure of success is when a Territorian calls for a police officer, they get one. We are now putting more money into police to get more police officers on the beat.

I will hand over to the Commissioner to talk to those KPIs.

**Mr MURPHY:** I agree that the Joint Emergency Services Communication Centre is extremely busy, and they work incredibly hard. The review points directly to that and the required investment in technology and staffing to improve service delivery to Territorians.

There were 149,979 000 calls from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024 with a projected (inaudible) put per month-on-month demand to 199,000 which is a 13% increase from the last reporting period.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** To clarify, when you said the 'projected' are you anticipating between 31 March 21024 to 1 July 2024?

**Mr MURPHY:** Basically, on a monthly average, we are expecting it to be just under 200,000 for 000. That does not include any other calls. The total amount of calls that come into that call centre is 279,970 between 1 July 2023 to 31 March this year.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When you say total calls, what is the difference? Have there been nearly 150,000 to Triple Zero and the remainder to the 131 number or are there other calls in there as well?

**Mr MURPHY:** There were 105,879 to 131 444 is and there are some other calls in relation to other business inquiries of 24,000 which could be Crime Stoppers and other associated numbers which come in from emergency services calls for assistance and the like.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How do the 149,979 calls to 000 compare to the same period last year?

**Mr POTTER:** In 2022–23 for 131 444 there were 151,754 calls.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the average wait time for someone who has called 000?

**Mr POTTER:** The average wait time as at March 2024 was 18 seconds.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is 18 seconds for the call to be answered?

**Mr POTTER:** That is the wait time in the queue.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the longest time someone waited for a 000 call to be answered?

**Mr POTTER:** We will take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.8

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the longest time someone waited for a 000 call to be answered?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes, we will accept the question.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.8.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many 000 calls are not answered at all—the call ends before it is picked up?

**Mr POTTER:** I will let the commissioner answer that one.

**Madam CHAIR:** While they are getting that data, for the committee's awareness we will break for lunch at 12 noon, in about 10 minutes.

**Mr MURPHY:** The abandoned calls are what you are pointing out. That is calls that are not answered across the Territory's 25,303.

**Madam CHAIR:** What is the threshold for an abandoned call? Can you articulate that?

**Mr MURPHY:** People who hang up ...

**Madam CHAIR:** It clicks through and then they might hang up?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes. Multiple calls coming in—a surge into the call centre. There might be a longer wait time. People hang up or their call is unanswered.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many calls not answered—it has effectively rung out?

**Mr POTTER:** We cannot give you that data on this. We can offer you those that were answered, those that were abandoned, the total calls received and the number of calls in terms of the target KPI, but you never meant that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is it not important for police to know how people in their desperate time of need do not have their call answered? It is different if someone voluntarily hangs up, that is one thing I can understand. However, to be ringing and the call failed, that is extremely bad.

**Mr POTTER:** I understand the point you are making. We can identify those that are abandoned which was 25,303. There are other technical issues like going in and out of service that we cannot quantify for you. The number I can offer you today is the abandoned calls, the calls that are answered and the total calls received.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you take on notice the number of calls were not answered. They did not fail; they were not answered by the centre.

**Mr POTTER:** I will take it on notice, but I will clarify that if a call is not answered in the Territory it will be diverted to another location to be answered. I have been a member who has done that and got through at a busy time and then handed it over. It is not straightforward but I am happy to take it on notice and see if we can answer it.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.9

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Could you please provide the number of calls to 000 that go unanswered which does not include calls where the person calling has disconnected the call? It is just the data showing how many times people tried to ring and no-one picked up the phone.

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

**Mr POTTER:** I accept the question.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.9.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many instances did calls that go unanswered—as you said earlier—were diverted interstate?

**Mr POTTER:** That will roll into the question we took on notice. That will be part of clarifying ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you need the Leader of the Opposition to restate the question, or that will ...

**Mr POTTER:** No, I am comfortable if she is that this will be included.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They are different things. There is one thing to call them and get a dead dial tone at the end meaning the call has ended. It is another thing to then have someone interstate pick up your call. I would prefer them to be separated as far as possible.

**Madam CHAIR:** Your previous question was ringing out, not getting through.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify for the record, the first interaction on 000 goes to Telstra. Telstra then attempts to connect with the JESCC in Darwin. If Telstra cannot connect, it will continue to attempt to connect. We can attempt to get that data from Telstra. We are happy to take it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.10

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you please provide the number of instances that a call by a Territorian to 000 was answered by someone interstate, not including the initial reception by 000 Telstra?

**Mr POTTER:** I accept the question.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.10.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When do you expect the additional 25 staff to the JESCC to be in place? How many are currently being recruited and in active duty?

**Mr MURPHY:** That is the body of work that is subject to the review. The review implementation team is still with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. That transitions to the police review implementation team on 1 July.

The call centre and the 25 additional staff and the front line are the priority. That will be a decision made by the review implementation team as well. It all plugs into the recruitment and getting those auxiliaries. We have had 44 auxiliaries across this year to service the call centres and front counters. That is part of the recruitment and attraction package to join the Northern Territory Police, to undergo those important roles and to put police in there as well. That will be one of the priorities of the review implementation team in July.

In saying that, it will not be 25 straight up. It is about recruiting, training—there is a 12-week program—then delivering them to the call centre. The front counter is where the demand exists. It takes time to find the right people, train them up and get them in.

We have some work to do in the call centre because it is a very busy environment. It injects trauma into a lot of our operators with some of the calls they take.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I have no doubt about that, commissioner. It is a very difficult job. It done exceptionally well by the team there. I have been to many of those graduations. I look forward to many more.

Just confirming, has recruitment of the 25 additional staff into the JESCC not commenced yet?

**Mr POTTER:** That is additional funding provided to the Northern Territory Police Force to hire an additional 25 officers. It continues to recruit above attrition and based on priority need. The commissioner has been clear that the resource allocation model will go a long way to identify the priority needs for the agency.

Having recently gone to the college, they are at capacity. We have members behind us who can talk to that. It will be at the discretion of the commissioner as to how he fills the front line and the 25 positions, as well as about the candidates who have presented to the Northern Territory Police Force recruitment.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are a couple of minutes away from our scheduled break. Please be conscious of that in asking and responding to questions.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The reason I am asking—I do not doubt that it is a priority of the commissioner; that is not my problem at all—is that the government is talking about 25 this and 570 that and 200 this. None of it is real. I just wanted to confirm—which you have—that the 25 additional JESCC that you have budgeted for do not exist yet.

**Mr POTTER:** As we discussed on the floor of the parliament, you are most welcome to go and see the Territory Safety Division, which I announced. They are real. The assistant commissioner is sitting behind me ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You barely let me into a police station, let alone see them.

**Mr POTTER:** You see the 52 officers for the Territory Safety Division, which is 19 at the moment. The expressions of interest will go out shortly. You see the 18 officers at the Territory Safety Division in Alice Springs. We see 200 officers budgeted for.

As the minister, I can offer the agency resources. It is at the discretion of the commissioner to expend those resources as he best sees fit.

I can assure Territorians that we have delivered more police officers in our term of government than the Country Liberal Party did in its term. There is commentary from the Northern Territory Police Association which was disappointed in the 120 officers failed to be delivered under your government previously.

I will continue to deliver the 200 officers, the 52 Territory Safety Division and the 18 officers from the TSD in Alice Springs and the 25 officers for the call takers.

**Mr MURPHY:** Last week, we swore in 12 auxiliaries in Darwin who commenced their training on 3 June, as well as 12 in Alice Springs to service that community. Whilst we still replace attrition, those 25 will be created positions and additional positions into the call centre.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will break until 12.30 pm, when we will recommence on the same portfolio output.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** We were on the whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies. Are there any further questions?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** We know that 170,000 has been allocated to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner for the racism review into the police force. Do you support the racism review, given your own recent history of racist and misogynistic Facebook posts?

**Madam CHAIR:** Before the minister answers that, I will let that question go, but it is a budget and fiscal output. We discussed it this morning, if we could be considerate to our comments.

**Mr POTTER:** In terms of the funding, that will come from the Attorney-General's department. I have been clear that I support the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner's work. It will be forward facing and not retrospective or punitive in nature, and there is plenty of other work being done by the department ongoing with the coronial and ICAC. I have been honest and up front with owning my mistakes and actions. I have been on the public record and in parliament, and I will not provide any more comment on that. I think the work the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner will have to do is separate from my words and actions.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You mentioned words to the effect that it will not be retrospective or punitive in nature. Can you expand on that? Does that mean police who are found to be racist will not be punished?

**Mr POTTER:** The discussions that I have had with him with the terms of reference and the time line is yet to be determined; that will be between the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and the commissioner. The premise of the review will be to make sure they have the right policies and processes in place to support diverse and multicultural opportunities for those that want to take one of those 200 extra police officer positions we funded. There are already mechanisms in place for internal reviews concerning Professional Standards Command and other avenues, and it is not one for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. I am happy to hand over to the commissioner to add any clarifying comments.

**Mr MURPHY:** I met with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and discussed some options on how he can assist the police force moving forward and looking at cultural reform. I have also written to the Aboriginal Justice Unit. They will have a review process to look at agency's practices and overall racist conduct and any systems or policy settings that may be racist or discriminatory in nature. Ms Leanne Liddle is joining the team shortly. She has a wealth of knowledge from the Aboriginal Justice Unit and led that work through that agency. She has a high level of independence and energy to examine some of the challenges we are facing in the police force now.

The whole conglomerate of those actions to support our workforce and set some big targets of 35% Indigenous representation across the ranks of the Northern Territory Police will be a body of work. We are heavily recruiting to the Aboriginal liaison officer programs as well.

One of the main points we discussed with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner is about an investment of not looking in the rear vision mirror but focusing on the future, cultural reform and what we can do by providing training to the many recruits going through our college. We have 122 recruits in our college now. We can give them exposure through the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner work and their expertise.

Collectively that all works together with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, the important work Leanne will do and looking after our 177 employees who identify as ATSI in the workforce. We have just had two inaugural conferences with them so we heard their concerns of their hurt and how to look after the healing process. We have to make sure we listen, understand and have them speaking directly to the executive and plugging into the work Leanne will do.

We are also internally challenging our recruitment process because there are many barriers. We need to challenge the status quo to make it a different place and a culturally safe and competent area. In saying that, another important partnership I have been working on is the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT. I met with John Paterson. I will be talking to the land councils and NAAJA because we need to make a change. I am the Commissioner of Police and have to share the power to make that change. It is important work. We need them to stand side by side to do that, not just in the police force but in the whole community.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How is it possible, despite this review being called months ago, that the terms of reference have not even been completed?

**Mr POTTER:** We have a coronial ongoing, and it is yet to be finalised. There was an ICAC investigation. The last thing we want to see is a pile onto police. There is a process that needs to be completed. The discussions I have had with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner was that those needed to be completed before the work can commence. They needed to meet with the commissioner.

**Mr MURPHY:** Part of that discussion with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner was about the terms of reference and a scope. He will draft something and come back because we need to have a cooperative approach to make change with that cooperative partnership with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

Once that is finalised—I imagine it will be next week if not this week—he will come back and Ms Leanne Liddle, his team and I will look at it and discuss what that looks like for us. Obviously there will be discussion about funding and that there may be a shortfall in funding for him as well. I do not have any money allocated to support the direction the Attorney-General gave him. We will have to work through what services he can provide.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you guarantee that none of the money going towards the review will come from the Police budget?

**Mr POTTER:** I can assure Territorians that the money for the review is allocated to Police resources. We will work across government to find the shortfall that the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner may have. That will be work that will be undertaken through CM and C, AGD and my office.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Sorry, you are saying that the 170 came from Police. My understanding is that no money for this review is coming from police.

**Mr POTTER:** That is correct. I never said the money came from Police. I made it clear that it is Attorney-General and Justice that provides that funding.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The shortfall would not come from Police?

**Mr POTTER:** The shortfall of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner speaks of will need to be tested in relation to how he will use the resource for the terms of reference. I can tell you that none of the money allocated to Police review or the department in dealing with crime that is operational will be going into that review. We have the Chief Minister's department, the Attorney-General and Justice and other areas that we can, as a whole-of-government look to find any agreed shortfalls.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You will not rule out that it could come from the corporate services area or other areas in Police; you are just guaranteeing it will not be operational funding?

**Mr POTTER:** It will not be coming from Police.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The entire Police budget?

**Mr POTTER:** It will not be coming from Police.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The Police budget?

**Madam CHAIR:** He can say it 10 different ways if you would like to keep questioning, but he has made it ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I do not think you need to defend him, Madam Chair. He can answer the question.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am speaking, thank you. I think he has made it clear. If you have another question.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** With respect, I am asking the question. I do not think it is clear. Is it from the police budget or just from police?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think the *Hansard* will make it clear. You can think what you want of it, but the minister has answered the question.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** He has not. He was about to answer it and you interrupted him.

**Madam CHAIR:** He has answered the question multiple times.

Minister, I will allow you to say it another time, if you wish, but we can move on with other questions.

**Mr POTTER:** I have put it on the record.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You will not rule out that it will come from the police budget; you made that clear. Do you understand that police find it hypocritical of you to hold yourself at a lower standard than what you are holding them with this review?

**Madam CHAIR:** That question is not in order. The minister has spoken ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Gagging debate. Come on, let it go.

**Madam CHAIR:** If you have another question, please ask it.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you let me know why it is out of order?

**Madam CHAIR:** Because we spoke to it this morning. The minister just responded to a question of a similar nature and provided a response. If you do not have any more questions for budget and fiscal strategy, we can move on to the outputs.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I have plenty of questions. We are currently discussing the racism review ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Terrific. Ask them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am trying to ask them; you are running interference from your Police minister. He can put on his big boy pants and answer the question, frankly.

**Madam CHAIR:** We do not need to get into name-calling. We have been doing so well the last couple of days. He has answered a question of a similar nature. If you do not have questions of a different nature, the Member for Araluen is indicating that she has questions, so I can move to her.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Police minister, do you hold yourself to a lower standard than you hold police?

**Madam CHAIR:** It is the same question. It is ruled out of order.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** On what basis?

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, you have a question on the whole-of-government budget and fiscal outlook.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have a question along the same vein as what the Opposition Leader has been asking.

**Madam CHAIR:** Please take note of the comments I have made as Chair, but go ahead and ask.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** This is from the Member for Mulka. The recent evidence at the coronial inquiry into Kumanjayi Walker's death has highlighted ongoing and wide-reaching issues of racism within the police force. These issues cannot be ignored as they have been in the past. APO NT has called for an independent inquiry into racism within the department. In the media, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has stated that he cannot investigate without the appropriate resources. He has also stated that there is a complete lack of urgency or engagement of the police hierarchy.

Why is the government not prioritising the issue of an entrenched culture of racism, given that these issues have been uncovered during the coronial inquiry into the police shooting of an Aboriginal man, which raises questions about whether the culture of racism may be a central part of this man's death?

Why are we not seeing an urgent independent public and transparent inquiry? To delay or underfund such a process suggests that fixing this problem is not a priority and that the fair treatment of Aboriginal people is not important to the minister or commissioner. What funds are outlined in this budget to address this issue and how will it be done?

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for asking the question on behalf of our colleague. The member has gone to some detail there, minister and commissioner, if you could please answer.

**Mr POTTER:** I thank the Member for Mulka for his question. I understand the hurt and trauma that the coronial has brought for many people—not just in Aboriginal communities and those identifying as ATSI, but also police members, prior and serving.

It is correct; there is money allocated in the Attorney-General and Justice budget for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. I think it would be fair to say that the terms of reference need to be confirmed before a true and accurate reflection of what fund shortfalls there are. I have met with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and the discussions we had were that we needed to see the coronial public hearings completed, and the ICAC report before they get into his review.

As I have made clear on the public record, it is more about setting the policy frameworks in place to grow the agency with a more diverse and multicultural approach, rather than looking back and being punitive in nature. Arguably, there have been pockets of racism, and that has been clearly articulated throughout that coronial process, but I have been clear on the record to say that I do not believe there is systemic or cultural racism within the Northern Territory Police Force.



I do not think you could say that considering the targets they have met with the Aboriginal liaison officers and the work they have done with CREC and others. There is still work to do. I will let the commissioner talk through his recent hires and appointments, and the vision he has for the agency. There is work to be done, but there are a lot of hardworking Northern Territory Police officers who feel strongly about what has occurred and disappointed by the actions of past members or current serving members, but to say the whole organisation is that way is untrue. I understand for some members serving they may see it that way, but the ICAC report made it very clear there was nothing post-2016.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What ICAC report are you referring to?

**Mr POTTER:** The ICAC investigation into the Territory Response Group that was done.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The four-day inquiry.

**Mr POTTER:** Sorry, the interim report.

**Mr MURPHY:** The Northern Territory Police treats this incredibly seriously. We have done a body of work through engaging with our workforce. The minister pointed out there was a lot of hurt in the community and in the workforce, so we have been engaging with the workforce to understand the trauma and moving forward about what that means to them. We need to need to make some significant change investing in the future, and there is a collective effort around the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and his involvement and the education looking forward.

The Aboriginal Justice Unit have done a body of work already into the police force to understand. Ms Leanne Liddle who surveyed many officers over a long period of time and got a pretty good understanding. Bringing in Ms Leanne Liddle into the Northern Territory Police to undertake a leadership role is significant. She is a very strong woman. She was a police officer for 12 years; she is a lawyer, an Australian of the Year and she gets answers. It will be good and quite disruptive for her to come in and have a look. It concerns me some of the behaviours we have seen more recently in chat groups, but we do not know what we do not know. We need to find out and create an environment where it is safe to report any behaviours that are racist, discriminatory or misogynistic in nature. It will take an incredible body of work, and to do that we need to increase our employment rate for Indigenous employees from the current 12% up to 30%. That is a direction. It is not an aspirational target any longer.

We have a body of work to do, and it goes back to the previous point I made about challenging some of the recruitment strategies and plans we have. We cannot have someone whose fourth language is English completing all their applications in English and online. We need to be more contemporary and embracing. It plugs into the Police review which was highlighted. Over 500 officers provided feedback in the review about the leadership and development pathways for First Nations Aboriginal ATSIC people to come into the workforce at all ranks. We have 70 ALOs across 39 communities which has made a huge significance in connection to community. Understanding that, and it goes back to we judge an operation—the success of an operation is the absence of use of force. The ALOs have been doing tremendous work asking people to come forward and collecting intelligence. It is about making a difference but also embedding leadership pathways so we can have even special measures ranks through sergeant and senior sergeant roles so we can start embedding Aboriginal leadership into the police force to have a future where they can see leadership positions.

The question around lethargy of meeting the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner—I had a meeting with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner planned, but I had to cancel because I had to go to a funeral in Hermannsburg, and it was not rescheduled. It is not a matter of being evasive at all; it is just that it was not rescheduled. Once he made his media statement, we made contact and caught up quickly.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You said that this review would not be retrospective. Commissioner, you said, 'Not a rear view'. Why have you chosen not to reflect on the past when some of what has happened over the last year or two has to be relevant to the future. The past informs the future. I am wondering why that decision has been made.

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to hand to the commissioner on this one, but there has already been a body of work in the coronial and in the interim ICAC report and what will occur through the Aboriginal Justice Agreement being signed, the AJA unit and then Leanne Liddle coming into that role. Otherwise there will be multiple people working on the same body of work with difference terms of reference.

**Mr MURPHY:** We are aware of a lot of events in the past and we need to be aware of the injustices to Aboriginal people over 154 years of the Northern Territory Police. There is a bigger plan in place, but we know we have incidents and evidence of racism in the Northern Territory Police Force. I would like cultural reform and moving forward to educate and invest in our workforce for the future, recognising and understanding the mistakes of the past, but not investing money into a three year investigation. The ICAC inquiry is still under way but it is making significant investigations into the workforce of the TRG.

The media release from weeks ago indicated there was a change from that type of conduct since 2017 and that was pleasing. We need to dive into it and bring in people who will own it and make sure they feel safe to report it and understand what is going on in the workforce so we can address it.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Both of you have faced allegations of racism and the fact that you are not taking a rear view look at racism in the police force looks a little convenient.

We were told by the Attorney-General last week that there would be a review into systemic racism in the police service. In the review you are talking about involving Leanne Liddle, is that the systemic racism review the AJA initiated first with DIPL and presumably you are next?

**Mr MURPHY:** It is a collective effort and a combination of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and work which has already been undertaken by the Aboriginal Justice Unit. It is bringing Ms Leanne Liddle into the workforce to help us change and challenge our thinking and the status quo and our recruitment options. It is a whole broad aspect of work and also working with Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT.

We want to understand exactly who will do what, which was discussed at the last meeting. We cannot duplicate effort as we need to be shoulder-to-shoulder to transfer the agency, and we need to take it seriously. Reviews do not interest me, I want to see action. We want to ask who is responsible, who can achieve, what can we do and what will we deliver tomorrow.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Is it the same thing as the Attorney-General talked about last Wednesday ...

**Madam CHAIR:** The departmental review of DIPL and other agencies, and I think the police are doing a body of work as well.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** This will be another review?

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify, as part of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, there are reviews that are occurring and you pointed out the one with DIPL. I am not familiar with the comments the Attorney-General made last and I am happy to check the *Hansard* and clarify that. If it is on the basis of that there will be a review as required by the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and Unit. The commissioner is saying that a body of that work will already naturally occur with Leanne Liddle. We talked about the terms of reference for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to make sure we are not doubling up on the same amount of work with the resources allocated.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** We are talking about two separate reviews into racism in the Northern Territory Police Force, one you referred to with Leanne Liddle and the other triggered by the Attorney-General and the work that has been done by DIPL?

**Mr POTTER:** I can put on the record, what is known with us, the work the NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner will do and the department internally with Leanne Liddle looking at processes, procedures, pathways and apropos. There will then be the work the ICAC Commissioner completes in his report. What the Aboriginal Justice Unit does in relation to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is a review of all government agencies, which is the mandate of that unit. I am not familiar with their schedule but I am happy ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Apparently you are next.

**Mr POTTER:** I did not listen to the Attorney-General during the week. It is a review done at arm's length from the ministers, rightfully so, and separate from the schedules determined by the department. To clarify the time is best answered by the Attorney-General.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is it necessary to have these three reviews?

**Mr POTTER:** I will hold on that question because the commissioner would like to add clarifying comments to the Member for Araluen.

**Mr MURPHY:** There is lots going on, so we want to make sure we do not duplicate effort and we want to try to achieve some positive outcomes. The thing that the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner was informative about was that positive duty and transforming. The Northern Territory Police can be the first police force that practises positive duty into the future which is legislated.

I wrote to the Aboriginal Justice Unit inviting them in. We are on the schedule, we are second; they have not completed DIPL yet. We are next. There was some delay because of the coronial proceedings and the like. I think it was last month that I wrote to them and asked them to come in and help us please.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You have mentioned a few times the ICAC investigation into the TRG. We know that it was a four-day investigation undertaken by the ICAC Commissioner.

Minister and commissioner, what contact did you have with the ICAC Commissioner regarding that investigation? It was a four-day investigation, so it cannot have been a great deal.

**Mr POTTER:** I had no engagement or contact with the ICAC Commissioner in relation to this issue.

**Mr MURPHY:** The ICAC investigation is still ongoing. My only involvement, from memory, is I signed off on the terms of reference. Deputy Commissioner Martin Dole has been the front communication. He will talk to it a bit more, but it is an ongoing Independent Commissioner Against Corruption inquiry now.

**Mr POTTER:** I will hand over to Martin Dole to talk about that.

**Madam CHAIR:** This committee has certain powers but we need to be respectful of another body that has legislation and procedures around it. Please keep that in mind as you respond.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** We could always go in camera if required, could we not, Madam Chair?

**Mr DOLE:** I will not be answering anything that will offend the ICAC Commissioner.

I referred the matter to the ICAC Commissioner in person. He took on the referral and commenced an investigation and he recontacted us and said that he needed additional resources. We have supplied additional resources from Crime Command to assist him. That investigation is ongoing.

He released a short, interim report prior to the last coronial sittings and evidence, but the investigation is still under way and is not finalised.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I am talking about what contact any of you had with the ICAC Commissioner during that four-day investigation to trigger the interim report. It was fairly conclusive, the findings. It exonerated certain people, did it not?

**Mr DOLE:** I am a bit lost, I think, when you talk about a four-day investigation. There has been a lot more than four days of investigative effort put into it. The ICAC Commissioner was investigating for numerous weeks prior to his interim report and that is still ongoing. I am not sure where the four days of investigation comes into it.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It was described as being a four-day investigation, as I remember reading quite clearly.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is having three parallel inquiries into the same thing necessary?

**Mr POTTER:** It is important to have those parallel inquiries, as you call them, but they all have distinctive terms of reference and they are all different in what they are achieving as the outcome. I think the agency and I as the minister owe Territorians those reviews.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police resources are being tied up in these reviews?

**Mr POTTER:** You have heard the numbers that were allocated for the ICAC. I will hand over to the commissioner to talk through the ones related to any of the others.

**Mr MURPHY:** Leanne will commence with us in coming weeks and she will establish a team to undertake work. The Aboriginal Justice Unit will have their own team to do their own work. The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner currently has his staff to undertake his work and a positive duty in the terms of reference.

I guess there is a little uncertainty for me too about what all the pieces of the puzzle look like about who is going to do what, and that is the bit that needs to be agreed to so that we can all set the direction and start delivering some progress.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police numbers did you allocate to the ICAC review?

**Mr DOLE:** There are currently three investigative resources from professional standards command and crime command, in total, seconded to the ICAC to assist with its investigation.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Commissioner how many will be in Ms Liddle's team?

**Mr MURPHY:** That is to be discussed, but realistically whatever she needs.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do we have time frames for the conclusion of these reviews?

**Mr MURPHY:** That will be defined in the terms of reference and scope.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The reason I ask is because every Territorian was under the impression that the review had been called, that it was immediate and expected an outcome within a couple of months. We learned just a couple of weeks ago that instead there has been argy-bargy between the Anti-Discrimination Commission and government about a lack of funding to complete it.

The ICAC's interim report came out. The ICAC Commissioner is now on leave. I am unaware of any certainty regarding when the final report will come out from the ICAC. Then there is the other one with Ms Liddle starting and the Anti-Discrimination one not having started yet with no end in sight.

This must be causing concern and disquiet amongst rank-and-file members of the force.

**Mr POTTER:** There is a process to be followed in relation to all these reviews and government funding to be allocated. I have made very clear on the public record and in the discussions with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner was that the coronial compete the public hearings, but also for the ICAC report. I cannot control the time, direction or duration of the ICAC. That is an independent body. I would not want to comment to influence that in any way. Unfortunately, we are in the circumstances that we are with the ICAC. He will do his report.

As the Commissioner has pointed out, when Leanne Liddle commences that work will be progressed.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Has there been any communication from the ICAC regarding recommending that investigation in the absence of the commissioner?

**Mr POTTER:** That is a discussion you should have had with the interim ICAC Commissioner when they came in last week.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Did you say due to be had? Have you had that conversation?

**Mr POTTER:** It is ongoing regardless of where the current or acting commissioner sits or is. That could have been a question put to the ICAC Commissioner when they came in last week with the Chief Minister.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** My question was: have you had correspondence from the ICAC saying what the status is, whether it has recommenced or whether it is still on pause?

**Mr POTTER:** You and I both know that the ICAC does not provide that necessarily to the minister or the public. You heard last week, and you heard here that it is ongoing.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You just said that you had contact with them last week.

**Madam CHAIR:** No. He said that it should have been a question put to the ICAC last week.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Prior to that, you made some sort of comment regarding meeting with the ICAC.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is how I heard it the first time.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am sure he can clarify.

**Mr POTTER:** I never commented on the public record here today at all regarding meeting with the ICAC. I spoke about meeting with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. I have been clear regarding the timelines that we spoke about and what the precursors were to start that. You have heard that I had a meeting with the commissioner. I have had no contact with the ICAC.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Sorry, what did you say about meeting with the commissioner?

**Mr POTTER:** I said that the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has met with the commissioner.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have multiple commissioners so clarify which one.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are police not aware of whether that ICAC investigation has recommenced or whether it is still on hold?

**Mr POTTER:** The advice that I have been provided by the Deputy Commissioner is that it is ongoing.

**Madam CHAIR:** The advice we got from the Acting ICAC Commissioner last week was that the office would keep working.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I was there and that is not what she actually said. But thank you for verballing the ICAC Commissioner.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have the Acting ICAC Commissioner who just returned from leave saying that she would get around all the matters that were being investigated and would make sure that they would continue. These things are a system and are bigger than individuals. I will make that clear for the record. If you want to keep interrupting me, I will put you on a warning. I scrapped the warnings at lunchtime. If you have questions, please ask them; there is no need to be rude.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The acting ICAC commissioner also said that she would have to review them all to make sure she did not have a conflict because she declared a conflict in one ongoing investigation. My question is 100% legitimate and within context, Madam Chair.

I mentioned earlier that this must be impacting police morale. We know this has been a significant issue over a long period of time. The NT Police Association ran a number of surveys. The latest was in December 2023. It showed that 98% of police do not believe that there are enough police to do their job. Is that a reflection of your government's failure to support the front line?

**Mr POTTER:** I value any member who is willing to put in the time to do a survey. It demonstrated the environment they have gone through and the one we find ourselves in now post-COVID across all policing jurisdictions. There has been a high attrition rate that is now going down as of 31 March. The attrition rate was 6.14% compared with other years. It is trending down.

We have listened; I have listened and definitely the Chief Minister has listened. Hence that is why they have a \$570m budget increase over the next five years with 200 sworn officers; 52 additional sworn officers for Territory Safety Division; 18 sworn officers to the Territory Safety Division in Alice Springs; and 25 call takers.

In relation to the survey if that is not a direct action to the outcomes to the survey, I do not know what it is. We have listened and acted.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You agree that over the last eight years, the government you are a part of has failed to recruit police adequately and failed to drive down crime?

**Mr POTTER:** Incorrect. If you go back to the *Hansard*, you just made the point that 98% of respondents believed they did not have enough police resources.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is right.

**Mr POTTER:** That is the question I answered. I have clearly articulated the 270 sworn officers who will be delivering under \$570m over five years.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There are 200 new police in the future that do not currently exist. What we are talking about now is the police force over successive Police Association surveys saying that there are not enough police; 98% of all respondents said there were not enough. That has to be a result of high rates of crime, meaning police are not able to get to the job and a lack of appropriate level of recruitment. Do you take any responsibility for that as the minister?

**Mr POTTER:** Those two examples and causal facts you raise may be one of many. I can tell you, as the minister—and the commissioner will talk to those—we recruit above attrition. That means we have more people coming in than we have leaving.

Every jurisdiction across the nation is looking for more police officers and having issues with retention post-COVID. We are fortunate that we are seeing a downward trend in our attrition rates. As I said, at 31 March it was 6.1%. That is a success, not only by the resources that government is putting in and the policy position that we put there, it is a reflection of the commissioner, his deputy commissioner, his assistant commissioners, and the cultural reform that is ongoing within the Northern Territory Police Force.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** A total of 62.69% of respondents in the same survey said morale was low or very low. Do you think these ongoing racism reviews will push to achieve a lower morale?

**Mr POTTER:** The time in which the survey was taken reflected the sentiment of the force then. If we were to look at the force now—I look forward to the new survey figures coming out—you will find that morale has increased. The officers I talk to who are in the Territory Safety Division, as an example—that you say does not exist and that the frontline officers do not exist—are happy and grateful for the additional resources that are coming. They are grateful for the support of the commissioner and the deputy commissioner and assistant commissioners give them.

I will reserve judgement until I see the next police survey. I note I believe in the survey you mentioned there was a 6% improvement in the sentiment of frontline officers about the support the government provided them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You were the failed police adviser to the failed Police minister who joins us today. During that time ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I will pull you up. We can treat this committee and its questions with respect. We do not need the personal attacks; it is okay here and there. If you could rephrase your question, giving respect to the people who are appearing before us, Leader of the Opposition.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** As I said, you were the police adviser to a failed Police minister, hence why the police was removed ...

**Madam CHAIR:** You got halfway there. Do you think you can get the whole way there?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I will ask my question, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** You can rephrase your question, or I will rule it ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You can try to interrupt and run interference all you like. He is happy to answer; I am here to ask. You really do not have role here.

**Madam CHAIR:** I do have a role.

**Mrs MANISON:** She is the Chair of the committee. Come on!

**Madam CHAIR:** I am Chair of the committee and if you do not rephrase it 100% I will rule it out of order and we will move on to the next question. Rephrase your question.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Your government has failed to deal with the broken disciplinary system. I stood at Police Association conference after Police Association conference for years where the Member for Wanguri, Nicole Manison, promised reform to the disciplinary system and failed to deliver it. Where is reform to the disciplinary system? Why has it taken eight years? Why should police have to wait any longer, when you have been promising them for nearly a decade?

**Mr POTTER:** I have been clear. Since I took over the portfolio every time I speak to graduates and the current serving front line it is the exact same discussion I have with the President of the Northern Territory Police

Association, the deputy commissioner, the assistant commissioners and the commissioner. I want to see a system that focuses on retraining rather than punitive measures and treating individuals as criminals. We need to be using retraining as a mechanism to retain our force and get a better outcome for the front line and Territorians.

In relation to the reform required to the police disciplinary system, that requires multiple parties to come to the table. It is not as easy as you indicate it to be, Leader of the Opposition. I have made a commitment to the Northern Territory Police Association and to the commissioner that we must continue to work on this, and the minute they tell me they have the solution together, I will stand in parliament and move that legislation.

I am happy to hand to the commissioner to give a more detailed update on where they are at in terms of that development.

**Mr MURPHY:** We have transformed the disciplinary space quite significantly over 12 months. We have seen comparatively—I think there is some history attached to it too, even with an over-punished police force that would dispute decisions and lead to tribunals. We did not have significant Chairs, and those would drag on for years. Members would be on sick leave, which had an impact on the workforce.

We have listened to the workforce and changed our position from a disciplinary one to performance management where people can feel safe in owning mistakes and learning from them. Increasing corporate risk in regard to identifying trends and what that means in the workforce—if officers are making mistakes across the Territory is it a human error or an organisational issue?

We have Commander Jason Kennedy from the Australian Federal Police, who has come here on a 12-month secondment. He has done a huge body of work on re-engaging. The most important thing is to listen to the surveys and work closely in a good relationship with the Northern Territory Police Association, because we have our members' best interests at the forefront of our minds, which is important industrially and in regard to health and mental wellbeing. There is a whole body of work being done on that.

With the recruitment and the announcement of the additional 200 police over four years, and a declining attrition rate, we are back to 2019 levels of 6.1. In the previous years were 9.6 and 10.2. That is a really positive change.

We are focusing on an early intervention project as well, which is a number of different avenues to identify officers before they make a mistake or error, and what the organisation needs to do is make it a safer place is engage them and make sure they feel valued so that they do not want to leave. For a lot of the officers I speak to who have made the decision to leave, basically it is a 12-month decision. By the time you ring them or see it in the gazette, the decision is made and it is hard to capture them back, so we must do the work earlier to listen, understand and make sure people feel valued.

The exit questionnaires were not taken up very well previously, but out of the 103 people who left—90 resignations—44 people engaged in the exit questionnaires, which is a positive step. People are hoping they can effect some change in departure. The top reasons are dissatisfaction with the organisation, personal circumstances, career opportunities thanks to other law enforcement doing recruitment actions, and other matters.

We have come a significant way in reforming, and the important thing is to listen to the workforce to effect the change. It is commitment-designed and co-owned because we have 1,708 police officers out there. It is the community's police force; we have to listen to make a difference.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police left for the reporting period, including resignations, retirements, the whole works?

**Mr POTTER:** That would be 103.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Could you break that down into dismissals, retirements and the whole works?

**Mr POTTER:** For the year to date, dismissals two, resignations 91, retirements 10, and fortunately no deceased.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Ninety-eight per cent of police respondents to the NTPA survey are dissatisfied with the Labor government. What do you put that down to?

**Mr POTTER:** I believe there is an improvement in those numbers—I am happy for you to correct me. It is not a great number, but there is a trend in the right direction. The fact that there has been an improvement in those survey results is an indication that we are tracking in the right direction.

I put it down to an increase in police resources, a change in the executive and a cultural reform that is under way, the policy setting the government sets for the agency, a significant time outside of the COVID environment and the coming to a conclusion of the coronial. All those measures have a huge impact on the morale of the police force and in those survey results.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police are currently on personal leave? You may want to break that down as I am trying to work out how many on the long-term personal leave versus just going on holidays.

**Madam CHAIR:** You are welcome to provide what you have to the hearings and take further details on notice.

**Mr MURPHY:** As at 28 March 63 are on leave. That is broken down into a couple of categories from one day to over 12 months—three to six months is 18, six to 12 months is 24, over 12 months is 21—I might give this to the chief financial officer next time. That does not include short-term leave for people who may have COVID or the like. We have approximately 89 on return-to-work.

The pattern is zero to three months and three to six months for physical injury, and from the three to six months going onwards is psychological. We usually do not see officers come back from that. Some officers in that figure are the ones in the disciplinary process of the appeals. We are hoping that if we resolve the appeals we get them back to work. We have appointed nine new Chairs and the appeals are getting fast-tracked so that we do not prolong the uncertainty for them; we move them forward and get them back to work. That is another body of work we are undertaking as well.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many staff do you have in the wellbeing team?

**Mr POTTER:** Nineteen.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many positions are there for psychologists and how many are filled?

**Mr POTTER:** There are six in Darwin, one in Alice Springs and one in Katherine.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is how many positions there are?

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify, there is an establishment which is 19, the actual number we have in that area is 14 in total. Of that 14 we have six psychologists, with four in Darwin, one in Alice Springs and one in Katherine.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is six how many you are supposed to have or are you meant to have eight, for example? What is the establishment for the psychologists?

**Mr POTTER:** We are meant to have nine in the establishment for the overall area and we have 14. The fact is we have more psychologists and more op rehabs than we were originally funded to and the agency puts a priority towards the health and wellbeing of the frontline, hence there is more staff.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The wellbeing team is supposed to have 19, it has 14. You have six psychologists. Are there any psychologist positions vacant at the moment?

**Mr POTTER:** There are no vacancies.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the total time for the reporting period that you spent on overtime?

**Mr POTTER:** Overtime is always too high in the agency, and it will be for this as well. Before I hand to the commissioner, it is exactly the reason we had to allocate \$570m over five years and recruit additional 200 sworn officers, on top of the Territory Safety Division, but what is positive in terms of addressing the overtime shortage—we will get to it shortly and what the codes look like—is the reduction in the numbers you just saw then—the 63, that is a downward trend on long-term sick leave. I will hand to the commissioner to go through individual numbers and the coding for this financial year.

**Mr MURPHY:** For the 2023–24 overtime hours it was 170,347. That is \$15.2m in expenditure, which included \$0.6m back pay following the consent agreement.



**Mr POTTER:** It is worth noting for the record this is a 7% increase to the previous year.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What do you attribute that to?

**Mr POTTER:** That will be due to operations and ultimately availability of staff. I am happy for the commissioner to give specifics of the events that they have had to respond to.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is it not due to increases in crime? If there is more crime you have more police working more hours. For an agency that is police you never want to talk about crime, which is what police do is catch bad guys.

**Mr POTTER:** A lot of the increase in overtime is in relation to specific operations. For example, we have high-risk weather seasons, major events, we had an operation after the death of Declan Lavery for retail bottle shop outlets. You will find I am very much on the public record talking about crime as the Police minister. I see it as the number one issue for Territorians, and I am not shying away from that. It is why I fought so hard to get the additional resource budget for the Northern Territory police force of \$570m, with 52 for the Territory Safety Division, 18 in Alice Springs and the 20 sworn officers over the next four years.

**Mr MURPHY:** I have some information on the overtime expenditure. The reason code analysis—I will pass to the chief financial officer who will talk more on it. The three highest reason codes were callout due to absence of members on sick leave, which was 16,812 hours, but that has declined 10% compared to the previous year, which is consistent with sick leave reductions by FTE across 2023–24, with a decline of 30% on the prior year.

The second reason was continuation of duty due to arrest, which was 16,364 hours, increasing 16% compared to the prior year. The third reason was special operation exercises 11%, or 9,579 hours, increasing on the previous year by 79%. The minister highlighted a number of emergency management events, lots of operations, including Operation Drina, the retail operation after the sad death of Declan Lavery. The breakdown is predominantly 53% overtime hours consumed in the regional remote operations area. That is 90,249 hours. Then it goes down to the greater Darwin area for crime, intelligence and capability, and people in cultural reform, which adds up to that total overtime expenditure.

What it demonstrates—when we go to the morale question—is an ongoing commitment from all Northern Territory Police that when the need is there and they are called on duty they come and do the work to help the community and their fellow officers.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** One hundred per cent. Thank you, commissioner.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What was the percentage increase?

**Mr POTTER:** There was a 7% increase in overall overtime.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There was a curfew earlier in the year in Alice Springs. What powers did police have if someone was removed from the curfew area and then returned back to the area?

**Mr POTTER:** The implementation of the curfew was one that the Chief Minister, myself and the commissioner did not take lightly but it was a measure that needed to be enacted in Alice Springs for the residents of Alice Springs.

As you know we recently passed legislation, and we talked about what is the government is doing concerning crime. One of the key pillars of the policy we take to Territorians is the curfew. The direction to vacate the area was one of the provisions under the *Emergency Management Act*. It gave them liberal powers, and we are now seeing new powers being implemented under the curfew legislation. I suspect that you will go to youths shortly on this issue, but under the *Care and Protection of Children Act* there were provisions for police officers to remove a youth from the streets and take them into either a 24/7 child protection capability that we rolled out—that I know the Member for Nelson was supportive of—to responsible adults or, if required, hold them in the police station.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What powers have you given police to be able to deal with people who continuously breach the curfew?

**Mr POTTER:** We adequately debated this in parliament, but it exists within the normal powers of the *Police Administration Act*. I am happy to go through those for you now and the key features of the bill that we passed

in parliament at the last sittings. It was authorising the commissioner to make a public disorder declaration if they believe public order, being a riot or other civil disturbance or any imminent risk of public disorder, is occurring in a public place. The new public order powers are required to prevent, stop or reduce the public disorder. Public disorder declarations can, if needed, be made orally but must be published in the Government Gazette as soon as practicable. It can be up to 72 hours and be extended by me or whoever the minister is for seven days.

When we talk about a public disorder declaration being enforced, we mean that police can control the movement of persons by directing a person to leave the area, directing a person not to enter the area, directing a person to stay where they are only if necessary to prevent the risk to their safety or another person's safety. Additionally, they can direct a group in the area to disperse.

They are quite liberal powers and are empowering for police, but we need to be clear that they will be exceptional circumstances in which a curfew is called. Failure to comply with a police direction without reasonable excuse is an offence as we now know for which an infringement can be issued or a maximum penalty of eight penalty units up to \$1,408. The commissioner has reporting obligations with the ombudsman.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If a 15-year-old is told to leave the curfew area, returns back to the curfew area, the police can give them a fine?

**Mr POTTER:** They can arrest the individual as well. As I said, it is within the powers of the PAA.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** They can arrest a youth for coming back into the curfew area?

**Mr POTTER:** They can. They can also use the *Care and Protection of Children Act* to take the youth into the care of the police if they have not committed a criminal offence.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many youths were arrested during the curfew?

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to...

**Madam CHAIR:** You are talking about Alice Springs?

**Mr MURPHY:** During Alice Springs.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There has only been one?

**Madam CHAIR:** Did you want to answer that, minister?

**Mr POTTER:** Due to the success of the co-responder model and the work that Territory Families staff, Department of Education and most importantly, our frontline police officers did, there was not a crime to arrest anyone. Proof was in the pudding when you drove along the streets in Alice Springs. It was definitely effective. Many businesses and Alice Springs residents who were supportive of the curfew actions the Chief Minister took.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the definition of a responsible adult when police can return a young person to a responsible adult? What criteria is ticked off?

**Mr MURPHY:** It is someone who is responsible who is willing to take care of the child. It probably extends to kinship groups and extended family for someone who is responsible. The officer who is leaving the child in someone's care is sufficiently satisfied that they are in a safe place. If they are not, then it is a referral to Territory Families.

Building on what the minister said, that co-responder model that was generated in Alice Springs was a huge success. I thank the Territory Families team for their ongoing efforts.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There is a lot of talk about this responsible adult. Some people would argue that if the adult was responsible, they would know where that child was in the first place and police would not have to pick them up and dropping them back.

I have been on the Tangentyere bus before driving around where kids are picked up. They just hop out of the bus and run inside—no checks and balances are done ...

**Madam CHAIR:** You are talking to two different things.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am still asking my question, Chair.

I want to know from the police perspective. It must be an incredibly difficult job to determine if someone is a responsible adult. Presumably you may never have met these people. You have a young person in your care. They say, 'I live here. My aunty looks after me', or whatever. How is the police office on the ground supposed to determine this concept of responsible adult?

**Madam CHAIR:** Before you answer that, you talked about the Tang bus which provides support for young people to get back to their home, versus the question you asked about a police officer who is acting in a different situation. I will hand to the minister and commissioner to answer the question.

**Mr POTTER:** The curfew was successful. I understand the line of question we are taking here to bring this back to you. We have been clear we will do another curfew if we need to and find the circumstances meet that threshold.

In terms of youths and the responsible adult question, there is nothing more that frustrates me than when you hear of a youth being dropped off to a responsible adult and then absconding again.

During the curfew, we found that there are many adults, parents and responsible adults who reach out to police during that period to get the support they needed. Police and Territory Families worked with them, and that is why that operation was such a success.

I am happy to let the commissioner talk through more detail of how that played out for his frontline members.

**Mr MURPHY:** I will make a couple of comments and pass to the Deputy Commissioner Martin Dole to make some comments as well.

We found that yes, we agree that it is incredibly frustrating for a frontline member dealing with children who return to the CBD. The curfew effectively removed the platform to commit offences in front of their peers and the like. Obviously, impacts on social media is an indication that it was good.

We had good discussions with Territory Families about deploying Territory Families and Education staff into the field or having a place we could deposit them at the first point of call. Responsible adults could then be sought out by Territory Families. We had them in the field to help us locate responsible adults so the police could continue with their important work.

What has happened now is that has been accepted. Just touching on what the minister said, the groundbreaking thing was the responsible adults were asking Territory Families for help. They said, 'We do not know how to control our child. How do you help us?' That led to examining the education, engagement, health and housing strategies through the regional co-ord footprint of Central Australia. There is a body of work that came out of that; it was quite successful.

I will pass to Deputy Commissioner Dole. He was in the field a little more than me. He will have some insights as well.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am also conscious the Member for Araluen wants to jump in on this line of questioning as well.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have other questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, I thought it was this. Deputy commissioner, please go ahead.

**Mr DOLE:** There is actually a definition under the *Care and Protection of Children Act*, so I can just give you that full definition:

*'responsible adult', in respect of a youth, means a person who exercises parental responsibility for the youth, whether the responsibility is exercised in accordance with contemporary social practice, Aboriginal customary law and Aboriginal tradition or in any other way ...*

That is the bar that officers judge in the field when they are taking a child or youth home, to make sure there is somebody who falls within that category.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is it true that police breath test responsible adults before leaving the child?

**Mr DOLE:** I have not heard of that practice, no.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Earlier I asked a question about the ICAC investigation that took four days, and I confused myself as much as I probably confused you, but I was referring to the four-day ICAC investigation into Commissioner Murphy. You probably realised that to some extent, because it was a record-breaking short ICAC investigation from most people's perspective.

What contact did the ICAC Commissioner have with the Police Commissioner in order to complete that investigation in four days?

**Madam CHAIR:** As the chair of the committee, I was not aware that was the context. I will hand to the minister and the commissioner.

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to hand to the commissioner on this one.

**Mr MURPHY:** Shortly after that allegation, the ICAC investigators made contact with me and I was interviewed, and that was all I had until I got the final letter from the ICAC Commissioner that was communicated to Her Honour.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Was that a lengthy interview?

**Mr MURPHY:** I cannot remember. Maybe half an hour, maybe an hour.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I received a lot of different questions from many people about the issue of integrity within the police. I will ask these questions to put them on the record, and what you do with them is up to you. In regard to the Police Commissioner, why did you sit on the knowledge of racist awards for six months?

**Mr POTTER:** Member for Araluen, the commissioner has been very clear in public hearings on the coronial what he did and did not know. I am happy to hand to him. He can answer, but it is public knowledge.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I am not clear on that public knowledge and I do not think a lot of other people are either. That is why they have asked me to ask these questions, obviously.

**Mr MURPHY:** I had a meeting in August in Alice Springs. Regrettably, I did not action that. I did not take it as seriously as I should have. I regret that. I do not mean to cause any harm or damage to the community or Aboriginal and ATSI people. I deeply regret that and am very sorry. I am not racist. I will do everything I can to reform the police force.

Can I caveat the fact I am a witness in a number of coronial proceedings, and I am very mindful that those coronial proceedings are still alive before Her Honour. I will leave my answer at that and see what the next question brings, if that is all right.

**Madam CHAIR:** This line of questioning probably does not go to this, but I understand the important role this committee has, Member for Araluen, so I will allow latitude for the questions to continue. I appreciate the commissioner's willingness to respond.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I appreciate it. In a press conference on 27 February, the Police Commissioner said he had no knowledge of these awards. Why did you not tell the truth, Police Commissioner?

**Mr POTTER:** The commissioner has answered that very clearly in the coronial. I made this same comment to that particular newsagency recently at my interview at the police college last week. I do not think I will provide any more commentary on it.

**Madam CHAIR:** You are welcome to ask some further questions, but I will bring the committee back to the budget estimates before us.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Were you aware that the Police Commissioner did not tell the truth in that press conference?

**Mr POTTER:** As I made that statement to that media outlet, I make the same statement here. It was not about being truthful or not truthful. The commissioner has answered that. We do it differently now. I knew everything that the community knew as it became public.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Why did you not sack the commissioner for not telling the truth?

**Mr POTTER:** Let me be clear on this. Everyone makes mistakes. I have made my own. The sign of a genuine, good leader is one who owns those mistakes and puts themselves first and foremost to the people they represent. He has done that. He has done the coronial.

We can all acknowledge we have had a conversation at one point in time and then we know something further and wish we had put two and two together. The commissioner has been on the public record on that.

We have heard the stats coming out in relation to police retention. There is a 10% decrease in the overtime, sick leave—that is those covering members on sick leave. There is an improvement in some of the areas of the Northern Territory Police Association report where they are all a direct reflection of the commissioner and the work he is doing.

You cannot begrudge someone from making a mistake and owning that mistake.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I do not like asking these questions. As I said, they have come from a lot of people.

**Mr POTTER:** That is why I am answering.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will allow a couple more in the most respectful way. I appreciate the way in which they are being asked, Member for Araluen.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Are the five officers that essentially lied or did not tell the truth on statutory declarations, denying the knowledge of racist awards, being sacked? Lying on a stat dec is a serious offence.

**Mr POTTER:** That is all through the ICAC at the moment, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the outcome of that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What has been the cost to Police for the total involvement in the Walker coronial inquest?

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot give you specifics for the Walker coronial inquest, but I can give you overall fees that the agency spent on legal outcomes. For confidentiality, we do not say which of the total number goes to which hearing or case. We could probably give you those as an overall.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** The data was provided last year. It is a big public matter. It is not a secret that government has to pay a number of people to provide legal and other services to support it.

**Madam CHAIR:** For the committee's information, we aim to have a break at 2 pm.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I just have a few more questions.

**Mr POTTER:** We can give the overall costings for legal fees spent by the agency to external consultants, but we cannot give you a breakdown of which case it went to.

**Madam CHAIR:** Can you please give that response and take the question on notice?

**Mr POTTER:** You are right. We will take it on notice and see what we can provide back.

**Madam CHAIR:** Will you give us the overall figure now, or do you want both on notice?

**Mr POTTER:** Let us take the question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.11

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

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What is the total cost to Northern Territory Police of the Walker coronial inquest?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.11.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Senior Aboriginal leaders throughout the Northern Territory have called on you, as the minister, and the Police commissioner to apologise for racism within the police. Have you apologised?

**Mr POTTER:** I have apologised on the public record, in front of the media and to the people who I will be judged by—my constituents—on August 24. I have been clear on that matter, and so has the Police commissioner. We have been public in that apology and clear and open on that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Are you aware that a complaint has been lodged with Police concerning the authorisation of travel valued at more than \$40,000 by the then Chief Minister's office to support Labor's 2020 general election campaign? Will you assure Territorians that these matters will be thoroughly investigated?

**Mr POTTER:** In the specific question as to whether I was aware, no, but I am informed the commissioner is aware, so I am happy to let him ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You have not been aware? You are not aware?

**Mr POTTER:** No.

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes, I am aware of a complaint that has been made. I will be making no further comment, and I am happy to brief the Police minister on it.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for the respectful way in which those questions were asked and considered. Are there further questions on the budget fiscal strategy ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Minister, are police ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Can I just pause? I am trying to get a sense—we have not even an hour-and-a-half to go. Did you want to keep going on agency-related whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy or move to outputs? I do not mind.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It makes no difference. There is one output for Police.

**Madam CHAIR:** There is not one output, but anyway. I am happy to keep going.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There effectively is. There is corporate services and there is policing. Are police sufficiently resourced to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, given the extraordinary increases over the last eight years?

**Mr POTTER:** I will ask AC White to come to the table, but while he does that, I think we need to remember that every general duties member who attends a call for assistance is the first responder, and we therefore classify that as the resource. When you talk about specific DV capabilities—I will get Michael White to come to the table.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What proportion of all crimes that police are responding to are domestic and family violence?

**Mr POTTER:** I will hand to the commissioner.

**Mr MURPHY:** We are treating domestic violence as a high priority. It consumes the majority of our workload, and we see the trauma it creates on men, women, Indigenous families and our workforce every day, as well as the time it consumes. We see an unprecedented demand on services when it comes to domestic violence, and almost a level of acceptance in the children who witness it.

Last year, after my appointment, we created a new portfolio of domestic violence and youth. Michael White, the assistant commissioner, is charged with delivering strategic and tactical options and what that looks like

for high-harm management, victimisation, looking after victim-survivors and children, working across government.

The important work Janelle Tonkin is doing as assistant commissioner at the Territory Community Safety Coordination Centre is consolidating all government services to deliver safety options. Whilst we see the prevention, sadly we have seen the improvements we can make in forward inquests of domestic violence. We still see women dying at the hands of their partner. There is a huge body of work to do on a co-responder model for Alice Springs, but also in Darwin.

We are treating it very seriously. Michael is building his portfolio, which includes a number of different disciplines and investigations, with it in mind that we will have uniformed officers supporting our front line in domestic violence with a view of prevention.

We talk about statistics increasing significantly in the future; I have a different thought, that we reduce it with the work we do. That is the important work Michael will lead. I will pass over to him.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Just before you do, commissioner, do you have a percentage of all police time spent on domestic and family violence out of all crimes?

**Mr MURPHY:** We do, but I might pass to Michael. He has all that data.

**Mr WHITE:** It is a challenge for the Northern Territory Police to respond to domestic and family violence and sexual violence in our community. My role at the moment is to build our ability and capability in that space. That includes the training of our officers across the board—our front line who respond to every domestic violence report. It includes rewrite of the general order, the process of how we respond and linkages through SerPro to make our job easier for frontline officers. The challenge with that, of course, is the volume of work that continues to come through the front door, through JESCC and people reporting crime to us.

From an operational perspective, critically it is about redeveloping our response capability and empowering the front line to respond in a quicker way, and reducing the amount of calls to the JESCC initially so we can dedicate our initial response more broadly to the victims of domestic and family violence.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do you know what percentage of all crimes are domestic and family violence crimes?

**Mr WHITE:** That varies on a day-to-day basis. I can say that between 60% and 80% of all calls to the JESCC relate to either family violence or reports of domestic or other sorts of disturbances. We know for a fact that about 65% of all the people in prison are there for domestic or violence offences. It is a significant component of our workload and it impacts across all other agencies—whether it is child protection or the justice continuum as well. Everything we can do collectively across government and non-government agencies is to reduce the impact of domestic and family violence across the sector.

**Madam CHAIR:** A quick question. Where would you relate the alcohol factor in that?

**Mr WHITE:** Alcohol is a causal factor. There is a lot of discussion, debate and academic research about alcohol. It is a factor that often causes greater harm, rather than the actual domestic violence incident.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Last year it was revealed in Estimates that in relation to the Howard Springs quarantine facility police had to attend 145 incidents in under 60 days, including 67 reports of domestic violence; 38 people were arrested at the facility; and 12 people were apprehended by police and held in protective custody. We know there were 600 windows broken, hundred of thousands, even millions of dollars spent.

The former Chief Minister who is the Chair of our committee said at the time: 'Absolutely if someone has done criminal damage they will absolutely have to go through that process. The government is essentially the victim of crime there.'

Has anyone been charged for criminal damage resulting from damage done at the Howard Springs quarantine facility?

**Mr POTTER:** We do not have it in front of us; we will have to take it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.12

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Has anyone been charged for criminal damage or other offences while at the Howard Springs quarantine facility?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.12.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There were 67 domestic violence incidents at Howard Springs at that time. Were any of those involved charged?

**Mr POTTER:** I will take that on notice. Any questions related to criminal outcome proceedings in relation to the time at Howard Springs I will take on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.13

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 67 domestic violence incidents at the Howard Springs quarantine facility was anyone charged?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.13.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Despite the fact that there were over 600 broken windows at that facility, do you agree with the then Chief Minister that this was just wear and tear?

**Mr POTTER:** I do not believe that relates to my portfolio.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You are the Police minister.

**Mr POTTER:** As I said, I will answer the question about how many criminal damage charges were laid and the like.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I suppose you would not want to be seen to be disagreeing with the Chair of the committee over her wild claims that it was just wear and tear?

**Mr POTTER:** Leader of the Opposition ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I will move on.

**Madam CHAIR:** We can spend time talking about this; it does not cause me any bother. We have a lot before us. You can continue with this line of questioning if you like, Leader of the Opposition ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** He is not answering.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... and play petty politics or you can use your time wisely that might help shape some of the policies that you take to the election that Territorians would be interested in. Are there more questions?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You are getting bothered. The minister said that he is happy to answer, so I will leave it to him.

**Mr POTTER:** One thing I have learned and do is that I do not comment on other members' portfolios that I have never had or hold. I have taken the question on notice in relation to the criminal damage at Howard



Springs. I will answer every question as truthfully as I can with the information I am provided and if I cannot, I will put it on notice.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police were assaulted during the reporting period?

**Mr POTTER:** That is one I can answer.

I will caveat this data with we need to clarify whether it is unique instances, so one assault offence on one officer, or if it is multiple assault offences on the same officer. Year to date, at 31 March as per the Estimates period, it is 299.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many involve spitting or biting?

**Mr POTTER:** That number we do not have. We can take it on notice.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I will ask how many involved weapons. I could do this in one big question if you want.

**Mr POTTER:** Let us do that in one big question.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.14

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 299 police who were assaulted year to date, how many police were assaulted; how many of the instances of assault involved spitting or biting; how many instances of assault involved any weapon, whether it be controlled, prohibited or offensive; and any other assault?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.14.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many officers received hospital treatment for their injuries as a result of the attacks on police?

**Mr POTTER:** We will get you the specific numbers. We know that quite a number of those who have been spat on present to ED. We changed the legislation previously to force an individual to provide a blood sample for those who spit on police officers which was a commitment the NTPA asked us to deliver, and we did.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What was the range of injuries?

**Mr POTTER:** How about you ask them all in one again, and I will take it all as one question.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.15

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police officers received hospital treatment as a result of their injuries from being attacked? What was the range of injuries? How many police had to take leave as a result of their injuries? What was the longest period of leave required to be taken as a result of the injuries? In the two absence questions could you also add because of the trauma; it could be a trauma injury as well.

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

**Mr POTTER:** Lost-time injury is an example. I am happy to take it on notice.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 5.15.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many people have been charged with assaulting police?

**Mr POTTER:** That is 274.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is that 274 charges or people charged?

**Mr POTTER:** It is charges.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do you know how many people that represents?

**Mr POTTER:** I cannot give you that data at the moment.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I ask that question be put on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 5.16**

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 274 charges for assault on police, how many individuals were charged?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 5.16.

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**Mr POTTER:** To your second point, the number of charges that proceeded in court, as there may have been additional charges added on, was 316, so it increased.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many successful prosecutions were there?

**Mr POTTER:** I will caveat this because some may still be ongoing. This is not a true reflection of what will be the actual outcome, but as it currently stands at the date this brief was printed it was 99.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police cars have been stolen?

**Mr POTTER:** We have had no police cars stolen.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police cars have been rammed?

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to take that question on notice. Was it the intent of ramming the vehicle or are you including car accidents?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** A stolen vehicle has rammed it, like the vision we saw in Katherine when someone drove straight at it.

**Mr POTTER:** The reason I ask is that there will be times where police will use particular manoeuvres to remove a vehicle off the road and, naturally, car accidents occur.

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**Question on Notice No 5.17**

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many police vehicles have been rammed, broken down into four categories: a traffic accident; police using it as a manoeuvre or tactic; intentional damage by someone who is not police; and any other reason?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 5.17.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many vehicles have been stolen from a police station or compound?

**Mr POTTER:** We will take that on notice, because I assume you mean non-police vehicles as well.

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**Question on Notice No 5.18**

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many vehicles of any description have been stolen from a police station, police compound or premises controlled by police?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 5.18.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will pause for a five-minute break before we have our final session with this minister.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** We are considering agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy. Are there any questions?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** On 18 March this year you made a comment on radio that prisoners would be out of watch houses by the middle of the year. You said, 'I made a commitment to the front line to get them their watch houses back, and that is what I will be doing around the middle of this year'.

How many police watch houses are still being used as prisons?

**Mr POTTER:** We are not at the middle of the year yet. There has been a clear plan articulated to Territorians on how we get our police watch houses back, and that involves opening additional beds for the women out of the main prison and additional beds for our men. We still have time, and that is the commitment that I stand by to the frontline.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Within two weeks will you have returned all watch houses back to police?

**Mr POTTER:** The specifics on how we get our watch houses back rests with the Attorney-General and Justice and Corrections, but I am confident we will have our solution to the announcement very shortly.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You promised police in March that they would have their watch houses back by the middle of this year. How many watch houses are currently holding prisoners?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** We have two, being Darwin and Alice Springs, and we are still working to the plan that we spoke about publicly.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is Berrimah no longer being used as a prison?

**Mr POTTER:** To add one, the Peter McAulay cells are being used by Corrections.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are there any prisoners at the Palmerston watch house?

**Mr POTTER:** No, it is a functioning watch house.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Darwin, Alice Springs and Peter McAulay Centre currently are not being used as watch houses; they are being used as prisons.

**Mr POTTER:** That is correct. We need the occupancy to put the members into, and that is what they have been repurposed to. Territorians would want to see us retain the members within custody, and these are the options that we have available. We will get police their watch houses back.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is this limiting the capability of police to do their functions?

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify before handing over to the commissioner, Alice Springs is also functioning.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Are there no prisoners in Alice Springs?

**Mr MURPHY:** There are prisoners in Alice Springs. It is compartmentalised. Corrections officers are using our watch house to house their prisoners, and we are using the watch house as a functional watch house for police charging and remand.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many prisoners are taking up space across the three facilities?

**Mr MURPHY:** I am probably not accurate, but there are 14 at Peter McAulay. The last time I was briefed there were 54 in Darwin watch house on Mitchell Street and over 30 in Alice Springs, which is quite fluent with releases and movements that is subject to Commissioner Varley.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Nearly 100 prisoners are taking up space in police facilities; who is paying for that?

**Mr MURPHY:** Corrections looks after management of its prisoners; we pay for electricity and running of the building costs because it is our building. As far as resourcing goes, Corrections staff look after it.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No police are having to be used to monitor prisoners?

**Mr MURPHY:** Not at the Peter M McAulay Centre, the Darwin facility and no longer in Alice Springs.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When did that stop for Alice Springs?

**Mr MURPHY:** Maybe three months ago.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If you have blown out your middle-of-the-year time frame, what is the new time frame for all prisoners to be out of watch houses?

**Mr POTTER:** I would not say we have blown anything out. It is June. You will notice in the budget papers we have allocated \$57m to establish two interim standalone women's prisons in Darwin and Alice Springs. That allows Corrections to repurpose those women's beds into men's beds, which opens up, for example, watch houses back to police.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Does this not make you furious that, because of the incompetence of your colleague and deputy, the Attorney-General, to build new prisons, your police facilities are having to be used to do something that is not a Police responsibility or job and police need utilisation of these facilities to have their own increased capability? Is that not something you are furious about?

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not sure about the question, but I will allow some latitude for the minister to respond.

**Mr POTTER:** It is pertinent to point out that the reason we have such full prisons and watch houses is because we are locking up offenders. Criminals are behind bars; there are consequences for their offending. Police is doing their job, and Corrections is doing their job. Corrections in AGD and Police are doing their jobs to get capacity. We articulated a reasonable costed plan to open to additional facilities, not in two years' time if elected, but right now in the budget. Come new financial year, and the works will start; they are already starting the planning process to acquire those two facilities and stand them up. I am confident we will still meet the time lines we have spoken about, but should we not, I point out to Territorians that no offenders will be walking freely on the streets, as others would have people believe. Our prisons are at capacity because we are arresting more people.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Your prisons are at capacity because you need more space, and your Attorney-General believes that gaoling is failing. It is totally unacceptable to continue to have the watch houses being used in

this way. You made a commitment for the middle of the year; clearly that will not happen. Will these new facilities be completed before the election?

**Mr POTTER:** They are your comments, not mine. I believe your team has agreed and publicly said that gaoling is failing. I think there is a nuance in that statement that you are not fairly representing for Territorians. That is okay; that is the position you have taken. We will deliver two alternatives for women so that we can move men into those facilities and free our watch houses. We ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes. When?

**Mr POTTER:** I do not interrupt.

We have allocated \$57m in the next financial year. When we talk about 'when', as of 1 July for the financial year, that money will be made available by Treasury into the agency budgets. I can tell you now that Commissioner Varley, who is good at the job he does and the work and reform he has done in the department already, has started to enact those plans. Come 1 July when the money is made available, there is a decrease in the wait time, and they can execute that transition.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No time frame—thank you. How ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you want to respond to the comment from the Leader of the Opposition?

**Mr POTTER:** I will correct the record. That is her verbal statement, not mine.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If there is a time frame, will you say it? Because you have not said one, so I am saying there is not one. If there is one, you can say.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will intervene. I will get both of you to respond, but the minister answered your question. He is indicating that he is comfortable with the response, so we will move on to further questions.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** So there is no time frame for ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, if you will put that in, I will hand it back to the minister. Let us just ask questions without commentary.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But that is the question.

**Madam CHAIR:** No. You have a choice.

**Mr POTTER:** Leader of the Opposition, I have made it clear that when the money is made available to the agency ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes.

**Mr POTTER:** Hold on. I have made indications regarding the time line of when that would come to fruition, which is the middle of the year. We are still not at the middle of the year; we are not in the new financial year yet. Work has already commenced with Corrections, and I know Police is working with them daily. In the interim, they will continue to arrest people who commit offences.

**Madam CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, ask the next question without any commentary, or I will go back to the minister.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, sir.

**Madam CHAIR:** Ma'am, thanks. Next question.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yeah, good one. It is a dictatorship here in the Estimates Committee.

How many people have been bailed by police, split into youths and adults?

**Mr POTTER:** I will let the agency get their figures up and let them talk through that, but it is worth pointing out to Territorians that in 2021 or 2020 we made provisions to change the bail for youths. We recently made

provisions to change bail around offenders and high-risk offenders in the execution of crimes with controlled and prohibited weapons.

**Mr MURPHY:** I do not have that data on me. That is an incredible amount of data about everyone who receives bail, both adult and youth. I know it is extraordinary, but I do not have it with me.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I will ask it on notice.

**Mr POTTER:** I will clarify the youth piece, because I know that is where you will probably go next. If a youth is on bail, whether it is police bail or court bail, and they commit a serious offence or a prescribed offence, there is a presumption against bail; police cannot grant them bail. They will deny them bail and they will go to the on-call judges ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is not my question.

**Mr POTTER:** No, just let me finish, Leader of the Opposition.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are not interrupting, remember. We were doing well.

**Mr POTTER:** That question will need to be in writing and directed to the Attorney-General and Justice in relation to that. We can probably get the answer for you on notice in relation to the first instance of police bail, but anything related to post that will need to be directed to the Attorney-General.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, that was my question.

**Madam CHAIR:** The Police Commissioner is indicating that it is a massive body of work. I am sure you ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I ask this every year, and I am happy to take it on notice.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, and I am sure you would not want them to do work unnecessarily to keep you happy.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is certainly not unnecessary, thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** You would rather the police take their time getting you something than working on keeping Territorians safe.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** My god, listen to yourself.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Spillett, you would like the question on notice even though it is an enormous body of work.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you.

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many people have been bailed by police, broken up into youths and adults?

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

**Mr POTTER:** I accept the question, but it will be only related to police granted bail in the watch house and not judge granted bail at the watch house.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes. That is right, because this is Police and I am asking police. I understand.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are trying to help you, Leader of the Opposition. I sometimes wonder why ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I think you are the one who needs help.

I am asking specifically about police bail.

**Madam CHAIR:** I have not finished the process so that question did not get on the record, but you have moved on.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** No. You can put it on.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will start the process again because you keep interrupting and providing personal commentary.

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**Question on Notice No 5.19**

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many people have been bailed by police, broken down into youths and adults? How many youths were referred back to court for serious breach of bail?

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

**Mr POTTER:** We accept the question and acknowledge that it will take a bit of time.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.19.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the number of people apprehended by police, how many are given an oral warning and a written warning?

**Mr POTTER:** Is that for youths?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is only for youths. I do not know whether you can give adults an oral or a written warning.

**Mr POTTER:** In terms of youth there have been 20 verbal warnings issued for the period from 1 July to 31 March 2024.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** And how many written?

**Mr POTTER:** It was 154.

**Madam CHAIR:** Can you provide a little information in regard to the context of a verbal or written warning?

**Mr POTTER:** That would be good.

**Mr MURPHY:** From 1 July to 31 March we have had a total of 1,700 events with youth. Of those, 1,054 were not diverted. There is a small portion that are diverted, which depends on the type of offending, the seriousness of the events, the impact that it has had on the community, their ability to understand their action and acknowledgement of the behaviour.

Antecedence is also a consideration. If they have a criminal history or any records with police or intelligence holding, the officer can make a discretionary decision whether to give a verbal warning. If it is a more accountable option they talk to the youth diversion unit as well, and can put a more formal written warning in place. That is accountable.

It is a record that is keeping the child out of the criminal justice system at the lowest common available point. We usually see a success because we see success with those who want to take diversion where there is not a reengagement in criminal activity.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of those youths who were apprehended, how many were diverted?

**Mr POTTER:** The number who were diverted is 546 and 1,154 who were not diverted. Those who were not diverted—it is a point worth noting for Territorians listening to the media—who present to them are charged and go through the court system. The idea that has been circulating that every youth gets a verbal or written and is diverted, is not the case. There is a vast majority that are not eligible for diversion and who are then sent before the court.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the number of youth and adult offenders bailed by police, how many were fitted with electronic monitoring devices?

**Mr POTTER:** We can give you EMD numbers. There were 78 electronic monitoring devices as of 31 March.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Was that for adults or youths?

**Mr POTTER:** That was how many EMDs we have. That was quantity. In terms of how many bailees were issued an EMD, that was 115 during the period to 31 March. Of the 115, 88 were for youth and 27 were for adults compared to the previous reporting year, which was 78 youths and five adults.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 1,154 youths who were not diverted, did all of them proceed to court?

**Mr POTTER:** We will take the question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 5.20**

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 1,154 youths who were not given a verbal or written warning or diverted, did all of those proceed to court?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.20.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of those 1,154 that proceeded to court, how many resulted in successful convictions?

**Mr POTTER:** That question will need to be allocated to the Attorney-General's department.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If police are apprehending someone and they have given a verbal or written warning, then they apprehend that person again, there is nothing requiring police to take stronger action. They could issue another written or verbal warning. Is that correct?

**Mr MURPHY:** It is at the discretion of the police officer. Engaging with the youth, considering a number of circumstances, (inaudible), new offence, harm or the like, the impact on community. It is reevaluating. Yes, they can do another written or verbal caution.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 546 youths who were diverted, how many took up diversion?

**Mr POTTER:** It may be better for me to answer that more simply for you. There was only one who declined diversion, so the rest have been diverted.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is there any requirement for the person to undertake the diversion?

**Mr POTTER:** A decline in the diversion—I am happy to stand corrected by the panel—will see the charges progress. If you say no to diversion, it progresses. If you do not complete the diversion, it progresses. If you reoffend whilst on diversion, it progresses.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many people were charged by police whilst on bail, broken into youths and adults?

**Mr POTTER:** Are you talking about breach of bail charges or fresh offences?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Breach of bail in general, because you cannot charge a youth for breach of bail. Of all the people who were on bail, how many went on to offend whilst on bail, to be reapprehended?

**Mr POTTER:** I have four months here, related to SerPro, from December to March. I will ask for that question on notice and we will go further back.

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**Question on Notice No 5.21**



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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the number of people apprehended by police, how many of them were on bail at the time that they were apprehended, broken down into youths and adults?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 5.21.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What data did you have, minister?

**Mr POTTER:** For youths, we have December, January, February and March.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am happy to take that.

**Mr POTTER:** Are you happy to have what we have at the moment?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I will take it on notice, but you can also give me what you have now.

**Mr POTTER:** At the risk of giving two numbers, we will hold off and take that question on notice completely.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many adults were charged with breach of bail?

**Mr POTTER:** A point worth noting for the Estimates Committee and the public listening is that breach of bail is an offence. We will be able to get that data. It is important we delineate for those listening ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is why I said it.

**Mr POTTER:** I am putting on the record that youths who breach the bail condition can still be revoked bail, but if they are fresh offences it is a criminal offence. For adults, breach of bail is an offence of its own.

We will take that on notice as well.

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#### **Question on Notice No 5.22**

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many adult offenders were charged with breach of bail?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Spillett has been allocated the number 5.22.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many youths were referred back to court for serious breach of bail?

**Mr POTTER:** That will be provided when we do your question on notice. It will come out of that.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It was not in my question. I specifically made that last question about adults. You can charge an adult for breach of bail; you cannot charge a youth.

**Mr POTTER:** To clarify, the question you asked is in relation to youths and bail breaches and fresh offending. We are happy to add that to the question because it will come out from those numbers; we will be able to articulate that.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, would you have it under 5.19 which was for youth, or would you have it under the one you just took?

**Mr POTTER:** I will have it under youth.

**Madam CHAIR:** It will be under question on notice 5.19.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** For question on notice 5.19 can you please also add how many youths were referred back to court for serious breach of bail?

**Mr POTTER:** I accept the question's addition.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many serious breaches of bail received no further action by police?

**Mr POTTER:** Any youth who enacts a serious breach of bail will be denied bail by police. They were the changes this government made, I believe, in 2021. What the court then determines regarding regranting bail or changing bail conditions and variations is a question for the Attorney-General and Justice.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** For the whole Northern Territory, how many times have the police picked up someone? I want the answer split into taken to: a watch house; home; a sobering-up shelter; a rehabilitation facility; a hospital; or other location?

**Mr POTTER:** I can give you the numbers for police and we can find them now for protective custody in the watch house. In relation to the SUS and the night patrol and the others that would be questions for other ministers.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It is not, because I ask this every year and every year police provide it to me. I ask of all the people police picked up where did you take them. We then do an analysis of where that was. I have the numbers in front of me from last year, so it is possible.

**Madam CHAIR:** The advice from the minister and the commissioner is that it is not.

**Mr POTTER:** I do not have those numbers on me at the moment. I will give you the watch house numbers for protective custody and I will take the rest on notice. The other qualifying factor in this is the SerPro data, so let us take it on notice and come back to you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Will you give one response now or will you take it all on notice?

**Mr POTTER:** We will put it all in one question on notice if you are happy, Leader of the Opposition, and we will answer it.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.23

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** For the whole Northern Territory, how many times did police pick up someone and break it down into where they took them, including watch house, home, sobering-up shelter, rehabilitation facility, hospital or other location?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.23.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many new homes for police have been built in remote communities for the reporting period?

**Mr POTTER:** That question is best directed to DIPL as they project manage the relevant infrastructure.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You will not answer any questions on police housing?

**Mr POTTER:** I can answer about the money we are putting into police housing. There will be an additional \$25m in infrastructure in next year's budget and every year ongoing for five years. In relation to the specific police housing that will need to be directed to DIPL.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You cannot answer how many homes have had major upgrades or repairs?

**Mr POTTER:** Because it is GEH it will be Territory Families as well as DIPL. It does not sit with this agency.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How much has the government spent having to reinforce and upgrade security at police stations?

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

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#### Question on Notice No 5.24

**Madam CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, please restate the question for the record.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How much has the government spent having to reinforce and upgrade security at police stations across the Territory?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.24.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I wanted to ask about the split between Police and Fire and Emergency Services. What portion of the Police budget has moved across to Fire?

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to answer that now. Next year's budget for FES will be \$64.322m.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Sorry, what was that for?

**Mr POTTER:** FES, which is Fire and Emergency Services.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** And that has come out of the Police budget?

**Mr POTTER:** Arguably, it was the firefighters' budget that has just been separated. As the CFO would do, they would have different line items for the agencies. That is just their budget they are entitled to, and they have taken it with them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What cost has there been to Police in the split in regard to rebranding, organisational movements, loss of staff?

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to answer this now generally, but I think it is better aligned to the next briefing we have with the FES Commissioner. There is a (inaudible) shared services that are ongoing for the next 12 months, and then there will be some costs assumed by FES when we get to them.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is it not being assumed by Police? Surely Police will have some costs.

**Mr POTTER:** For example media, the CFO and others—part of their time is being split, but it is not captured at the moment; it is outside that period. I am happy to go through the specific numbers on the FES separation when we get to that next output group.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I just want to thank the police. Obviously, we could go on for hours, but I am conscious of the time and want to get to Fire, so I will questions there. If I have any more I will put them in as written questions. I thank everyone for their hard work and time today, particularly the ones who are not in this room, the ones in the back rooms and working back in the agency, putting in the hard hours, as well as the people answering our questions on notice.

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

**OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – POLICING SERVICES**  
**Output 4.1 – Community Safety, Crime Prevention and Safer Roads**

No questions.

**OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES**  
**Output 5.1 – Corporate and Governance**  
**Output 5.2 – Shared Services Received**

No questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of all outputs related to the Northern Territory Police. On behalf of the committee, we sincerely thank you for the support you provided the minister and for answering our questions today. We will pause for a couple of minutes while we change over and welcome the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services.

**Mr POTTER:** I equally thank the members with me on the bench, but also the assistant commissioners who came in today. I know it is a lot of time out of your busy schedule, so thank you very much.

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The committee suspended.

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**FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**Madam CHAIR:** This is quite historic, minister. Please introduce the officials for the first ever opening statement for the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services at an Estimates.

**Mr POTTER:** Thank you, Chair. I am grateful to be here and to introduce the executive: Andrew Warton, Interim Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer, Fire and Emergency Services; Terry Trewin, Acting Chief Fire Officer; Paul Kelly, Chief Financial Officer and Fleur O'Connor, Director.

**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr POTTER:** The only thing I will put on the record is that this is a monumental occasion for the agency. They have separated and this will be their first Estimates of the new agency, so it is a fantastic day.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will not consider that a statement, I will consider it as commentary. The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 as they relate to the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How complete is the separation process? Is Fire fully autonomous from Police now, give or take the deliberate continued shared services?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes, they are now that the act has been implemented and assented, they are a standalone agency, and it gives them the mandate to do that. It is correct in saying that there are shared HR, media and financial shared services, but we have Andy as the first interim commissioner and the CE of the department. Andy will talk through the specifics on how that plays on a day-to-day basis.

**Madam CHAIR:** For our officials, I am sure you have been watching, but make sure your mics are on and please introduce yourselves, thank you.

**Mr WARTON:** The core of the transition at the moment relates to the shared services between the two agencies that we have encountered and used since 1981. There are 17 of those, and we have identified three categories of shared services. Nine of those will transition in the next six months, six will transition in the next 12 months, and a couple will probably remain on a fee-for-cost basis.

That is what we are working through in regard to shared services. Our challenge as an agency is to re-create those while we keep delivering services operationally on both sides of the house, which is what we are doing. There will be some other expenses as we roll out in regard to relocating, for instance the corporate and executive on the NTES and Fire and Rescue relocating from NAB House. We are seeing some accommodation there.

There is also some rebranding that we will do over the coming months. Standing up a number of positions funded from within will head up these key services. That is where we are heading. There is an MOU between the Police Commissioner and me currently being negotiated, and that dictates exactly what our obligations are over the next 12 months as we transit to a separate agency.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you. Do you mind breaking those down? You mentioned 17 shared services you have split into three categories and given different time frames. Can you outline each of those items within the time frame?

**Mr WARTON:** In terms of ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** You said in six to 12 months there will be X number transfer across. Can you itemise what they are?

**Mr WARTON:** The actual shared services?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes. Go through the shared services and their transition time frame.

**Mr WARTON:** I am happy to take the specific list of items on notice, but to give you a flavour of what we are talking about, we are talking about strategic policy, media and communications, ICT, finance, the standard shared services. What I neglected to mention before is that many of those services will transit across to DCDD; others will remain capabilities that we have to build ourselves.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Have they been identified yet?

**Mr WARTON:** Yes, they have. It is a work in progress.

**Madam CHAIR:** Did you want that on notice?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.25

**Madam CHAIR:** Opposition Leader, please restate the question for the record.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Of the 17 shared services, please break down each of those services under the three main categories and the time frames for which they will be delivered, including which services will go from Police directly to DCDD rather than Fire.

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.25.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Can you outline all the fire stations that are currently vacant? As in, they do not have full-time members there, but they are being filled by fly-in fly-out of Darwin.

**Mr POTTER:** I am informed the only station is Humpty Doo.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** That is not manned?

**Mr POTTER:** Correct. The others that should be manned are manned.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** But do they have full-time dedicated members, or are they being filled by fly-in out of Darwin?

**Mr POTTER:** They have dedicated members.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Last time I was in Tennant Creek, they were filling that station with people out of Darwin, so has that been resolved?

**Mr POTTER:** There will be members who take leave, and therefore you need a supplementation and fly someone in for the period to cover their leave. But yes, they are filled with members who reside there, pending any leave, sick leave et cetera.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Has any analysis been done on the decision to outsource early burns during the Dry Season to private providers and whether that is actually a function better suited to come back to Fire?

**Mr POTTER:** I am happy to hand to Terry to answer this one in detail.

**Mr TREWIN:** We used to manage hazard reduction burns—strategic burns—some years ago, and it transitioned across to private providers. It is typically on Commonwealth property through a Commonwealth-funded program. By all accounts, to the best of my knowledge, it has been successful so far.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What happens now to hazard reduction on Crown land?

**Mr TREWIN:** It is managed in coordination with Bushfires NT and other government agencies to coordinate what areas are burned throughout the year.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** NT Fire is not responsible for doing all those controlled burns; different agencies do different parcels of land?

**Mr TREWIN:** Correct, although we still have an advisory role in what is done.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do agencies come to Fire for that advice, though? For example, Zuccoli is in my electorate; there are huge parcels of Crown land around that. A few years ago we had a massive fire come right up to the houses, and there was a lack of gamba management on those blocks. Would that be something Fire programs in or that DIPL, for example, should be responsible for?

**Mr TREWIN:** That is shared, but we have full-time hazard abatement personnel who receive complaints and do a monitoring program where they go and inspect particular areas we view as high risk.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to these prescribed burns and the fact that volunteer fires are not doing those anymore, do volunteer fire brigades like at Howard Springs in my area want that back, or are they happy for it to go to these outside contractors?

**Mr TREWIN:** I could not answer.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is it that the work you used to do is now being changed, or is it the work the volunteer firefighters were doing?

**Mr TREWIN:** It is a mixture of both. Career firefighters and volunteers would work together on those. There are specific burns they will do for training programs and so forth to meet the Australian competencies for wildfire firefighting where they will do planned burns.

**Mr MALEY:** Are those local volunteer fire brigades allowed to do burns in the rural area—I have a particular example of an old lady who was an invalid who had a burn pile. Are they allowed to burn it, or does she need to hire a private contractor to?

**Mr TREWIN:** There is a permit-based system for things like that.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes, but if you have a permit—this example I am thinking of is an older lady who is not capable of burning a burn pile, which might be five metres by five metres. Are the volunteers allowed to go and do that, or does the landowner need to get a permit and hire an outside contractor?

**Mr TREWIN:** In the context of community engagement and service, yes, the volunteers could do that.

**Mr POTTER:** I will hand to Andrew, who has a couple of points to clarify regarding government agencies and their burner obligations.

**Mr WARTON:** I put on record that, on starting this job, I wrote to each CEOs and relevant landholders to remind them of their obligations and encouraged them in advance to be part of the mitigation.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is the best process, as a local member—because it comes up across all our areas—to write to the minister if we have a concerning area or approach the agency?

**Mr POTTER:** Through the minister. I am always happy to help with questions through us to go to the agency.

**Mr MALEY:** Is it all right in my area, if a resident comes to see me, if I send them to, say, the Howard Springs Volunteer Fire Brigade and say, 'Go and see them; they are allowed to burn if they have the time.' They could be doing something else. Is it okay for me to refer those people to volunteer fire brigades in the rural area?

**Mr POTTER:** I would never get in the way of the rural residents, Member for Nelson. If it was the person going directly to the fire brigade versus you, it is different. If it is from you, it needs to come through me. If a resident approaches the fire brigade directly through their own channels, it will be passed up and down.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many full-time vacancies are there across all stations in the Territory?

**Mr POTTER:** While they get the specifics, I can tell you at a minimum that it will be higher than 20. I say that because there are an additional 20 officers who have come out from the consent agreement that we have agreed to that will be coming into effect in the next financial year. We have allocated money for them to recruit those firefighters.

What is really pleasing with the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services is the retention rates that we have. We see very small numbers of members leaving the fire service which is a testament to the quality of work they do in the organisation.

**Mr TREWIN:** At present we have 224 Fire and Rescue career personnel, and we have 24 civilian staff supporting them, giving a total of 248. A breakdown of those numbers is we have a female headcount of 33 staff and an ATSI headcount of 13 in that mix.

I could not give you an accurate number of what we are short at the moment, so I would probably have to take it on notice.

**Mr POTTER:** We will take it on notice, but it is worth pointing out that we know there will be the 20 come next financial year because that is the obligation we have from those consent agreements and we are working to recruit them. I clearly articulated with the union back and forward.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.26

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Delineating between the 20 extra as a part of the consent agreement and current full-time vacancies across all stations, please detail the number of full-time vacancies.

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.26.

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**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the new agency that is being developed, what about Bushfires NT? Is there a plan to bring that type of organisation under the umbrella of the new agency?

**Mr POTTER:** Not as it currently stands.

**Mr MALEY:** What about something like St John?

**Mr POTTER:** I believe a review has been announced into St John. It is outside my portfolio area and best directed to Health.

**Mr MALEY:** Has the commissioner heard of Bushfires or St John coming under this new agency?

**Mr WARTON:** There are no plans for that to occur.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Mr Warton is the interim commissioner. When will there be the commissioner?

**Mr POTTER:** Andrew is doing a fantastic job.

**Madam CHAIR:** We do miss *Tales from the Tinny*, though. I just put that on the record.

**Mr POTTER:** I have just realised!

**Madam CHAIR:** What rock have you been under?

**Mr POTTER:** That has just clicked; there you go.

On 31 July is the answer to your question.

It just shows how much time I have to listen to radio.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Will a new commissioner be appointed on 31 July?

**Mr POTTER:** That is the intent.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How does the interaction work now? Obviously when it was Police, Fire and Emergency Services there were three commissioners and now there are two. There is still an interaction between Ms O'Connor and the commissioner's role. How is that structure working so that Emergency Services does not become the fires of when it was Police, if you know what I mean?

**Mr POTTER:** There is a hierarchical structure inside that organisation with clear lines of responsibility. Ultimately all of that rests with Mr Warton. In terms of responsibilities for Emergency Services and Fire, he has overall responsibility to equally weight both outcomes respectively and the requirements that come with his KPIs and letter of commission or equivalent thereof.

**Mr WARTON:** It is a timely question because today we received a draft of a high-level corporate design for the new agency that we have been working on for the past six weeks. It builds this agency not as a recreation of something that slid off from police but as something that is built for the future, to grow and be the emergency management agency for the NT into the future.

**Mr MALEY:** How can you make sure the new agency does not become top heavy with executives and not enough soldiers on the ground? You have an opportunity to get the balance right. There are all sorts of stories about many organisations becoming too heavy at the top. What steps have you taken to make sure this new organisation does not?

**Mr POTTER:** There is an agreed structure within the agency and the funded positions they are allocated. At the moment I think the balance is right; at some point there will need to be review of that. Frontline resources first and foremost are the priority of the agency. We will see whoever the new commissioner is and how they play forward, as it will be at their discretion.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Back to the comments made by Mr Warton in the last question—actually, sorry, minister, it was probably you talking about this new agency being responsible for emergency management. Does that mean the controller position will transfer to Fire and Emergency Services from Police?

**Mr POTTER:** No, the Incident Controller will remain with the Commissioner of Police. The role currently falls under Andrew in relation to the respective services that he has control of.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What new emergency parameters will this new agency have?



**Mr POTTER:** It will have the same parameters the Fire and Rescue Service had before as emergency services under the one standalone agency but with more autonomy.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** In terms of the budget transfer, was additional budget provided to the new agency to account for the transition?

**Mr POTTER:** Yes, there is a budget increase this year of \$64.3m total budget, with \$9.9m for new government initiatives, including enhancement of emergency management, which is \$3m into Fleur's area, where she has been a fantastic advocate for those initiatives. We also see the stage one reforms for the Fire and Rescue Service at \$5m, which links to an additional 20 firefighters that we have spoken about, and the Disaster Ready Fund is a further \$1.9m.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many assaults were there on fires?

**Mr POTTER:** There are currently none we are aware of.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How many fires are on leave due to injuries at work?

**Mr POTTER:** There are approximately 24 members on workers' compensation leave. It is worth clarifying that we recently increased the approved cancers for our frontline fire fighters, I believe, from 20 or 19 at the top of my head, which is something the union had been strongly advocating for many years. It was good to deliver that with our Attorney-General. It means if you get any one of those cancers, it is an automatic recognition that it is related to service. I think we can all appreciate that is a good outcome for our frontline.

**Mr MALEY:** Have there been any fire assets that have been subject to criminal damage or stolen?

**Mr POTTER:** No.

**Mr MALEY:** What about the replacement—I understand some of the fire assets in trucks are old and need to be regenerated or replaced. Is there a program in place to update the assets? What sort of budget is there to keep the fire trucks—I understand a fire truck is quite expensive—fit for purpose? When I say fire trucks, I mean fire assets.

**Mr POTTER:** The capital equipment budget is \$3.9m annually. We talk about the major fire appliance replacement program, which is \$2m, and \$800,000 is on the replacement of vehicles for the standard fleet. A further \$1.1m is on essential replacement of specialist assets such as Fire and Emergency Services trailers, flood boats and electric hydraulic rescue kits. Our commitment is not finalised; some of those we purchased in 2023 but they may not arrive because we have to 'purchase to build', and they arrive the next year.

**Mr MALEY:** Ultimately, there is \$2m in assets—I have no idea what it costs to buy a fire truck with a ladder and stuff, but it seems pretty expensive, so it does not seem that the amount of cash will not buy many trucks, considering some of them are pretty old. Do you think that is appropriate in relation to asset management and replacement of the fire assets?

**Mr POTTER:** I will hand to the commissioner to go through the specifics.

**Madam Chair:** Before the commissioner speaks, there is only five minutes left with the commissioner and his officials.

**Mr WARTON:** There is a breakdown of a cost for each appliance if that is what you are interested in?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes. The second part of the question is: is your budget adequate to keep and replace as required?

**Mr WARTON:** Urban specialist aerial appliances are \$2.4m; urban crew cab-heavy pump, \$1.12m; rural tankers, \$0.5m; light rescue tankers, \$0.36m; and heavy rescue tankers, \$1.2m.

**Mr MALEY:** It seems that \$2m will not even replace one aerial truck?

**Mr WARTON:** There is always room for more funding for appliances.

**Mr MALEY:** There must be a lot of room. How many aerial trucks do you have now and are they fit for purpose?

**Mr POTTER:** We have one at the moment and I will hand it over for Mr Trewin to talk through those.

**Mr TREWIN:** We have one major aerial appliance, the Bronto, and we currently have two undergoing a build program that has been funded internally so far, to the tune of \$460,000. It is a staged build, and the funding flows over financial years as it takes a long time to plan, build and inspect. A build on a major appliance could take up to 12 months from start to finish.

**Mr MALEY:** How many of these aerial appliances are you meant to have to keep the Territory safe, if you only have one that is active?

**Mr Trewin:** It depends on the building height. We have shorter aerial appliances. The ladder that we are talking about at the moment, the Bronto, is a 45-metre platform located in the Darwin CBD.

**Mr MALEY:** You only have one. Is that enough to service the CBD?

**Mr TREWIN:** It is enough until it breaks down or needs servicing and maintenance. That is why we have planned to purchase an additional two, with one allocated—from my understanding—to the southern region as that continues to grow, they will need something.

**Mr MALEY:** If there is a structural fire here in Darwin and the truck is being serviced, there is no backup?

**Mr TREWIN:** No, they can use alternative methods, such as internal attacks and so forth. We also put additional crews on with standard pumpers and shorter aerial platforms to increase that to compensate.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There was an audit conducted by BDO in 2022–23 into overtime, but the audit was binned. What was the cost of that audit?

**Madam CHAIR:** In responding to this question, the committee has two minutes left.

**Mr POTTER:** I have very public in relation to this, with the media to the union and now on the *Parliamentary Record*. I have not seen that report, I do not want to see it and have no care for it, as it was done prior to the separation. We are moving forward as an agency through the union and members. I am happy to take on notice the cost of the review, but it will not be circulated and for all intents and purposes, can be binned.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I would like that taken on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.27

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

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What was the cost of the BDO audit conducted in 2022–23 into overtime?

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

**Mr POTTER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 5.27.

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**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If the report was commissioned by government, paid for by the Territory taxpayer, why should it go in the bin?

**Mr POTTER:** Because the relevance of that and the mechanism in which it was enacted is irrelevant to where we are now. That report for all intents and purposes, and the last advice that I received from the agency was together it had no relevance going forward for the agency. I am happy to get you the dollars related to that. I have taken that on notice. What I have told you here on the public record is the same that I have relayed to the union and frontline members.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** How can you make that judgement call if you have never seen it?

**Mr POTTER:** It relates to a period during COVID, during EBA negotiations and during protected action. There was a decision made by members before me, not ministers but members within the agency before, and prior chief executives when they were combining the Police department. We are moving forward as an agency under the interim commissioner here, and we are getting good results for the front line.

Like I have said many times in here it is not about being retrospective; we need to continue to look forward. Now they are a standalone agency it is about securing more funding and more capabilities so that we can realise things like the Middle Arm development precinct.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are at the end of our allocated time. We sincerely thank the staff for waiting patiently and for appearing before us. It is very exciting to have you as a standalone agency for the first time. Thank you for all your efforts. We will just take a minute before we change to Minister Ah Kit.

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The committee suspended.

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## MINISTER AH KIT'S PORTFOLIOS

### TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, we welcome you and your officials to today's hearing and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

**Ms AH KIT:** This afternoon I am joined at the desk by Emma White, Chief Executive Officer; Karen Broadfoot, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer Regional Services and Communities; Jeanette Kerr, Deputy Chief Executive Officer for Youth Justice; Kim Charles, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer Strategic and Enabling Services; and Rachelle McMillan, Acting Chief Financial Officer.

**Madam CHAIR:** I remind the officials that when you speak make sure your microphone is on, and introduce yourselves for our Hansard team. Minister, in a moment I will invite you to make a brief opening statement and then I will call on questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider whole-of-government budget and fiscal-related questions, before moving onto the specific outputs.

I will invite the shadow ministers to ask their questions first, followed by other committee members, but I will allow members to join in if it is a line of questioning. If you feel that a question is better in a different output area, please advise us at any point. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Ms AH KIT:** I start by acknowledging we gather on the land of the Larrakia people, the traditional custodians, and pay my deepest respects to elders past, present and emerging. I thank all of my staff here with me at the table today and all those who have helped to prepare for Estimates this year. I also want to take the time to acknowledge you and all of those who have participated in the Estimates process from your side. I know we are left with a day and a half. I have been tuning in on and off, and I think you are all doing a wonderful job. I am happy to be here today and a huge thank you to my staff and I look forward to welcoming your questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will call for questions around the opening remarks you have made and any agency related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy. Member for Braitling did you want to do it there or did you want to go to outputs?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Let us get straight into it and see how the minister goes.

**Madam CHAIR:** She will go terrifically.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you please confirm that recently, young people climbed onto the roof of the youth detention centre in Alice Springs, smashing hot water services and letting off fire extinguishers?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am aware of an incident at the Alice Springs youth detention centre and can confirm that some of our young detainees did make their way onto the roof. I do not have all the details at hand. I would be happy to pass to my chief executive or another staff member at the table. When it comes to youth detention, my job is to make sure that our facilities are fit-for-purpose and can house our young people in a safe

manner—not only our young detainees but also all of those who provide the care for them, and those who visit the centre.

It has been a real journey for me as the incoming Minister for Territory Families to ensure that the refurbishments to the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre were undertaken in the most timely manner, making sure the facility is safe and there for practical usage by the young people and those who look after them.

As minister, as well as every other community member, when you hear that young people can make their way onto the roof, my first thought is always about the safety of those young people and for those at the centre. I get the briefings on those incidents, and I work closely with my team and those at the centre to ensure the young people are safe.

I take my hat off to the incredible youth justice officers in the agency. They work very closely with the young people to keep them safe, to ensure situations are de-escalated and that they make their way down. A follow-up to that will always be about appropriate consequences, because it is dangerous behaviour and none of us wants to see a young person on the roof of a facility.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you confirm that since the first breakout, young people have once again broken out, further smashed repaired systems, and have attacked contractors?

**Ms AH KIT:** By breakout, do you mean still being inside the centre but outside of the rooms? Can I get you to clarify?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Certainly. In the first incident, where the young people were alleged to have broken out, gotten onto the roof of the youth detention centre and smashed the hot water services, there was also information given to me that there was another incident that occurred after the first one in which further damage was done and contractors were attacked.

**Ms AH KIT:** I do not have all the details, but I will pass over to my chief executive, Emma White.

**Ms WHITE:** We have no evidence or information that contractors have been attacked. I am happy to investigate that if there is additional information we are not aware of.

In regard to a second incident, we have had significant incidents—the first one we have had here in Darwin back in early April. There was significant damage done. In regard to a subsequent or second major incident of that kind in Don Dale, it has not happened. We have young people who find their way onto the roof, and we have incidents that result in some damage, but that major level damage that you are pointing to, not since in Alice Springs.

As you would be aware, we have moved into the new area; that was part of the redevelopment. I would definitely say the young people are testing that facility. It is a new space and they are finding their way around. We had a couple of incidents over the weekend where minor damage was done, and we have been working through that, as you would expect, as per our protocol. We do not have information about contractors, so I am happy to take that on notice if there is more information.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How much has been spent on the Alice Springs youth justice facility upgrading over the last few years?

**Ms AH KIT:** Let me just look for that answer. The current funding for the Alice Springs youth justice centre is \$33.5m.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** This is what I am trying to get at. We have had \$33.5m spent on the youth justice facility, thousands spent on transportation of youth detainees between Alice Springs and Darwin over that time. Now the facility is finished. I pick up on comments you made earlier about ensuring the facilities are fit for purpose as part of the refurbishments. Is it satisfactory that youth detainees are now accessing the roof and causing untold damage? I do not imagine that we have a cost yet for the damage that was incurred at the Alice Springs facility, but this was after we just spent \$33.5m refurbishing.

**Ms AH KIT:** I hear you loud and clear. It has been an extensive process. The young people getting onto the roof is a serious situation and is one we are continuing to work through with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to make sure that the centre is made safe. I will hand over to the chief executive regarding the work on the refurbishment of the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre.

**Ms WHITE:** In terms of the detailed budget in time spent, materials and contracting, it would be useful to draw on DIPL if the detail on technical information is required. Generally speaking, it was a big investment that places us in a nation-leading position. These are state-of-the-art purpose-built facilities that bring to life a model of care that is trauma-informed and therapeutic. It modernises a detention facility for young people that balances holding them to account for their behaviours and also—given the profiles of the young people in terms of their life circumstances, cognitive and behavioural issues, disability, experience of trauma and disadvantage over generations—with the need for rehabilitation and support to change behaviour.

The investment is large. Moving into any new facility, particularly a residential one of this nature, will have teething issues. Young people, particularly adolescents, test boundaries. This is a new facility, and we are learning as we go, but we are not unhappy with how we are stepping through the process in Alice Springs. There is still work afoot as we complete the project.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Does it assist in someone's rehabilitation if they are able to access the roof and smash hot water services?

**Ms AH KIT:** Our focus will always be on ensuring the safety of young people and workers in the youth detention centres. Our focus will be on making sure they can undertake pro-social activities, get back on the right track, learn to make better decisions to live a good life and be held to account for their actions. Safety is number one, and I will continue to work through my department and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to ensure young people cannot get onto the roofs of youth detention centres.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is extremely important. We would not want someone to fall off the roof and hurt themselves or someone else. After the large investment of \$33.5m, I think that is what I am trying to get at today; it is concerning that people are testing the new facility. I would hope that whatever can be done to stop young people accessing the roof and causing damage is done.

**Mr MALEY:** Was anyone charged in relation to the damage done at the youth facility?

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is that the incidents are still under investigation by the police and, where they see fit, they will charge people.

**Mr MALEY:** When was the breakout?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will pass to the CEO for the exact date.

**Ms WHITE:** The incident at Don Dale in Darwin was on 3 April.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** And the incident at the Alice Springs youth justice facility?

**Ms WHITE:** It was the long weekend just past. I would have to check my calendar.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In Alice Springs—or across the Northern Territory—for some time stakeholders have discussed with me that there are children classed as at risk and high risk. Can you please confirm how many children across the Northern Territory by region are currently deemed to be at risk?

**Madam CHAIR:** Before you answer minister, is that enough clarification for you or do you need some more clarification—in what context. Is that for children in care?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will clarify for the committee. When talking with stakeholders in Alice Springs specifically—but I know this happens across the Northern Territory—young people out late at night are deemed to be either at risk or high risk. This is something that young people are essentially classed as. Territory Families will deal and support young people depending on their risk category. For me it is important to understand how many young people are deemed to be at risk or high risk; therefore, we know how many young people we need to assist.

**Ms AH KIT:** Thank you for the clarification. I will just work with my department. I acknowledge that young people who are found to be on the streets in Alice Springs or anywhere else late at night should automatically and are deemed to be at risk. They are young people. We are always concerned about their safety—as everybody in this room is—so making sure that we can identify them, return them home to a responsible adult in a safe place and do the follow ups with the families to help protect that young person from being on the streets again is our number one priority.

I will have a chat with my department to see what the relevant details are and ask Emma White to add some details.

**Ms WHITE:** The whole approach for child protection or youth justice, particularly for young people who are street-present at night and/or we have received notification through our portal, by phone or the local offices, we absolutely run a risk assessment system. It is important, like an emergency department at a hospital. We have to find a way to triage people and to figure out what is the right response in that time.

Risk, of course, never stands still, so there might be an extremely high risk on the street at night in Alice Springs or anywhere else for that matter. The provisions outlined in our legislation is, if a young person is at an immediate and extreme risk to themselves then we have absolute provisions to remove that child or take them into the legal responsibility of the department. They have for that moment, become a temporary child in care, which is the technical language. It is often a young person in a lot of strife, but also equally there might be young people who definitely have a lot of risk factors, and we do not have a lot of information, but they might not be at such high risk that we need to take that extreme action.

We will work with police and others, through families, to see if there is a responsible adult available for that night and/or the coming days while we make further inquiries and do deeper work to understand what risk that young person is in now and into the future, and therefore provide and connect them with the appropriate supports and pathways. It can be a real moving face. I think the young people on the street in Alice Springs who you are talking about, without doubt, have a lot of risk factors in their lives. Equally some of the nearly 30,000 reports of concerns for children that we receive over a financial year—little ones under two and under five—have different sets of vulnerabilities and risk factors that we in the professional workforce take into consideration as they make those judgements.

I hope that has answered the question. I am happy to provide further information.

**Madam CHAIR:** I think the member asked for specific numbers.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You have spoken to exactly what I am seeking. Surely if there have been young people deemed high risk over the last reporting period—I would like numbers and breakdowns, if you have it, per region, if you have a whole figure?

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Braitling, are you going to want numbers of kids in care per region, then ask them for the numbers they might come into contact with?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I believe there is a class of high risk, where Territory Families will intervene, and that is what I am seeking to find out. How many kids have been deemed at that high-risk category?

I will ask to take that question on notice. It is a big question, and I am happy to provide the answer. What I am thinking of is the child protection notifications are on the right track, referrals, the co-responder model, the young ones who are dropped home by either Northern Territory Police or our department. I am happy to take it on notice and find out if there is a regional breakdown of children who Territory Families, Housing and Communities has classified as being at risk.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, if you get any information while we are speaking, if you let me know we can refer back to it, which might help the member ask further questions.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.1

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you please confirm how many children across the Northern Territory, broken down by region, are currently deemed to be at high risk?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.1.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last year there was much talk in regard to the Prime Minister's \$250m for Alice Springs. At the time, Minister Worden said there would be a submission made by Territory Families for funding. Can I please get an update on what funding Territory Families has secured through the \$250m federal government funding?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is great to have such a large commitment from the federal government into Alice Springs to ensure that local people are receiving the supports they need in partnership with the government. I believe Minister Worden placed a response on the Estimates record the other day. I will re-read that. It is federal government money. We have provided input to the through our department.

I understand the funding goes directly to organisations on the ground in Central Australia for that service delivery. We work very closely with all the stakeholders so we can add value to the work being delivered. I will ask the CEO to provide a bit more detail. I think you said that Minister Worden had stated previously that the Northern Territory Government would put in a submission to see if we can get part of that funding.

**Ms WHITE:** The short answer to your question about the amount of money the department has secured through that investment from the Australian Government is zero. There is no money that has come directly to the department.

The Australian Government has worked in partnership with Northern Territory Government and departments like ours through local regional governance arrangements, the regional controllers, the regional coordination groups and so on. As a department we have provided information and ideas. We have been part of the process to influence that investment, bringing local knowledge together with some of what the Australian Government is trying to achieve with some of the bigger levers. There has not been a formal submission process; we have not provided a budget submission to Cabinet or anything that like. We have just participated in the overall funding process. We ourselves have not received any dollars directly.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There was specific emphasis on family support programs and working with young people in remote regions. This has been a key part of the promised money. It concerns me that Territory Families has not ended up with any of that money, because in some of those areas I would have through Territory Families are the only providers of support to families on the ground.

You have provided ideas and had information and input. Are you able to outline to me today any of the programs, especially family support programs that ended up with additional funding as a result of your advocacy work?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will hand over to my chief executive to go through some more details of how the federal government has supported Centralians through this funding.

**Ms WHITE:** For a number of years our department has worked closely with the Australian Government equivalent department to make sure their investment in family support complements and enables the investment that the Northern Territory Government, through our department, is investing. It is important, as you are signalling, that we get a spread of services as well as unbelievable specialism and an importance to the need of a location.

I can list the investment pieces one by one as we know it, if that is useful. I do not have the list of individual organisations that the Australian Government has directly funded nor would we on hand, but it would be on public record as that money comes online. On 9 May the investments were:

- \$155.7m announced for Central Australia which included \$50m for community and regional infrastructure projects
- \$40.4m over two years from 2023–24 to schools in Central Australia, particularly to improve school attendance and educational outcomes
- \$23.5m to support the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families in Alice Springs and surrounding communities. That particular investment we have been close with them in terms of where the sorts of programmatic considerations would be important based on our experience.
- \$10m in funding under the Regional Connectivity Program

- \$10m for Justice Reinvestment in Central Australia
- \$9.2m to strengthen community safety in Central Australia
- \$3.9m provided over four years to develop the Youth Strategy Action Plan for Central Australia
- \$1.2m for up to five new junior ranger sites in Central Australia
- \$7.5m for effective governance to ensure successful delivery.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Did I hear another youth action plan?

**Ms WHITE:** Currently, from the Youth Action Plans through the Office of Youth, Central Australia does not have an up-to-date action plan as you would be well aware. This money is to enhance that effort given the complexity of not only within Alice Springs itself but needing to build a really robust regional plan rather than a town-based plan.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** This gets to the crux of what I am asking. I have written to Minister Burney regarding the \$155m and I received a similar list of the money that was being spent. Conversations in the Estimates Committee last year was about the remaining \$95m and it was specifically there would be submissions that would go forward from the department—this is what we were told last year and I understand it could have changed since then—but the reality is that out of the \$250m there is \$94m left.

To date we have not had any new programs come forward as a result of that. We have had the commitment, \$155m, which has been spoken about broadly but at the end of the day, did Territory Families ever put forward a submission as was spoken about. We know that zero dollars has been given to the department but was a submission ever put forward to essentially try to get access to the remaining \$94m or \$95m of that \$250m?

**Madam CHAIR:** Their answer before was 'no'. There was some advice provided but not a formal submission.

**Ms AH KIT:** That is right. No formal submission was provided to the federal government for the remainder of the funding. However, written advice and many conversations have been had about how the Northern Territory government, through Territory Families, could assist the Centralians through the use of that money.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Since last year, if Territory Families is successful in the proposed list put forward, the money will come directly to us, and that never eventuated?

**Ms AH KIT:** No formal submission was provided to the federal government.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many young people are currently being case managed across the Northern Territory?

**Madam CHAIR:** Feel free to take your time; we have hours, but it will go quickly. We promise.

**Ms AH KIT:** The total is 4,022.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many case managers does Territory Families currently have?

**Ms AH KIT:** I need to clarify a few details with you. I will ask my CEO, Emma White, to explain the different types of case managers we have and which ones you might be looking for.

**Ms WHITE:** I am keen to clarify the numbers of children and young people you are asking about and the case management. Is that within the child protection remit, youth justice or across the broad spectrum? The reason I ask, as you would be well aware—you have been shadow for a long time—there are different types of case management, different programmatic pathways and different ways we allocate frontline workers or FTE to those programs. I want to get the right information. I am almost certain we have it. If there is any clarification it would be useful.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Certainly. It is no secret. I am basically trying to work out how many young people each case manager is dealing with. I understand that you have a total figure of young people being case managed and that you have different case managers. It is important to represent how many case managers we currently have in the Northern Territory and their current workload.



**Ms AH KIT:** We believe we have the response amongst our paperwork. I have some information I can share with you then I will ask my CEO to elaborate more detail.

I gave you the number of 4,022 young people being case managed. There are 93 case workers with an average load of 43 young people. As you can appreciate there are some case managers who have less number for their caseload. I will get the CEO to explain why that might be.

**Ms WHITE:** In clarification about the number of child protection investigations and a type of case that is open, there are 1,796 currently open. In the average caseload there is a differential per region.

The average caseload with child protection investigations in Arnhem is 14; in Barkly is seven; Big Rivers is 18; in Central Australia it is six; greater Darwin it is 12; and in the Top End communities it is 21.

We also have family support cases. We have a total of 468 open cases. Again, the average caseload in Arnhem is assigned. We have a total of 27 open cases. We have an average of three in Barkly; Big Rivers is two; Central Australia is three; greater Darwin is two; and the Top End is 23.

We also have protective assessment cases that are open—a total number of 104 across the region. In terms of the average caseload in that open-case category, it is four for Arnhem, five for Barkly, seven for Big Rivers, six for Central Australia, nine for Greater Darwin and eight for the Top End.

We also have 856 children and young people in out-of-home care. The caseload is different per region.

If I look at all the total cases that we have open, we have some that are staff who are active and allocated and some cases that are being oversighted and actively monitored through our senior staff to manage that workload. We are making judgements about priority every day, particularly as new information comes onboard and as the minister has alluded to and we have spoken about previously, we also have several agencies across the Territory in that child protection space. Those case ratio numbers change quite rapidly with an active management of those cases.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I think you have touched on it there. What is the most cases held by one case worker and how is that being managed?

**Ms AH KIT:** Member for Braiiling I do not have that information at hand, could I that on notice please?

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**Question on Notice No 6.2**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What is the most cases held by one case worker?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.2.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** There has been a lot of talk about the co-responder model, which has been operating in Alice Springs. Could you please advise of information as to whether that co-responder model is operating in any other jurisdictions across the Northern Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** The co-responder model is working well in Central Australia, as you know. It has been really great to follow the journey between my department and the great work of NT Police working together to ensure our young people are kept safe and that they are engaged with when they are on the streets at night and are dropped home to a safe place with a safe person.

We have always looked at ways to extend programs like this because we know there is a need to. In the budget we announced that we would extending this to Tennant Creek and Katherine. I will throw to Karen Broadfoot, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer to talk more about this.

**Ms BROADFOOT:** The co-responder model has been stood up and is highly active in Alice Springs and greater Darwin, with staff responding 24 hours to young people on the street or who need response from us—in addition to the child protection staff who are already on call.

In Tennant Creek and Katherine, with discussions with their local police, there has been less of a requirement for the 24-hour ongoing work that is happening in Alice Springs and greater Darwin, so that is negotiated between the police and the staff. We have YORETs based in Katherine and Tennant Creek, and depending on the priorities determined at the local meetings is what their schedules are collaboratively set to with police.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What requirement must be met for the co-responder to be introduced?

**Ms BROADFOOT:** For the co-responder to be introduced, it is a negotiation on the ground—in Darwin and Alice Springs it is fully operational; in Katherine and Tennant Creek it is dependent on what the local meetings are determining. For example, Police and our staff meet regularly and look at the profile of the young people are, how much activity is happening after hours and timeframes of the activity. Following that they will make a decision about when to put additional people out.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many Territory Families staff are on call in Alice Springs overnight, and how many are on the streets walking the beat?

**Ms BROADFOOT:** We always have two child protection staff on call at night, in addition to the central intake team in Darwin that takes calls from across the Northern Territory. We also have six staff driving around overnight working with police, from 6 pm to 6 am.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last year it was stated that there were two child protection Territory Families staff on call, so that has remained the same, and it is the six staff who are driving around that is the change under the co-responder model? And, just to confirm, that operates from 6 pm to 6 am?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, that is what they said.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the six staff driving around at night, what data do they collect? Are they counting the number of young people on the streets at night or the number of engagements? How is their work being reported to you?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, our youth outreach and re-engagement officers collect that information. Until 29 March, when the co-responder model was introduced in Alice Springs, there were 53 young people supported; in Darwin, 23 young people were supported. To date, 76 young people have been supported.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What support was given to the 53 young people that were supported. Are they taken home or is it ensured they are enrolled in school? What is the support for those kids who are found out late at night?

**Ms AH KIT:** Good question, Member for Brainting. When the young people are picked up from the streets, our first priority is to make sure they are returned to a responsible person and a safe place if that can be managed. If not, we accommodate them overnight to protect them and keep them safe. When a young person is taken home to a responsible person in a safe place, Territory Families follows up with the person and their caregivers the next day. We then look to understand the behaviours that lead to the situation and the young person being deemed at risk. My department then works with the family and caregivers to create a safe plan, ensuring the young person has the relevant support they need to keep themselves safe, including engagement or re-engagement in school, or pro-social activities during the school holidays, and making sure the family is connected to services.

I will hand over to my department because they do such a great job in this space and I want to give them the opportunity to add more detail.

**Ms WHITE:** In addition to the surge capacity overnight of the six staff and additional efforts by the public housing safety officers, the different feature of the co-responder model is the intensive follow-up the next day, as outlined by the minister. There is an obligation on the department to follow up the very next day and provide integrated case management support that involves the department and other services, including brokering and providing a referral to other services for that young person, depending on the needs and circumstances of the needs and services of the family. That could extend from practical things like providing advocacy and support if there are practical issues in the house that need sorting out, right through to if the young person has cognitive behaviour issues or drug and alcohol misuse, substance misuse or, in fact, needs

to be re-engaged in school or engaged in more pro-social activities through some of our youth providers. It depends on the circumstances of the young person and the family.

The key is the follow-up following and walking alongside that young person and family with other services and not just services for the young person; it must be services and focus with the family and adults in the scenario as well.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many times is a safe sleeping arrangement and space in Alice Springs at the Saltbush facility been used in the last reporting period? Whilst you are looking for that how many other safe sleeping arrangements are there in the Northern Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** We are trying to find the Alice Springs figure. The number for the Darwin and Palmerston co-responder model is zero.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That has not been utilised as a safe sleeping space?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is exactly right.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Alice Springs facility?

**Ms AH KIT:** I believe the figure is around seven. I will confirm that for you, but it is definitely under 10.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many times have those been utilised by at-risk children or children in need of a safe space to sleep?

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is that every young person who has been accommodated there would have been deemed at-risk because it is only used in exceptional circumstances, which is why the number is so low.

I am always grateful for both our police and Territory Families workers to make sure that young people are dropped home to a safe place with a responsible adult. That says a lot about the communities. I have spoken to a number of people in Alice Springs about this. There are an amazing array of people who will take over the care and protection of the young person even if it is not theirs. They are known to the young person and they want to help to keep them safe, which is great.

The answer would be all, but I am happy to take the previous one on notice as well to find you the exact number of young people who have stayed overnight at the Saltbush facility in Alice Springs, if that is okay, Madam Chair.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.3

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many times has a safe sleeping space in Alice Springs at the Saltbush facility been used in the last reporting period?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.3.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last year there was discussion relating to a safe space for vulnerable children in Tennant Creek. How have those conversations progressed?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is an important question. I was conferring with my staff members of the department. I have not come across a commitment for a safe sleeping space in Tennant Creek. My understanding is that it is because there has not been a need in the last two to three years that we have been undertaking our work. I will throw to the department officers to provide background in regards to the work we are undertaking with the expansion of the co-responder model. We are standing up the residential youth justice facility. There are

other focuses in the Tennant Creek and Barkly regions, but a safe sleeping space has not been something that we have been focusing on.

**Ms KERR:** There was consideration of safe sleeping place in Tennant Creek; however, locally the police executive and our executive, who have a very good working relationship, determined that there was not a need. Police have not had an issue finding a safe space quickly for a young person for a number of years. The agreement was that we would have people on call in the event that it occurred, and it has not occurred since.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For the benefit of the committee I will read out an answer in relation to a question taken on notice from last year. This relates to the crisis youth support initiative under the Barkly Regional Deal. It relates to what Territory Families is doing. The answer was, 'The crisis youth support initiative is due to be completed in quarter four of 2023 as per the implementation plan. The Department of Territory Families has in communities, in consultation with the crisis youth support working group, drafted the proposed service model and program. This will be reviewed, the scope of the initiative developed, and options and recommendations put to the government's table.'

This all came about in discussions after there was a long conversation had in regard to safe spaces for young people in Tennant Creek. I do not want to confuse the two things, but has that crisis youth support initiative progressed, and was that completed in quarter four of 2023 of last year?

**Ms AH KIT:** I received advice from my department that this questions relates to youth accommodation, which we come to under the Urban Housing portfolio output. So I do not have to change representatives in and out if that is okay? We will make sure we take a note and remind you if we get there and you forget.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 6.3

At Saltbush the safe sleeping place usage is eight.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Eight, thank you very much minister.

Service mapping is something we talk about every year. It is very important, and we seem to get no closer to actually working out is happening and where the money is being spent. Can you please update the committee on where we are at with service mapping for Central Australia and the Barkly?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is an important question. My understanding is that the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet takes carriage of service mapping. They have been working with the federal government, which is also undertaking theirs. We understand that the service mapping has not been completed at this stage, but again it is not the responsibility of my department.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** To confirm, your department is not mapping what money Territory Families spend in regard to youth programs in Central Australia and the Barkly? Surely you are providing information to Department of the Chief Minister?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, absolutely. We will go through and find what we have here. Sorry, my confusion. When you asked that question, I automatically assumed you asked if we would take a responsibility for all of the services being mapped for Central Australia. Thank you for clarifying.

The pile of paperwork I have in front of me is all the grants disbursed through the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities. As you can appreciate there is a great deal of investment from the department in the Alice Springs area in regard to youth justice. We have grants that to support men's and women's policies, seniors, youth grants, school holiday programs and the like.

I would not recommend reading them all out because I could be here for the next hour. Is there anything that I can table? My CEO will talk further about them.

**Ms WHITE:** We provided a level of detail through written questions and are happy to take this on notice again. We have detail. As a department we invest in programs and grants. As you would appreciate there is a combination of investment across our child protection outputs, family support outputs, youth justice outputs and also through the Office of Youth Affairs—all investing in youth programs from the prevention to early

intervention to a more secondary and tertiary response. There is a range of youth programs in that mapping, and we definitely have that information in detail.

As the minister mentioned, it is a very long list of organisations with dollar figures attached which we can provide.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That would be fantastic. Are you happy to table that, minister?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Will you table it or take it on notice? What is the best way to provide the information?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will take that on notice and I will make sure that all the information is provided as soon as we can.

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**Question on Notice No 6.4**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you please provide detailed information regarding the programs and grant funding by Territory Families for youth services in Central Australia and the Barkly?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.4.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** We may yet get to the bottom of that one.

Last year 113 foster carer assessments were in train. How many are currently being assessed?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is 147.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There are 147 foster carer assessments now being assessed or in train. That has obviously increased. How is your department working through those current foster carer assessments? How many have you progressed in the last reporting period? How many have been approved is probably the easier way to put that.

**Ms AH KIT:** I clarify that the 147 figure I gave you is current carers who are being reassessed for carer status. I will give you a couple of other details.

Currently we have 406 carers in the Northern Territory, and there are 147 who are having their carer status reassessed.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Are they allowed to be carers while they are undergoing that reassessment?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many people are wanting to become carers but are currently being assessed? Those who are waiting on their assessment before they can become foster carers?

**Ms AH KIT:** We have received 274 applications to become carers. Out of those 274, 84 are proceeding to assessment, a total of 37 have been approved to become carers.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thirty-seven approved?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes. There are 315 carer applications currently under assessment.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have an average time to assess foster carers?

**Ms AH KIT:** We do. Average days from the application being received to approved is 84.41 days.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Last year it was reported that 32 children had transitioned from foster care to kinship care. Can you give us the figure for the current reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** Member for Braitling, we do not have those details at hand; may I take that question on notice please?

**Mr MALEY:** Before you do that, I have another question. How many people go from foster to kinship and back? Would you have that information, or would you like to wrap all that up into this one on notice?

**Ms AH KIT:** The Member for Braitling asked from general care to kinship which we do not have. We actually have kinship to general—but I would have to take that on notice as we would have to figure out who has gone from general to kinship and then back to general.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** That is two separate questions.

**Ms AH KIT:** I am happy to take both.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.5

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Braitling, please restate the question for the record.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many children in the past reporting period have been removed from foster parents and placed in kinship care?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.5.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.6

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

**Mr MALEY:** How many people have gone from general care to kinship care and then back to general care in the last reporting period?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.6.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 6.1

**Ms AH KIT:** I provide a response to question on notice 6.1, which related to children at risk across the Territory. The answer is 896 have been deemed high risk.

The breakdown of the regions is: Arnhem region, 28; Barkly, 123; Big Rivers, 71; Central Australia, 224; greater Darwin, 309; and Top End region, 145.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** There are 896 young people deemed at high risk across the Northern Territory. You spoke about how you try to address that and deal with those young people. Would it be accurate to say that every young person who is deemed at high risk therefore ends up with a case manager?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is a large number of young people. Our department works closely with them and their carers to ensure that they are kept safe. I will ask my chief executive to elaborate on the operational aspects.

**Ms WHITE:** The 896 young people who the minister spoke of are young people who have formally been taken into the child protection system and a formal investigation of harm has been done by the staff. It has been deemed that harm has occurred to that young person, so it has been substantiated. That is the high-risk scenario.

Each young person are then matched to a case worker, particularly based on that risk profile. Sometimes a young person is at high risk and that has been substantiated because they have been physically harmed, something has occurred, there has been an incident, different things have happened in the family or, in fact, the young person might have come into care and the actual ongoing risk in the here and now does change in the subsequent weeks and months following.

As we talked about earlier, our first priority is to always allocate a high-risk case to a case worker. If, in some circumstances that cannot happen or, in fact, there is a different risk and that young person is at higher risk, we might need to make some adjustments about the level of case management and how those allocations are occurring. They are based on that risk profile each and every day.

**Mr MALEY:** On a few occasions, the media have reported literally hundreds of notifications about one child, and that child becomes a victim of a crime. How does that occur?

**Ms WHITE:** If I have understood your question correctly, notifications are a signal of how many times the public, another professional or an interaction with our department has occurred about a young person. Not each and every one of those notifications is a notification of harm or suspected harm. Sometimes that number is high, but it is quite misleading in terms of what that actually means.

We are constantly trying to figure out a better way to represent the touchpoints that actually equate to significant harm. For example, we will record a notification if a teacher has made contact to say, 'We think little Billy needs a new set of glasses or we have noticed his glasses have been broken for ages. Can you provide some input into the family to support him?' That counts as a notification.

The second part of your question was about the number of notifications and then they themselves become a victim of crime; is that correct?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes. From memory there was a case in Tennant Creek where there were literally hundreds of notifications—this is what the media said and I cannot give you more detail—and that young child was seriously harmed. How does that occur?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, I appreciate that you are trying to understand the operations of the department and how they go about their job. It would be good if you could point to specific examples rather than hearsay, 'How about this story I heard once upon a time?' We know these things happen ...

**Mr MALEY:** I do not want to give the child's name.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Just try to be more pointed in the examples you are using. Given we are talking about such a serious topic—it does not get more serious than child protection—you can reference our example because we have good public servants here and a minister who want to give you the precise information. It is hard ...

**Mr MALEY:** Are you aware of the case in Tennant Creek where the media reported hundreds of notifications and the child became a victim? You are nodding your head over there.

**Ms AH KIT:** If it is the one that I am thinking of, this was the entire basis for a lot of reform that was undertaken by my government. Unfortunately, I have had a number of conversations regarding child protection with a lot of people.

As my CEO said, we are trying to find a way where we can understand all of the different reports that are coming in—from the broken glasses because a concerned teacher wants to do the right thing by making sure that little Johnny has those specs so he can attend class, see the whiteboard and understand the learning, which is what we all want for that young child, to some of the serious notifications.

As the Minister for Territory Families, my department looks at every complaint and report that comes in. Our job, as my CEO said before, is looking to ensure that we have appropriate processes to triage to make sure we can get to the young people who need that care and protection and support to make sure they are safe, well and looked after.

We can receive a number of notifications. I honestly do not think that is a bad thing. I, you and probably every elected member, push all of our constituents and community members to make sure they are reporting; these are our children out there.

Most of the time they are not able to look after themselves, so my department does an incredible job to have a look at all of the notifications reports that come in to follow up appropriately with the young people and families, making sure they have connections to services.

We have a pretty incredible youth services sector whose staff know the area quite well and are always willing to connect with families and young people and help them.

**Mr MALEY:** I accept that the people work hard, but there are cases that slip through. How does that occur? You have been in government for eight years. How long do you need to fix it so that children do not become a victim of crime or a statistic?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will throw to my CEO because she wants to provide some input.

Some of the important work that government has undertaken is ensuring that we have invested in our IT systems. We have the CARE Services system that has come on board. It is the opportunity to have a 360-degree view of the child. It is something that in my previous role as the Minister for Corporate and Digital Development, I was excited to witness firsthand with the department, speaking to frontline officers about their ability to provide input from their important work.

We want to see that we can look at the young person, get to have a bit of insight through the system about what their life is like; what is driving some of the concerns and behaviour; and who is in the system to be care and help protect them. At the end of the day our focus is making sure that these young people have a diligent and well-resourced protective system to make sure they can live their best lives.

I will offer the opportunity to my CEO to add some commentary.

**Ms WHITE:** I accept the premise of your question, Member for Nelson, in how we prevent harm to children in our community. In child protection, the professional area that it is, we are making judgements each and every day. Sometimes, even though we do everything right, things still go wrong.

I am not making comment on the media situation you referred to; I am not sure I know exactly which one you were talking about. Sadly, we are in the media a lot.

Young people who come to the attention of departments like Territory Families, by definition, have vulnerabilities and things happening in their lives that put them in some risk factor generally, unless there is a malice report or something like that. By definition teachers, nurses and police officers are referring to our department because they are trying to understand if there is something else going on for a young person or a family.

There have been many cases over the 20-odd years that I have worked in child protection where the service system has responded as you would want it to respond. Has that prevented harm in every single case? Absolutely not. I do not think there is a child protection system globally that is fool-proof, and we are learning a lot as we go. A lot of the reforms that have occurred here in the Territory, including the 360 that the minister talked about and the implementation of a consistent practice framework across the Territory, good quality assurance, robust training of the workforce and working really hard to make sure we are working with the right cases. When you have a volume of referrals, it is important that you have the rigorous risk assessment, so you are putting the resources to the ones that are most at risk of coming into harms way. There is need throughout the system, as you would appreciate.

It is something that is a constant work-in-progress. Even when everything goes well, very sadly, in child protection communities all over the world children still come into harm's way.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the 896 deemed to be 'at high risk', you have spoken about the different responses. In Alice Springs, how many available spots are there available for kids to take part in the Back on Track program run through Congress?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Can you repeat your question, Member for Braitling?



**Mr BURGOYNE:** In Alice Springs there is a program run by Congress called Back on Track. There are a number of others called 'on track', 'right track' or 'back on track' and I believe the one run by Congress is 'back on track'. There is a limited number of spots for that program and as we have 224 'at high risk' children in Alice Springs, I am wondering how many spaces are available in that program.

**Ms AH KIT:** Thank you. I will hand over to the department to provide more details, but what I understand is that there are 26 spaces per intake for the Back on Track in Alice Springs. As you said, there are 100s of young people deemed 'at risk', so I will get my department to talk about the work they are undertaking to ensure young people who are at risk are connected with the Back on Track program.

**Ms WHITE:** As the minister said, there are 26 places at any one time through the Congress-run program and then there are 20 through the Saltbush Back on Track program. In terms of other options for the 264 young people at risk, there are a number of other programs available, depending on the circumstances. Some of that is family support, youth programs, or any combination.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Are you able to outline those other programs?

**Mr MALEY:** Also, there is a program in Ramingining that does something similar, can you outline that as well?

**Ms AH KIT:** Seven Emu?

**Mr MALEY:** No, in Ramingining.

**Ms AH KIT:** I will just get my CEO to provide the details, but we are jumping back and forth because we are not following outputs. That is why it has taken us a bit of time to go through the briefs.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** If you would like to push it through to the output group, you can request that. It is up to you if you would like to do it now or later.

**Ms AH KIT:** We might provide this one and then tackle the next one as it comes, but we might push that to the output group so we can stay in order.

**Ms WHITE:** Can I clarify that it is just in Central Australia that you are looking for, Member for Brainting, or is it the programs across the Territory?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We can start in Central Australia and see how far we get.

**Ms WHITE:** In the previous question we took on notice, we are committed to provide the funding of all of the programs on offer, so I think that would cover it. We will provide that by region and I think that will give you the best information. As the minister has just flagged, we are talking across a number of youth justice, child protection and family support programs, so we would seek to provide you the full suite in that previous written question.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Not a problem.

**Mr MALEY:** What about the one in Ramingining, will that be included?

**Ms BROADFOOT:** Is that the Country Connect in Ramingining? Yes, we can include that.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Still whole of government, or would you like to go into the output groups?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have a few questions on whole of government and then we will move on.

With regard to the Alice Springs curfew, what was the overall cost incurred by Territory Families relating to the implementation of the curfew and how many Territory Families staff were involved in the implementation of that?

**Ms AH KIT:** On 27 March 2024 the Northern Territory Government declared an emergency situation under the Emergency Management Act 2013. The declaration enabled a youth curfew in the Alice Springs central business district high risk area for all people under 18 years of age. The curfew ended on 16 April 2024.

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities worked closely with the lead agency and incident controller, NT Police, throughout the curfew period in the high-risk area to engage with young people and their families. The department deployed a significant surge workforce across the curfew period, including tripling the number of co-responder and youth outreach and re-engagement staff to undertake patrols during the night shift. This was an increase from two staff per shift to six staff. This operated seven days per week, with day shift follow-up with young people and their families. Additionally, the department extended the operation of public housing safety officers from 1 am to 3 am each night to ensure oversight of housing complexes outside of the high-risk area.

The department established safe places in the event that a young person was not able to be taken to a responsible adult at a safe address during the curfew period. This was, ultimately, not needed.

During the curfew period the department engaged with young people on 381 occasions in the high-risk area, with 317 occasions where young people were conveyed out of the high-risk area. In addition, 64 young people were transported home to a responsible adult from outside of the high-risk area. As a part of post-curfew planning, the department is a lead agency and partner in the delivery of the Strengthening Community Safety Plan for Alice Springs, which is being implemented through collective agency governance provided by the Central Australian Regional Coordination Committee.

The department is implementing a complex tenancies team in Alice Springs with three dedicated staff, including a housing social worker, who will be responsible for identifying and case managing high-risk tenancies where families have complex needs. This may include vulnerable young people or young people who are offending.

The department is integrating the operations of its youth teams, including co-responder, youth outreach and re-engagement teams and On the Right Track through an integrated model for service delivery. This will ensure support provision is tapered and escalated according to assessment of need and risk with a key focus on raising levels of accountability and responsibility in parents and carers.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have an overall cost incurred by Territory Families as a result of that additional work and staff you have?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will have to take that one on notice as I do not have the details at hand today.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.7

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Brainting, please restate the question for the record. It would be helpful to be time specific.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What was the overall cost incurred by the taxpayer in relation to the implementation of the curfew for Territory Families staff?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.7.

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#### Answer to Question on Notice No 6.2

**Ms AH KIT:** I have a response to question 6.2 that I took on notice that relates to the case worker with the most cases.

The most cases held by a current case worker as at 31 March 2024 was 49 open cases, which included nine children in care; 23 family support cases; 16 child protection investigations; and one protective assessment.

**Ms AH KIT:** You also asked how that caseload was being managed. I will throw to my department to provide details of the operations.

**Ms BROADFOOT:** It is never desirable for people to have such high caseloads. You will find that caseloads fluctuate significantly between the regions, depending on the experience of the staff involved and the complexities of the cases.

Forty-nine is a high number. That is managed by professional staff in an office who hold the responsibility for the overall decision-making of a case. There are also other staff who are involved which includes family support workers, Aboriginal community workers and other administrative staff like youth workers who can step in and provide additional support. The professional is then able to focus on the areas that require that professional input and decision-making while being able to task out things to other staff.

While we prefer caseloads to be lower than that, in circumstances where they are high that additional support is provided.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There has been much talk regarding vacancies in Territory Families. Are you able to answer today how many case manager FTE positions you have and how many vacancies there are?

**Ms AH KIT:** There are a total of 307 positions and a total vacancy of 110. We have 197 filled at the moment.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is a third of the workforce missing for lack of a better term. How are you managing those case workers? You have sort of spoken to it, but essentially the people remaining will burn out if they are not assisted. How are we assisting and helping the remaining case managers to manage that workload?

**Ms AH KIT:** That important question is something that I discuss regularly with my department who are undertaking an incredible amount of work helping Territorians every day. Burnout is a big fear of mine. My background is in mental health and suicide prevention, so we are making sure this incredible work is supported. Karen Broadfoot said that there are protections in place to ensure that each one of our staff members, let alone case workers, are being supported making sure their mental health comes first because, as you can appreciate it is not easy work.

I put on the public record quite early into becoming the minister the fact we do have a lot of vacancies. I understand this is happening right across our country, so making sure we are valuing and supporting and protecting our amazing workers is one of our highest priorities. I will throw it open to my department to talk about other self-care measures and protections we have in the department.

**Ms BROADFOOT:** As I described before there is a workforce around each case manager that also provides that assistance. It is also important to note that a case is exactly that—a case per child—and there are usually more children in a family. While you may have five children in a family, that will be five cases but still dealing with one family group. That is important around how we actually manage that because firstly we prioritise the work.

The first thing that management staff will do on the ground is have a look at the level of caseload across the board—the sorts of supports and experience that the case manager has. They will then allocate depending on priority and then where a case is unable to be allocated because caseloads are so high or too high, the manager and team leader will monitor caseloads and monitor and prioritise work across the cases that cannot be allocated. That allows us to ensure that while there may be high caseloads, we are monitoring our staff wellbeing and allocating depending on their capacity and the supports around them.

For the agency, one of the priorities we have—the minister was certainly correct in saying that this jurisdiction is not alone—is the difficulty we have in recruiting child protection staff. That has been felt across all jurisdictions and certainly, even internationally—we are certainly not alone in that. One of the things we are looking at doing is our targeted recruitment and how we actually engage with staff we could potentially recruit—potential staff we could bring into the jurisdiction—and whether or not we need to be looking at the model in which our staff are set up.

Is there a different way we could utilise our resources that may provide a greater level of support and lift up the decision-making for child protection professionals while recruiting staff who do not necessarily have the qualifications but have the skills needed to do the work to support those professional staff. We are looking at it from a number of different angles and we need to do that because this is something that is being experienced across the nation.

**Mr MALEY:** Talking about staff, I see that there are three acting executives here. Is that a flow-on effect? If you are acting up there, does it flow right down? Does it affect morale that everyone is in an acting role and no permanency?

**Ms WHITE:** I think the flow-on effect you are seeing is the recent appointment of myself as the chief executive officer and Karen is acting in the role I was in, and we have had a couple of senior staff, including the CEO and the previous deputy recently exit the department. In terms of the team here, we are actively recruiting to those positions and we hope to finalise them shortly. Throughout the system there are definitely people acting at any one time. We have actually had a higher retention rate in the last budget financial year than we had the previous year. We have taken that as a pretty good sign.

Without a doubt, the work of child protection staff is complex and hard going. You need intellectual and emotionally resilient people doing it. On any one day you could be doing complicated legal work, writing affidavits and fronting court, right through to comforting a child if something has happened. You must have a broad understanding of dynamics in families, alcohol and other drugs, and all the things that go into that work.

As a department, our primary responsibility to workforce wellbeing—we try in a formal way to have good supervision policies, making sure training and development is available to staff. More and more, we are becoming stewards of the system rather than direct deliverers as we invest more into not-for-profit and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

We are working in partnership to share the load in one way, but also to bring a diversity of skills and experience to the table when working with kids and families. I worry about staff when we have persistent long vacancies. I think it is incumbent on leadership right through the system, either in an acting capacity or permanent, to be in tune and in contact, constantly talking to staff about what they might need and how we might manage situations when there are profound vacancies, which we have been experiencing post-COVID. We have seen that entrenched.

**Mr MALEY:** I agree that staff are important. Would you not think that filling the acting roles through here and the department would give certainty to those people and make them feel more appreciated? That is one word, but I am sure there are many words to describe it. Would that not be the first thing you would do, give people jobs so they know what is going on and can concentrate on the client, the children, and not have to worry about their jobs?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will get Emma to clarify.

**Ms WHITE:** I wholeheartedly agree. We have rolling recruitment for frontline child protection staff. We never stop recruiting; they are always open online, in the newspaper, through the NTG portal. It is not a 'do it once then close it'; we need a constant pipeline of child protection and youth justice workers. We have recently advertised the acting positions you have seen, and the committee today. We have done the interviews and those processes are about to conclude.

Similarly, right through the system, we are advertising vacant positions often two or three times before we secure someone. We have a task force through our strategic HR committee, which is a core governance committee in the department that works closely with the Office of Public Employment and DCDD in looking at proactive ways we can keep attracting local people into positions, but also attracting people from outside the Territory.

We recently participated in recruitment in the UK and Scotland. We have all sorts of networks out there, internationally and locally, so it is a work in progress and we are always focused on it.

**Mr MALEY:** If you have a third of your staff out, would you think it is not working? An opportunity to try something different? I think it was 104 vacancies.

**Ms AH KIT:** I highlight that it is not just a shortage in our workforce. I spoke to a number of my colleagues around the country and they are experiencing the same. As much as I would hate to go and steal all their staff and get them up here, we will continue to look at every possible opportunity to grow our own and give our own staff in the department the opportunity to upskill and fill those roles if that is what they choose to do.

Like my CEO said, we invest in overseas opportunities to encourage people with the right skillset to work here, choosing Australia over every other country that is chasing them and every other jurisdiction that is seeking that support.

I will ask Emma if she would like to add anything.

**Ms WHITE:** We are trying really hard to recruit, along with colleagues in other states and territories. We have always had a fluctuating vacancy rate, as you would be aware in this portfolio. Post-COVID and in line with the federal government changes in some of the immigration rules, we have seen the direct correlation in terms of the pipeline of people available.

We have tried to do things differently and are always open to new suggestions. We have looked at dual JDFs—I think Karen talked about that—a different tiered way of working in terms of who we can attract. We have a situation in the department where you can come in with no or little qualifications and through our formal training and development centre there is a pathway to quals which opens up different options in the department for career progression.

Some of the remote services teams have done creative things about supporting local people in remote communities and putting together CVs and different ways of applying for jobs, so not the traditional public service long written application but utilising videos and different mediums to communicate what the value proposition is of that staff member. We have had a lot of pooled recruitment options. People come in and might have an opportunity through the early careers program or other supported training options to try it out. We are in close partnership with Charles Darwin University around their social work placements. There is lots of other mechanism that we are trying.

From my point of view, we must keep our efforts up across all those things. There is no one magic solution out there. If there was, I am sure we would have tripped across it. We also have a different demographic with different ages and stages of young professional or professionals through their career in the department and I think we have to keep nuancing how to sell the opportunity and great career path that you have in departments like this with a close focus on those different ages and stages in careers and be very flexible in our workforce arrangements et cetera in order to attract more people. There is more work to do.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal Strategy.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – FAMILIES** **Output 1.1 – Family Support**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output Group 1.0, Families, Output Group 1.1, Family Support. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can I ask about family responsibility agreements in this output?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, Member for Braitling.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many family responsibility agreements have been signed and agreed to in the last reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** Zero. As we have been going through our processes, family responsibility agreements are court ordered. They are at the end of a stage where a young person has come before or engaged with the youth justice system. What the department has been focusing on is recognising all the opportunities to engage with the young person to help get them back on the right track before they get to the stage where they are committing a crime, behaving dangerously and things like that.

At the front of the process—we spoke about it in regard to the co-responder model in Alice Springs—when we are checking up on a young person after they are dropped home, my department is then going in to engage with the young person and those who provide care and protection for them. We develop safety plans, focus on prosocial activities, support service providers who can help not only the young person to stay on track and live their best life, engage with school but also every other support available to the parents and other people in the house.

I will ask my CEO to talk more about why we focus on safety plans as opposed to the family responsibility agreements and how this is supporting our Territory families and young people.

**Ms WHITE:** We are moving through the implementation of Signs of Safety and being much more focused on implementing safety plans across a number of our programs, strengthening family cases to some of the youth justice work in signs of success. Safety plans are almost in step with or in fact have made in some ways responsible parenting agreements a little redundant—this is the wrong word—in the sense that the features and professional tool of a safety plan and a responsible parenting agreement are similar. In some

programmatic areas the safety plan is more rigorous and strict in terms of family responsibility than the agreements were.

It is really a case of the professional tools evolving over those years. We now have 129 approved safety plans and more in development as alternative metrics to the family responsibility agreements.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How can this be? These were held up as the panacea only but a couple of years ago. Family responsibility agreements were how we were going to ensure that young people were going to school and we were working with families. In the last reporting period not one has been commenced. How have we changed so far from family responsibility agreements to now a safety plan. Are we just changing the wording so that we can say that we are doing something different? What has essentially caused this? The word that was used before was 'redundant'. Why are family responsibility agreement no longer relevant?

**Ms AH KIT:** As the chief executive said, professional tools have been evolving. The department creates a safety plan with the young person and their parents or guardians—those who provide care and protection for them. It is like a family responsibility agreement, but that agreement is at the end of the process and engagement; it is the result of a young person's engagement with the youth justice system.

A safety plan is created when a young person is dropped home through the co-responder model, they are deemed at risk. The department goes in, they sit around the table, they have a yarn, they find out the background of the young person, what leads to them being out on the streets at night, how can the family support them, how do we get them back in school, how we make sure they are supported to stay on track and how we make sure their carers are supported.

It is not just a change of terminology; it is working more proactively at the start of the process. When we understand or find that a young person is at risk and we have had to drop them home, we want the plan to help them through their family support from the get-go.

I do not think I am explaining it too well, so I will hand over to my CEO who may have a clear explanation.

**Ms WHITE:** To answer your question succinctly, safety plans are utilised across most of our program areas. Holding that balance of parental responsibility and also providing support and care to children, young people and families in a comprehensive plan is critical across all areas of our work. The family responsibility agreements were for a much narrower subset, generally through a court process, when it was first brought online.

Now in utilising our professional framework of Signs of Safety, we are using safety planning to hold that parental responsibility and care and support across most of our programmatic areas rather than that subset. That is my clearest explanation. I am not sure that answers your question.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am confirming because I have gone online and looked up how to enter into a family responsibility agreement. Is this process that is outlined on the NT Government website still relevant? Can a person still enter into a family responsibility agreement or do they no longer exist?

**Ms AH KIT:** Technically yes, but I will get my chief executive officer to elaborate.

**Ms WHITE:** I think you have answered the question, minister. So technically yes, the provisions for family responsibility agreements are still within in our system. We still have policy and procedures around them. There is mention of them in the youth justice legislation, so technically we absolutely can, but as I have described previously in my answers, we are utilising safety planning earlier and more consistently across all our program areas. I think there has been expansion of both tightening family responsibility in relation to the care and protection of the children, but also holding the balance between care and support of families and kids, and what parents and families generally need to be held to be responsible and accountable for when things are going wrong.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The annual report 2022–23 highlights included, 'Improved family support services that help families keep children safe at home, prevent entry into care and support reunifications after care'. Can you please provide more detail on that highlight? Essentially, I am asking what are the improved family support services.

**Ms AH KIT:** I have a list in front of me, so I will read them into the record.

We have families who can be referred to support at all points of our system, from locally led support services to referrals through the department's Central Intake Team. Family support programs delivered and funded by the department include Strengthening Families cases, so department case workers providing short-term intensive support and assistance to a child and their family that increases their ability and capacity to keep their child safe in their care ongoing to prevent children coming into care.

We also have family support cases where department case workers support individuals and families to achieve and maintain their wellbeing. On The Right Track cases are where department case workers support a young person involved in antisocial behaviours that increase their risk of entering the youth justice system.

We have funded family support services program delivered by 15 organisations that we fund to deliver programs in 39 locations across the Northern Territory—13 of these 39 providers are Aboriginal led.

We have child and family centres, so Aboriginal-controlled child and family centres that provide tailored and coordinated services to vulnerable families. We also have the remote family support program, so department remote support workers engage proactively with families to identify and support the resolution of child safety and wellbeing concerns. We also have Family and Children Enquiry Services, or FACES for short—I know you know this well. The department's dedicated phonenumber connecting community members to services in their local area.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In Budget Paper No 3 you have provided \$5m and it is a revised \$5m for accelerated family support. Obviously with the raising of the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years, what specifically was the \$5m used for and what will it be used for in the next financial year? It is a revised figure, so it was there and it has been carried across by the looks of it. I am wondering what it will be used for?

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is the money was allocated to establish and support the On The Right Track program.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to Country Connect, is that under this output? I want to ask some questions about how much it costs and how many people go through it.

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, that is under this output.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give us an outline how much that program costs and how long it has been running for?

**Ms AH KIT:** In regard to Country Connect, there is no allocated budget, it is included in out-of-home care costs and is on a case-by-case basis whereby the department would contact Country Connect about a young person who requires their support and there would be a negotiation for the purchase of services.

I am happy to get my department to elaborate on that. I think part of your question was with regard to where it operates.

**Mr MALEY:** It operates in Ramingining. How much was spent in the last reporting period on Country Connect and how many children attended the program?

**Ms AH KIT:** I understand we have a breakdown for the individual placement arrangements, but I do not have the detail for Country Connect specifically and can provide that on notice.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell us how many children went to that program?

**Ms AH KIT:** I do not have the number of children who have used the Country Connect program.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.8

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

**Mr MALEY:** Please tell us how much money in the reporting period was spent on the Country Connect program and how many children went through that program in the reporting period?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.8.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** We will have a 10-minute break.

The committee suspended.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are at consideration of Output 1.1.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have no further questions on Output 1.1, Family Support.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I have a question. I am not sure if this is the right place.

Is it true that you will be building a youth accommodation facility on Ragonesi Road in Alice Springs?

**Madam CHAIR:** Did you not ask Minister Paech this question last week?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No.

**Madam CHAIR:** That was an alternative to prison or something.

**Ms AH KIT:** I think it is the *Youth Justice Act*.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You do not know anything about it?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am not overseeing any of that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Okay. I thought it was within the youth justice.

**Ms AH KIT:** It could be in within the department ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you want to take it on notice?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am happy to take your question. We can provide some clarification, Member for Araluen. I will throw to Jeannette Kerr, the Deputy CEO of Youth Justice.

**Ms KERR:** In relation to the residential youth justice facilities that have been announced and are being built across the Territory, or established, we do not currently have a site for Alice Springs. There are range of sites that we have visited, started to scope and asked DIPL to make further inquires, but there is no decision made on that site.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are you happy with that response, Member for Araluen?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I know the people living on Ragonesi Road ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I meant in terms of whether you still want to put something on notice.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No, that is fine. We will not worry about it.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

### **Output 1.2 – Child Protection**

**Madam CHAIR:** We will now move on to Output 1.2, Child Protection. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many child protection notifications have ben made for the reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** The total number of child protection notifications for the reporting period is 17,152.



**Mr BURGOYNE:** How does this compare with last financial year's figures?

**Ms AH KIT:** Last year it was 27,676, so we are 10,500 less this reporting period. Sorry, this is up to 31 March.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Have we seen a change in how these numbers are reported since the introduction of the CARE Services system?

**Ms WHITE:** We have seen a change in some patterns of reporting. We actually take in most of our notification reports in our online portal which is part of our mandatory reporting system and general referrals into central intake. The care system is really once those referrals have come into the system, rather than generating reports themselves. We have seen a reduction in reports.

We only have the figures from 31 March, but predicting through to the end of the financial year we still think there will be a slight reduction. Some of that is through our professional reports. We would say some of that is about the proactive education we have been doing in partnership with police and education; for example, about when to report, what to report on and the other family support options in the service system that is available. You do not need to come through the department; you can do direct referrals. There have been some changes that we have seen in the numbers.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have it broken down for how many people are still phoning in? I know that was always a service. Obviously when you have 17,000 child protection notifications coming through, quite often in the past, there have been questions in regard to how many people are getting through, how many calls are going unanswered, and obviously with that online portal, things may be changing.

**Ms AH KIT:** The number is 7,942.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is taken by phone?

**Ms AH KIT:** Taken by phone.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have any phone calls that were not able to be dealt with or gotten to that went unanswered?

**Ms AH KIT:** We had a proportion of calls that were abandoned—20%.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How does that compare with the KPI you set for your agency?

**Ms AH KIT:** There is no specific KPI around this; however, it is a good improvement for us to have 20% for the year to date compared to 41% last year. I am advised by my team that there are other ways people are reporting online and that those numbers of online reports have gone up.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many people are reporting online? I guess it is the remaining 10,000-odd because you would have professional reports as well.

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely, notifications received online were 6,960.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** And the professional reports?

**Ms AH KIT:** I have a table here that includes non-professional reports. I am just going to quickly whiz through and do some calculations.

Can I take that on notice and come back to you, I just want to make sure that I give you the right calculations.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.9

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can we please get a breakdown of child protection notifications in regard to online reports, professional reports and phone reports?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.9.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** This has been widely spoken about—the draft plans for a new youth justice facility that were released back in 2020 with a total of \$5.55m allocated for it.

Are you happy for me to ask this question in this output or would you like for me to wait for youth justice?

**Ms AH KIT:** I think that is in Child Protection in Output 1.2.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How much has been spent so far and when will this project be completed and opened?

**Ms AH KIT:** Sorry; it is under Output 1.4.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is what I thought.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 6.5**

**Ms AH KIT:** Question 6.5 was in regard to transitions from foster care to kinship care. How many children in the reporting period have transitioned from foster care to kinship. During the reporting period there were 19 children who transitioned out of foster care and into kinship places.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 6.6**

**Ms AH KIT:** Question 6.6 was in regard to transitions from foster care to kinship and back to foster care. During the reporting period two children transitioned from a foster care placement to a kinship placement and then returned to a foster care placement.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 6.8**

**Ms AH KIT:** Question 6.8 was in regard to Country Connect. I believe the Member for Nelson was looking for information. I just wanted to clarify that Country Connect operates in Darwin, Tiwi islands, Ramingining, Galiwinku, Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Jabiru. The total purchase of services cost \$4.9m for 11 young people.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The co-responder model in my mind comes under Child Protection. Is the co-responder model still on trial? Is it now permanent? What is happening with that program?

**Ms AH KIT:** The co-responder model was initially funded from within, and we now have a new appropriation in the budget to ensure it is ongoing for another year at \$2m.

**Mr MALEY:** Can I cast a question back to Country Connect. There was \$4.9m spent on 11 children. My calculator says that is \$445,000 per child; is that correct?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is correct.

**Mr MALEY:** How long were those children involved with Country Connect to spend that sort of money?

**Ms AH KIT:** There were varying lengths of time depending on the circumstances of the young person. Country Connect provides support to make sure a young person can be returned home safely.

**Mr MALEY:** Are we talking years, months or days?

**Ms AH KIT:** The longest period was just over a year of Country Connect support to a young person.

**Mr MALEY:** Just over a year, and that person was \$445,000. Of those 11 children, can you give us the time each of them was in the program?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, I can take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 6.10**

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

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the Country Connect program, can you tell us how long each of the 11 children were in that program?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.10.

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**Madam CHAIR:** It is obviously an intense service for those young people.

**Ms AH KIT:** It is an important service. My understanding is that it has only been around for the past four years. The work they have undertaken in the program is absolutely critical. I hear your concerns and am happy to come back with more information, but they do a great job.

**Mr MALEY:** It seems like a lot of money for only 11 children. I will be happy to get the information.

**Ms AH KIT:** Happy to give that to you.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to Seven Emu Station, are you happy to be asked those questions in the youth justice output?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many people were engaged—no, we covered that earlier in regard to the co-responder trial. How many people were engaged for the trial and how many were engaged post-trial? I think you said 30-something young people were engaged during the trial? After you have engaged with them, do you continue to work with every young person?

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely. That is where it comes back to the design of the safety plan to ensure the young person has a plan in place with their caregivers as well, or we can continue to support them to remain out of risk.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have any numbers in regard to how many young people were engaged, then had a safety plan developed and have gone on to reoffend?

**Ms AH KIT:** I would have to take that question on notice and get back to you.

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**Question on Notice No 6.11**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Of the young people engaged in the co-responder model, how many were incorporated into a safety plan and how many who were engaged went on to reoffend?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.11.

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**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

### Output 1.3 – Out of Home Care

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Out of Home Care. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Your department's annual report provides performance indicators for out-of-home care. The data suggests the number of children in out-of-home care and the number of children entering out-of-home care during the year dropped. Are you able to talk me through the reasons behind the drop in numbers?

**Ms AH KIT:** As at 31 March 2024, we had a total of 151 young children entering care, but there was a total of 161 children who exited care. Either they were reunited with their family or caregivers, or they aged out of care—turned 18—so the number has come down.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There are number of young people who are engaged out on the street, but unless people are being put into out-of-home care as a result of how the policies are working within Territory Families, it does not seem to match. I am trying to understand how there seems to be a huge need for assistance for young people, yet the numbers in out-of-home care are reducing. I know some people would say that is a positive indicator, but I am trying to work out exactly who is assessed for out-of-home care and how they end up there.

**Ms WHITE:** The number of children who are brought into out-of-home care has increased in the last couple of years, but the total number of children in care, for the reasons the minister has talked about, has reduced. Operationally, we have more options and interventions to provide to young people and families earlier and at different points. Previously, when the number of children in care was going up and up, children were not leaving care through reunification or through ageing out. Often, the department was doing some of the work that is now happening in the family support system, so families and other providers such as the Department of Education, NT Health and other universal services can work with families and refer them to support earlier without coming through the front door. This means there is an early intervention dynamic happening in the Territory that is new and that we need to do more of, but this is impacting on some of those numbers. The total number of children brought into the system has gone up.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You are bringing in more people, but there is quite a number exiting, as you explained in the number previously.

**Ms WHITE:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As I look forward to the forecast, you are forecasting fewer and fewer people entering out-of-home care. Can you explain that?

**Ms WHITE:** They are forecast based on a set of indicators and information that we have today. They are forecasts only. For example, six years ago we forecast double the number of children in out-of-home care than we see today. I think that is due, partly, because of some of the things we talked about. Also, we are building up the other parts of the family support system and working in much closer partnership with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and have a national framework in Safe and Supported and the Generational Strategy that are designed for systemic reform in this area. We are thinking of this pre-birth and right through to the family and a young person's trajectory to have a positive impact at different points. I think we are getting sharper, not just us in the Territory, but also nationally, about which children and young people have to be in out-of-home care because there is no other option. The forecast is definitely a prediction that we keep revising.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

### Output 1.4 – Youth Justice

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 1.4, Youth Justice. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As part of the Barkly Regional Deal, draft plans for a new youth justice facility were released in 2020. A total of \$5.55m was allocated under the regional deal. How much has been spent so far and when will this project be completed?

**Ms AH KIT:** Are you referring to the bail support accommodation which is coming online later this year?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am referring to the youth justice facility.

**Ms AH KIT:** You said \$5.55m for the youth justice facility under the Barkly Regional Deal.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I believe from previous conversations that is being built and is sitting up here somewhere in Darwin, but I do not know that to be certain. There have been lots of conversations over a long time in relation to it.

**Ms AH KIT:** I am sort of across what you are saying, but I think we are mixing two different issues. I will hand over to Jeanette Kerr.

**Ms KERR:** The Barkly youth justice facility is not under the Barkly Regional Deal; it is the residential youth justice facility. That has been built, but there has been a delay over a number of years because of Indigenous land use agreements and different agreements with the local traditional owners. I am pleased to say that it will be online in two days, operating out of the Juno facility in a partnership with the Department of Education. We will be staying there until we finalise construction next door.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Let us talk this through, as there has been a bit of conversation. There was going to be a standalone youth justice facility. There have been difficulties in getting the land where that will go. You have now stood up a separate facility at the Juno Centre for it. Was it one-point-something million dollars?

**Ms KERR:** We have the Indigenous land use agreement contracts with the Patta group et cetera have been confirmed. The buildings are constructed.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Where are the buildings?

**Ms KERR:** They are in Darwin at present. That is not the issue; there are site works and things that need to happen. We are on the block next door at Juno and working there because it provides the same infrastructure. We do not expect to be full straightaway, so it gives us a good opportunity to start setting up. Once we move into the facility, we will still have access to Juno and have a partnership with the Department of Education.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Has the \$5.5m been expended to build the buildings that are sitting here in Darwin? Is the additional allocation of \$1.7m to upgrade the Juno Centre, as an interim facility, in place whilst you deal with the land resolutions?

**Ms KERR:** I should probably defer to DIPL about the construction costs, but my understanding is that it is \$3.3m in terms of the building works. Yes, the money has been allocated to upgrade Juno for the same purpose.

**Madam CHAIR:** DIPL are here tomorrow, so you can ask them a follow-up question.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I look forward to it.

**Ms AH KIT:** I want to clarify that out of the \$5.5m you referred to, \$3.5m has been allocated for capital and \$2m for operations.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Has the \$3.5m for capital been expended?

**Ms AH KIT:** That would be a question for tomorrow with the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** A review of the youth justice system was announced on 12 February 2024, according to the NT Government website. Five weeks later you announced an independent panel and terms of reference via a media release. Why did it take five weeks to announce the panel and terms of reference?

**Ms AH KIT:** I have been working closely with the Chief Minister, who is overseeing the youth justice system review. We wanted to make sure that there was enough time to promote the vacancies on the panel and to assess some viable candidates.

I thank those who agreed to take up the important role to review our youth justice system later this year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What are the terms of engagement or appointment of the panel members? How much are they being remunerated?

**Ms AH KIT:** The youth justice system review is being oversighted by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. It would have those details. I do not have access to them.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Territory Families were part of the appointment, though. You said it took you time to get the right people. Were you in control of who was appointed to the panel.

**Ms AH KIT:** No. I was speaking as a collective of the Northern Territory Government. The youth justice system review is being overseen by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and Chief Minister Eva Lawler.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The release also spoke about the panel will be supported by a team of senior government officials. Are those senior government officials a part of Territory Families or are they a part of DCMC as well?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is DCMC.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The acronyms continue.

**Ms AH KIT:** To clarify, it is better operationally for the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet to review what we are doing within youth justice and making sure that is done through them and not us.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** During the reporting period how many youth detainees were transferred from Alice Springs to Darwin?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, did you need to take the question on notice?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, I have it here. Member for Braitling, were you asking how many young people were transferred from the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre to the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in Darwin?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We will work though how many youths have been transferred throughout the Northern Territory. Due to the renovation works that have been happening, I know that there has been a large number of young people transferred from Alice Springs to Darwin. I am trying to work out how many and at what cost.

**Ms AH KIT:** The information I have is there were 82 unique young people, of which there were 64 young men, 17 young women, for a total of 343 movements. My understanding is when a young person transfers from one centre to another, that is one movement. When they are returned back to the original centre, that is another movement.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have a cost of those movements?

**Ms AH KIT:** The year to date costs for the movements is \$408,000.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Does there continue to be young people moved between the detention facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin?

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is no, but I will get my department to clarify. We have relocated all Alice Springs young people back to the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre now. I am not aware if there have been any instances where, since we returned them, new people have come into the centre and needed to be transferred through to Darwin.

I will hand across to the department to see if there is anything. Okay. The answer is no, zero.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to compliance checking of youth on bail, how many compliance checks does Territory Families undertake?

**Ms AH KIT:** I would have to take that question on notice. I do not have the details, but I understand it would be thousands. I am happy to see if we can put our fingers on an accurate number for you.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.12

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many youths on bail have undergone a compliance check by Territory Families?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.12.

**Mr MALEY:** How many youths in your care have electronic monitoring devices?

**Ms AH KIT:** The number of occasions where a young person has been fitted with an electronic monitoring device up until 31 March this year is 80. Last year it was 138.

**Mr MALEY:** How are those electronic devices monitored?

**Ms AH KIT:** My department will talk about the process they go through to ensure that young people wearing devices are monitored closely.

**Ms KERR:** They are electronically monitored by a company and if they go outside an exclusion zone or they are tampered with or they are flat, then that triggers an alert that there is a breach. Our youth justice officers who are either on duty or on-call 24/7 will respond.

**Mr MALEY:** How many times have you responded to someone for an alert on a monitoring device?

**Ms KERR:** Year to date there have been 356 for strap removals or tampering.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the cost of each monitoring device?

**Ms KERR:** They are about \$15,000 each—in the vicinity of that.

**Mr MALEY:** If someone has one on for a month, or six months, it is about \$15,000; is that correct? Does it vary depending on how long they are on for?

**Ms KERR:** It is per unit.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you have to pay to actually monitor them? How much is that?

**Ms KERR:** The overarching contract cost for leasing the devices and monitoring is \$738,482.

**Mr MALEY:** That is for the reporting period?

**Ms KERR:** That is per annum.

**Mr MALEY:** Does that go up if there are more and down if there are fewer, or is that just what it is? Okay.

In relation to the geofencing, is that part of it or is it extra on top? Do they geofence?

**Ms KERR:** Yes, that is part of it. There are exclusion zones that are set up.

**Mr MALEY:** If you have a device on, is it actively monitored 24/7, so someone could tell where those people are all the time?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give the committee an example if there is a reported incident where someone is breaking into a house, do you go and check that straightaway? Say the exclusion zone is the Darwin CBD, do you go and check them? If someone rings up the police reporting someone breaking into a house who looks like a young fellow, what happens next?

**Ms AH KIT:** As Ms Kerr mentioned previously, all the electronic monitoring devices are attached to young people in the Northern Territory. They are monitored 24/7 by an external company. As soon as there is a

breach—if they go outside the area—a notification is made directly to youth outreach and re-engagement team.

I will get Jeanette to talk about how the youth outreach and re-engagement team puts in an immediate response.

**Ms KERR:** Once there appears to be a breach, we notify the police immediately—we have 24/7 community youth justice officers to do that—and if it is in the vicinity of where our staff are, we will also attend.

**Mr MALEY:** What if there is not a breach, but someone is just in the exclusion zone and the house is broken into and someone reports there was a young fellow in their house, what happens then? Do you go and check that to see if one of your monitoring devices are at that address? How does that work?

**Ms KERR:** If it is not a breach of curfew or they are inside the zone they are allowed to be in, it would not automatically trigger. But if an offence is occurring and police ask for the information about where the young people have been, it would be provided.

**Mr MALEY:** How many times have police asked you for that information?

**Ms AH KIT:** I would have to take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 6.13**

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

**Mr MALEY:** How many times have police asked you for information in relation to the whereabouts of a young offender wearing an ankle bracelet?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.13.

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**Mr MALEY:** Just to confirm, if no alerts are firing up on the system, that information is kept in the system for a period of time. How long is it kept in the system? If the police ask you in one week if someone was in a certain place, would it be available? How long is it actually stored?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will take that on notice. I would have to check the contract.

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**Question on Notice No 6.14**

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

**Mr MALEY:** How long is information stored in relation to the whereabouts of a young offender wearing an ankle bracelet?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.14.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** Just to go back to the frame of mind we were in with the questions I was asking before, how many compliance checks have there been of youths on bail? There was said to be quite a number. These may be additional questions that need to be put on notice, but I will ask them. How many youths on bail were found to be non-compliant as part of a compliance check?



**Ms AH KIT:** I actually have an answer in regard to how many young people breached bail—27, up until 31 March this year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What were the consequences of being found to have breached bail? I imagine breaching bail—non-compliance. What were the consequences for those 27?

**Ms AH KIT:** Where there is a breach of bail, our community youth justice officers take that matter back to court. That is the consequence.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Your community youth justice officers work with organisations. How many young people have been recommended or court ordered into programs through working with your youth justice officers?

**Ms AH KIT:** The number of young people sentenced by court to those programs is 11.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As part of Territory Families and the youth justice arrangements, we often talk about victim-offender conferencing. Do you know how many people have undertaken victim-offender conferencing and if any of those have been court ordered?

**Ms AH KIT:** The information in front of me says that 18 restorative youth justice conferences were court referred and 11 of those have been completed.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** To confirm, 18, or all of them, were court ordered and 11 have been completed. Can you report to the committee the cost? Do you break it down that they were funded for 18 to take place, but only 11 were completed? Or do you only pay upon completion of the victim-offender conference?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes. We pay a referral fee and then pay a fee for the completion of conference.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What is the referral fee?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is approximately \$576.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What is the fee for completion?

**Ms AH KIT:** Depending on the location, it ranges between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have a figure for the total money spent on victim-offender conferencing?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is \$226,000.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am no mathematician, but for 11 completed, that is at a cost of \$20,000 per victim-offender conference, which would seem to be higher than you quoted at \$10,000 to \$15,000.

How is the victim-offender conferencing funded? In the past—I have spoken to providers about this—they used to receive an amount of funding and were told to go out and do victim-offender conferencing. It did not matter how many they did, they would only receive a set amount of funding. Am I right in assuming that it is now block funding?

**Ms KERR:** Previously, there was a contract with a bulk amount, but due to the number of victim-offender and family conferences it was cost-prohibitive—up to \$70,000 per conference some years. The most recent contract we did was on a fee-for-service basis with a fee for referrals, a fee for family group conference and a fee for a victim-offender conference, with additional costs for travel and accommodation, including for families travelling from remote areas or vice versa.

With the current contract there was an up-front amount paid and that is why the amount does not seem quite right. There was an up-front fee given, and conferences have been acquitted against that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the victim-offender conferencing again, how is Territory Families measuring the success or otherwise of the conferences? You know there is a fair bit of money going into it. Do you have the number of young people who undergo victim-offender conferencing but then go on to reoffend? You had 11 completed.

**Ms WHITE:** There is quite an established body of evidence for the benefits of restorative justice practices like conferencing. In terms of the question around what has been the success, I think we would need to take

some of that on notice. However, to say going forward we are exploring, through the ongoing youth justice programmatic development, how we can bring restorative justice practices to a broader suite of options within the system rather than wait to go to court and have it court ordered as it were. That is a future programmatic and future funding arrangement we are actively exploring and interested in because we would like more victims and young people to have the opportunity to have those restorative justice practices.

If we were to achieve that down the track we would definitely need to rethink how we would structure that investment or that funding to providers. At the moment it is quite narrow through court. We would like to see that open up. There is definitely a very strong evidence base for the benefit, and we can do the deep dive on those individual matters if that is of use.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Absolutely. Am I right in assuming that you can voluntarily undergo victim-offender conferencing as part of youth diversion? All these victim-offender conferences, the 11 that have been completed and all 18 that have been referred, have been court ordered and none have been undertaken in a voluntary basis. Can I confirm that?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, Member for Braitling.

Also with your previous question, as minister I would like to think that a successful conference would result in the young person not offending and coming before the courts, being charged by police or anything like that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I completely agree and I think that is my next question if you are able to take it on notice. Of the 11 victim-offender conferences that were completed, how many young people have gone on to reoffend?

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#### Question on Notice No 6.15

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Of the 11 victim-offender conferences that were completed, how many young people have gone on to reoffend?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.15.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to Seven Emu Station how many people have been referred to the station of the last financial year?

**Ms AH KIT:** There have been 47 young people who were referred to Seven Emu Station in the reporting period.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** And how many people made it there?

**Ms AH KIT:** There were 18.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For those who do not understand how it works, obviously the roads to Seven Emu Station during the Wet Season are not accessible.

Since the beginning of this calendar year, how many young people have attended? Have any young people attended Seven Emu Station since the beginning of this year?

**Ms AH KIT:** The first camp for this year was held from 20 May to 29 May, and that had six young people. We finished one recently from 3 June to 12 June which had two young people. The next long camp is in July and is targeted at young females.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There were some short-term camps, which run for 9 to 10 days, and the longer three-month camps in July. Can you explain what programs you are currently running there?

**Ms DENNIS:** We have short-term and long-term camps. Through the referral process we consider the appropriateness of the length of time for that young person. That is based on their current educational position, any interface with Youth Outreach Re-engagement Teams and their involvement within their local community, in particular sporting activities and their involvement with cultural events which are happening.

The up to three-month camp has a number of different activities which is more focused on education and training qualifications. We work in partnership with the Department of Education on ensuring that young people receive a licence, if they are of age. We look at Certificate I in basic farming and agriculture.

We work with the Shadforths clearly and closely on their aspirations, which often changes depending on the season and where they are at with the movement of their livestock. We also look at white cards and licence categories, including classifications outside of motor vehicles.

We have been working with the Shadforths on tourism opportunities for young people and linking in with Alice Springs Language Centre to do the Cert I in interpreting and translating language while they are there.

It is dependent on the length of time that they are there. Obviously the shorter time, the more focused it is on cultural healing and closer examination of safety planning and working with families around re-engagement and choosing better behaviours when they return.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Have you assessed and got people ready to go into that three-month program which will start in July?

**Ms DENNIS:** Yes, and the long-term camp will be the first for females to attend. Those referrals have come from across the Northern Territory, not just through our Youth Outreach Re-engagement Team but also the Department of Education. If in the community there is a child wellbeing multi-agency team, we receive referrals from those groups. We also take them from our health services and our funded community youth diversion providers if they think that it will enhance a young person's success.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many young people have been assessed and are ready to go?

**Ms DENNIS:** We have currently completed four assessments. We are working with the Shadforths as to what their capacity is to be able to take females. We will then be able to confirm those numbers.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is there an ongoing contract to provide those services or do you pay on a per person basis? For the reporting period to date, you have had 18 who have attended. At what cost? I understand there is a contract, but I think you pay per person.

**Ms DENNIS:** We have a contract, the value of which is \$516,000 per annum. It is not dependent on the number of young people who attend because the length of the camps vary. It is a committed agreement that we will be able to have any number—we do not have a cap on that—but it is dependent on the length of time that a young person stays. We also do not have an average of how much it would cost for a young person to attend the camp.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Alice Springs Language Centre, would they have to drive up to Seven Emu Station to provide their services?

**Ms DENNIS:** We are looking at using technology. It is part of an extension to a project that we are looking at doing with them at the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre. We will be building on that if it is a success there. We are also looking at utilising Starlink and so forth, which is work with the Shadforths that is under way.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Fantastic, that is good to see. Once again, we have spoken about assessing the success and I see value in what is happening out there. Minister, have you been out to Seven Emu Station?

**Ms AH KIT:** Not yet.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is well worth the trip.

Are the young people who go through the program assessed once they leave the program?

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely. Like you said it is well worth a trip out there and I look forward to making my way out there. Hearing all the good news stories, I give a huge thank you to the Shadforth family for working in partnership with us.

Understanding that there are a lot of complexities with these young people, I really want to congratulate and acknowledge their willingness to go out to the program. I have heard some of the amazing stories, as I am sure most of us in this room have. We make sure the young people when they come back and their families are supported through safety plans and ongoing work because part of the success measurement will be that the young people do not have to go out to a camp like that.

We all want them to be able to tell all their friends or acquaintances about the experience they had and how they were supported to get back on track and are being supported today as well.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is an interesting comment because some young people who attend the program—I have had it reported to me—want to attend again. That is how much they enjoy the program.

Have any young people been supported to attend multiple programs out there and then possibly to take up employment opportunities out there? I know that is something that Frank is very big on.

**Ms DENNIS:** We have supported young people to return. For a number of those young people it was because we sent them for a short period so that they were successful and understood what the camp entailed and involved their family visiting, so then we supported them to return to extend that.

There have been several successes. As part of our contract, we are currently evaluating the outcome and investment for the Territory as good governance. Within that we are also capturing the voices of the young people who have attended. We have had the success of one young person who attended right at the very commencement of this agreement who has remained there and has had success with a number of other different employment options in the Borroloola region, but remains connected to Seven Emu Station.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Of the 47 referred, what is happening with the 18 who are attending? Explain to me the referral process and why out of 47 only 18 in the reporting period are attending? Are they found to be not suitable? Who is deciding on their suitability to attend or not attend?

**Ms DENNIS:** We have a panel and it is dependent on the region. It is not just Territory Families; it is a mixture of representatives from the Department of Education, the Department of Health or the local Aboriginal regional health service. We also have current providers if a community uses diversion providers. There is also involvement with Back on Track. The Northern Territory Police also attend. It is a mixed group of people who assess.

We also speak with the family because the young people have to consent. Part of the reason why they are found unsuitable is they may not have completed their medical assessment in time, so we find them unsuitable to attend at that camp, but then they go back on to the wait list for the next process.

Our youth outreach re-engagement teams work with the family and the Department of Education—in particular Clontarf and Stars through the school—to help those young people get their medical clearance.

We also look at the cohort. If we know that those young people are not best suited to go together because they do not display positive behaviour together, we will not send them. That is also part of why they may not be found suitable.

Every young person is eligible to attend, but it is the cohort that they will attend with and the period of time as to whether they are suitable.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are coming up to our allocated time for a break. Did you have further questions under Output 1.4?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I do.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will keep going after the break. We will pause and resume at 7 pm.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** We will continue. We were at Output 1.4 and were with the shadow, Member for Braitling.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Fourteen youths were charged by NT Police in relation to a riot at the youth detention centre in early April this year. A total of 79 charges were laid across the cohort alleged involved, with all being charged in engaging riot and damage property amongst other offences including arson and assault worker.

What was the value of damage caused to the youth justice facility?

**Ms AH KIT:** The total cost of damage is estimated at \$310,000 from that incident. The total amount spent by my department to rectify that damage is \$86,796.36.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Am I right in assuming the other figure is from another department, but your department is \$86,000, did you say?

**Ms AH KIT:** DIPL has come back with the estimated cost of damage at \$310,000, but the amount of money spent by my department to rectify that damage to date is \$86,796.36.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Am I right in assuming it will be \$310,000 plus \$86,000?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, that is the total cost that my department has put into this because we are exiting that site in the near future. It is \$86,796.36.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have a cost incurred for staff who worked overtime as a result of that incident?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is not significant but if you would like to get an exact figure we could take that on notice.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Okay, thank you, Madam Chair.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.16

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What was the cost of overtime incurred by the youth justice staff during and after the riot which occurred in early April this year?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.16.

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**Mr MALEY:** Going back to Seven Emus quickly, can you tell the committee what the cost is to your department to run that facility.

**Madam CHAIR:** She provided that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, you must have jumped out at the wrong time.

**Madam CHAIR:** You must have gone to dinner early. Busted!

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to residential youth facilities, on 20 March you announced that the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities would shortly launch a recruitment campaign for youth justice and outreach workers, along with teachers and registered training officers. As a result of that work, how many positions have been approved?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will hand this to my department to provide an update.

**Ms DENNIS:** The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities has three positions per facility. In total there are 12. All 12 positions were approved to be recruited and funded for 2024–25 and 2025–26. All positions underwent recruitment in round one, which was released in March.

We were able to fill five of the positions in the first recruitment round and are going back out to recruit for those positions that are vacant. However, to fill those when we bring our facilities online, we are able to use the youth outreach re-engagement team staff, who have the same skill set and, where available, our youth justice officers who also have experience in the youth outreach re-engagement team.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The youth justice facility announced in Alice Springs, can you confirm it is the Saltbush facility on Gap Road?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, the interim facility will be at Saltbush.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you need additional staff seeing as that is already staffed by Saltbush.

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, but I will get Sasha Dennis to provide more detail.

**Ms DENNIS:** As part of the sentenced order program which will be facilitated in the residential youth justice facilities, there are three dedicated Territory Families, Housing and Communities staff. They are youth outreach and re-engagement officers who have a special skill set to work with these young people, and they work in the facility not in the regional team, hence we have recruited additional staff.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Of the three dedicated youth justice staff in Alice Springs, how many have been filled? You said five positions in total had been filled.

**Ms DENNIS:** We will need to take that on notice to ensure it is accurate.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.17

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Of the three dedicated youth justice staff to be hired as part of the Alice Springs youth justice facility, the Saltbush facility on Gap Road, how many of those positions have been filled?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.17.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** These facilities have been running for quite some time, the one in Alice Springs particularly. What additional services will be offered as part of the most recent announcement.

**Ms AH KIT:** I will hand to Sasha Dennis to provide details.

**Ms DENNIS:** Originally, the service was a bail support service, so it was focused on providing accommodation for a young person to ensure they had a suitable location to meet their bail requirements ordered by the court.

Through evaluating our bail accommodation support service over the previous five years we have identified that there needs to be a stronger focus on younger people being engagement—not just for a short period as per their bail orders but through the therapeutic response which our model of care provides through our organisational framework—and an option for the courts to be able to sentence young people for a longer period so we and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, health services and funded providers can work specifically with young people and identify their needs through a safety plan and a through-care plan.

It is about getting them into employment and education pathways, but also dealing with the adverse social impacts and effects they have had over a period of time so they are not returning to the same environment, having the same negative outcomes and continuing to cycle through the service.

While we have had the bail support accommodation available for the past five years, this is a new service that is sentenced order programs where young people have very clear elements of their court order that they must participate in.

The Department of Education has staff who will solely be in that facility and working with those young people, so they will not need to go to another school. If they are already engaged in school and it is successful, we would continue to facilitate and support that, but it is about having them in a contained environment, not secured. It is not a detention facility. We can work with them in a therapeutic approach but use all the resources we have in an intensive, focused and monitored way, and delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

**Ms AH KIT:** In addition to that, the facilities will also function as a step down or pre-release accommodation option for young people exiting detention.

As you can appreciate some of our young people who are incarcerated at the moment might not have a conducive environment in which to exit into. Rather than set them up for failure placing them perhaps back in the same environment which helped to lead to that offending, it is really important we provide that step-down approach, ongoing support and engagement so that they can exit and be supported on the right path.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Having been through the facility previously, there was already support in regard to education, and there were kids on certain strict provisions as part of their bail support accommodation. You have clearly outlined a range of what will be occurring, but what I am trying to get at is a lot of that was already previously occurring. I am just interested in the Aboriginal-controlled organisation. Is that what you are saying Saltbush is?

**Ms DENNIS:** We have just announced the award of the tender for our First Steps Development Enterprise—they are an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation and will be operating the Darwin Residential Youth Justice Facility from 8 July. We released tenders yesterday and also on Monday. Under our procurement policy our priority would be for an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to facilitate the program in Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. That has not been awarded. Saltbush has been extended while we build the new facility and then, obviously, we have just released the tender for a new provider.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Will you not build a new facility in Alice Springs?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, we are. The Saltbush facility currently being used is an interim site. My department has been undertaking some different scoping. We have looked at some of the different options but we have not locked in or committed to an actual site or venue for the longer-term facility. Our plan for Saltbush right now I believe is for the immediate future for up to two years.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There has been a lot of confusion because people have not properly understood what is happening with their contracts. The contract in Darwin was ceased and the one in Alice Springs is going to continue. Can you tell us where you are looking at building this facility in Alice Springs?

**Ms AH KIT:** My department has been scoping out different options. We have not landed on a site that we have been able to lock in, but we are giving ourselves that window of two years to be able to find a suitable site and to ensure that it is prepared and ready so that we can transition and have an ongoing accommodation facility for the young people down there.

In regard to the commentary about the contracts, I am not quite sure. My department has been engaging very closely with Saltbush in regard to First Steps winning the contract up here. I believe Saltbush and First Steps are known to each other. In regard to Saltbush in Alice Springs, my department advised extending that contract in the meantime to make sure we can add the additional supports at the current facility on Gap Road.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Will a facility be built in Katherine?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Where will that facility be?

**Ms AH KIT:** The department has been working closely with the Jawoyn Association to stand up a site down there. I will declare that I am a Jawoyn woman and I have not had any conversations or involvement in this; it is operational.

**Ms DENNIS:** The current situation is that we are working very closely with the Jawoyn Association and their board about potential sites and then working with them around what the costings will be from those discussions.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is there anything currently budgeted in this year's budget for these new facilities?

**Ms AH KIT:** Not in this year's budget.

**Mrs HERSEY:** As the Member for Katherine, I am quite interested in where that facility will be. The department has been having discussions with the Jawoyn so if it is not in this year's budget, will it be in next year's or when is that? I thought it was something that was going to happen pretty soon.

**Ms AH KIT:** We have been scoping out what the facilities would look like and have \$15m in the next budget for operations. The infrastructure budget would be sitting with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, but I will through to Ms McMillan as the Acting Chief Financial Officer for more detail.

**Ms McMILLAN:** What is proposed for Katherine is a capital grant and it is next year's budget, 2024–25.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many current positions are there for youth justice workers and how many current vacancies?

**Ms AH KIT:** There are a total 168 youth justice officer positions across the Territory: 113 are filled at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in Darwin; 35 are filled at the Alice Springs centre; and nine are vacant. Don Dale in Darwin has 13 casual youth justice officers and Alice Springs does not have any casuals.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many youth justice officers are on extended leave?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will take that on notice. We do not have the specific numbers for youth justice officers.

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#### **Question on Notice No 6.18**

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many youth justice officers are currently on extended leave from the department?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.18.

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many assaults have there been on youth justice officers in the reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** There are two parts to the answer. Incidents of staff injured as the result of a serious assault is zero. Incidents of staff injured as a result of an assault, not being a serious assault, is six.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 6.7**

**Ms AH KIT:** During the curfew period in Alice Springs a total of 33 staff of the department worked a total of 824 hours overtime. The cost does not include the ordinary hours worked by the employees in their ordinary course of their duties.

There is a table that I will be tabling.

The additional cost for the period between 27 March 2024 and 6 am on 16 April 2024 is \$113,028.89. The breakdown is: employee overtime, including superannuation and payroll tax is \$102,797.54; the travel and accommodation total of \$5,296.79; and the furniture and fittings for staff accommodation in Alice Springs total of \$4,934.56.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 6.9**



**Ms AH KIT:** As at 31 March 2024 there was a total of 17,152 child protection notifications received by the Central Intake Unit. Of these 7,998 or 46% of the notifications were received online, with most other contacts being via phone. From time to time notifications may be recorded through in-person contact or email with child protection practitioners in the regions.

Note the number quoted by me, being 6,960, relates to the number of unique children who were reported through the online portal.

There is 12,751 or 73% of notifications received by professional notifiers, of which 7,347 or 58% were received online.

There were 4,761 or 27% notifications received by non-professional notifiers, of which 621 or 13% were received online.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.14**

**Ms AH KIT:** Data associated with an electronic monitoring device fitted on a young person is held by the contractor engaged by the Northern Territory Government to provide this service. The data will be held by the provider for the term of the contract.

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

On behalf of the committee, I thank the officials who joined us.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Thank you very much for your time today.

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The committee suspended.

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**OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – HOUSING**  
**Output 2.1 – Homelessness Services**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 2.0, Housing, Output 2.1, Homelessness Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr MALEY:** Is there no opening statement?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you have an opening statement?

**Ms AH KIT:** No. I welcome to the table: Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Housing; Jared Collins, Executive Director, Market Reform and Programs; and Kim Charles, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Strategic and Enabling Services. Alongside them are: Rachele McMillan, Acting Chief Financial Officer; and Chief Executive Officer Emma White.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is the same portfolio, so there are no opening statements. We just go straight to the output questions.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the question that my colleague Josh Burgoyne asked about safe places, which you said to ask in this output, I think he was talking about the safe places for young people under the Barkly Regional Deal. Can you explain your answer to that?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will ask the Deputy Chief Executive Officer for Housing, Brent Warren, to provide commentary.

**Mr WARREN:** I understand the reference was to the supported accommodation provided to young people connected to the Barkly Regional Deal. There is absolutely a project line in the Barkly Regional Deal and it has a \$1m operational fund for a three-year period. The intent was to describe and set up a location where local service providers could provide enhanced support for young people, which could include accommodation.

There has been significant discussion and work with the local group down there around what they want that service to look like. As late as the most recent governance meeting in June, the group was still unclear, and they have self-directed to run a workshop to identify what the collective of youth services would like to do with the funding. It has been an open project. We have attempted to fit it into what is available locally and, through a combination of limited infrastructure options and differing views from local organisations, we have not implemented it yet.

**Mr MALEY:** My understanding is that it was meant to be completed in quarter four 2023, so why is there a delay in that?

**Mr WARREN:** The delay is because our role is to work with the local governance group. It is meant to be a locally controlled set of projects rolling out under the Barkly Regional Deal. That group has been working through what can work locally and they have had a number of different views on that and have not landed it yet. The most recent meeting of the governance group that makes the decisions for the BRD decided to have a local workshop. Our agency is facilitating that and working with the not-for-profits to come up with a plan to use the money.

**Mr MALEY:** Thank you; I think that answered it. In relation to homelessness, last year when we were speaking about this the NT was 12 times the national average. What are we now?

**Ms AH KIT:** The same; 12 times the national average.

**Mr MALEY:** Last year you told us you spent \$9m trying to reduce that. What have you spent this year?

**Ms AH KIT:** The total expenditure to 31 March 2024 was \$34.888m.

**Mr MALEY:** Thirty-four million dollars for the reporting period this year? That is to reduce homelessness but it is still the same.

**Ms AH KIT:** That is correct.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you explain to the committee why, when last year you spent \$9m, it stayed the same? My notes were that is about \$175,000 a week. This year you spent \$34m and it has not improved. That seems to be a lot of money for no outcome, so can you explain to the committee why \$34m of taxpayer money has been spent and there has been no outcome—outcome being improvement.

**Ms AH KIT:** I am just having some discussions in relation to the \$9m figure you quoted for homelessness services last year, which is not correct. I will ask my department to find the actual figure because I want to make sure that is clarified.

In the annual report, our actual spend on homelessness services for the last financial year was \$38.290m.

**Mr MALEY:** Thirty-eight million, not \$34m?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, \$38.290m for last—that is for a 12-month period. That is 2022–23.

**Mr MALEY:** You spent \$38m and it has not improved. What KPIs do you have to measure that if it has not improved and you spent that much?

**Ms AH KIT:** Homelessness data is taken from the Census, which is completed every five years or so. We are working against the figure provided at the last Census until the new Census figure comes out. I will provide an opportunity for my department to explain that a bit better than I just did.

**Mr WARREN:** As the minister was explaining, we estimate total homelessness in the Territory based on Census figures. That is the best way to get a fair measure between jurisdictions. That is the data we have been talking about that unfortunately shows the Territory is over-represented with homelessness.

What we can talk about in more detail is the number of clients the different services see through their work and the different services they are accessing. That is a whole-of-Territory number based on annual Census.

**Mr MALEY:** Thanks for where you got it from, but I am trying to work out the KPI. You spent \$38m of taxpayer money, and the NT is 12 times the national average still—it was a year ago. It seems to be an awful lot of money spent on reducing homelessness and it has not worked.

**Madam CHAIR:** They just explained that the Census figure is only done every five years, so that figure will be the same, but they can give more detail if you wanted to delve into some of the service providers. That is how they understand if there have been improvements or increases in the numbers. Did you want them to respond further?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes, please.

**Ms AH KIT:** We have a different KPI measurement now. We are looking at measuring how many Territorians have accessed homelessness services and went on to be housed in accommodation. We used to measure how many people accessed first homelessness services.

**Mr MALEY:** I have some questions in relation to Batten Road. Is that in this output?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** How much money has government put into Batten Road in this reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is \$9.164m.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that about the same as you spent last year?

**Ms AH KIT:** This year to 31 March 2024 it was \$9.164m and last year it was \$9.12m.

**Mr MALEY:** How many nights has Batten Road been full?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is full every night, Member for Nelson. Between 1 July 2023 and 31 March this year a total of 49,023 nights of accommodation have been provided to a total of 3,421 individuals and families.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that \$9m about repairs and maintenance or is that extra?

**Ms AH KIT:** I have been advised that the overall total of \$9.164m is for a combination of operations at Batten Road. It covers the cost of the accommodation, the staff and operations and through the Mission Australia side is intensive support and case management. Those costs are included as well.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell the committee how much has been spent on repairs and maintenance on that facility over the last reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is not information I have at hand. I am happy to take it on notice. To explain that we contract yearly housing to Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation to look after and manage Batten Road. We then give it money to manage that accommodation. It uses that money to repair and maintain the property. It also uses money from the rent it receives from people staying there to manage as well. We could find out from Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation and I can take that on notice.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes, please.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.19

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please tell the committee how much money was spent on repairs and maintenance at Batten House in the last reporting period?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.19.

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**Mr MALEY:** In relation to criminal damage at that premises can you tell the committee how many crimes have been reported at that facility?

**Ms AH KIT:** I would have to take that question on notice and work with Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation to obtain the information and come back.

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**Question on Notice No 6.20**

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please tell the committee how many times there has been reported crime at Batten Road facility?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.20.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to crime, how much money has been spent on repairing in relation to criminal damage?

**Ms AH KIT:** Again, that information about repairs and maintenance would be held by Yilli Rreung. That could be tied into the 6.19 question or I could take a separate one if that suits you.

**Mr MALEY:** Just take a separate one so it is clear and easier for everyone.

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**Question on Notice No 6.21**

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please tell the committee what the cost of repairing criminal damage to the Batten Road facility cost your department?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.21.

**Mr MALEY:** On page 117 of Budget Paper No 3, it talks about a reduction for homelessness. It has a footnote that talks about the decrease of homelessness services due to the expiry of the national partnership, yet to be negotiated. Can you explain what you mean by that?

**Ms AH KIT:** Member for Nelson, it has not been included in the budget because we have not finalised the agreement with the federal government yet.

**Mr MALEY:** I am going through the figures, and last year the revised amount was \$45,430; now it is \$37,080. Why that drop of around \$10,000?

**Ms AH KIT:** It has to do with timing between the current agreement expiring and the new national housing agreement being finalised. In regard to that we have been able to negotiate a total \$55.6m in additional funding, of which \$42.8m will be provided to the Northern Territory for homelessness supports and services.

**Mr MALEY:** So you are saying there is will be \$38m plus an additional \$42m to spend on homelessness services?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is correct and that will appear in the next financial year budget.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think with that amount of money being spent on homelessness there will actually be an improvement of the homelessness rate in the Northern Territory? We have been 12 times and 12 times, do you think when we are sitting her next year it will be better?

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely, the figures will be doubled. Our homelessness sector out there are working extremely hard. We do have higher, you know, a rise in the cost of living. We have poverty being experienced at levels that no one would ever wish upon, but we have an incredible sector that is always going above and beyond to stretch that dollar a little further. Our department is very committed to continue supporting them with this incredible work. Places like Baton Road, like I said, more than 40,000 nights of accommodation are needed now more than ever. I can tell you that the sector is pretty excited about this investment, as are we. We are really looking forward to, not just spending that money, but making sure that we support Territorians as much as possible. Like I said, changing our KPI from just recording the number of people accessing services to the number of people accessing services and then ending up in stable and sustainable accommodation. It is always going to be our key focus.

**Mr MALEY:** Out of that \$42m, do you plan on spending all that in the next financial year? Or do you think there will be some sort of revote in that system?

**Ms AH KIT:** Member for Nelson, because it is such a great increase for the Northern Territory, we are working with the sector to prepare for that money to come in. What we are looking at is also what infrastructure needs or capital needs we might have to invest in. Again, in the Northern Territory we need 11,430 homes that we are very cognizant about. We know that there is a number of Territorians requiring homelessness supports and we do not have enough homes at the moment to cater for everybody and for our future growth. We are busily working on our housing plan with the sector to make sure we can deliver as much stable and safe accommodation for everybody.

**Mr MALEY:** This \$42m will go on building new homes?

**Ms AH KIT:** The money that is coming for housing and homelessness supports is not specifically for building new homes. It is about the services that are being delivered by our providers. There will be the ability for updates but not purposefully about building new homes.

**Mr WARREN:** In support of the minister's comments, in this first year of this new budget arrangement, we must work with the sector to let them catch up. This was an announcement much bigger than we expected and so we have work with them happening this month to map out a strategy for the next five years to figure out what growth they can do straightaway verses what they may have to get ready for.

We are really interested in things like increasing the backbone of the system. A couple of examples of that will be upgrades to facilities required like drop-in centres or places of transitional accommodation. There are upgrades to the way we share information. An example of that is at the moment our organisations have to essentially ring around the phone tree to figure out where vacant beds are, so the sector is interested in having some kind of centralised bed reporting system so that they can do better allocation of clients. The other component of shared value to everyone is extra training and upgrading of professional skills for the sector, putting them through some training and qualifications over the next period to recruit and run staff that have a high level of skills to do their work.

**Mr YAN:** I have a follow-up question from when we are talking about homelessness services. You mentioned a way that there is a new methodology for recording that. I see that in BP3 and page 121, 'Homeless services presentations where clients were housed at the end of their support period'. The KPI for 2023–24 was 19% but it was then estimated at 11%. You are saying that you are investing more into homelessness services, but the KPI for 2024–25 is back at 19%. Why would that figure not be revised down if we are going to be improving services in the homelessness space?

**Ms AH KIT:** The new money we are expecting has not been received, so we have not been able to lower—this figure was set before we negotiated the increase in homelessness funding from the federal government.

**Mr YAN:** By rights then we should see when we look at next year's Estimates figures a reduction from that 19%. Considering the previous estimate was 19% and it was only 11%, we should see a much better figure than that.

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely.

**Mr MALEY:** Will the \$42m be used to make up some sort of bed reporting system and for training and qualifications? It will not necessarily improve homelessness; it will improve the way your department operates.

**Ms AH KIT:** Homelessness services across the Northern Territory will be able to benefit from this allocation of funds. Making sure that we have the most effective system in which all the providers and all those who require services can be supported is critical. We welcome the investment from the federal government to help us to do that.

**Mr MALEY:** Are you matching any money as part of your negotiations? We are already spending that \$38m to get the \$42m. Have you had to commit to match that and spend more money?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will throw to Brent Warren. However, the Northern Territory has always put in three times the amount of funding into our housing and homelessness services, so we appreciate and are grateful for the federal government for understanding that we have 12 times the national rate of homelessness and are in great need and will use this money well to look after some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Mr Warren is across the details of the investment, so I will get him to talk about that.

**Mr WARREN:** Our budget for next year is \$31.706m, which is part of our matching commitment. Until this year that was significantly more dollar matching than the Commonwealth contributed. Now we need to recalibrate to ensure we can point to all the funding. Funding that we spend in other parts of the housing system will end up being part of that matching, but also money that is spent in other portfolios that provide accommodation. One of the obvious ones is the domestic, family and sexual violence sector. They are very much providing an accommodation service for people in need who might be otherwise homeless through that lens of domestic violence. Once we amalgamate those funding streams, we will be dollar matching everything that the Commonwealth has put on the table.

**Mr MALEY:** You will not necessarily be spending more money, rather you will change the books so that the money that is being spent somewhere else will be allocated to this to match it.

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** We have been talking about Batten Road. Are there other facilities that offer the same service? If yes, what sort of money are we spending on those facilities?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, there are more housing facilities. We have visitor parks, such as the Apmere Mwerre Visitor Park in Alice Springs. The total expenditure for that facility to 31 March this year was \$1.531m. I visited that visitor park recently and it is a fantastic facility that is run really well. It was great to see that the visitor park itself has received federal government investment for them to increase the number of people they can cater for at that site.

We also have the Crerar Road facility in Berrimah, which is off Boulter Road, and \$655,000 is provided to help accommodate Territorians there.

**Mr MALEY:** How many people stay in that facility? Is that managed by Yilli as well?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, it is managed by CatholicCare. In 2022–23 the Crerar Road and Apmere Mwerre visitor parks together provided 47,894 nights of accommodation to visitors. I do not have the individual breakdown.

We are working on the Tennant Creek visitor park as well, as part of the Barkly Regional Deal.

**Mr MALEY:** What about Katherine?

**Ms AH KIT:** There is a Red Cross program, is that what you are talking about?

**Mr YAN:** In relation to the Alice Springs visitor park, what is the capacity of that park currently? Has there been any expansion in the reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** Can I take that on notice? We should be able to grab that figure for you shortly.

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**Question on Notice No 6.22**

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

**Mr YAN:** What is the current capacity of the Alice Springs visitor park and what will the capacity be with any expansion?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.22.

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**Mr YAN:** Particularly in relation to Alice Springs, we know there is an increasing number of people coming in from communities to access healthcare and other services within Alice Springs. The Alice Springs Visitor Park has been at capacity for quite some time. I would be interested to find out what the expansion capacity will be with that upcoming construction. Has there been any consideration to expanding services in Alice Springs apart from the Alice Springs Visitor Park?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr WARREN:** We are just confirming numbers, but there has absolutely been an agreement between us and the Commonwealth and Aboriginal Hostels Limited to grow the capacity at Apmere Mwerre—I think it is 20 rooms, we will just confirm that. Beyond that, one of the key investments we made in the financial year ending, was to work with Lhere Artepe in relation to creating a suitable outreach program down there—that was a missing piece of the puzzle for us. Before Christmas we negotiated a multi-year agreement with them to provide assertive outreach which is essentially staff on patrol interacting with people where they are, rather than having to go to a service. That has been set up in the current financial year.

Beyond that we mentioned earlier tonight the fact that we are now working with the whole of the Northern Territory homelessness sector around how to invest this new money and Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and the bush are definitely high on our radar. We want to make sure the focus is everywhere, not just a kind of Darwin centric piece.

**Mr YAN:** The reason I asked is that I am regularly assisting people coming in from bush to access dialysis services, there is nowhere for them to stay in Alice Springs and they are living rough in the river in this cold and inclement weather. We have been providing tents and swags so these people can actually stay in Alice Springs and access services because we have a distinct lack of accommodation and homeless services and of course, visitor parks in our region. I know there is the same issue for Katherine and a major issue for Tennant Creek. I am very interested to see those services expand.

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely, that is a good point and something that our housing plan is working to tackle and like I said, we need 11,430 homes. I hear what you are saying about people coming in for necessary health treatments and we will keep working to support them.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** The Alice Springs Visitor Park—you probably know this, you may not—was built as a part of the intervention and was opened by Julia Gillard—I remember it well. Originally there were plans to build one north of town and one on the southern end of town—that visitor park is the southern facility example. They just could not find a site in the northern part of town to services people from the north. That was the original plan. Is there any thought around pursuing that idea? It was a good idea at the time, but it just stalled and then the intervention concluded, I guess.

**Ms AH KIT:** I did not know the history about two sites being looked at which makes sense because Alice Springs is a hub for the outer regions as well. I do understand that Aboriginal Hostels Limited also operate a visitor park separately from the Alice Springs visitor park, but I hear what you are saying about the needs for accommodation down there. We will keep looking at ways to help build more of those homes and accommodate more people visiting and living in the region.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** A lot of work was done back then but just did not come to fruition I guess. It makes sense to have that split between north and south honouring the different groups who require accommodation.

**Ms AH KIT:** Thank you, Member for Araluen. That is really helpful. Just talking with my chief executive officer, we will try to find more information on the extensive work that was undertaken during the intervention and see if we can bring that into our housing planning.

**Mr MALEY:** We touched on Tennant Creek and then you said that it was not yet built. Can you give the committee some more information on what is happening in Tennant Creek?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will read you some of the information I have in regard to the Tennant Creek Visitor Park in my brief. The park will be constructed on a subdivided parcel of land linked to the old Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics works depot. The site was chosen after extensive consultation with stakeholders and required a subdivision including a road, infrastructure services and the creation of three new parcels of land.

The initial budget for the project was \$5m; however, Budget 2023–24 has provided further funding of \$5.8m for capital construction costs, bringing the total to \$10.8m. Operational funding will be provided for an initial three-year period of \$1.5m per annum from 2024–25. The service delivery model will be designed in consultation with the Barkly consultative group during the construction of the facility.

Subdivision costs are still being determined due to extensive hydrocarbon remediation works required on the site. Project design work will be informed once all costs have been determined. Remediation works are expected to be completed by the end of this year, 2024. It is anticipated that contract award for the construction component of the subdivision will occur in March 2025, and construction is estimated to be completed in November 2025.

Construction of the visitor park is estimated to commence after the 2025–26 Wet Season has cleared, to be completed in November 2026.

**Mr MALEY:** When was the idea first floated?

**Ms AH KIT:** The visitor park was part of the Barkly Regional Deal considerations.

**Mr MALEY:** What date was that?

**Madam CHAIR:** I think it was 2018.

**Ms AH KIT:** It was about six years ago, but we will find the date for you if we can. Member for Nelson, that site, the Tennant Creek Visitor Park, is estimated to cater for 27 to 30 beds.

**Mr MALEY:** It was talked about in 2019, and we have picked a site. Why has there been such a delay in getting this up and running? It was first mentioned in the Barkly Regional Deal in 2019, let us say. That is many years ago. It seems to be a project talked about and not delivered. Why is that?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will throw to my deputy chief executive to provide some details.

**Mr WARREN:** This project is one of the Barkly Regional Deal projects. That means that from the get-go we have had to work within the Barkly Regional Deal governance arrangements. They very deliberately put local organisations and people around the people around the table, which meant there was a long, slow negotiation process about each of these projects. With this one, a key aspect was where to put it. There was a long exploration of sites.

One of the pieces of work we have tried to do through BRD governance is to work closely with the Patta traditional owners, who have land holdings and interest in Tennant Creek to see where possible we could use their land. That approach worked for the youth justice facility, which is being worked on and took a long time to get land use access.

In relation to this visitor park, after much looking around we eventually identified this government-owned land that we could use and subdivide. The piece of work had to be then done about understanding the environmental factors, preparing and designing a subdivision. That is the work that has been going on for the last 18 months or so. It has been a slow process to get the subdivision finished in order to get the construction of the facility under way. We have been designing the facility in parallel. That work has been done with local input. We will be ready to go before the subdivision is finished.



**Madam CHAIR:** We spoke about the Barkly Regional Deal with the Chief Minister's department about the three levels of government. It had been slow in some aspects. Do you remember that when you were here?

**Mr MALEY:** I think I do. I am still not getting why it has taken five years to come up with this. You said that five years was to try to find a location. That was unsuccessful so you had to go back to some government land.

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr MALEY:** You basically said it will be finished by 2026. Has there been any other date you said it would be finished and has been delayed? When you initially announced it, was this being done by 2022, 2023 or 2024?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, it has been a long process to date. My understanding is there have been a number of deadlines that were highlighted and were not able to be achieved due to a range of environmental factors. There were some works that had to occur onsite.

I will get Brent Warren to explain a bit more detail about some of those delays.

Before I go to Brent, I met with the Barkly Regional Deal backbone team when I was in Tennant Creek a few months ago. We had similar conversations about when the Barkly Regional Deal was first established, the basis of ensuring local input was a key driver and factor for those people living in the area and for important supports they need.

I thank and acknowledge that Backbone Team. It is doing a wonderful job. It is feeling the pressure of some of the delays and making sure we can communicate to the wider Barkly region about the progress we are making in regard to the Tennant Creek visitor park being built.

**Mr WARREN:** The site has been a vexed issue in the Barkly Regional Deal. Even once it was identified the negotiations around affected stakeholders—in particular, if I remember correctly, BRADAAG, the alcohol rehabilitation group there—finding a site was creating an overall with this project.

Once the site was properly identified and agreed to, there was then a need to do some environmental testing. I will defer to DIPL to give some of the technical detail. Basically, there have been a couple of steps required that took longer than we first expected.

The design of the facility happened in parallel to that. We essentially have a 75% design for the build which has occurred in parallel with the site works that have been more complicated than we thought.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

## Output 2.2 – Urban Housing

**Madam CHAIR:** We now move to Output 2.2, Urban Housing. Are there any questions?

**Mr MALEY:** How do you list key performance indicators that help you decide if you achieve your objectives? I note your objective in relation to BP3 at page 121 was:

*Affordable, appropriate and accessible housing for eligible Territorians that contributes to economic development, local jobs and improved social wellbeing.*

What are the KPIs to help you work out whether you achieve those objectives?

**Ms AH KIT:** As you have clearly indicated, there are several housing performance measures that are tied to our national reporting obligations which we report on every year. They include the number of social housing dwellings, how many are managed by community housing providers, how much rent we are receiving, how many tenants are paying, how many public housing dwellings have been inspected in the previous 12 months, how many public housing dwellings have been occupied within 70 days of becoming vacant and how many new households have been assisted into public housing.

**Mr MALEY:** Is one of those performance indicators how long you must wait to get into a public house?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is not included as a budget KPI, but we report that figure federally twice a year. I have information on that.

As well as being publicly available on our website, I can provide to you the estimated urban public housing wait times as at 31 March 2024 for each region.

**Mr MALEY:** I already have that. It is eight to 10 years.

**Ms AH KIT:** The longest wait is eight to 10 years, yes.

**Mr MALEY:** You are talking about your objectives and what the key performance indicators are. Why is the wait time which is eight to 10 years part of that? I would say that having to wait that long is a failure.

**Ms AH KIT:** I will ask Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive of Housing, to explain how we are reporting the public waitlist times twice per year.

**Mr WARREN:** I think the question is: why is the waitlist not a specific BP3 performance indicator? Our experience is that it is not a fast-changing measure. Jurisdictions around Australia have the same experience as us in that they have significant queues of people who are applying for housing as part of multiple ways of trying to secure accommodation. It is an important figure and we want to see that go down.

However, where we have been spending most of our effort is on making sure that we are allocating as quickly as possible; making sure that we turn over houses that are in the system; and getting people off the waitlist based on a proper assessment of their priority, making sure that those people currently homeless or who might be a domestic, family and sexual violence victim or who have a significant disability are getting supported as the priority placement.

**Mr MALEY:** I have some questions regarding turnaround times, but I might ask them now since you have raised it. There are two parts: what is your KPI; and what is the average turnaround time for an urban house?

**Ms AH KIT:** The 12-month average number of days to turn around a vacant dwelling has reduced from 165 days as at 30 June 2023 to 145 days as at 31 March 2024. If you like, I can provide you with the turnaround times for each region.

**Mr MALEY:** What is your KPI? My understanding is that the KPI is a lot lower than that. Was it 80?

**Ms AH KIT:** The KPI is under 70 days.

**Mr MALEY:** If your KPI is 70 days and as of 31 March it is 145 days, that is basically double your KPI. Why has your KPI not been met by such a huge amount?

**Mr WARREN:** Our current published KPIs are showing that we had the 70-day turnaround achieved 42% of the time, so a bit less than half the time. When we look across each region we see that there is significant variation in how long turnaround takes.

One of the really significant factors that is affecting our turnaround is getting empty houses scoped for works. When someone moves out you need to make sure that the house is being repaired and brought up to standard again before it is reallocated. A house can spend a lot of time waiting for someone to be able to scope it and then waiting for those works to be delivered. We are seeing that pressure in particular in regions like Central Australia and the Barkly where trades are at a premium. We work closely with DIPL on how we get more capacity into the trade panel system.

We have been making sure that where the houses are repaired and available to allocate, we are trying to get that time down as much as possible. What we have seen in the Top End, in greater Darwin for example, is that they have been able to get their list right down so that the number of available houses in Darwin last month was reduced to 26 because they had been turning them over as they became available.

The work around getting the right tenant identified goes back to what I was describing before about identifying people on the waitlist and making sure that we understand their need and matching them to the houses that we have available. The prospective tenant has the chance to decide whether they want to take that house. Sometimes tenants will say that it does not meet their needs. That can be a reason why even if a house has been allocated it goes back into the pool again. We have seen some types of housing are less popular at certain times. We have had people needing to live in the northern suburbs who cannot accept a house in

Palmerston and that kind of thing. There can be a number of factors that cause a tenant to decline an offer when they get it.

**Mr MALEY:** Your average turnaround time is 145 days. Is that across the Northern Territory in urban housing?

**Mr WARREN:** That is correct.

**Mr MALEY:** It is not remote; we are just talking about urban.

**Ms AH KIT:** I understand that is a blended KPI, so you are right; it is an average of 145 days to turn around a vacant property across urban and remote settings.

**Mr MALEY:** I thought that was Darwin, but you said that it is a blended figure.

**Ms AH KIT:** That is a blended figure across remote housing and urban housing.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the Darwin figure?

**Ms AH KIT:** The Darwin figure for this year is 135 days.

**Mr MALEY:** That is in Darwin. You gave an explanation that in the regions it was difficult to get tradies and stuff. For the 135 days in Darwin I do not think you can use the excuse of it being a remote area. It still seems excessive because ultimately that is 135 days that you are not taking rent. That is money that could be paid to general revenue, but it is sitting vacant for 135 days. I do not think anyone out there would accept that. If you keep that public housing house in an acceptable standard so that when a tenant moves out—it is your duty to keep it clean and tidy anyway, because I am sure you do maintenance inspections just like for any other rental. That 135 days seems excessive. I think the average Territorian thinks that is just way too far.

Can you explain why it is 135 days in Darwin? Not the blended figure, which is only 10 days' difference anyway.

**Ms AH KIT:** Going back to what Brent Warren said, there is an internal process that the department goes through to find the right tenant for the right property. They make sure that the right tenant accepts it and moves into it. It is also about making sure that the repairs and maintenance are scoped out and that we can work with DIPL to contract the right people to come in and bring the housing up to scratch so that it is safe and can be tenanted as soon as possible. The average time at the moment is that 135 days in the Darwin region.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think that is acceptable?

**Ms AH KIT:** I continue to work with the department and through DIPL and every other avenue. I would love to be able to meet the KPI. That is what we are striving for. We want to bring the homes back online as quickly as we can so that we can decrease the waitlist and encourage tenants to really consider the options for when the homes become available, to move in and start paying rent, to start living in a home that has been brought back up to the standard that we need it in.

**Mr MALEY:** Minister, you are in charge. What steps have you taken to rectify that 135 days since you found out about it?

**Ms AH KIT:** You are right; as Minister for Urban Housing I am adamant on bringing the wait times down. As a local member I have a number of vacant properties and I am continuing to follow up through that avenue as well.

I have regular reporting and engagements with my CEO and senior executives within the department, making sure that we are on top of the number of properties that remain vacant across the Northern Territory in urban housing settings. We partner with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to ensure that properties are inspected, scoped out and the repairs and maintenance undertaken as quickly as possible. I am having conversations at my level as well as at the department level.

**Mr WARREN:** I add to the minister's comments about the department working shoulder-to-shoulder with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. They are our partners in this. We have a system where we have a regional network where their staff are co-located with our staff to make sure we are working

together. We have regional directors from both departments that connect together regularly to be able to track things like the maintenance program and work on houses that have been vacant for too long. We have an executive level meeting between the two departments every month and, as the minister mentioned, the two chief executives come together regularly as well.

I think the bit for me is that we have to work on each part of the system. There is a piece here around the maintenance system, but there is also a piece here about being able to find the right tenant for these houses once they are ready. It is a constant piece of work. One of the things that we have done in the Top End and Alice Springs is to start bringing the case managers from the non-government organisations in with us, to work through their list to make sure we are best identifying the families that need and the ones that are ready to move in, so we can do allocations as quickly as possible once a house is available and the tenant has been vetted.

**Mr MALEY:** Is it anything to do with the amount of damage to these properties?

**Mr WARREN:** That can sometimes be the case. It can sometimes be that we need to get a scoping and trade service through to do just the standard repairs for a house that might have been occupied for a long time. We find that some locations are less popular than others. Sometimes that figure in the greater Darwin area can be pushed up if some people do not want to live in a certain part of town.

The other thing is in the financial year that is finishing shortly we have been dealing with the tail end of decanting a large complex, which was Shiers Street. We held properties empty to make sure that we could allocate people from one place to another. Dealing with people who are already in the system who need to be transferred is an important part of what we are doing.

**Mr MALEY:** You said there is reasonable—I have no doubt those people are reasonable, but on any face of it, 165 days, 145 days or 135 days turnaround period is completely unreasonable. What steps are you taking? You have been in power for eight years, and I am not sure how long you people have been in your jobs, but Ms White said you have for a while and it has been pretty consistent.

What are you doing to make that better? How come it is so high? Has it gone down at all?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am not sure if I am on the right track, but when you ask what work we are undertaking to shorten those turnaround times, a lot of my answer is based on prevention. Since I came in as the Minister for Urban Housing in late October, I have worked closely with my department to ensure that effective and constant engagement and support is provided to public housing tenancies before they become problematic.

I have worked with the department and we stood up a complex tenancy unit. We have about 15 properties across the Darwin and Palmerston region that are some of our most complex and problematic tenancies. The department has established a unit where they are provided coordinated and intensive supports. My initial request was that in four to eight weeks I wanted a resolution on these properties. I wanted to make sure the tenants were being supported and managed collectively. I wanted to understand what led to the problems that were associated with the tenancies.

Working with the department to be more proactive meant we could nip issues in the bud with tenants who were not performing the way they should, so we could be responsive with our management rather than just looking at the tail end of properties that were severely damaged or serious breaches.

That is part of the work we have been undertaking, but I will open it up to the department to add some extra details as well.

**Ms WHITE:** Just to answer the specific question of whether it has gone down, it has actually gone down in the last financial year, excepting there is still work to do and we need to keep our pedal to the metal.

**Mr MALEY:** How much has it gone down?

**Ms WHITE:** We are just getting that figure for you. I also add in terms of the other efforts, for example that proactive earlier identification of where repairs and maintenance are required to help prevent the long waiting time of more severe works. We have increased inspections across the urban housing system and implemented a mobile housing inspection tool so tenancy staff can use a mobile app, effectively, which cuts down a lot of the paperwork and steps they need to go through in order to advise DIPL that there is work to be done.

It is streamlining that process of repairs and maintenance, and about 80% of all inspections in the last financial year have been done using that mobile app. It is improving the efficiency of the system to prevent some of the more serious damages and therefore delays. We are seeing a reduction, though.

**Mr MALEY:** How often do you do your inspections?

**Ms WHITE:** I will just get that figure for you.

**Ms AH KIT:** As my chief executive is finding a response to that, I just wanted to let you know the average turnaround times have reduced from 165 days to 145 days, and the KPI is ...

**Mr MALEY:** Over one year?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, from last year to this year. The KPI is for us to re-tenant 50% of our vacant properties within 70 days, and we are at 42% of the KPI of 50%.

**Mr MALEY:** That means there must be a significant number of properties vacant for a lot longer than 135 days if that is just an average if you are doing 42% under 70 days. I am not very good at maths, but there must be tenant properties that are vacant for months and months to bring an average—you are saying 42% do meet the 70 days, yet the average is 135, which is double. Can you tell us, what is the longest time a house has been vacant?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am looking at the average turnaround times for each of the regions. Looking at this, the average turnaround time for Alice Springs for this year, as at 31 March, was 252 days. I would be happy to take the question on notice.

**Mr MALEY:** How many houses are there in Alice Springs? The average is 252 days, so I want to clarify that.

**Ms AH KIT:** There are 777 urban public housing dwellings in Alice Springs.

**Mr MALEY:** Is there 770 urban public houses and the average turnaround is 252 days?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** When someone moves out, it takes almost a year to have that house ready for someone to move in.

**Ms AH KIT:** About nine months.

**Ms LAMBLEY:** How many vacant houses are there currently in Alice Springs?

**Mr MALEY:** Sorry to interrupt you; what about Katherine and Darwin?

**Ms AH KIT:** The average turnaround time for Katherine is 196 days; Palmerston, 115 days; Nhulunbuy, 149 days; and Tennant Creek, 165 days.

**Ms WHITE:** In response to the Member for Araluen's question there are 57 properties vacant in Alice Springs currently.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you find in Alice Springs that 252 days is an acceptable turnaround period? I am a bit shocked there for Alice Springs.

**Ms AH KIT:** We continue to work closely with DIPL to make sure that repairs and maintenance are undertaken to every property as soon as possible, but I will get the deputy chief executive officer to add to that because he knows more about the close work we do with DIPL and the processes that they undertake in order to repair and maintain a public housing property.

**Mr WARREN:** The figure we have in Alice Springs for the turnaround of houses is not acceptable. We have been working closely with DIPL as our partner, but also with our community housing partners in Central Australia to make sure we are identifying every house that needs work, getting a scope done, getting the work done and then finding a tenant to put in there. There have been some serious challenges with getting a trade response in Central Australia; it has been hard to find trade support to get that work done.

The other piece has been that in a budget cycle we need to work to our budget and each year we are able to reset and get on with the work again. Therefore, sometimes works might be scheduled to occur in a new financial year so that we can balance it out over multiple budgets.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to how these houses get into such a state, can you explain how many times a house is inspected?

**Ms WHITE:** In answer to your question earlier and in addition to the question you have asked again, I can report that for the year to date we have done 2,140 successful inspections across the urban housing system. We have also had an additional 1,184 attempts where we have attended the property to do the inspection and the tenant has not been home—that sort of thing. We classify that as a non-attendance inspection attempt. Total dwellings inspected completely are 3,324, so about 64% have been successful.

**Mr MALEY:** How many houses are there altogether?

**Ms WHITE:** There are 5,618.

**Mr MALEY:** Some of these houses are not even being inspected once a year?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** I want to get back to the figure of the turnaround times. What is the average cost of repairs to a house in that turnaround period?

**Ms AH KIT:** That would be information held by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

**Mr MALEY:** It is held by them, but surely it would share that with you? How much you have to spend goes into your budget. They might do the work but I am sure that is passed on to you.

**Ms AH KIT:** I would have details in regard to the entire repairs and maintenance ...

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give me that to start with?

**Ms AH KIT:** I would have to take the other part on notice to break that down.

Current approved program for repairs and maintenance is \$32,310,740.

**Mr MALEY:** That is in relation to repairs and maintenance. Is that all to just repairs and maintenance to public housing caused by the tenant?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, it is entire repairs and maintenance budget.

**Mr MALEY:** For what? What does that include?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is for all urban housing stock.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the most damage caused by in relation to repairs and maintenance? Is it caused by tenants, criminal damage or old age?

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is wear and tear is a big part of that. We have ageing assets that require generic and ongoing repairs and maintenance just as for any home. DIPL would have more details on that.

**Mr MALEY:** Can I take that on notice for you? How much of the \$32m is spent on repairs and maintenance of tenant damage?

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### Question on Notice No 6.23

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

**Mr MALEY:** How much of the \$32m is spent on repairs and maintenance of damage caused by tenants or their guests?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.23.

**Mr MALEY:** I go back to the inspections of the 3,324 of the 5,610 properties. Are there properties that have not been inspected for over a year?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes. The department takes a risk-based approach in regard to tenant behaviour reports that have been received. It will prioritise certain tenants first.

**Mr MALEY:** How do you make that prioritising? Who is it—tenants who have the most complaints?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will ask the department deputy CEO, Brent Warren to address that.

**Ms WARREN:** The minister is referring to the fact that some of our tenants have been longstanding tenants who have been well maintaining their property. There has been little or no issues with their capacity to maintain their home. We might take a risk-based approach and say that we will focus on other tenants first and come back around to them as time permits.

We want to make sure we are spending the most amount of time with the those tenants who are struggling the most to maintain the tenancy. It could be a combination of complaints, our own observations when we go to that house, as well as what we understand of the tenant's capability to be when they move in. Their case manager may also be providing us with input as well.

**Mr MALEY:** Has anyone been evicted to failing to pass a tenancy inspection? Do you go in and say, 'We are kicking you out because you have not maintained the property'. I have written to the minister on many occasions about different properties. I will not name any of those properties. The properties I know about have had literally hundreds of complaints about antisocial behaviour, damage, rubbish, doors—all sorts of stuff. Have any of those tenants ever been evicted? If not, why not?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will ask the department to provide details. I hear what you are saying, loud and clear, about tenants and damage caused to public housing assets. That is why we do the risk-based approach of making sure that for those who have come to our attention—of whom we are well aware—we are working to tackle the behaviour that leads to that damage. We make sure that gets sorted as soon as possible.

**Madam CHAIR:** I want to ask a question which sort of follows on. Obviously in the private housing sector there are protections needed for tenants, but in the public and social housing space I know the complexities and it can cause a lot of angst for neighbours. We need to support people. We know homelessness can then lead to not being able to be engaged in education or work.

What if you were to separate the legislation, have a public social housing and then a private? Have any other jurisdictions done that where you have then seen a greater ability—some of these might be in small settings, like a cul-de-sac and the neighbours have wanted to support but had to deal with a lot. You would know this in your electorate. It is just something that comes up.

**Ms AH KIT:** I appreciate the line of questioning and I hear you all loud and clear. I still have the most densely populated public housing electorate in the Northern Territory. I will hand over to the department to talk about whether other jurisdictions have split their residential tenancy act to focus on public, affordable and social housing.

I am across and work very closely with the department in regard to compliance actions. This is why I brought in the complex tenancy unit, because I too felt that there were an umpteen number of complaints. I have spoken to the department about information sharing—without sharing the privacy of a tenant and a Territorian with everybody else, which is not okay to do—and how we give a bit more hope to those who are putting the complaints in.

Members for Nightcliff and Nelson—I can hear it in your voices—there are great Territorians out there who are reporting because they just want peace and quiet or they are worried about the damage to the property, which is really great. We appreciate those complaints, but there is also the majority of people I come into

contact with who do not want to see people homeless; they want them to be supported to make better choices and live better lives and to look after that public asset, which is what we focus on.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you say whether any have been evicted?

**Ms WHITE:** In terms of the two parts of the question, one is around evictions and the attempts to more formally, through the inspection process, go to evict, I will ask Brent to give you the data.

In terms of your question on the evidence around how to support people in social, affordable and public housing, but also support neighbours, businesses et cetera that might be experiencing a negative impact from some of the behaviours of tenancies, the research is pretty compelling, both internationally and locally. Blended arrangements of housing combinations in suburbs and regions create better social outcomes. There are some unintended and sometimes quite unintended consequences if, for example, you put all the social housing or types of housing in one place, separate to other parts of the community.

However, there is also a lot of alternative housing models, some of which we have in the Territory that look at integrating support services into the housing complexes. I think we are doing more of that. I know the sector is keen to talk to us about different models and how we intensify that, particularly to some locations in suburbs and townships where those issues are profound, and looking at different service delivery models that you can bring forward and integrate with the actual capital or housing—the resource itself.

It is not a neat answer. It is not a neat solution either in terms of how you create a combination of a healthy community, based on different housing options. I think there are a lot of social housing models and programs that we can keep building from.

**Mr MALEY:** We are not talking about all tenants. A lot of tenants are great tenants. I think the minister ...

**Ms AH KIT:** The majority—yes, you are right.

**Mr MALEY:** They probably are the majority, but there are some who I hear about who are so bad. I have been past some of these places and I cannot believe that person is still there. There seems to be no consequences. When there are no consequences other people say that it has happened to them and it just flows on and affects the whole cul-de-sac. The people in the street cannot be there. People cannot sleep properly, so it is affecting the community because of one bad tenant. There might be two Housing properties in that street, but only one bad tenant.

Why have you not evicted someone to show that it can happen and there is a consequence? We talk about crime and no consequences. It seems to be that there are also no consequences for behaviour in public housing. I have not even talked about paying rent yet, which is next; this is just about damage, antisocial behaviour and rubbish—that sort of thing.

**Ms AH KIT:** I hear you, Member for Nelson, and can say that my department does receive, follow up and verify those complaints. We have to make sure that we have the right story about what is going on. That is why, when people do complain, we have the department follow up. If you report it, the department will follow up with other people in the street to make sure your version is supported. We put those actions together.

I spent some time with the compliance unit and urban housing officers in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. I am hearing from them loud and clear that we need to make sure they feel their work for the residents and tenants is coming to fruition. The complex tenancy unit has been a really good way of working to support those who come to our attention for not doing the right thing. I only stood that up this year and we have that rolled it out in Alice Springs, so that should give people a bit of hope.

Of the number of properties that have come to our attention that way, I think there have been two cases where the tenancy was very problematic and the department did go in with stakeholders and created a safety plan, including understanding what the tenant needed and how we could support them so that there would be no more complaints, damage or antisocial behaviour. Two of those problematic tenancies have responded well and appreciated the intensive supports. They have since dropped out of that and are managed at another level. Unfortunately, two more have moved in there.

I said to the department, with my knowledge and experience—which is not dissimilar to all of you sitting over there as local members—we need to find a way to get some good traction with those who are at the pointy end. What I can guarantee to you as the Minister for Urban Housing is that I have been working closely with my department and ministerial team to understand if there are problematic and complex tenancies that are



not responding we do go through compliance actions. If they do not change their behaviour, eviction will eventuate.

**Mr MALEY:** Have you evicted anyone?

**Madam CHAIR:** I am going to pause there. I was waiting for this to conclude because I think it is a meaningful conversation, but we will pause and take a break. When we come back we can continue the line of questioning and perhaps have that response because I know the member has asked a couple of times.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** We will continue. Minister, you were asking your deputy chief executive to provide the figure of evictions for the Member for Nelson.

**Ms AH KIT:** There were zero evictions this reporting period up to 31 March and one for the last reporting period.

Since becoming the Minister for Urban Housing in late October last year I have worked with my department to address the concerns and reports that have come in, in a quicker time period—that might be the right way of saying it.

When we were talking earlier my CEO Emma White advised a number of inspections that have not been able to eventuate. My department contacts the tenant, we agree on a time that is locked in, the department representatives turn up to the property to undertake an inspection and no-one is home; it is locked, they cannot get access or undertake that inspection.

My department is now going to the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal—NTCAT—earlier and seeking a notice to remedy. That is seeking permission from NTCAT to access the property and undertake that inspection because the one that was lined up was unable to be undertaken. We are going to NTCAT a lot earlier.

We used to go to NTCAT at the end and seek a termination of tenancy or an eviction. We are now following up a lot earlier so that we can hold the tenants to account a lot earlier as well. I also ...

**Mr MALEY:** How many of those have you done?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will ask the deputy CEO of Housing, Brent Warren, to provide details on that.

In regard to evictions, no government, as a provider of last resort, ever wants to have to terminate a tenancy and kick a vulnerable citizen out onto the streets. We fund the Salvation Army for an important step-down program called TIPTE, Towards Independence Program Top End. I understand this is where they are provided with a last resort attempt to support them to maintain properties and tenancies, and it is for those who unfortunately have their convictions upheld at NTCAT. A lot of the work that we have been focusing on identifying the problematic tenancies, reaching out to the tenants to find out what is leading to noncompliance and supporting them to uphold their tenancies. I will ask the Deputy CEO to talk more about the data in detail.

**Mr WARREN:** The minister has been referring to the fact that we have a few different tools that we can use along the way with a tenant. The first layer for us is trying to get them to voluntarily comply and work with us, and what we find with some of the tenants who are having trouble is that they actually want help. They may not have asked for help but when it is offered, they will accept it. We fund, through the homelessness services funding that we talked about earlier, a portion of that is for what we call tenancy support services. The organisations like Salvation Army, Anglicare and like Larrakia Nation who are funded to get in and walk next to a tenant who might need a hand looking after a yard, they might need a hand managing a family situation, they might be managing visitors, they might be unclear how to manage the house in terms of cleanliness, so we fund \$7.588m worth of service to each of the regional centres to get the support in. That is one of the first responses because we have a social obligation.

Where a tenant is less willing to accept help, we need to step it up and we can use things like notice to remedy, which is a function under the *Residential Tenancies Act* which is the landlord's power to require access to the house to do an inspection or to require the tenant to make good on something that they have done poorly in terms of yard maintenance, or in relation to them not maintaining their rent payments. We use

those notices fairly regularly. We also do inspections without going into the house, like a street observation of a house and we can do that without breaching the RTA. Where we see signs that the tenant is not maintaining the yard, we will give them a notice to make good, and we have a record of how we have tried to support, prompt and cajole them to work within the rules. When those things do not work, we can move to more serious action. Where a notice to remedy is unsuccessful, for example, we are able to lodge with the NTCAT, and I will give you an example. In relation to unpaid rent—91 notices issued for unpaid rent 23 tenancies immediately remedied the breach and entered into an agreement to pay. A couple of others made other arrangements.

**Mr MALEY:** Of the 91 only 23 remedied to fix the problem?

**Mr WARREN:** Immediately. One tenancy remedied the amount by paying the full amount outstanding. One was withdrawn because of a change in circumstance, 61 tenancies did not remedy and proceeded to the NTCAT, and that is where we are going into the tribunal to get an independent decision by the umpire. We ask them to make an order in our favour that the tenant has to pay the rent using the legal process.

**Mr MALEY:** How many has been to completion, is it 61 times or are they all on foot?

**Mr WARREN:** The 61 matters that went to the NTCAT in relation to rent, 50 matters have been adjourned or currently in progress, on seven matters we were granted a compensation order—that is a legal order requiring the tenant to make payment. Two matters we were granted termination compensation and possession, that means the tenants moved out of the property, and we have the order for them to repay and two matters were withdrawn.

**Mr MALEY:** Did they move out?

**Mr WARREN:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** Were seven ordered to pay, and did they pay the money?

**Mr WARREN:** In the reporting period seven matters we were granted a compensation order in full. I would have to take on notice whether that has been properly repaid.

**Mr MALEY:** Did you get compensation? You got an order from the tribunal saying they have to pay, for example, did they actually pay?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am happy to take that on notice regarding the seven matters, Member for Nelson.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.24

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

**Mr MALEY:** Of the seven notices you got from NTCAT to remedy or compensate you, how many paid or complied with that order?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.24.

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**Mr MALEY:** Are repairs and maintenance and damage to the property separate figures?

**Mr WARREN:** I will share some information about notice to remedy. This is where there has been a sustained failure to maintain the property to a standard. In the period, we issued 11 notices to remedy and from those 11, five tenants remedied the breach and made good on the yard or the house. Four tenancies did not remedy that breach and it proceeded to NTCAT; two other notices expired without further action being taken. In terms of the outcome from NTCAT, I would need to take that on notice. That is the workflow.

The other part to the story is in relation to where tenants are determined to be accountable for damage. We will require them to make a payment and ...

**Mr MALEY:** Have any been accountable for damage?

**Mr WARREN:** In the reporting period there were 227 occasions where we detected tenant damage and took recovery action which resulted in us raising recovery action for \$870,000.

**Mr MALEY:** That was \$870,000 worth of damage for 227 properties?

**Mr WARREN:** Correct. That was 227 incidents; it could be that there might be more than one incident relating to the same property.

**Mr MALEY:** That was \$870,000 worth of repairs and maintenance was ordered to you?

**Mr WARREN:** Correct.

**Mr MALEY:** How much did you receive?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will hand to Rachelle McMillan, Acting Chief Financial Officer. After Rachelle, I will clarify the previous question in regard to the 11 notices to remedy.

**Ms McMILLAN:** To date we have recovered \$75,000.

**Mr MALEY:** There was \$870,000 outstanding, and you have only recovered \$75,000?

**Ms McMILLAN:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** That is with damage.

**Ms AH KIT:** Regarding the previous question about the notices to remedy for failure to maintain a premise, my Deputy CEO, Brent Warren, told you that there were five who remedied the breach, and there were 11 notices to remedy; five who remedied the breach, two notices expired with no further action, four tenancies did not remedy the breach and proceeded to NTCAT. Out of the four which went to NTCAT, all four were withdrawn as one tenant remedied the breach before the Hearing and fixed whatever was needed and three remedied that breach after the adjournment.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** In the electorate of Araluen in The Gap, there is a small public housing complex in Gnoilya Street—seven units—and I have been communicating with the various ministers for Urban Housing, Kate Worden, and now you, Minister Ah Kit, for the last three to four years on the security of this housing complex.

The tenants are mainly elderly sick or disabled people, they are all extremely vulnerable, and about 18 months or two years ago you put up a nice fence but there still remains a gap where a gate should go. Obviously to secure the complex the tenants want and need a gate, but it has not been forthcoming.

**Ms AH KIT:** Could I double check the property details?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Gnoilya Street. It has been an ongoing issue and I, and my electorate officer, get texts and messages about it almost every week. It makes sense that if you put in a lovely big secure fence, it needs a gate.

**Ms AH KIT:** I do not have the specific details of Gnoilya Street but my department is listening in, and I will get you some information before the close of session. If not, I am happy to take that on notice.

**Madam CHAIR:** Let us put it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.25

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

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** When will the minister install a gate at 4 Gnoilya Street, The Gap, for the vulnerable public housing tenants?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 6.25.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** There has been a long-term commitment to hand over the Keith Lawrie Flats and the Mokari flats to a social housing provider. We were told in the last year that it would only be the Keith Lawrie Flats and not the Mokari Flats. When will that happen? This goes back about four years when we were told it would happen. Could you give me an update on that please, minister?

**Ms AH KIT:** Negotiations are well under way. I have been to Alice Springs a couple of times that have meetings with Community Housing Central Australia. I will pass it on to the department for extra details. It is something I am determined to do. CHCA does an amazing job with the properties it looks after. It has a wonderful model. I look forward to handing over those properties to Frances, along with a few others.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I would like to know when for everyone concerned.

**Mr WARREN:** The minister is right; we are on the tail end of commercial negotiations with CHCA to hand over 131 properties that will be subject to a management transfer. It will run them as the landlord in its own right. A couple of those complexes you mentioned are part of that bundle. We are expecting to reach agreement in about the month of June—this month. We are on track to do handover and a go-live where CHCA takes over as the landlord in September 2024.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Does it include the Keith Lawrie Flats, but not the Mokari Flats? Is that correct?

**Mr WARREN:** My understanding is it includes the Mokari Flats. I beg your pardon, it does not include—sorry, I take that back.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Just the Keith Lawrie Flats and not the Mokari Flats?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you want to take it on notice?

**Mr WARREN:** I might check my information and take it on notice, yes.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** If it does not include the Mokari Flats, what are your plans for them? They are in Nicker Crescent.

**Mr WARREN:** Are you talking about the Nicker Crescent complex?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes.

**Ms AH KIT:** I know them as the Nicker Crescent Flats, so thank you for using that terminology.

This will be a part of the second round of Housing Australia Future Fund submissions. We are looking to redevelop Nicker Crescent Flats.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What do you mean by that? What will you do? This is big news for my electorate.

**Ms AH KIT:** The plan is to go out to tender for a community housing provider who would be eligible for Housing Australia Future Fund money to redevelop Nicker Crescent Flats. We have not made much progress on it. Looking at the way the Housing Australia Future Fund is set up and being able to work with our community housing providers to take advantage of the ability to redevelop existing complexes such as Nicker Crescent, we are looking at how we can successfully partner with a community housing provider to do that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You only have one community housing provider in Alice Springs, I think.

**Ms AH KIT:** Sorry, a community housing provider, are you saying?

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Yes.

**Ms AH KIT:** We have 17 registered across the Northern Territory. It is providing an opportunity and delivering the outcomes of the community housing growth strategy to give all of our community housing providers an opportunity to tender for an important project like that.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** When you say redevelop, what do you mean? Do them up? Refurbish them? Demolish them?

**Ms AH KIT:** To come up with a plan. We will not be limiting that. Whether it is a complete refurbishment or demolish it altogether—such as your Shiers Street in the Narrows—and being able to access Housing Australia Future Fund to redevelop the site for a more suitable purpose for the surrounding area and your region. We would be open to all of those as we do not limit our community housing providers in their dream for that important part of Alice Springs. We are looking to partner with one of those to deliver on a successful outcome.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** What is the time frame to go out for tender?

**Ms AH KIT:** It will be at least a couple of years. This is a part of our housing plan. We need to deliver 11,430 properties across the Northern Territory and at the moment we have already got big projects underway which the department is looking after such as the Shiers Street complex in The Narrows and the YWCA complex which we are focusing on it Mitchell Street in Darwin CBD.

We are making sure we are not just focusing on Darwin centric, but we have the housing plan to look at what we can do in Alice Springs regarding accessing the Housing Australia Future Fund as well as the other urban centres.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** This has been many years ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, can I suggest you put your question on the record and perhaps ...

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** No, that is fine with what you said. But it has been many years talking about doing something about the Mokari and Keith Lawrie Flats.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the Community Housing Growth Strategy ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Is it under the same output?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** As we are shifting into the Community Housing Growth Strategy, I will put on the record acknowledgement of the housing staff and the PHSOs. Particularly for me in my northern suburbs electorate, they are probably one of the government agencies I have the most to deal with and they are always very positive and work extremely hard in some difficult conditions. It is important as we often acknowledge a lot of public servants and it sounds like, from other members' conversations, that they also deal with them.

**Mr MALEY:** ...are you on track to meet the KPIs in that strategy?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, we are on track to meet our KPI which is to transfer control of 1,000 properties. We have the last package going out to community housing providers and that will be a transfer of 269 properties to them which will meet our KPI.

**Mr MALEY:** I am talking about page 12 of that strategy which says 1,600 homes should have been transferred by 2023 and only 250 have been earmarked. I think you are at least 1,000 behind; is that correct? The graph on page 12 shows that year three is 2023–24 consultation and 2024–25, and the number of dwellings to be transferred is 1,600. It is nowhere near that. In relation to transferring control of properties, the KPIs have not been met.

**Ms AH KIT:** I will ask my deputy CEO, Brent Warren, to talk more about it. If you look at the bottom of page 12 of the Community Housing Growth Strategy, it has the transfer total for social housing as 578 and 633. What we are talking about is the 1,100 homes which we will reach by putting out the next housing transfer.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you make sure we are talking about the right year because the two figures you just gave were meant to be for 2022–23, and we are halfway through 2024. There was a press release where you only

released the first 250 and there are none in Alice Springs, and in Tennant Creek there is meant to be 18 dwellings. How many will be completed by 30 June 2024?

**Ms AH KIT:** Roughly 1,100 homes will be transferred by 30 June this year, Member for Nelson, but I will ask Brent Warren to provide the explanation.

**Mr WARREN:** The investment pipeline that you can see in the strategy document has changed a bit as the strategy has been rolled out, but I can take you through the relevant parts.

**Mr MALEY:** Has this changed?

**Mr WARREN:** It has been amended as we have been implementing, and it is more about changing the way the packages are broken up rather than changing the intent. I can step that through if you like.

**Mr MALEY:** Have you changed the numbers?

**Mr WARREN:** The packages have changed in size, but the same total number of houses is going across. I can step you through each of those transfers if you like.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes please.

**Mr WARREN:** In year one you can see reference to 250 dwellings in Darwin and 250 dwellings in Palmerston. That has been changed to 501 dwellings, that is what I mean, there has been slight adjustments to the figures as we have worked it out. They both went out to tender and that tender has been closed. They were awarded to Mission Australia Housing and Venture Housing. Mission Australia has gone live operating those houses and Venture Housing will go live in July. In relation to John Stokes Square ...

**Mr MALEY:** Can we stay with the first lot. That was in 2022. In 2022–23 there is meant to be another 500, 250 and 250. What about the other 500, has that happened?

**Mr WARREN:** It might be easiest for me to go down the column and then go across so that you can get the flow of things. We have done the first 501 that I mentioned. The next one down is John Stokes Square, and that building was finished, and it has been fully transferred to Venture Housing to operate, that is the 78. The affordable housing contract management that you can see there ...

**Mr MALEY:** Was that not handed back? Did Venture Housing not hand back a whole lot of units?

**Ms AH KIT:** Not in John Stokes Square.

**Mr WARREN:** No.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... factually based.

**Mr MALEY:** Go on; sorry to interrupt.

**Mr WARREN:** John Stoke Square is operated by Venture Housing under a 10 plus 10 management agreement, both in year two at the moment and they are in there running it. The affordable housing contract management these are houses that the department had head leases over with private developers and we agreed to re-commission them out to the market. We went out to market in Alice Springs, and they have been handed over to Community Housing Central Australia. We went out to market in Tennant Creek, and we did not get a response from the CHP so a real estate agent picked that up. We went out to market in Darwin and Venture Housing picked up that project, that portfolio, and as you mentioned, they elected to hand back—they made a decision about the commerciality of that arrangement.

I will go up to the second column. We made a decision around trying to preference and support a couple of Aboriginal controlled community housing providers. We have been doing direct negotiations with Yilli Rreung Housing in Darwin and Community Housing Central Australia. Yilli Rreung are about to sign off with us on a package of 100 dwellings in Greater Darwin ...

**Mr MALEY:** Is this column 2, year two 2022–23?

**Mr WARREN:** Correct. That is why I mean the package sizes have changed to meet requirements. Community Housing Central Australia is in negotiation for 131 dwellings ...

**Mr MALEY:** Have they gone from 250 down to 100 and 250 down to 130?

**Mr WARREN:** There is a third package of 269 dwellings, which is the difference, that is the residue of the first 1,000 which will go out for a competitive tender process in June.

**Mr MALEY:** Was that meant to be done by 2023?

**Mr WARREN:** This was the year of operation. The strategy started in 2022, and we are in the second year of operation of the strategy at the moment. We will have all thousand of the social housing transfers out to market in the second year. The John Stokes transfer is completed. We have done the affordable housing project.

The other work we are doing with community housing providers is about making some direct offers to people to build houses on our land using some of their access to finance and capital grant support we have available. We are still negotiating some of those packages at the moment to do new construction.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Are they some of the ones that are happening in Katherine, or meant to be happening?

**Mr WARREN:** No, that is extra investment beyond what was envisaged in the strategy. In Katherine, Venture Housing did a project with grant support from the NT Government on land the NT Government made available. That was on the back of COVID stimulus funding. It was designed to make housing available to make more affordable housing options for people.

**Mr MALEY:** What impact are these delays having on tenants who are waiting to get into this urban housing?

**Mr WARREN:** There has not been any impact on tenants. Tenants are housed the whole time. The key part of the transfer process is moving the lease arrangement that a tenant has with us across to the community housing provider.

We communicate with the tenants who are in the affected houses and let them know what is happening. When the community housing provider is ready to take over we jointly canvass the tenants to explain the change and make sure they are helped across the finish line so they become a client of the community housing provider.

**Mr MALEY:** What about year four 2024–25? Are you on track to deliver the next 500 homes?

**Ms AH KIT:** We always said that halfway through our five-year plan we would be undertaking a review. It is important for us to do that because we have extra investment from the Commonwealth Government going into the housing needs we have across the Northern Territory. We are working closely with the sector in regard to capacity. We will be undertaking a review then mapping the way forward to make sure we can maximise the capacity of the sector to build as many homes as we can.

**Mr MALEY:** What about the essentially private business which have geared up, got staff ready to transfer the property and now there will be a review? How will that affect them? How does it affect a business if it is up and running and ready for 1,000 homes and it does not happen? How does it affect the industry and the community housing providers?

You said Venture was one and Mission. Let us use those two as an example. They are following this and think they will get access to 1,000 homes so they are building their capacity now in 2022 and 2023. They have built the capacity—now what will happen to them? Will they let those staff go?

**Ms AH KIT:** We are in close and regular contact with that community housing sector, not just only the department and through me as Minister for Urban Housing. Recently I attended the Venture Housing Board meeting to go through some of its strategic directions and our partnerships. We are all talking about growing capacity.

I said to the community housing sector from the get-go that I am a huge advocate for community housing; it is a wonderful model. I look forward to achieving our target of transferring up to 40% of our public housing stock across for their management. I am cognisant of the amount of work that is required and the capacity they have to work on a lot of those projects.

It is complete partnership, Member for Nelson. We have an open-door policy where community Housing Industry Australia NT, CHCA local board will be in regular contact and share any ideas or concerns they have. This is a complete partnership where we make sure the sector is not being set up for failure. We are managing our relationship and communications closely with them

**Mr MALEY:** You are saying that the community housing providers are completely on board with you and you are dealing with them and they know exactly what is happening? They will not be put at risk because this delay or review because it seems to be that you are a fair bit behind? They are happy with that? You have dealt with them and they have no concerns?

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely—from both my level as the minister and the engagement in my ministerial office as well as through my department. The close engagement with the sector is frequent, making sure that everybody is on the same page. We all want the same outcomes. We need to have all of those properties built and to access the federal government's funding and to make sure we are planning our housing together, which we are currently.

**Mr MALEY:** How much is outstanding in urban rent?

**Ms AH KIT:** My department is currently collecting 91% of all rent in urban areas. The balance outstanding is \$2,706,339.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the total rent payable for this reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** The total rent payable is \$31,277,795.

**Mr MALEY:** We should have received \$31m, but \$2.7m is outstanding.

**Ms AH KIT:** We have collected \$28,571,456.

**Mr MALEY:** Are you taking any steps to collect the outstanding rent?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes. That goes back to some of our conversations regarding going to NTCAT for a notice to remedy for unpaid rent. Sometimes we get good results and tenants enter into time-to-pay agreements. We try to chase up every outstanding cent and dollar.

As at 31 March 2024 there were 1,375 agreements to pay across urban public housing for not only rent but also debt and damages.

**Mrs HERSEY:** In November 2022 your government issued a media release stating that you were addressing key worker and private sector housing shortages in Alice Springs and Katherine. It was to deliver 240 dwellings in Katherine with half of them to be used for key workers and the remainder to be offered for sale or rent in the private market. From what I have learned in Katherine, eight have been built by Venture Housing—social housing—and six by NJ Homes in Martin Terrace. There is a shortfall of 226 dwellings. When will the rest of the 226 dwellings be built in Katherine? Have the six units on Martin Terrace all been filled?

**Ms AH KIT:** I understand this related to a Chief Minister announcement. The project of accommodation for targeted workforce came under Investment Territory, so I am not across those details. Those details would be available through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

As the Minister for Urban Housing, I make sure that we work to include Katherine and the Big Rivers region, so they are covered in our housing story. We know we need 11,430 homes. We are looking at ways, not just where the Chief Minister and Cabinet continues to deliver on that commitment of workers' homes ...

**Mrs HERSEY:** Are you saying that if I want some answers about the media release I need to ask the Chief Minister's department?

**Madam CHAIR:** It should have been asked of the Chief Minister under Investment Territory. Why not see whether the minister for Infrastructure tomorrow ...

**Mrs HERSEY:** The accelerated regional accommodation project was led by Investment Territory through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. My department does not have oversight of that project.



I was in Katherine and I spoke to local people about the importance of having those accommodation spaces put up. We are making sure that is part of our housing plan going forward as well.

**Mr MALEY:** I understand that there are 30 public housing safety officers employed now. Is that correct?

**Madam CHAIR:** PHSOs.

**Ms AH KIT:** There are 29 public housing safety officers, I believe.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give a breakdown of where they are located by region?

**Ms AH KIT:** We have 16 PHSOs in the greater Darwin region; seven located in Alice Springs; three located in Kathrine; and a further three in Tennant Creek.

**Mr MALEY:** How much budget do they have in relation to doing their duties?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is \$3.259m up to 31 March this year.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that how much they spent—their actual?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** Has that been reduced or staying the same for the next financial year?

**Ms AH KIT:** The budget will be increasing to a total of \$5.149m for the 2024–25 financial year.

**Mr MALEY:** Why is it increasing that much?

**Ms AH KIT:** There are two main reasons for that. It is part of the complex tenancy unit that I stood up with the department and the Lhere Artepe assertive outreach program.

**Mr MALEY:** Did it overspend its budget last year or was it within budget?

**Ms AH KIT:** I might pass to the department staff to see if they have that detail.

I will have to take that question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.26

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

**Mr MALEY:** Did the public housing safety officers overspend their budget last financial year?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.26.

**Mr MALEY:** How many inspections were undertaken by public housing safety officers?

**Ms AH KIT:** Member for Nelson, could I clarify? When you are asking about our public housing safety officers undertaking inspections at properties, are you talking about attendances ...

**Mr MALEY:** I am not sure what it is called. Are they called out or do they do random inspections? How do they work?

**Ms AH KIT:** Public housing safety officers patrol public housing properties. They are there first and foremost to support public housing tenants to maintain their tenancies. Where the safety unit is called with a complaint—let us say about antisocial behaviour—they would visit the complex.

I was worried about the undertaking an inspection. That is okay; I just wanted to double check.

**Mr MALEY:** How many times have they been called out?

**Ms AH KIT:** Public housing safety unit proactive patrol-generated events up to 31 March was 1,455 times. Events reported by the public for them to go out was 4,651.

**Mr MALEY:** Have any of those officers ever been assaulted?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, but I do not have the specific details. I am happy to take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 6.27**

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

**Mr MALEY:** Have any of the public safety officers been assaulted? If so, how many times?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.27.

**Mr MALEY:** How many times have housing safety officers called police to attend to incidents or problems?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am having conversations with my department to see if that information is readily accessible. I will offer to take it on notice. Our public housing safety officers work very closely with NT police. We are on the Interagency Tasking Coordination Group, and we are on a shared radio system. We are not sure if police will keep that so it might be best to take it on notice and find out what we can for you.

**Mr MALEY:** How many times have public safety officers called police in the last 12 months?

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**Question on Notice No 6.28**

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

**Mr MALEY:** How many times have public safety officers called police 000 or the 131 444 number in the last 12 months?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.28.

**Mr YAN:** Of the 777 dwellings in Alice Springs, you said there are 57 currently vacant. Of the 57 how many are considered beyond economic repair?

**Ms AH KIT:** Member for Namatjira, we have to take that on notice and check with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, and a reminder that Minister Joel Bowden is appearing tomorrow.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you want to ask the minister, tomorrow?

**Mr YAN:** No, I will get it on notice now because I am not in tomorrow.

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**Question on Notice No 6.29**

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

**Mr YAN:** Of the 777 dwellings in Central Australia 57 are vacant. How many are beyond economic repair?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.29.

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**Mr YAN:** Of the 777 properties in Central Australia there have been a number of blocks where the properties have been knocked down. Do you have a record of how many vacant blocks belong to NT Housing without properties on them?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will take the question on notice, but I will clarify for the committee that all of the vacant blocks in Alice Springs are making sure that we can repurpose for use of social and affordable housing with the Social Housing Accelerator fund, the \$50m that was provided to our government to ensure that we can use vacant lots of Crown Land to support development there. Madam Chair, I will take that question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.30

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

**Mr YAN:** How many would be vacant lots that currently exist in Alice Springs

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.30.

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**Mr YAN:** Over the reporting period, how many NT houses or vacant blocks have been sold or disposed of?

**Ms AH KIT:** Were you asking about blocks of land or properties as well?

**Mr YAN:** Properties and public housing assets which have been sold or disposed of in the reporting period.

**Ms AH KIT:** The answer is one property at 3 Baker Court, Larapinta, which was sold on 2 November 2023.

**Mr YAN:** Have there been any new dwellings added to the housing stock in Central Australia since the last Estimates?

**Ms AH KIT:** No.

**Mr YAN:** We talked about \$720,000 that went to Lhere Artepe to address homelessness and support for individuals. What outcomes are the Northern Territory Government getting from that investment? Effectively, if we talk about 100 to 150 homeless people that is over \$4,800 per person, on my basic calculations.

**Mr WARREN:** I understand your question is about the service that the Lhere Artepe assertive outreach provides. They provide a patrol service model where they have Aboriginal employees primarily who work evening and night shifts attending areas that are known to them to be places of congregation for people who are living rough. They are funded to have interactions with those people to understand who they are, where they have come from and if they can be referred into a service to get support.

A common example might be getting them connected into accommodation. One of the arrangements they have is that they have been connected to the Alice Springs visitor park and they have had a practice of reserving some beds that are available for referrals. They also work on transport back to country or connecting into other case management support. It is about trying to get them from sleeping rough to being in the system and properly connecting into it.

**Mr YAN:** The funding we are providing to Lhere Artepe is not specifically to do with homelessness but to support people to find ways to get out of homelessness. Would I be safe in saying that?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, it is assertive outreach.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.20**

**Ms AH KIT:** Seven alleged crimes were reported to the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities for the Batten Road facility between 1 July and 31 March 2024 of which:

- five incidents were reported to the Northern Territory Police; three related to onsite incidents and two incidents occurred offsite involving guests of the Batten Road facility.
- two incidents were reported to the NT Fire Service, both of which related to fires outside the facility, either impacting the site or allegedly involving guests.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.16**

**Ms AH KIT:** This is in regard to the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre overtime costs.

The incident at Don Dale Youth Detention Centre occurred between 2.22 pm on 3 April 2024 and 9.30 am on 4 April 2024. In total 124 hours of overtime was paid to youth justice officers at a total cost of \$12,317.79 including superannuation and payroll tax.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.15**

**Ms AH KIT:** I have an answer to question number 6.15 relating to offender conferencing completion and the number of young people who have reoffended.

Restorative youth justice conferencing is undertaken to increase young people's understanding of the impact of their actions and to give victims an opportunity to talk about the harm the offending has caused. During the reporting period there were 12 restorative youth justice conferences that were completed. Seven of the young persons who completed the conferencing reoffended, which means that five of the young persons who completed the conferencing have not reoffended.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.17**

**Ms AH KIT:** I have an answer to question number 6.17 which related to positions filled at the Alice Springs Saltbush supported bail accommodation facility.

Recruitment to these three dedicated positions is still under way.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.18**

**Ms AH KIT:** I have an answer to question number 6.18 in regard to youth justice officers on extended leave.

There were 13 youth justice officers on extended leave during the reporting period. These comprised of 10 in Darwin. Five of these workers were on workers' compensation; three on long leave without pay; and two on parental leave.

There were also three in Alice Springs who were on long leave without pay.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.19**

**Ms AH KIT:** I also have an answer to question number 6.19 in regard to the Batten Road facility repairs and maintenance costs.

The total repairs and maintenance cost for the Batten Road facility was \$639,054 for the reporting period.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.22**

**Ms AH KIT:** I have an answer to question number 6.22 in regard to the Alice Springs Visitor Park capacity.

Aboriginal Hostels Ltd manage the Alice Springs Visitor Park. AHL bases accommodation capacity on beds and not rooms. The current capacity at the Alice Springs Visitor Park is 84 beds with expansion to add a further 20 beds. The total future capacity of Alice Springs Visitor Park is there 104 beds.

I am happy to table these; there is a lot of information in these answers.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.24**

**Ms AH KIT:** I also have an answer to question number 6.24 in regard to NTCAT rent debt compensation orders.

From 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024 of the seven compensation orders granted by NTCAT none have been repaid in full. Compensation orders are generally for significant debts and, therefore, the time taken to pay the outstanding debt can be significant where tenants are engaging with the department agreements to payment plans for the outstanding debts.

For clarification on rent debt compensation orders through NTCAT, we are still going through the process to set up the time-to-pay agreement and we will track it from there.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, you said you would table one of those. Could you let me know which number again. I will get someone from the secretariat to come ...

**Ms AH KIT:** It is number 6.22 that had a table and some other dot points I thought I would add to the file, thank you.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 6.26**

**Ms AH KIT:** Madam Chair, I have one more answer to question number 6.26 in regard to the public housing safety officer's budget.

The underspend was a total of \$57,000.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any further questions on the output or to the answer, Member for Nelson?

**Mr MALEY:** No, we are all good.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concluded consideration of Output 2.2 and Output Group 2.0.

We thank the minister and her officials. You may change some of them over.

**OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – COMMUNITIES**  
**Output 3.4 – Social Inclusion**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Communities.

Output 3.1, Arts and Culture; Output 3.2, Heritage, Libraries and Archives; and Output 3.3, Sport and Active Recreation are the responsibility of other ministers.

We will consider Output 3.4, Social Inclusion. While we are changing officials so, minister, please introduce the new officials that have joined you.

**Ms AH KIT:** The new official I have joining me at the desk for this output is Samantha Livesley, General Manager, Community Participation and Inclusion in the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you. Are there any questions?

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many seniors are taking up beds in hospitals across the Territory due to a lack of aged-care beds in facilities?

**Ms AH KIT:** Aged care comes under the Minister for Health's portfolio responsibilities, not under Seniors.

**Madam CHAIR:** I think she answered that question.

**Mrs MANISON:** She had an extensive discussion on it the other day.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Thank you both for your information, I will have to go back and read ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Go back and read *Hansard*.

**Mrs HERSEY:** If I want to ask any questions on elder abuse am I asking you that in Seniors?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mrs HERSEY:** How many reports does the department receive about elder abuse?

**Ms AH KIT:** We fund the Darwin Community Legal Services who provide an elder abuse support service. There is also a hotline. The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities does not receive the complaints firsthand, it goes through Darwin Community Legal Services.

**Mrs HERSEY:** If I wanted any information are you saying I would need to get in contact with Darwin Community Legal Services, or is there a department that I can get that information from about elder abuse?

**Ms AH KIT:** I can get my department to follow that up as a question on notice. We can go through DCLS and ask for that.

**Mrs HERSEY:** That is fine.

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#### Question on Notice No 6.31

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

**Mrs HERSEY:** I will put two together because they are both on elder abuse. How many reports does the department receive about elder abuse; and of the reports of elder abuse, can you break them down, and are they because of neglect, stealing or financial coercion?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.31.

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**Mrs HERSEY:** In 2021 a licence for an aged-care facility was allocated by the Commonwealth Government and in Budget 2024–25 \$12m is allocated for 120 bed facility. Why has it taken three years to build when we have senior Territorians creating bed block and code yellows in our hospitals, according to Dr Marco Briceno?

**Ms AH KIT:** All aged-care-related questions are the responsibility of the Minister for Health not the minister for Seniors.

**Mrs HERSEY:** What specific support does the department provide to NDIS participants, and how do participants access these services?

**Madam CHAIR:** I suggest, Member for Katherine, that is the next output. Would you like me to conclude this?

**Mrs HERSEY:** Sorry. Yes.

**Mr YAN:** I have one more question on seniors, please. I note in the KPIs that eligible Territorians who are members of the Seniors Recognition Scheme is only 73% ...

**Madam CHAIR:** That is in the next output.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the overall budget of the Office of Multicultural Affairs?

**Ms AH KIT:** The total expenditure as at 31 March was \$1.623m.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the staffing and operational budget?

**Ms AH KIT:** I do not have the exact figure, and I would be happy to take that on notice. There are two staff members in the Office of Multicultural Affairs and four in the interpreting service.

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**Question on Notice No 6.32**

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

**Mr MALEY:** What is the staffing and operational budget for the Office of Multicultural Affairs?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 6.32.

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**Mr MALEY:** You said there were two staff employed. What are their levels?

**Ms AH KIT:** One is an Administrative Officer 7 and the other is Administrative Officer 6.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the total value of the multicultural grants program, noting that it received an increase in the 2024–25 budget?

**Ms AH KIT:** The total expenditure for 2023–24 was \$1.263m.

**Mr MALEY:** What funding can multicultural groups apply for?

**Ms AH KIT:** The department offers grants totalling approximately \$1.4m. There is \$1m for the multicultural grants program, which consists of two rounds. There are also quick response grants, multicultural services and peak body funding and overseas qualifications. There is \$343,000 for Multicultural Community Facilities Grants, which includes a sharing arrangement scheme. There is \$52,000 allocated towards Harmony Grants and \$14,000 for the Charles See Kee Scholarship at CDU.

**Mr YAN:** There was an increase in the budget of \$750,000 for the multicultural grants program. Do you have a breakdown of what that amount will be for?

**Ms AH KIT:** There is an additional \$600,000 approved in the 2024–25 budget for the multicultural grants program bringing the total budget to \$1.6m.

There is an additional \$150,000 that was approved in the 2024–25 budget for the multicultural community facilities grants, including sharing arrangements, bringing the total budget to \$450,000.

**Mr YAN:** Can you break down what the \$150,000 was for—multicultural facilities grants?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes. We have a number of multicultural facilities throughout the Territory. They are ageing assets. One of the oldest would be the Kalymnian Brotherhood hall in my area on Batten Road. Over the

years there has been wear and tear. The community members who look after that asset are often volunteers who work.

It is imperative for government to make sure that these assets are supported through grant funding. I have grown the budget by \$150,000 to help there as well.

**Mr YAN:** That \$150,000 is for multicultural groups to apply for to upgrade or repair facilities?

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely. I mentioned there is a facility sharing grant. As we can all appreciate in the Northern Territory, a lot of our multicultural groups do not have their own space to celebrate. For those who have, operate and maintain multicultural spaces, my department works to help connect and facilitate sharing arrangements.

As an example, the Filipino community in Darwin in my area in Batten Road is provided with funding to encourage them to share its hall with others who may not have a hall of their own. It is a good way to encourage community harmony and make good use of the assets most days of the year.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you provide us a list of the grant provided to multicultural groups including the name of the group, the amount granted and the name of the project the grant was for?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, I can. It is quite an extensive list. Would you like me to table this? It is about six pages. Otherwise I will read them all onto the record and use up the rest of the time.

**Mr MALEY:** Do not. Table it, thank you. Thank you for tabling that. It will save us time going through six pages. I appreciate that.

Have you had feedback from multicultural community groups in relation to community safety?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, that is why I have been teaming up with Minister Potter, as the Minister for Police, to reach out to multicultural community leader to meet with them to hear directly from their about their concerns, and more importantly, to talk about government's work and take any questions and have those direct conversations.

I also have my amazing Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural Affairs, so I hear directly from multicultural Territorians from across the Territory about their concerns.

**Mr MALEY:** What are their concerns? What do they relay to you?

**Ms AH KIT:** All about community safety across the Northern Territory, clarifying ways in which response are organised, talking about information sharing between different departments. One of the most important parts that I continue to work on with my department and my team in my ministerial office is about ensuring the communication is getting back to the people in the manner in which suits them.

Previously you asked the question and I told you that there were four important officers working in our interpreting and translating service, ensuring that communication is provided to people so they can clearly understand the responses.

**Mr MALEY:** When you say safety concerns, are you talking about crime?

**Ms AH KIT:** We talk about a variety of things in regard to our engagement. Crime features, as does having a look at our workforce, making sure that housing is supported and provided, ensuring that every multicultural community group receives the information from my team and I and my department in regard to grant availabilities and opportunities. It is a variety of issues, but community safety is always raised.

**Madam CHAIR:** I have allowed a little attitude. I am not sure it relates to the output, but if the minister is willing—I am conscious of the time, we only have about 20 minutes left and there are another couple of outputs.

**Mr MALEY:** We are talking about social inclusion here, multicultural affairs. Specifically, what are you doing to release the concerns of these multicultural groups, minister?

**Ms AH KIT:** We have over 120 incorporated multicultural groups throughout the Northern Territory. I have had the portfolio for just over two years. Meeting and engaging with community leaders and hearing from



them directly is a key part of my role, making sure that we are supporting them through my ministerial staff and also through the department to ensure that people are aware of the grants and the support that is available. Part of my engagement is always focused on asking the community groups what their dreams, their hopes and their aspirations are. What are the key issues and ideas that they have. I have had an overwhelming response over the last two years from many multicultural leaders. We have stories of people applying for land to build their own facilities. We have been able to support multicultural groups who perhaps were not aware of facility sharing arrangements. I still attend around three to four multicultural events each week which provides an important opportunity for me to engage directly and to help and provide ongoing support about the way forward for them.

**Mr MALEY:** What impact do you think these concerns will have on our multicultural communities?

**Ms AH KIT:** Which concerns?

**Mr MALEY:** The safety concerns which have been raised with you by multicultural communities. What impact is that having on the multicultural communities that raise those concerns with you?

**Ms AH KIT:** I engage closely with a number of leaders in regard to their concerns. My job is to make sure that they are followed up. I recently took my advisory committee on multicultural affairs to Alice Springs in order to broaden their exposure and to make sure that they could see some of the good stuff that was happening in the area and directly connect with the incredible people who work out our peak body of Multicultural Services of Central Australia. Part of my work there has been with the incredible Sikh community at Gurudwara talking about not only community safety concerns but how they can be supported to access land and build facilities. I started the conversation with the Afghan Mosque and met with the Imam there a few years ago when I first got in. I visit Alice Springs quite regularly to meet directly with stakeholders and hearing from them.

Member for Nelson, I will finish with a good news story. The Imam and the incredible members of the Afghan Mosque a few years ago were talking about antisocial behaviour—the Member for Namatjira knows this all too well about rock throwing and damages. On my second visit I took representatives from the local Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. We sat at the mosque and had a good conversation about the local settings of the Alice Springs community, offered ideas for the Imam and the community to take up. Part of that was focused on engaging with the FaFT program at the local school on Larapinta Drive.

When I caught up with the Imam next and followed up with keen interest as did my incredible adviser, Jaya Srinivas. It was great to hear from the Imam directly that the engagement with the local school and the community had bridged a gap of understanding and compassion and the result was that the gates were opened—there were open days and they were opening up their facility to everyone in the area so that they could understand what was happening there and if there were any concerns or building of relationships then it could occur. That was just one of many good results we have been able to achieve through our direct conversations over the last two years.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am conscious that we have four more outputs and approximately 15 minutes. Are there any more questions?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 6.32**

**Ms AH KIT:** For 2023–24 a total of \$2.864m was allocated. There was \$1.024m for employees, \$403,000 for operations and \$1.437m for grants.

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**Mr MALEY:** How many of the multicultural communities have left the Territory in the last 12 months that you are aware of?

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, I have allowed a little latitude, but I am not sure that directly relates to the output. That would have been better this morning with the Minister for Police.

**Mr MALEY:** I am talking about social inclusion ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, but she has been quite gracious in giving you answers to questions which I would have ruled out of order.

**Mr MALEY:** There is no output for Multicultural Affairs, so we have to put it under social inclusion. This is our last line of questioning.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you have any questions on Disability Services, Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Schemes or Emergency Management Welfare Group? You have 15 minutes and I am not sure your question is relevant.

**Mr MALEY:** How often does your ministerial advisory council meet?

**Ms AH KIT:** My Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs meets two to three times per year. It has met twice this year and a third meeting is planned for later this year.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you go to those meetings?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, I attend those meetings. They are chaired by the Chairperson, Dr Devaki Monani.

**Mr MALEY:** Have you set any KPIs for the ministerial advisory council?

**Ms AH KIT:** The focus of the ministerial advisory committee is to represent their views and to provide input and feedback on tracking our work against our multicultural affairs strategy.

What has been really great about getting a comprehensive collective of incredible people together is the partnerships and workability of their ideas. Some of our incredible members have a focus on domestic violence education and prevention; some members are partnering together to have a look at the way we deliver support for multicultural communities; some are looking at events being provided; and others are looking at communication. Every member on that group is incredible.

I acknowledge the incredible work of Dr Devaki Monani in chairing the committee. I thank all who have been on the committee before my time as the minister.

I want every member in this room to know that I now have representation from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin and Palmerston. I have a collective of people from different backgrounds and ethnicities. The only place that I am working on that I have not been able to secure yet is Nhulunbuy. I am also working hard to get remote representation. It is important to make sure we have an advisory committee that truly reflects the community which they represent. They are all doing an incredible job.

**Mr MALEY:** Have the allocated resources to the multicultural communities gone down? Is it based on community population or membership? How does that work in relation to grants?

**Ms AH KIT:** The grants have grown in size in regard to financial capacity. Are you asking specifically about census data on multicultural communities and whether funding is allocated to them based on that?

**Mr MALEY:** When you are assessing a grant application, is it assessed on the size of the multicultural group, how many people are in it, the membership and what will it be used for? Is that all part of the grant application?

**Ms AH KIT:** Every grant application comes with guidelines that are focused on interaction.

I will hand over to Sam—I almost forgot she was sitting here—and ask her to provide details.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, considering she is here at 10.20 pm; it is kind of her.

**Ms LIVESLEY:** For each of our different grant programs we have different criteria as part of the application process. We always convene a panel to assess all the grant applications in line with that criteria. It is based on merit; we do not do it in terms of demographic with how many are in. It is also trying to get some regional spread and diversity of activity.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.4.

### Output 3.5 – Disability Services

**Madam CHAIR:** We will now move on to Output 3.5, Disability Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** Could you explain the comments in the footnotes on BP3, page 118, about the decrease in disability services output in 2024–25? It relates to the budget on page 117 where there is a reduction. The budget was \$144m, revised up to \$152m and now dropped to \$117m.

**Ms AH KIT:** I will hand over to the acting chief financial officer, Rachelle McMillan, to provide some details and explanation regarding that.

**Ms McMILLAN:** The decrease of \$34.8m from 2023–24 to 2024–25 is in relation to the cessation of the DisabilityCare Australia Fund from the Commonwealth of \$11.1m. There has been a redirection from disability of \$17.3m into out-of-home care in the family space and \$7.2m into urban housing. That is off the back of our discount and in-kind support that the NT Government provides. We get that discount off our NDIS contribution bill and increased this year.

**Mr YAN:** What does that mean, in effect, for the Northern Territory Government in its provision of disability services with that reduction in funding? Obviously that redirection has gone to other agencies. What does that mean for our disability sector?

**Ms LIVESLEY:** This will ensure that we meet our commitments for the Northern Territory's contribution to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We do not directly provide those disability support services through the Office of Disability anymore with the NDIS.

There are some of those retained functions that sit across agencies that may be delivered through the Department of Health through forensic disability, forensic mental health services and some allied health services. Education also has different supports for students with disability. DIPL will do its specialist school transport and taxi subsidy scheme.

This is just in terms of the Office of Disability is responsible for the NDIS contribution. Disability sits across all other government agencies and is funded through those agencies.

**Mr YAN:** I appreciate that. I note that disability care fund has a drop of \$11.1m between 2023–24 and now. That obviously accounts for that. Is there any risk for the Northern Territory that we will have to tip in more money in this space?

**Ms AH KIT:** Are you referring to contributions to the NDIS?

**Mr YAN:** No, not specifically to the NDIS, but into disability. We had a reduction. We are hoping that the redirection of funds by the feds to some of those other departments for that disability work will take effect. If it does not, will the Northern Territory Government have to tip in some more money into the disability bucket to pick up those services they are not providing?

**Ms AH KIT:** We have been on a path of reform for disability—particularly the NDIS—for some time now. My department is working across every other agency to compile our Northern Territory Government draft response to the royal commission, as well as the independent review into the NDIS.

I am cognisant of the level of support that is currently being provided and accessed by Territorians who live with disability—those who are either assessed as being eligible and are receiving a package under the NDIS who just cannot access services, and those who are still in need of assessment and support.

As an example, I commissioned a deep dive into both Yuendumu and Maningrida to look at how the NDIS is working in a remote setting, and I am pleased and grateful for the federal minister for the NDIS, Bill Shorten, to back the important work we do in Maningrida with the community, with the sector and with NDIA who deliver the NDIS scheme, to look at alternative commissioning so that we can get better value for the people living there with a package.

We will provide our feedback on the royal commission and in time to the NDIS independent review, but we have to make sure that look at helping our Territorians living with disability to access the supports they need, and that is what we will continue to do.

**Mr YAN:** Does the department assist NDIS participants, or prospective NDIS participants, in drafting plans or preparing for plan assessments?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, that is not the work that we undertake. The scheme is administered through the National Disability Insurance Agency and there are ...

**Mr YAN:** Does our own department have any input? Every member in this room has a litany of issues with NDIS and people trying to access NDIS, let alone in the bush, and Territorians find it difficult to navigate NDIS. Is there any assistance provided by Disabilities within the Northern Territory Government to the Territorians seeking that assistance?

**Ms AH KIT:** I understand exactly what you are referring to. There is one cohort of Territory Families clients who we provide NDIS support to, and they are our young children in out-of-home care.

In regard to the complaints and seeking advice we will always help to navigate the system for those who make contact with us. We work very closely with the National Disability Insurance Agency, making sure if we receive any complaints or communications in my ministerial office, we provide the information to the NDIA. They are all Territorians that we are looking after. We understand the system is not that easy to navigate and we will always lend a hand where possible. We do not provide NDIS supports to anyone other than those who are in out-of-home care.

**Mr YAN:** I understand that minister. It is not a requirement for us to provide support, but advice and assistance ...

**Ms AH KIT:** We will help Territorians where we can to navigate ...

**Mr YAN:** ... is where people are looking for that ...

**Madam CHAIR:** The minister has been a strong mouthpiece to the Commonwealth Government and the federal minister, particularly of the needs of Territorians in the bush where English is a second language. Minister, you have some responses there, and we have two minutes. I will let the shadow minister keep asking questions.

**Mr YAN:** I have one more question on disability; you have already touched on it. Do we have any numbers on how many Aboriginal-owned NDIS providers there are in the Territory, and what are we doing to try to increase that number?

**Madam CHAIR:** It would not be under this output. It would be either a question directly for NDIS or sometimes Chief Minister's do some of the global works around supporting the development of the organisations.

**Mr YAN:** I was not sure whether the minister would know within the Disabilities portfolio.

**Ms AH KIT:** That is part of the reform work that we are looking at in regard to providing our responses to the royal commission and the NDIS independent review.

As the Minister for Disabilities and not just the NDIS, and as a proud Aboriginal person, I am always looking around to find those who are First Nations-led NDIS providers and encourage more people to get into the sector. I have family members who are coordinators of support in the Darwin region, local Larrakia people and I am very proud of them for being in that space. I was in Alice Springs for the NDIS independent review and attended the sessions.

I spoke to a couple of local Aboriginal women who were also doing support coordination and daily activities and I try to encourage more people. There is plenty of opportunity in the disability space and there is plenty of opportunity for successful outcomes under the NDIS. If people reach out to my office or my department, we are more than happy to let them know what the avenues are for availability and steer them in the right direction.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are at the end of our allocated time. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and the officials that have supported her this evening. It has been a fulsome questioning, and we appreciate you at this late hour.

Minister, do you want to provide any closing comments thanking your officials quickly?

**Ms AH KIT:** Thank you to Chief Executive Officer Emma White, all the senior executives and every employee in the department who has worked so hard to ensure that up-to-date information could be provided to you.

Thank you to the Estimates Committee for putting in the long hours and asking the important questions. Thank you to all the DLA staff and everyone listening in.

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The committee concluded.

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DRAFT