

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

Madam CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. Before we start today I want to say a couple of things. First, the Public Accounts Committee, which is now the Estimates Committee, received its terms of reference from the parliament and not directly from the government. That process is bipartisan.

The terms of reference are broad to allow the committee to determine how it will conduct its business in scheduling ministers and the presentation of evidence. It is up to the committee to run the agenda and determine how it will finalise its business within the global delivery of estimates, which is for five-and-a-half days.

The construct of the committee's processes is a matter solely for the committee and the government is compelled to adhere to this. The committee has, by its actions, been unable to effectively manage its time; we are on Day 3 and have not even been through two ministers and Madam Speaker. There are many reasons for this, namely there are long-winded statements that do not end in questions or are not questions related to the budget. There are constant interjections while ministers are trying to provide answers. There are long periods of sustained questioning about matters irrelevant to the 2013-14 budget.

The committee has insisted on the reading of questions and answers that have been notified to ministers in advance and, generally speaking, most questions are vague and general in nature, which has resulted in a waste of time.

Early this morning, the member for Nelson elected to leave and, following the finalisation of the Police portfolio, some opposition members left and the member for Barkly continued with the remaining portfolios of the Chief Minister. The member for Barkly then elected to leave. In those circumstances, the Chief Minister felt it was in the best interests of transparency to Territorians that we stop estimates, despite having a quorum, and return this morning.

We return this morning on strict conditions that the Chief Minister is to be out of here by 10.30 am, which was resolved by the Estimates Committee last night. Following the Chief Minister's finalisation of budget questions at 10.30 am we will have an Estimates Committee meeting in the Ormiston Room.

Mr WOOD: You have made a statement; I would like to comment please.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, if you speak now you are chewing up your precious time with the Chief Minister.

Mr WOOD: You just chewed up some of our precious time by making a statement.

Madam CHAIR: I beg your pardon?

Mr WOOD: It was not accurate.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I suggest you withdraw that comment.

Mr WOOD: Why? I have an opinion. I am not going to withdraw my opinion. The issue I am taking ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, you do not have the call.

DEPARTMENT OF CORPORATE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Madam CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Corporate and Information Services if you wish.

OUTPUT GROUP 12.0 – Shared Services Output 12.1 – Finance Services

Mr GILES: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You were succinct in your summation of the events last night.

Mr WOOD: That is wrong.

Mr GILES: I believed it was important we continue the process today, despite the fact estimates was continuing last night and we had a quorum. It is of the utmost importance there is openness, transparency and accountability.

Mr WOOD: While you are wide awake.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do not interrupt the Chief Minister while he is speaking.

Mr GILES: I recommended we postpone it and come back this morning so the opposition has the chance to ask questions. I thank all the public servants who stayed last night in anticipation of adhering to the guidelines set by this committee; that is, to fulfil questions and answers in estimates into finality and through all portfolios. Thank you to those people who stayed around, went home, and have come back again this morning.

I again welcome Kathleen Robinson, CEO of the Department of Corporate and Information Services. Last night we went through the written questions and the whole output groups and stopped before we reached output-specific areas. I understand there is 45 minutes, which may be reduced. At this point I am happy to take questions at your call, Madam Chair, from any member at any time in any output area to make it easier in case there is a specific point you want to get to. I am happy to take questions now.

Mr WOOD: I have one output non-specific question.

Mr GILES: I am happy to take questions about the department.

Mr WOOD: Can I have an indication of the government's policy on the future of Bushfires NT after statements were made some months ago that it may become part of the Northern Territory Fire Service?

Mr GILES: Member for Nelson, Bushfires NT does not come under the Department of Corporate and Information Services.

Mr WOOD: I know. I thought you said you would take global questions.

Mr GILES: On DCIS, sorry.

Mr WOOD: The way you said it – my apologies.

Mr GILES: Then, after the 40 minute period remaining on the clock, we will move into Transport for 45 minutes, and then 15 minutes for the port and 15 minutes for Asian Relations and Trade. We will do DCIS now, as we have the CEO of DCIS here.

Mr WOOD: That is all right. I thought you were saying ...

Mr GILES: Questions on DCIS.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Chair, I agree with the member for Nelson. It might be okay for you, but some of that statement was questionable. The fact it is bipartisan - when you have 16 members, eight, and one Independent, I do not know how that can be called bipartisan. Let us not forget the way we structured the estimates - it was done by John Elferink. Not all ideas coming from John Elferink are the work of a brilliant mind!

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, that is incorrect. You, as well as anybody, in all your years in this parliament, know how the PAC process operates - the estimates process. Please ask your question of the Chief Minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Madam Chair. Yes, I have been here 12 years more than you and know how it works because I have been here as a ...

Madam CHAIR: You are bordering very close, member for Casuarina, on reflections on the Chair. If you would come to your question it would be greatly appreciated.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Chair, I will go to the question. Again, I express my thanks to the Chief Minister for making himself available. In estimates all ministers should be available and no minister has previously said; 'I have to be out at a certain time'. However ...

Mr GILES: Member for Casuarina, I was here last night willing to work through the night, as are the rules of estimates. Labor and the Independent, accepting the point, walked out. I called an end to it in support of the Chair. I was prepared to take questions on all output areas last night. They are the rules. You wanted to go to exhaustion. You had the opportunity; I was here from 10 am yesterday until 2 am this morning. I would have continued to go in the interests of Territorians having questions answered. I elected to come back and provide that opportunity to you. Ask questions on the DCIS portfolio and I am happy to answer.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I saw you yesterday. I was also here the day before until 1 am, and working like that is no good for either of us, or Territorians. However, I have many questions and will go straight to the point.

Chief Minister, you made many promises during the election period. Are you planning to sell NT Fleet?

Mr GILES: No.

Mr VATSKALIS: Why not? That was one of your key commitments. You told us you were going to raise money. Can you explain why you will not sell NT Fleet?

Mr GILES: We conducted a review of NT Fleet and determined optimal savings were to be made in how we manage NT Fleet, including extending the life cycle of a vehicle from two years and 40 000 km to three years and 60 000 km, and making some changes in relation to four-wheel drive vehicles. That provided a better life cycle valuation model on utilisation of that car. We also changed some structures around the green fleet initiatives. We identified the green fleet was costing much more to run cars, and it had less value on the vehicles when we tried to sell them.

One of the issues we found when conducting the review was some of the green initiatives on the purchase of vehicles identified cars purchased for agencies, such as NRETAS at the time, were not being utilised. Two electric cars which cost roughly \$60 000 to purchase - one had done about 9300 km and one had done about 10 000 km over a two year period - rough numbers. NRETAS was refusing to use the cars even though it was the department of Environment - would not use the green car initiatives. A range of different green products were causing concern and it was better for us to change the way the purchase of vehicles was conducted so we could get better efficiencies out of the utilisation of those cars and, by changing the life cycle, reduce the lease payments for agencies, reducing the cost of agencies and make savings for NT Fleet.

Also, a number of vehicles purchased were not making good sense in their location. For example, we had a Volkswagen - not sure what type - based in Tennant Creek and no one there can service Volkswagens. Every time the car came up for service we would have to get a tilt tray to drive it to Darwin to service it and drive in back on the tilt tray. Those cost efficiencies are not there.

We have made a number of changes and identified if we sold NT Fleet, whatever the realisation of NT Fleet may be, the issue was the ongoing cost structure around getting cars serviced but, more importantly, there was a real risk there would be a loss to the new car market in the Northern Territory. Many of those vehicles would probably have been purchased interstate and it would have had a significant negative impact on the economy without realising much savings.

Once we ran the ruler over it, it was identified remodelling the NT Fleet structure and changing some of the green car initiatives provided us with cost efficiency savings and improved NT Fleet servicing, and that is why the decision was made.

There is another issue we are managing through the process. Because we have made some savings initiatives and some of the agencies have reduced the number of vehicles they require, NT Fleet has an over-supply of stock. When we want to remove some of that stock we have to be careful not to flood the market and create negative problems for the second-hand vehicle market. There may be a couple of excess NT Fleet cars around at the moment as we try to water down removing some cars because we do not want to flood the market.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am pleased you came to this conclusion because our argument was always it was crazy to sell NT Fleet. It would not work for us or for private industry in the Territory.

It is a pity that type of assessment does not take place in other areas of the government. If you had done that with the BDR you might have found it worked.

Good assessment, good outcome. I like it because that is what we have been saying all along.

Can you tell us if you are going to abolish or privatise the Government Printing Office?

Mr GILES: We are conducting a review of the Government Printing Office at the moment. It is starting to lose money in a significant way. With new forms of technology and mediums, there are other ways for things to be done on a different monetary value basis. We are conducting an internal desktop review and are working out the best ways to move forward with that.

We are also mindful of the way the Government Printing Office is structured and the best way to utilise it. Member for Casuarina, as at 31 March, 27.3% of all sales were being outsourced. That has now increased to 34.8%, not as a direct reflection of any government policy but the way the business model is working. The Government Printing Office is a high cost model with a need to continue to upgrade infrastructure all the time and we are finding utilisation of an outsource market for the Government Printing Office a better working model.

To run a project management component where the work goes to the Government Printing Office in project management - some of that work will go towards the GPO and 38.4% is now being outsourced. That will continue to increase. We need to ensure, as part of the review, that if the GPO continues doing the work – the project management – it has the facilities to do so and, if they do, the best way to utilise that. If they do not, we need to consider what we do going forward to ensure we have the best technology and assets that are up-to-date to deliver the services government needs.

There is a desktop review and I anticipate there will be changes, but we do not know what they might be at this point.

Mr VATSKALIS: How many people work at the Government Printing Office?

Mr GILES: Member for Casuarina, there are 30 FTEs - 26 permanent employees and four temporary employees, including four administrative officers. The number of administrative officers has increased by two in the last eight months of the reporting period.

Mr VATSKALIS: Chief Minister, many people working at the GPO have specialised skills. What will happen to them if the government closes the printing office?

Mr GILES: No decision has made about that yet. We are doing a performance review on the GPO which will determine the way we structure government printing into the future. There are some highly skilled employees at the GPO, and their interests will be at the forefront of any government decision.

Mr VATSKALIS: How can you guarantee outsourced government printing would be done in Australia not overseas?

Mr GILES: There is no hard and fast policy framework for this. The government wants all the work to be done locally and there are policies to ensure we do that as much as possible because it is important for the local industry and the local economy.

Mr VATSKALIS: Chief Minister, Budget Paper No 3 page 53 states the government will be delivering savings and benefits to agencies by expanding the range of across government contracts. What does that mean and how will you do it?

Mr GILES: Member for Casuarina, the government is moving to a new model where agencies will be required to take a whole-of-government approach to the tendering process. In the past, individual agencies have had their own arrangements with different private sector contractors, but we believe a range of savings can be made through a whole-of-government approach to procurement. For example, the GPO does work for a number of agencies across government which helps reduce costs for those agencies.

Mr VATSKALIS: Chief Minister, usually agencies try to put everything in a big contract because of economies of scale. How can you guarantee this amalgamation will not affect local business? We understand local contractors are suffering? How will you ensure a department does not pile everything into one big contract with one supplier and everybody else in the Northern Territory misses out?

Mr GILES: I appreciate that comment, member for Casuarina, but I do not accept the premise of it because not everyone is suffering. However, panel contracts, which have been operating in a number of agencies,

provide an opportunity to give work to a number of different companies or businesses so one person does not get it all. This leads to better efficiencies in the government's tendering and procurement processes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have you done any economic modelling on this concept?

Mr GILES: The department does a range of economic modelling on the way things should be done. A budget Cabinet submission came forward about the way we should move forward to make savings in this regard and a streamlined process, as I have just outlined.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Chief Minister.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is it correct about 440 cars are being removed from NT Fleet? I am using the figures from page 63 of Budget Paper No 3 showing the difference between the mini-budget and today's budget.

Mr GILES: In the 2012-13 mini-budget, the number of light vehicles managed was 3025. In the 2012-13 estimate it was 2900, which is a reduction of 125. In the 2013-14 budget it is 2800, which is another reduction of 100 cars. In total, there are 225 fewer vehicles in the 2013-14 budget than in the mini-budget.

Mr WOOD: Is that a result of the review?

Mr GILES: It is partly the result of efficiency savings by agencies, but it is also partly because of the review. We used to purchase about 1000 vehicles a year; that has reduced to 750 because we have extended the life of the vehicles.

Mr WOOD: Is that partly reflected in the drop in surplus between the estimate for 2012-13 of \$15m to \$12m?

Mr GILES: Yes, that is correct.

Mr WOOD: Is there any loss of income by hanging onto vehicles longer? I might have asked this question. Previously, light vehicles were held for 40 000km - in some cases there may have been a time period as well – four-wheel drives were held for 80 000km. I presume that was because they fetched a better price when put up for auction. Will running them longer reduce the profitability of NT Fleet?

Mr GILES: At the back end it does not. It ensures better useability. Cars have changed over a number of years. I am sure you remember a vehicle warranty use to be for 20 000km then it was 40 000km, then 60 000km. Now vehicle warranties are for five years and 100 000km. We are ensuring we get the best efficiencies out of utilising new car vehicle warranties. We still will not be using the full amount, because we only reach three years and 60 000km. There might be a little more depreciation for three years as opposed to two, but at the back end that number is much smaller than at the front end.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Mr GILES: If you have a car for an extra year or an extra 20 000km, it depreciate by a lesser amount than when you first purchase the vehicle.

Mr WOOD: Are government businesses still required to buy vehicles from NT Fleet?

Mr GILES: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Does the Power and Water Corporation operate through NT Fleet?

Mr GILES: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Do they have to?

Mr GILES: Yes, they do because they are part of the government procurement process.

Mr WOOD: There has been much spouting about how it has to run like a private business.

Mr GILES: At the moment it comes under the government procurement framework. I do not want to get into questions about the Power and Water Corporation.

Mr WOOD: No, it was if they had to buy from the fleet. If they were operating as a business you would think there would be a choice. They do not have a choice?

Mr GILES: If changes were made to the Power and Water procurement framework it would have a choice of where vehicles were purchased or leased from. At the moment, Power and Water goes through the government procurement framework, which is why it uses NT Fleet.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Chair, the Chief Minister said he can answer questions on any outputs. Do you mind if I ask about Asian Relations?

Mr GILES: We will get to Asian Relations and Trade at the end. The officials for Asian Relations are in the other room at the moment.

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay. I am done with this.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes all outputs for the Department of Corporate and Information Services, which includes NT Fleet, Data Centre Services and the Government Printing Office.

Mr GILES: Can I say something?

Madam CHAIR: You can.

Mr GILES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank Kathleen Robinson and the officials who worked last night, sat around Tuesday night, all day yesterday, and came back early this morning to provide services and answers. I also thank the department for the cooperative relationship in facilitating government business. There have been some exciting outcomes in this portfolio, particularly with the efficiencies for NT Fleet, some of the reforms in the GPO and potential future reforms, also some of the increased focus on Information Technology, particularly around the new Telstra contract where we will roll out more 3G or mobile and broadband services. Thank you, Kathleen and your staff. It was a long night.

Madam CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who assisted the Chief Minister over the last three days.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

Madam CHAIR: I again welcome you, Chief Minister, as the Minister for Transport, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement.

Mr GILES: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I welcome Clare Gardiner-Barnes, on my right, Chief Executive of the Department of Transport, and Ernie Wanka is back again for another year, Executive Director of the Road Network Division. We also have Paul Rajan to provide advice.

In the interests of brevity, I will not go through my full statement. The Department of Transport is an exciting place to be. We have been progressing a range of reforms and initiatives, including opening MVR Parap on Saturday mornings.

We have been working tirelessly to improve our information technology processes around how much of the Department of Transport conducts its business, including putting Wi-Fi at bus interchanges and on buses. We are working to get more licence renewals online, registrations online, and we are also working towards getting people to get their roadworthiness inspections from the private sector rather than at test sheds, which provides a greater opportunity for people to do their business where they want rather than waiting in line at MVRs. I see a time where people will not need to go to a MVR to have their vehicle inspected. That may provide an opportunity for relocation of the MVR site in the future so MVR services provide more of a role for heavy vehicles, and the mums and dads have an opportunity to utilise the private sector inspectors and do things online.

We are working to develop contracts with some private sector providers which are confidential in nature at the moment, but are under negotiation where much of the MVR services can be done by third party providers as is done for other agencies, particularly around the billing structure.

There are many reform processes under way at the moment. I will not go through the whole department, but there are a number of different divisions and exciting aspects, including the work Ernie does with the road bases, the DriveSafe NT Remote, the continuation of the program the shadow minister was aware of - we have put a substantial amount of money into that extension frame. It is a really important component for building the social cohesiveness of many Territorians' lifestyle opportunities.

One of the unfortunate factors of recent times has been, coming into government, we set our mind that we wanted to build road and bridge network infrastructure, particularly in regional and remote areas, to ensure greater connectivity for Territorians. Part of that process is we offered to put up around 20% of funding for new road opportunities and sought support from the federal government for around 80% of that commitment. I am a firm believer the Northern Territory has never really been built and developed in regard to its road and infrastructure capacity, and we were keen to provide ongoing support through that.

In detailing the federal budget a few weeks ago, and some announcements made about the next stage of the nation building program - Nation Building 2, in direct comparison with Nation Building 1 - the Territory government was significantly short-changed. Some of our initiatives around NB2, and around additional initiatives, venture into the area of more than \$1bn where we could have had much more work done to build the Northern Territory. That was not forthcoming. There were a couple of announcements from the federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan, and commentary by the federal Roads minister, Anthony Albanese, suggesting they are providing road network money for the Northern Territory. That road network money will not come down until 2016-17 and is for things like Tiger Brennan Drive. There was great posturing by the federal Roads minister saying they were doing much work on Tiger Brennan Drive when the work commencing next month on Tiger Brennan between Woolner Road and Dinah Beach is being conducted by the Territory government. It has been a long transitional process. We were really short-changed in the federal budget.

We hope to work with a future Prime Minister, whether that is next week or after 14 September, to secure road funding for the Northern Territory to help build the Northern Territory in a whole range of areas. That includes the Carpentaria Highway, Tanami Road, Port Keats Road, Central Arnhem top road - a whole range of things which have not been supported.

I am happy to take questions on any output area. I presume you do not want me reading all the written questions?

Mr McCARTHY: You could table them, Chief Minister.

Mr GILES: As you ask questions I will quickly flip through them and, if I believe anything has content information you would be interested in, I will see whether I can table that or read out information for you.

Mr WOOD: Through the Chair, whilst we are tight for time, Chief Minister - this applies to what the Chair said before - this is the opportunity for the public to hear what the government is doing in relation to its budget. The problem with tabling documents and not reading them out is they disappear into *Hansard*, which the public will not know about because they pick it up later. Whilst I accept we are short on time, it needs to be made pretty clear that is a really important part of this process - public scrutiny of the government - when questions are asked the answers are given in public.

Perhaps we will have to live with that, but the principle is important. I would rather see it as the rule not the exception.

Mr GILES: Yes, I am happy to take questions in any area of Transport, any output groups.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, I accept what the member for Nelson said and time constraint is the issue here. That will be dealt with in a review of this Estimates Committee because 16 against 8 - the government got it wrong and ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, Standing Order 112: imputations. What you are saying is factually incorrect. Please control your comments. If you have a question for the minister I suggest you get on with it.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, thank you for coming back because there will be far more Territorians interested in this debate at 9:04 am as opposed to 3 am. Thank you for your time.

I will stick to those questions so let us get the elephant in the room out.

Mr GILES: Do you want to go through the questions?

Mr McCARTHY: No, let us get the elephant in the room out in relation to election promises. Between you and me and the public record, you can walk away from open speed limits in the Northern Territory. You can do that honourably, Chief Minister. I travel the Territory extensively. I have done over 300 000 km in four years and Territorians tell me they want things to remain the same.

Chief Minister, this is a plea to kick off the Transport portfolio in estimates. I ask you to walk away from the CLP election promise to return to open speed limits in the Northern Territory.

Mr GILES: Is that a question?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes, I ask you to walk away from the decision to open speed limits in the Northern Territory.

Mr GILES: No, you should ask a question about the budget.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, I made a plea to you ...

Mr GILES: You are making a political plea and it has no value in the estimates process. There are a whole range of questions you could ask in relation to the budget, and if you want to ask about the speed limit review ask the question, but do not use this forum for political grandstanding. I am happy to give you an answer on anything to do with the budget.

If you want to know how much the review cost, what we have looked at, the statistics, in our 11 year analysis of the Barkly Highway there has not been one speed-related road death since 2001. In the same time frame, about 500 people were killed on Territory roads and 45% of those deaths were alcohol-related, 23% were a result of speed, but those deaths are not directly attributed to the four main highways in the Northern Territory: the Barkly, Stuart, Victoria and Arnhem. Most of those deaths occurred on regional bush roads or urban centres. The majority of accidents on Territory roads involve males as opposed to females, and I can tell you exactly where those accidents happened, the horizontal and vertical causal factors, where there is a higher impact near roadhouses, and the changes we want to make. I can answer questions on a range of areas and give statistical analysis. I can also talk about the condition of the roads and the resources needed to maintain their structural integrity or the requirement for them to be renewed. The federal government not providing additional resources through Nation Building 2 to rebuild those roads or make improvements causes difficulties for Territorians driving on those roads, both privately and in a business capacity. There is a whole range of questions I can answer.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, I remind you of the death of a personal family friend, Michael Sim on the Barkly Highway. You cannot deny speed was a factor in that tragedy. Chief Minister, you have said in the House you have two reports on open speed limits. You are sitting on those reports. When will you release them?

Mr GILES: We will not be releasing those reports because they are being considered by Cabinet. I expect a Cabinet decision soon about how we move forward with the election commitment for open speed limits, possibly this week.

Mr WOOD: When Cabinet is finished will those reports, will they be made public?

Mr GILES: No.

Mr WOOD: Why not?

Mr GILES: Information contained in those reports is for analysis by government regarding the structural integrity of the road and how we can best direct our resources to improve road conditions. Also, they are Cabinet documents and Cabinet documents are not released to the public.

Mr WOOD: Besides the Cabinet document smokescreen, what is secret about the roads? Why would you want to hide a report on the state of the roads and a private company's opinion about what sections of the road would be safe for an open speed limit?

Mr GILES: Member for Nelson, I will be releasing information from that report, but I will not be releasing the report because it is a Cabinet document.

Mr WOOD: It is a publically-funded report about roads. It is not an ASIO report, not about terrorism, it is about a road.

Mr GILES: All work done within the confines of Cabinet is publicly-funded no matter who is in government. Cabinet documents remain within the secrecy of Cabinet and will continue to do so for a long time. Because these are Cabinet documents, they will continue to be withheld from the public. I am sure there is a significant amount of information in those reports that will be spoken about in the broader context.

Mr WOOD: How are we, as members of parliament, meant to debate that report if we are not allowed to see it? You will come up with a conclusion one way or the other, which means there will be public debate and we will be part of it whether we support it or not. It is hard to do that if the parliament is not allowed access to the review you base your decision on.

Mr GILES: I will ensure there is significant public information to debate.

Mr WOOD: That sounds like censorship to me.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, can you inform the committee if you have sought advice from the experts in road safety: the National Road Safety Council, Northern Territory Police, the doctors and nurses at hospitals, and the paramedics who deal with road trauma?

Mr GILES: A range of people have been consulted on this. The key aspect of the work undertaken looks at the structural integrity, design and makeup of the road infrastructure to identify the suitable or optimal speed that can be undertaken at every chainage point on those four highways. There are areas where the speed limit needs to come down, and areas where there is opportunity to increase the speed limit. Those decisions will be made by Cabinet once I make a presentation to Cabinet of the findings of those reports.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, you have the honour of working with the National Road Safety Council through a Northern Territory delegate who sits on that council. You also have great vision for the improvement of road transport infrastructure in the Territory which directly relates to Commonwealth funding. How can you tell Territorians you will risk the optimal funding from the Commonwealth and go in front of the National Road Safety Council with a decision that could be seen as being irresponsible and high risk, and risk the possibility of having reduced funding to deliver your plan?

Mr GILES: I do not accept the premise of the question. There is no risk to the funding based on a speed limit review. Three jurisdictions in Australia are looking at increasing speed limits because they believe the road quality, distances, fatigue, and a range of issues allow for them to be increased. Reviews are occurring in those jurisdictions. There is no financial threat being held over the head of Territorians and I cannot accept the premise of that question.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, you mentioned reviews in other states. The Queensland review is not talking about open speed limits. The Territory has set 130 km/h as its top speed level. The other states, I presume, would be working within 110 km/h and 130 km/h, which could be judged as acceptable. They are definitely not looking at open speed limits nor would any federal government accept that.

Mr GILES: Member for Barkly, I accept the premise of your question. They are some of things the other jurisdictions are looking at, but we have to look at what speed would be judged as acceptable in line with the infrastructure of the road structure at every chainage point. That report will inform Cabinet on a range of different information, some of which I will make available post a decision being made.

Member for Barkly, without being directly negative, you ran an anti-speed limit debate over a period of time while in government. During that debate you were clocked driving at 149 km/h on the Stuart Highway while saying no one should drive above 130 km/h. What you believe the speed limit should be, as shadow minister, is questionable. You said you made a mistake, but the Country Liberal government is debating, internally, whether or not speed limits should be changed. When we see something like that we ask questions. If it is not open, should it be 150 km/h, should it be 160 km/h, should it stay at 130 km/h, or should it be reduced? There is a whole range of different debates, but in the frame of the speed that you or other people have travelled, we have to work out where we set the base.

There is no federal funding being held over the head of the Territory government in this regard. There has been a wide-ranging consultation process, particularly about the design, structural integrity of the roads and the factors within that basis, and they form part of the decisions we will make as Cabinet.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Chief Minister, for raising my traffic infringement. I would like to put on the public record my thanks to the two police officers who stopped me, booked me, put three points on my licence, and made me pay \$300 to the Northern Territory, because they saved my life and are saving lives of other Territorians.

Can you put on the public record that you have consulted with police about open speed limits in the Northern Territory?

Mr GILES: I have spoken to a number of police regarding their opinion on the speed limit on major highways.

Mr WOOD: A little like the opinion of the BDR, 'I have spoken to a few police'. What is the official opinion? What is the official police view, not just a few police you met in the street?

Mr GILES: I am happy for you to speak with the Police Commissioner and ask his official opinion.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you.

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Nelson, do you have further questions on this issue?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr McCARTHY: I have many questions for the other portfolio outputs. Can we move on?

Mr WOOD: Are you going to Passenger Transport?

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, there was also a major election commitment to reduce the cost of living. Can you tell the committee how charging a senior \$1 on the bus network reduces the cost of living?

Mr GILES: Member for Barkly, as I have explained many times, the cost of providing bus services is heavily subsidised. At the time the decision was made, it was costing around \$22m a year to provide bus services. We were getting a very poor return on our investment - in the vicinity of 10%. I will be corrected if I am wrong; I do not have the brief in front of me.

By introducing a \$1 bus fare and changing the fare structure for other passengers we have increased the return on investment to about 15%. That has allowed us to reinvest in the fleet, including making improvements around the quality of buses, renewing fleet, fixing up interchanges and putting in place more bus shelters to meet the *Disability Discrimination Act*. It has allowed us to increase the number of routes, and there will be more routes to follow. Some of those were announced in the budget process. That is providing a better service.

It also reduces the amount of subsidy provided to the bus system, which allows us to put more money into areas such as the \$20m going to the next stage of Bellamack. This allows us to release more land and build more houses. The biggest issue around cost of living pressures is the price of housing, and the more housing the better. We cannot do that if we do not have money for land release and infrastructure headworks.

We had to ensure better performance and improvement in the bus service and fleet, and a better return on investment moving it from 10% to 15%, which allowed us to make upgrades in the bus service network. This allowed us to put money towards much-needed investments around land servicing and housing development so we have a greater supply market to meet the demand, which will reduce the cost of living pressures. We are already starting to see outcomes under our government. However, there will be much more improvement because we put those structural frameworks in place, investments are occurring, and there will be change over time.

Mr McCARTHY: What I like about the estimates process is the opposition is challenging policy, policy settings, and priorities. We talk about tough fiscal times - the previous government worked its way through the global financial crisis to deliver the Territory economy as one of the ...

Mr GILES: It is fair to say you borrowed your way through it.

Mr McCARTHY: ... fastest and most progressive in the country. We are talking about policy settings and priorities. Chief Minister, you talk about Wi-Fi on buses. I support that initiative but not in the current fiscal constraint because there are so many other priorities to fund. Chief Minister, can you tell us how much the Wi-Fi system cost to set up on buses and at interchanges.

Mr GILES: It costs about \$10 000 a bus to set up. A number of buses have already been set up across the Territory. I will get some more detailed information for you. There are 10 buses in Darwin with Wi-Fi capability, six in Alice Springs, and it is costing around \$120 000 to maintain the Wi-Fi services not just on the buses, but at the interchanges. The take-up rate has been substantial. I will get you some data on that in a second.

Since implementation, 8785 unique users - different phones, iPads, tablets or otherwise - have utilised the free service 55 531 times. That is an average of six times per unique user. I knew the take-up of Wi-Fi service at interchanges and on buses would be quite good, but it is interesting walking through the interchange here or in Palmerston, or getting on a bus and seeing the number of people using this service. I did not expect it to be taken up as well as it has been. I hear anecdotal comments about people who are not using it asking, 'Why have we made this investment?' For the people who use it the compliments about modernising the fleet, keeping up with new technology services and ensuring we are in a comparable leading position with our public service network against other jurisdictions in Australia is very important. It means we are competing with the rest of Australia. We run a model from our broad-based economy where we have a very good education sector, particularly through CDU, and we are trying to attract overseas visitors, particularly for education. These are some of the areas we need to invest in to ensure we have a competitive environment to attract students. The services provided on buses and at interchanges are very well-received.

Mr WOOD: Chief Minister, yesterday you were talking about savings. I cannot remember the savings you had made, but believe it was something which cost \$12 000, and you said, 'We have made many cuts in many small areas and they add up'. I take the point the member for Barkly made: Wi-Fi might be terrific, but it is not essential. You have put \$120 000 into Wi-Fi and cut other things which were more essential. Why, in this era of cutting, did you introduce something new when it could have been brought on when the budget was in a better state?

Mr GILES: Member for Nelson, the budget remains in a perilous state. It will not be until 2017-18 that we can start paying down Labor debt. If we were going to wait for Wi-Fi on buses until Labor debt was paid down, we would be looking well past 2020. That \$5.5bn of Labor debt will take us a long time to repay because of the revenue basis we are on, and we are not going to reach a fiscal balance until 2017-18. We need to ensure we continue to balance our priorities so we invest in new things that keep us competitive with the rest of the nation and we keep building the Territory while trying to find efficiencies and savings in other areas.

Getting the balance right is always difficult for government, but it is important we maintain a leading edge in the way we do our business. That is why we are looking at things like reforming the way our port is servicing so we can improve capacity and capability to increase trade, but also to provide greater economies of scale to reduce the cost of living pressures by increasing the supply chain structure.

There is a range of areas we invest in we believe are important for the growth of the Northern Territory and this is one area. Another thing we did to support the revenue streams of Darwin buses was allow advertising on buses. We anticipate in 2013 the government will gain an additional \$250 000 in revenue based on changes that allow advertising on buses, which in turn allows us to reinvest that revenue in other areas of government. It is about getting a good balance on revenue streams and efficiency savings across a range of government priorities.

Mr WOOD: Chief Minister, you said the government is making cuts, even in small areas, to save money, but we have spent \$120 000 on Wi-Fi for buses. People are able to work on their smartphone so why is 20 minutes on a bus with Wi-Fi an essential item to spend money on?

Mr GILES: Member for Nelson, school students think this is a fantastic initiative. Many of them catch buses where Wi-Fi is connected and it saves them the cost of data downloads through their smartphones and tablets. I would like every bus to have Wi-Fi, but we are not installing it at the moment because we are being efficient with our service delivery and it would be expensive to roll it out fully.

However, we are making public bus travel more attractive by improving the fleet and ensuring we are competitive with the rest of the nation. Students who travel on buses with Wi-Fi love it, and it is a great way to support students and education.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, I have a smartphone and the next time I am at a bus stop in Darwin I will look for a school student to show me how to connect to Wi-Fi. On that subject ...

Mr GILES: I will comment on that before you go on, member for Barkly. When we made the announcement at Darwin bus interchange it took about 15 seconds to get it working. It is very simple and I am happy to show you, member for Barkly.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Chief Minister. I remember when the Labor government launched the trip planner they gave me a tablet which kept shutting down. It was pretty scary because the media was there. You are younger than me, Chief Minister, and more tech savvy. However, what analysis have you done into ongoing support and training and costs incurred when you go down the technology road?

Mr GILES: There has been much analysis and it has been much cheaper than I thought. I will take the question on notice so I can get the exact number for the member for Barkly. There is a cost to service the interchanges, and the buses are not as expensive as the interchanges, but I will get the data for you.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, could you clarify the question for the record.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, can you provide ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, can you speak slowly because Mr Keith is typing the question.

Question on Notice 3.17

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, can you provide for the committee any economic analysis conducted into the investment in IT technology, operating systems, staffing, training, and the ongoing IT support needed for the WI-Fi system on Territory buses?

Madam CHAIR: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question number 3.17.

Madam CHAIR: We will take a five minute break. Part of the Chief Minister's request last night was there be a five minute break at 9.30 am. We will resume at 9.35 am.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Minister. I welcome back the officials accompanying you. We will continue with Transport and the member for Barkly.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Chief Minister, in the budget there is an appropriation of \$1m for a new ticketing system. Once again, what economic analysis has been conducted around the investment in IT technology, the operating system, staffing, training, and ongoing support?

Mr GILES: Member for Barkly, I will take the question on notice but I will give a preamble. There is an issue, as I am sure you would appreciate as former Transport minister, with the ticketing process. Because there is no electronic analysis of what tickets are sold and to whom, there is a very poor database in the Department of Transport about what routes people are taking, what times people are taking those routes, and the passengers taking those routes.

The purpose of the ticketing system will provide efficiencies in how tickets are allocated. It will also allow the department to do more planning around where the high utilisation routes are and ensure we get the bus infrastructure better allocated to high-demand routes. That will provide an increased level of opportunity, particularly for people who like to analyse data, to see where we need to provide bus services more regularly. It will also allow us to identify potential new routes. It will also allow efficiencies at the back end, or the downstream component, about better application of new technologies, including an application to monitor where buses are, what time buses are running, and how long before they reach the next bus stop.

The electronic ticketing process will allow us to sell tickets in a more streamlined fashion, allow better planning, and allow better IT mapping of where buses are moving at a point in time so people who want to monitor what time buses will be arriving - there will be more up-to-date information in that regard. I will hand over to Paul Rajan, who will be able to provide a more detailed answer. The idea of the ticketing system is to improve the services we deliver.

Mr RAJAN: Thanks, minister. Paul Rajan, Executive Director Transport Services. Member for Barkly, there are several components to the answer. The first is around the analysis being undertaken. We have spent the last 18 months talking with industry representatives about systems in use in other places, thinking about the context of the Northern Territory service as we are a reasonably small operation compared to some of the larger national providers, and getting advice about what type of system might be most appropriate for us and most robust for our conditions. We wanted to avoid going down the path of some of the bigger jurisdictions with their high-level integrated ticketing systems which have been massively expensive and not particularly robust. We have reached a couple of conclusions around that. We wanted a system where each vehicle was stand-alone, but also where the data from those vehicles dropped itself automatically into a database on a regular basis so we could provide a detailed analysis of what was happening on vehicles.

The second was obtaining data about where people get on and off routes, how long they spent on buses, and mapping their travel needs. That gives us huge insight into not only bus loading, but also into operational profiles of vehicles. One of the systems we are looking at will allow us to integrate servicing and maintenance arrangement for fleet vehicles to achieve much better use. At the moment, about 80% of our fleet is live running, in other words, active. That is much higher than just about anywhere else in the country, but we believe we can even improve on that.

The final aspect is around ticketing. From time to time we receive requests for particular types of tickets from the community, and there has already been a question about ticketing revenue. One of the things in moving from our existing system, where we have Darwin bus running one system and Buslink running another and we pre-print tickets and the drivers hand them out - will allow us to be much more creative with the tickets we issue. One we will look at quickly once we have implemented is seniors have asked, 'Why can't we have a period concession holder ticket?' We can look at that when we have a much better ticket system.

Those are the things we are looking at. We currently have staff talking with people in Queensland about a system we believe we can use which will integrate with our existing processes. However, we will move carefully to ensure whatever system we put in place is right for the Territory.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Chief Minister. I support that. It is a great move and I understand it.

Chief Minister, with the existing system, how do you calculate how much seniors are paying the \$1 fare?

Mr GILES: I will ask Paul Rajan to provide an answer.

Mr RAJAN: Paul Rajan, Executive Director Transport Services. Member for Barkly, we cannot separate what seniors are paying from what other concession holders are paying. Pensioners and carers, for example, are in the same group. We can estimate the amount of revenue from the sale of \$1 concession tickets, but we cannot identify seniors within that amount.

Mr GILES: That is why the ticketing system will provide better data analysis, and we can do the mapping on the back end of that. The point you raised about time frames of people using those services - at the moment we do not know where people travel to and from or the time frame in which they travel. When we get that data, which is what the ticketing system will provide, we can start making more strategic policy decisions about the design of the ticket system in regard to what we are selling and who we are selling it to.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, the ticketing system is a step in the right direction. Can you confirm students will not be charged on our public buses under the new system?

Mr GILES: There is no plan to change the fare structure at the moment. If data mapping shows better efficiencies and services can be provided by changing components changes may occur, but there is no plan to change or increase the fare structure.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, law and order was a big part of the government's 2012 election campaign. It is an old chestnut of the CLP. In relation to the commercial passenger industry and appropriations, how does the budget support the safety of passengers, transport operators and the public?

Mr GILES: A range of things can be considered such as the work done by public transport safety officers. The government has continued that initiative and will continue to ensure random spot checks of the bus fleet. The government is also continuing work with cameras in taxis, and police continue to provide strong assistance to taxis. If you have a more specific question, member for Barkly, I am happy to provide another answer.

Mr McCARTHY: The question was about law and order and what the government has outlined in the budget to support that in the transport industry. I have searched through the budget papers and cannot find investment in public transport. We hear about growth in public transport. I was on the number 10 bus recently when transport safety officers had to engage with a passenger. It was good to witness a practical application of that great initiative. As minister, I had hoped to increase investment into transport safety officers so hot spots could be targeted. If the person had not been on the bus we would not have had the trouble with antisocial behaviour.

I asked the question because I cannot find anything in the budget to indicate what the government is doing about law and order initiatives which increase safety.

Mr GILES: The transport safety unit currently has eight patrolling officers, which is an increase from the original four. The unit is funded for 13 staff and recruitment has commenced to employ more public transport safety officers which will provide better safety for people travelling on Darwin bus services.

The government is also committed to putting an extra 120 police on the beat. We have a low turnover rate at the moment; the lowest it has been in the last six years. More police on the beat provide greater responsiveness and proactive policing services for the community. We have a strong focus on law and order. The additional police and public transport safety officers will provide a stronger level of service so people can have a greater level of security.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, you have not mentioned safety and security at taxi ranks. Will the government continue to invest in secure taxi ranks, particularly in the Darwin CBD?

Mr GILES: Member for Barkly, work around security at taxi ranks will continue. It is a program of the previous Labor administration and we have adopted it and continue to provide the service. It is important to ensure the safety of passengers and drivers is top priority in the commercial passenger vehicle industry, particularly with taxis. We will continue to deliver on that. There is a range of reforms we are seeking to progress around the taxi industry into the future and we have been working, since taking government, on how we can make improvements. It is a long process to get a streamlined model on improvements to the taxi and commercial passenger vehicle industry. You would recall the Five Nines report undertaken a number of years ago by the previous government about potential reforms which could be put in place.

A number of positive initiatives were not put in place. We will try to adopt some of those and put in more of our own initiatives. Over time, you will see an increase in productivity gains and service level improvements in the CPV industry. We continue to have CCTV cameras in all taxis, which helps provide a level of security and allows us to provide increased security benefits and services to the CPV industry - where there is agreement from the CPV industry, including stakeholders such as the Taxi Council. We will continue to roll out new initiatives as they come to hand.

Mr McCARTHY: Staying with the CPV industry and taxis, many stakeholders have commented on the increase in taxi licences. You saw the analysis of the 10 peak licences. Your government choose to increase taxi licenses by how many? How many full licences ended up on the market in addition to the existing ones?

Mr GILES: It is important we get taxis numbers right as a ratio to the population. There is significant concern in the general public about availability of taxis, particularly at peak periods. We have to ensure we have the supply of taxis to meet demand. At the same time, we have to ensure we are not over supplying the taxi market to a point where the industry becomes unsustainable.

Some of the reviews and performance measures we are looking at are about how we better match supply and demand and free up the market to provide solutions as taxis owners see fit.

In regard to taxi licences, the first 10 taxi licences for Darwin were the conversion of the peak period taxis to full-time operation. This was completed in January 2013. A number of taxi licences are expected to be released later this year, and we are still making a determination as to whether and how they will be released. Also, there is consideration as to whether or not any of those taxi plates should be issued as MPTs which can provide a greater serviceability for people with a disability.

You will recall not long after I took the role of Transport minister we made changes to the taxi lift scheme and the subsidy scheme, which saw a doubling of the allowance from \$10 to \$20 a fare and increased the number of fares individuals were allowed to utilise throughout the year. Since that very smart initiative was undertaken, it has improved the serviceability of taxis for people who access MPTs. There will continue to be a range of service changes in that area.

I am mindful of ensuring we do not over supply the market with taxi licences and taxi plates. I am also keen to ensure we work to stamp out the ongoing allegations and concerns around the alleged illegal subleasing of plates. Those allegations, if substantiated - there are several that could be substantiated - provide a very difficult environment for drivers to operate in, and penalises drivers who are driving on other people's licences. That is not to say it is a widespread issue, but I am aware of several allegations from a number of people that some drivers have to pay to drive a taxi. We are investigating to identify where those activities are occurring. It is not allowable under our system, and we need substantial reform in the taxi industry to enable better conditions for owners of plates, better conditions for drivers, and to ensure we match the service level requirements to passengers of the taxi industry.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, it is good to see a pattern emerge. There have been hits to the cost of living but, then, there are also revenue-raising opportunities for government - service delivery efficiencies, so that is good.

Once again, in the priorities and MVR services - a major election commitment was MVR services for the bush. A major priority of the previous government was to deliver MVR services to the bush. We can talk about investment in the future and reducing costs to government when we have fewer people in prisons. I support the initiative of MVR services and we do not need to go into them; you have alluded to some and the media releases talk about the new initiatives around Motor Vehicle Registry services.

Minister, the Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Centre has a major refurbishment going on with its Malandari Store in Borroloola and has office space up for grabs. They are looking for good tenants. One of the election commitments was to put services into Borroloola to normalise the town. If we can get an MVR operating at Borroloola the real estate is waiting - it will be brand new. It is Robinson Road CBD frontage; it would be great to see. That is an election commitment. My concerns are ...

Mr GILES: Can I answer that question? Under the previous government's desire to run the growth town model, there was a commitment to put MVR services in all growth towns. That has not happened in any of the growth towns. We are committed to putting MVR services in a range of high priority communities as a first step, see how it works, then roll it out to other areas.

I will take up the idea of Mabunji. Borroloola is an area where we want MVR services. Work is going on behind the scenes to ensure we can provide serviceability. We are considering a range of issues - the level of take-up of MVR services in those locations, the number of vehicles registered and unregistered, the number of licensed and unlicensed drivers, how we have instructors available to train people to drive, how we have appropriate licensed people to conduct vehicle inspections. I know we have some of those services in Borroloola.

We also need to look at how we run a licensing regime. You will see we recently increased licences to 10 years. That has an important component which works well in the urban centres such as Darwin, where people have to frequent MVR on a less frequent basis, but when you undertake models like that it means people in smaller population centres have to attend MVR even less. We then look at the work flow for staff, how many staff will be required, and ensure you have a level of amenity of MVR services. If you have one officer who takes four weeks leave a year it means the officer is not available for four weeks work a year. How do we ensure we have the workload to meet the service requirements in that area? There is a whole range of things - that is a global perspective.

The other components here also include: how we manage the DriveSafe NT Remote component to ensure people are licensed; how we prioritise where DriveSafe NT Remote will go because DriveSafe NT Remote does not force itself into communities, it is invited. If Borroloola was requesting it, that component would

have an opportunity to go on our forward works plan. The area in contention, not in a negative way, is we do hot spot work where we go to a location to try to get everyone licensed and all the cars registered.

What that means is everyone's licence and renewal comes up in the same week once a year, once every three years, or whatever the time frame might be. That would mean peak periods when MVR services are required rather than a constant flow. We model a region such as Borroloola to ensure we have a constant flow, match that with staff workloads, and ensure we have an efficient model so it is not too expensive to lease space or for IT. A whole range of things are going into the thinking around that. There are a number of places we are looking at such as Borroloola, Wadeye, Maningrida, and the Tiwi Islands.

This work will continue and there will be an outcome - but how do we do it.

You have mentioned Mabunji and the office space available. Is it better for us to set up our own office or is it better to outsource services? We are looking at it at the moment. It is not as high a priority as setting up an office in Borroloola - but not far below - whether or not we can run a service level agreement with local government to do the transactions for MVR on a broad basis. There is much work going on. Watch this space. We are not going to rush into it because we want to get the model right. Much planning has to go on behind the scenes.

Madam CHAIR: Chief Minister, it is 10 am. We resolved you would have 15 minutes on Darwin Port and 15 minutes on Asian Relations. Is that ...

Mr GILES: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: In that case I would like to thank your ...

Mr WOOD: We are not ...

Mr McCARTHY: We are going to continue, Madam Chair, with Transport and we will get to Darwin Port. The member for Nelson has some important questions around road transport infrastructure ...

Madam CHAIR: You would like to amalgamate ...

Mr McCARTHY: ... if we can continue.

Madam CHAIR: You will use your ...

Mr GILES: No, the resolution made last night when Labor and the Independent walked out - I made a recommendation to the Chair that, in the interests of good governance, transparency and accountability, rather than proceed, even though we had a quorum, it was not fair on Territorians. I recommended we finish and have two more hours today. We set 40 minutes for DCIS, 45 minutes for Transport, 15 minutes for the Port Authority and 15 minutes for Asian Relations and Trade. I cannot see the time, but if we have reached 10 am, that was the agreed time frame ...

Madam CHAIR: It is 10.01 am.

Mr GILES: It is not about gagging or shutting down debate. We were open for these questions last night.

Mr WOOD: It was physically shut down. It is stupid to be asking questions at 2 am.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson ...

Mr WOOD: No, the minister stated he wanted to go all night. The reality is that did not make sense.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I have to stop you.

Mr WOOD: You are always stopping me.

Madam CHAIR: That is because you are always speaking out of turn.

Mr WOOD: Yes, Madam schoolmaster.

Madam CHAIR: This is eating into your time. I would like, on behalf of the committee, to thank the Department of Transport staff for coming back this morning. We will now call the officials for the Darwin Port.

Mr GILES: Can I thank Jasmin, Paul, Clare and Ernie for their time today and on Tuesday and Wednesday waiting for this debate. It is an area I am passionate about. The members for Nelson and Barkly, and all my colleagues, are also passionate about it. It is unfortunate things could not continue last night. We were open to do business last night and, at any point when there are questions about Transport you want answered, I am more than happy to do that. Member for Nelson, I am happy to answer your questions.

Mr WOOD: I will give you them to look at in your spare time.

Mr GILES: Thank you for your help and for staying around late yesterday, even though you did not get on.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Minister, for clarifying that last night you said you would take questions on notice.

DARWIN PORT CORPORATION

Mr GILES: Do you want an introduction?

Madam CHAIR: Yes, that would be great.

Mr GILES: I would like to welcome Terry and Anne from the Darwin Port Corporation. I am happy to take questions on any areas of the Port Corporation from the word go. I will not make an opening statement.

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, I will not make a political statement, but it was interesting when you used to hammer away about the bulk loading facility at the port. You did not get it and just played politics with it. I had the pleasure and honour to learn all about it. How is it progressing? How are the customers coming online?

Mr GILES: The port is going very well. We now have an open and transparent government ready for business. In the first three months of taking on the role of Chief Minister we have already started up Sherwin Iron and Australian Ilmenite. That is going to see increased utilisation of the port, increased income for the port, and we want to see more business at the port.

What we will see into the future under the new regime of an open and accountable government open for business, is a greater need for port servicing for industry both in import and export. I gave an answer yesterday to the Leader of the Opposition about how I see the port progressing in the future. We have people doing initial scoping analysis at the moment about what those requirements and opportunities will be for the port into the future, and how we can best model options for increasing capacity at the port, including quay line and hard stand area, reefer points for things such as the abattoir, what we can do to improve work around operation of the crane and the containerised components, and also Darwin's requirements for a second port facility, particularly in relation to bulk loading and unloading facilities. The government is also investigating what downstream opportunities there could be for petrochemical plants or any other industrialisation of a second port facility. That would work in line with opportunities around the oil and gas industry we see coming up in the Territory.

The way I see the opportunity for growth of the Territory, particularly in the oil and gas field, is through the development of Darwin LNG and ENI and now INPEX. Those projects have set a substantial framework for development into the future. When the pipeline is built for INPEX we will have a 890 km pipeline running through a 5 m easement with a SUPAC approval process coming onto unencumbered land at Middle Arm, and that land is available for another company should they wish to bring gas onshore. Projects in the Browse Basin could have an opportunity to utilise that pipeline easement to bring their product onshore.

For Darwin port and the Marine Supply Base being project-managed by the Department of Infrastructure - now part of Darwin port - that means greater requirements to provide services to offshore industries. Last Friday we were on site in Berrimah to turn the sod for the service site for the Shell floating LNG plant. That was an exciting day. It is not often highlighted in the public sphere, but Darwin is the service centre base for Shell's floating LNG plant which is currently being built in a number of locations overseas. That plant will need to utilise Darwin ports, so, we need to ensure we have the infrastructure to support the opportunities now and into the future.

Because of the way logistics supply works, we have a port at capacity when it is being utilised at just 65%. Darwin Port currently operates at near 40% utilisation. We average 40% and it peaks at 50% when companies such as Shell start doing more bulk loading. The utilisation component of the port will increase because Sherwin is sending out three or four lots of 70 000 tonnes of product to a company in China for testing. If some of those things are successful, we may see an increase in demand for bulk exports. With mineral discovery options for the Territory that might lead to mining development, there will be a greater need for Darwin port utilisation. We have been doing the concept study to identify current and emerging trends so we can design our key infrastructure to support the serviceability of the industries likely to have operations in the Territory. In the short term, we will see models, ideas and options of how we increase those opportunities into the future.

I spoke about the offshore oil and gas industry and what we are doing about policy reinforcement in regard to not having a domestic gas reservation policy. In the near future we will see people who want gas development onshore, and there has been a range of explorations conducted over a number of years. Some companies operate a more proactive basis in regard to exploration. Some do not adhere to the policy of 'use it or lose it'. For those who are using it, there are positive signs that some onshore development will continue, which will be a good thing. It also means we need greater capacity at the port because if there is onshore development, there will be a need to import products and equipment to service those areas.

There was discussion some time ago about a pipeline from Tennant Creek to Mt Isa to tap into the national supply grid. In regard to the national supply grid, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia are all networked on a pipeline to receive gas for their energy markets.

Some jurisdictions are working out their energy security solutions for the future. I do not pinpoint New South Wales, but there is great opportunity for us to look at a pipeline connection between Alice Springs and Moomba. Many people see that as pie in the sky, but it is highly visionary and allows the Northern Territory to become a supply base of gas into the national market. Without going into commercial-in-confidence arrangements, as you would appreciate Kon, I am working behind the scenes to get financial modelling on that by the private sector at no cost to us at this point in time -I do not anticipate a cost to us -to see what the demand structures are on the energy supply cycle for power generation in those other jurisdictions, what could be obtained from the Territory, and what the requirement of that pipeline would be.

When we understand the financial modelling and economies scaled around that pipeline it will set the framework for a greater level of investment in the Northern Territory. There is a range of companies looking at the Territory, which I cannot talk about but which could, potentially, do some more work in the Territory. Even if we got one, that would be substantial, but we are working with a range of different players. I am talking to a range of different people who might be looking at investing in the Northern Territory and will support these needs. Are you happy for me to keep talking?

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, thank you for that.

Mr GILES: I have a little more I can add, which is good for the Territory, if you want?

Mr McCARTHY: Yes. I recommend a firm hand on the tiller. I had about 60 questions and did not want to keep public officials here all night. That is why we are in this quandary, but I have a couple of minutes left. It is good to see appropriation into fixing the CLP legacy of the storm water problem. You have to get that right. I have less than a minute. How is the work on solving the mud wave?

Mr GILES: What mud wave?

Mr McCARTHY: Chief Minister, you have to get down there. I ask now because I did not want to keep Transport officials here until 6 am. I would love to make some visits and would love briefings. I have more to discuss and we can do it that way, Chief Minister, if you are happy. I offer that with honesty and integrity. It is a really exciting part of the Territory's development. I want to keep pace with it, and have always said I want kids in the Barkly involved in it.

Mr GILES: There is no port in the Barkly at the moment.

Mr WOOD: You are looking for a second port.

Mr McCARTHY: Will you allow the CEO to give me a quick outline of how we are going with the mud wave?

Mr GILES: We might take that on notice. You are able to have briefings, just let my office know when you would like one. We can also provide information on what is happening with the MSB. There was a delay from September to December on the MSB, partly because of the delay in the SUPAC environmental approval around the MSB - a federal issue which has caused us trouble.

We also had an issue identifying harder rock than was expected for the dredging component. It would be good for you to get an update on the potential around tug pens - particularly cyclone rated tug pens - the future for pilings services, and how the piling services might operate with INPEX. We have struck a deal with INPEX where we can provide 24/7 all tides access to Darwin port to a substantial depth.

We are looking to get Charles Point patches work done so we have all tides access. At the moment we do not have all tides access. We have 24-hour access but not all tides. That will be a substantial improvement to our port.

We are working with shipping lines to identify ways to increase levels of importing goods and services into Darwin rather than through Brisbane. These are a work in progress but, in the interests of openness and transparency, much is happening.

I am happy to chat with you about that. I am happy to talk to Terry, and am sure Terry would be happy to give you a broad briefing on the performance structure and opportunities into the future and you can have a tour of the port.

It is now after 10.15 am. If you want, I can take a question on notice about the mudflats.

Mr McCARTHY: Wave minister -I am an old surfer too, I might add. You have a maritime expert there, an old surfer here ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, before you go, you will have to clarify the question with Russell. Perhaps you can do that while I thank the Darwin Port staff for coming, and welcome the Asian Relations officials.

Output 19.1 - Asian Engagement and Trade

Mr GILES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I welcome Mr Peter Carew, Chief Executive of the Department of Business, and Mr Brian O'Gallagher, Executive Director, Asian Engagement, Trade and Investment, also from the Department of Business. I am happy to take questions in any area.

Mr VATSKALIS: Chief Minister, I am pleased to see there is another crazy man advocating a pipeline from Alice Springs to Moomba. When I first flagged it everybody thought I was crazy. I am glad we are two now; I do not feel so lonely.

Mr GILES: There are many more behind me.

Mr VATSKALIS: If you look at what Santos did, buying into Western Petroleum, and the fact Santos owns the gas fields in Moomba - all the ducks are in a row and we are on a winning trip.

Chief Minister, the Labor government recognised Asia was the future of the Territory, and I am pleased to hear you follow the same trend. Is the Asian Engagement and Trade unit still in existence in your portfolio?

Mr GILES: It is within my portfolio and I am the minister, but it is situated within the Department of Business to ensure we get greater alignment with the trade and business component.

Mr VATSKALIS: Is it still there?

Mr GILES: It is still there, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Good, that is what I want to hear. How many people work there?

Mr GILES: We answered this question last night. There are currently 14.4 staff dedicated to the integrated economic approach.

Mr VATSKALIS: How many of these people speak Mandarin, how many speak Korean, and how many speak Japanese?

Mr GILES: We have one Vietnamese speaker, and we access interpreter services as required.

Mr VATSKALIS: From my experience as the previous minister for Mines doing much work with China, we found we did not get the quality of service from translation services in Australia; you need somebody there all the time. From experience, I urge you to have a unit with native language speakers if you are going to do business in China or Korea. Initially, we had many difficulties.

Mr GILES: In the recent trip the Deputy Chief Minister undertook to China, part of that business delegation was Gerry Wren, a highly influential and well-known Chinese speaker. I understand that provided great opportunities for facilitation. One thing Cabinet has agreed on is the potential opportunity of setting up an office in Jakarta. That agreement has been made - it has not been announced. That will provide an opportunity for us to get better integration into Indonesia. With 240 million people, a growing middle class, increasing GDP every year on a per capita basis, that provides opportunities.

It is important to get the right people in the right locations. On my recent trip to Indonesia, I also went to Singapore. In Indonesia we were working closely with a highly-influential Indonesian business person who really opened doors to certain areas. I fully appreciate what you are saying. If we proceed down that avenue of opening an office, which is a great initiative, particularly if we can work with our Queensland counterparts for an office of northern Australia, which is the avenue I am moving towards, identifying the right person with the language skills and competency to understand how Territorians operate is important in that mix.

Mr VATSKALIS: The member for Blain, who speaks Indonesian and has links with Jakarta, would make a very good candidate. Can you find him a post and ...

Mr GILES: You will have to be a referee for people ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You are putting an office in Jakarta with a population of 260 million people. How many offices are you going to put in China with a population of 1.3 billion?

Mr GILES: It is still a consideration at the moment. One thing I am working on, which is progressing, is if we want to engage in this area we need to do it on a collective basis. There are opportunities for northern Australia, not just the Northern Territory. When I say northern Australia, I consider the whole of the Territory. If we can get efficiencies with other jurisdictions it provides us an opportunity to get best bang for our buck and not just have it in Jakarta, but other strategic locations.

As you can imagine, I am working behind the scenes to try to make some of these things happen.

Mr VATSKALIS: Has your department developed any policies to attract investment from Southeast Asia to the Territory?

Mr GILES: We are still developing the Asian engagement strategy. I do not want to rush this process. We are facilitating all our investment on a four pillars approach around economic development underpinned by economic, social, cultural, environmental aspects, and trying to build a matrix framework into how investment comes in that area. That will be the basis of how we develop the strategy.

This is a work in progress, but many different things are happening. I have visited East Timor to start developing a relationship, particularly around some of the social and cultural values. Going to Jakarta, we spelt out the investment opportunities in the Northern Territory. There is a great deal of interest there, the same with Singapore. My colleague, Mr Tollner, had the same options around China.

We are starting to get a high level of interest so it is important to look at the governance structure of those investment opportunities. For example, around the Ord River - and we have had a number of people express interest in the Ord -we are talking about Stage 3 of the Ord. I have instructed our officials to start thinking, 'We have Stage 3. How do we ensure we get the best economic gain for the Territory rather than just Western Australia', who we are keen to work with, but are there opportunities for three, four or five, or is that an unrealistic idea? If there is, how do we ensure we get through those four pillars of economic development into Asia? How does that support that development, and how does that support the development of the northern Australian food bowl - the supply of food and grocery products for food security for the Territory and the rest of Australia.

It is not just about Asia; it is about the Territory - Darwin, Alice Springs, the regional areas, the rest of Australia. There are important investors we need to attract because, as I am sure you understand, member for Casuarina, the ability to attract finance into the Territory helps build our economy and that is what builds infrastructure. The framework around those four pillars is Asian engagement. When that strategy is finally developed and released it will be the foundation on which we move forward.

Mr VATSKALIS: I suggest you look at policy developed by the department of Primary Industry at the time of our attempt to attract investment from China. China is investing in the Territory heavily with mining and exploration, and China is investing in the Ord. Have you set up a regular meeting with the Chinese Embassy?

Mr GILES: We have not as yet. I have been invited, on a number of occasions, to go to China to chat with a range of officials, including embassy officials in Australia and overseas. It is about us getting our timing and priorities right. I do not want to be, as the new Chief Minister three months into the job, having travelled all around the world and not done the fundamentals of preparing for estimates. It is about getting the balance right. There will be a trip soon, but there is no timing around that. We will ensure we make the right connectivity.

I am also mindful - I reflect on a comment I overheard from minister Tollner the other day - that we want a good balance of investors in the Territory. We want Territorians to invest, Australians to invest, people from overseas to invest, but we need a balance of where our investment comes from so we have a tenure mix of that investment because there are geopolitical issues in how investments come into the Northern Territory as I foresee them into the future, and whether we have investment from a range of different nations, a range of different states and jurisdictions, and a range of different Territorians. When we get a good tenure mix investment we will have a sound footing as a base for the Territory to move forward. That is what I am working towards, not just one nation in itself.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am aware the Commonwealth government keeps an eye on who is investing and where in the Territory. Are you aware the Chinese Embassy has an agreement with the Territory government, signed last year, for regular briefings and regular meetings?

Mr GILES: There are a range of different agreements between the Northern Territory and Chinese interests; the Chinese government, Chinese Investment Bank and so forth. Those agreements will continue to be facilitated through this government and built upon, and there are some that need renewal at the moment. We will continue with that work.

Mr VATSKALIS: Chief Minister, I applaud your focus on Asia. I have advocated that for a long time. We are closer to Jakarta and Singapore than to Canberra.

Mr GILES: We are closer to Timor than my home in Alice Springs.

Mr VATSKALIS: If you are looking for clients, there are about two billion people to our north and about 25 million to our south, so I know where the focus for the Northern Territory is. Was Minister Tollner's trip to China part of your Asian attraction strategy?

Mr GILES: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: What was the purpose of the trip?

Mr GILES: The purpose was to lay the framework for when I go. Minister Tollner met some business people about specific business initiatives, but also met some high level officials in the Chinese government which sets the frame for when I go. There was an option for me to go first, but I thought it was good for minister Tollner to make those introductions and I go in at a later date. The feedback I have received to date is it is a good opportunity. If the manufacturing plant for construction equipment comes to fruition it will provide me with the opportunity to do the next level of investment, and that is a good way to go.

We have had a range of different ministers go to different locations, such as Minister Westra van Holthe going to Houston. I have been asked a number of times to go to Houston to talk to officials from some of the top Fortune 500 companies looking at mining and investment. In the Cabinet structure you want ministers in lead agencies setting the framework first so someone like me, in my role as Chief Minister, can have the high level conversations and seal the deal, if deals are an option. What Minister Tollner did, despite the negative media commentary, was fantastic and set us up for a really good outcome when I go.

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not criticise ministers travelling to Asia; we encourage it. I would be the last one to talk about it, because if you do not go they do not come. We have to invite them.

Mr GILES: I agree.

Mr VATSKALIS: As you have said you will be an open and transparent government, can I have a list of the places minister Tollner visited and the names of people he met so we can see he did not go for a holiday or shopping. The previous Labor government did it before we left and when we came back. Is it possible, Chief Minister?

Mr GILES: I will ignore the political jibe about holidays and shopping. I do not accept that part of the question.

Mr VATSKALIS: I ask because I was accused of that too. I am asking the question.

Mr GILES: You have not been accused of that by me. Minister Tollner will be happy to provide information about where he went and who he met with as long as it is not commercial-in-confidence. There are, as you can understand ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We understand that.

Mr GILES: ... commercial-in-confidence issues. He was working very hard. I am unsure how your trips operated, but for myself, Peter Carew and Brian O’Gallagher, these guys know that you hit the ground running and do not stop. Asking questions about what type of a plane I fly on - when I make my first trip to Japan I will ensure I fly on a plane which gets me there fully refreshed so I can attend a meeting straightaway. That is the way you have to do business. There is a cost to doing business; a cost to achieving outcomes for the Northern Territory. You do not always come back with a bag of goodies in your suitcase, but you might set a framework for the bag for the next time.

Mr VATSKALIS: Since you mentioned it, how much did the trip to China cost? Do you have a final cost?

Mr GILES: For Minister Tollner? He has already spoken about that publicly. I believe it was about \$10 000 per person and the estimate for a commercial trip was about \$12 000. That is only the plane element. There would have been significant down time at airports of about 36 hours had he taken a commercial flight.

Mr VATSKALIS: Chief Minister, I flew to China many times and agree with you - people make jokes about shopping ...

Mr GILES: Can I add to that - sorry to cut you off, member for Casuarina - I have directed my Chief of Staff to identify suitable charter companies, when we require those services, where it will be deemed more financially feasible or time supportive, or a balance of both - an open and transparent tender process and people on a panel contract can provide that service. That is not to say we will take a charter all the time. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia which does not own a plane. I am not advocating that, but if it saves time and is financially beneficial to utilise the services of the charter plane, if we can identify a panel contract to get those services it is a better outcome. We will start to progress that through the system.

Madam CHAIR: Chief Minister, I draw your attention to the fact that it is now 10.30 am.

Mr GILES: Madam Chair, with the committee’s agreement, I am happy to take some more questions on this topic. I will take a few more and then call it quits.

Madam CHAIR: When you are ready to finish.

Mr GILES: As long as they are serious questions, I am happy to take them.

Mr VATSKALIS: I raised the trip because politicians are a target. It does not matter which political persuasion, you are always a target. You have your snout in the trough if you fly business class. People do not understand you have to go from the plane to meetings. I applaud having transparency in how you book your trips.

I will give you an example. I tried to find out how much it would cost for a commercial flight from Darwin to Beijing return. It was \$700 on Jetstar to Singapore arriving at 9.30 am, departing for Beijing at 1 pm arriving

at 6 pm. The most expensive airline was Singapore Airline: \$3200 return. From here to Beijing was less than \$4000 return. I did not hang around in lounges in China. If I could not get a plane I caught the train; sometimes the train was easier. I cannot accept the argument about spending 36 hours in a lounge. I know it is not the minister's fault because the minister does not book his own trips. Someone else has to do his planning properly to avoid delays. Territorians say the cost was excessive, and the use of a private charter was excessive, especially flying to China for \$10 000 per person. In 12 years in public life, the only time I used a charter interstate was when I got a freebie ride from Western Australia to Darwin on a Western Australian plane. I am glad we do not have one because landing in Darwin left much to be desired with that pilot.

Yes, travel to Asia! I encourage and support you. I am prepared to say it is a tough gig. You arrive, go from meeting to meeting, and come back exhausted. The question the public will ask is, 'Do we get value for money if you take a private jet?' At this stage, my answer is no. You could have done it cheaper and then we would not have these arguments.

Mr GILES: You could have put the question to minister Tollner. I will answer it, but it is specifically in relation to his travel. My understanding is, looking at when the meetings were set up and how to get there, this was the best option. It was a cheaper option than commercial flights. It provided an opportunity and achieved a good outcome.

You are right, politicians are always in the frame because everyone thinks it is the high life when you working tirelessly. You not have the opportunity you do on a holiday to get off the plane and sit in the hotel for four or five hours to catch up. You walk straight out and have to do business. You have to be clean shaven and all those things. That is why we are moving to a model of, if we need a charter, looking at the best way to do it. I do not see an issue with getting a panel contract if we need to use charter flights in the future. We are putting mechanisms in place. I do not see an issue with getting a panel contract. That is not to say it will be used on every occasion; it will be used if it is deemed necessary.

Mr VATSKALIS: Those are my questions. I encourage you, apart from the contract, to get somebody who knows how to plan a trip. The department of Resources may be able to help you because staff are familiar with travelling. It is how you plan it, not what you plan.

Mr GILES: I thank the member for Casuarina for his question and support. He is a former minister, someone new to opposition, who understands what it is like trying to do business. I am trying to move the Northern Territory and you appreciate the need to go to Asia and the need to spend money to build the Territory's economy. Apart from the political jibes about shopping and holidays, most of the conversation was good. I thank Peter Carew and Brian for coming.

Mr WOOD: Can I ask a question?

Mr GILES: No, we have reached 10.30 am.

Mr WOOD: Thanks, minister. You allowed a couple of questions ...

Mr GILES: You could have stayed last night but needed your beauty sleep. You supported the process.

Mr WOOD: Minister, why not ask staff if they liked being here at that time of night?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, on behalf of the committee, I thank the staff from Asian Engagement and also the Department of Business. Thank you very much.

The Estimates Committee will meet in the Ormiston Room so I propose a 15-minute break. We will return with the Attorney-General at 10.50 am, thank you.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER ELFERINK'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE

Madam CHAIR: Thank you for that recess. For the purposes of Hansard, we have Gerry McCarthy, member for Barkly; Lynne Walker, member for Nhulunbuy; me, Lia Finocchiaro; Larisa Lee, member for Arnhem; and Bess Price, member for Stuart.

I welcome the Attorney-General and his officials. Attorney-General, if you would like to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mr ELFERINK: I am supported by my CE, Mr Greg Shanahan, and the CFO for the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, Mr Andrew Bayliss.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes and then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government and fiscal strategy related questions before moving on to output specific questions and non-output specific budget-related questions.

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

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice?

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – DEPARTMENT OF ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE
Output 1.0 – Legal Services

Mr ELFERINK: Certainly, I will make a broad opening statement so members of the committee understand what we as a government are trying to do, particularly in the area of criminal justice. As the Attorney-General, the civil law as well as the criminal law comes under the purview of my office. In the area of criminal law, the Cabinet and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory have given me, as the lead minister, agency of a policy called the Pillars of Justice.

There are, essentially, five pillars supported by a sixth. The first pillar deals with the operation of the police, and is called Operation Street Sweep. The second pillar is called Swift Justice, and deals with processes in the courts. The third pillar is Sentenced To a Future, which contains programs such as Sentenced To a Job. Youth Turn is the fourth pillar, and that touches on things like boot camps. Victims First is the fifth pillar. Of course, we need the sixth supporting pillar which deals with legislative change to accommodate the Pillars of Justice reform package.

The reason this is important is because the pillars package gives me, as Attorney-General, a rare opportunity to have effective carriage of the whole criminal justice system, from the point of arrest to beyond parole. There are a number of areas where the operations of the police department, the courts, and Correctional Services wash into each other. By being able to have oversight of the whole system, that rare opportunity I referred to means we can create a matrix where there step-through processes between those various departments can have a positive effect on how each of those departments work.

Within the area of police powers, we are now talking about the paperless arrests, the alcohol protection orders etcetera, which then leads to the paperwork which finds its way to a court. Within the court system we are looking at pre-trial conferencing, pre-trial disclosure, sentence indications and the like, which will enable the court system to be far more effective on how they deal with hearings. By way of example, in Victoria where this process was introduced, the number of hearings fell from 7000 to slightly under 3500 in a 12-month period. That was an important reform which still ensured the processes of justice were fairly delivered.

Needless to say, the Sentence To a Future pillar, which includes Sentenced To a Job, has a number of areas we are currently working on. I am particularly proud of Sentenced To a Job. This morning, 64 people left prison across the Northern Territory to go to full-time paid work. They are now paying rent to the prison; they are paying money back to their victims; and they are also saving for a future for themselves, hopefully, never to have them back again.

Victims are all too often forgotten in the criminal justice system – well, not under this government. Under the Youth Turn pillar, we are anxious to divert kids away from getting involved in the criminal justice system, as well as dealing with those we have in custody, hence the development of the I-Camp and D-Camp models.

That is where government is at in relation to the criminal justice system. This budget is drawn up with a view to enabling the Pillars of Justice to be rolled out. They will be rolled out in an effective and understandable fashion so Territorians can understand what government is doing, and moreover, why government is doing these things.

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

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, I do not have any questions on the minister's statement. I recognise, as the first law officer in the Northern Territory, your responsibilities spread quite broadly across whole-of-government policy. I am familiar with the Pillars of Justice statement tabled in the Assembly last sittings. You have covered a huge area there but, of course, we are just in the Department of Attorney-General and Justice this morning.

I note how fresh and well-rested you look, Attorney-General, unlike the rest of us - and we have you to thank for you that. I have many questions and am not going to get through them all. We will provide most of them on notice as written questions.

We are keen to see your junior colleague, the Minister for Health and Alcohol Rehabilitation, have the time she needs to talk around legislative reforms in her area.

Attorney-General, could you ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, we have practice at the moment where the minister has read written questions received and the full answers. Is that how you would like it, or Attorney-General, do you ...

Mr WOOD: I have a question on the opening statement. I have not been given an opportunity.

Mr ELFERINK: Can I make one comment? 'You have me to thank for that'. The only thing delivered by government to the Public Accounts Committee and, ultimately, to the Estimates Committee, was the liberty to determine what questions you wanted to ask from whom, for as long as you wanted to. With liberty comes responsibility. I have seen the Treasurer of the Northern Territory subjected to the longest scrutiny in the history of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, as well as the Chief Minister

Ms WALKER: The Treasurer offered to stay for five days.

Mr ELFERINK: That is right, because he had the liberty.

Ms WALKER: It was your idea to go to exhaustion.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, do not interrupt the minister please.

Mr ELFERINK: How you exercise that liberty is your responsibility. If you are not sufficiently prepared, or alternatively choose to pursue questions to exhaustion so it deprives you of sleep, that is a liberty you have exercised because that is the process we have established. We promised an open, honest and accountable government and have given you that. If you are unable to demonstrate sufficient discipline it is not my fault; it is the fault of you and your colleagues.

Mr WOOD: I will show some discipline and not respond. I will ask a question in relation to the opening statement. Minister, I believe your policy regarding Sentenced to a Job is an excellent one. It is the way to go. Using a figure of 1000 prisoners, what percentage of those do you believe are able to fit in with this program?

Mr ELFERINK: I am not going to set a benchmark because, at the heart of this system, is the classification system. There would be a temptation, if we were looking at numbers, to push people through the classification system and I do not want to do that. The classification system is one by which you measure risk. When you are measuring risk of a particular prisoner, if you try to push them through the system

because we have some benchmark to aim for, what you ultimately do is push people through too hard and that is not what this is about.

This is about ensuring people who demonstrate they have a low level of risk are then offered an opportunity. I anticipate by the end of the year, 200 people will classify sufficiently low to go into this system. However, if Sentenced to a Job could not attract a single person because nobody classified low enough as a level of risk there would be zero people in Sentenced to A Job.

Naturally, when you deal with large sets of numbers - the prison population is about 1460 off the top of my head, I could stand corrected on that - there will be a body of people in that mix who will ultimately classify down to open rated prisoner. Because of the nature of offending in the Northern Territory we have many compliant prisoners. Once they are off the turps they are quite compliant. If you look at the Barkly Work Camp, there are currently 74 prisoners there today. The fence surrounding the Barkly Work Camp is a single strand of wire and is within walking distance of Tennant Creek.

Ultimately, I estimate as much as 25% of the prison population may classify down to the open rated status required to be involved in the Sentenced to a Job program. Ultimately, if that were to become manifest, the number would be around 400.

Mr WOOD: Will Sentenced to a Job take ...

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Madam Chair! Could I clarify, given we are in the Attorney-General and Justice section, these questions might be more appropriate in Output 6.1 - Custodial Operations, when we get to Correctional Services?

Madam CHAIR: I believe the member for Nelson is asking questions regarding issues raised in the statement. Perhaps the member for Nhulunbuy is correct, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: When I have been here previously the opening statement was sometimes questioned quite ...

Ms WALKER: Gerry, I have questions for that output when we get to it.

Mr WOOD: I am sure the minister can answer these questions quickly. The Sentenced to a Job, will it affect the day work people who go out with the trucks - the numbers for that?

Mr ELFERINK: No.

Mr WOOD: That is it.

Madam CHAIR: Would you like the Attorney-General to read his questions and answers?

Ms WALKER: I would ask him to do what the Speaker and Chief Minister did, and the Treasurer would not do, table his written responses to the questions.

Mr ELFERINK: I will need some guidance from you, Madam Chair. I do harp back to Tuesday morning where the member for Nelson insisted:

The fundamental basis of the Estimates Committee is that all questions and answers be heard in public. So, I would prefer answers and questions be given in public.

Do I take it the member for Nelson, and others, have changed their position in relation to tabling of questions? I am happy to table them because it would be a much better use of time. I just want to confirm ...

Ms WALKER: Thank you, I appreciate that.

Mr ELFERINK: ... that position has changed.

Madam CHAIR: Attorney-General, there is no requirement to do anything. If you would like to table them I am sure they will be warmly received. The member for Nelson has been adamant on this point, as have other members of the committee. I am in the committee's hands as to whether the Attorney-General reads ...

Mr WOOD: My position has not changed except if you had a complicated table which would be impossible to read out.

Mr ELFERINK: Then I ask committee members to decide amongst themselves. That is the question and answer pack for the generic questions. I imagine that would take me hour-and-a-half or two hours to read through. If you want me to I will, but I am in the hands of the committee, particularly the member for Nelson, who was quite strident about this.

Mr WOOD: The committee can take a vote.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, if the member for Nelson has asked that it go to a vote. Put your hand up if you would like the Attorney-General to read the questions and answers.

For Hansard, the member for Nelson voted for that and the remaining Estimates Committee members voted against. Minister, if you would table your written questions and responses.

Mr ELFERINK: I am more than happy to table the questions and responses for the output groups relating to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2013-14 as they relate to the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice.

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

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

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, I thank the Attorney-General for making such a very sensible decision. We may not have been here so late if the Treasurer had made the same decision.

Attorney-General, whilst I am waiting for that document to be circulated, I would like to go to written question No 1:

Details on progress of all CLP election commitments, including all commitments and policy announcements made to Territorians in CLP election policy documents, summary snapshots, media releases and announcements, 100 day plan, costings and savings documents, media advertisements and other printed material.

Whilst I am waiting on that, I would like to go directly to the law and order election commitments on this document where we see the former Chief Minister – I trust that is not regarded as offensive language today, Madam Chair, because the member for Blain was the former Chief Minister.

Attorney, I would like to go to the first law and order election commitment which is about removing drunks from our streets. As Attorney-General, you issued a media release on 21 September 2012 announcing the implementation of 'a key CLP election commitment', the establishment of the habitual drunks implementation unit. Where is that unit situated? How many public servants are employed in it, and who is the executive director?

Mr ELFERINK: As explained in the parliamentary process the original intention – I explained this at some length in the House – was to create a system where we used a hybrid of the criminal justice system and the health system to bring about a health outcome. It was my belief at the time the use of powers to apprehend people without reference to a court was not possible. However, subsequent to that it has become clear it is quite lawful so the nature of that policy – I explained this to the House in December – was instead of using a hybrid of the criminal justice system and the health system to produce a health outcome, we could do it exclusively in the health arena. Consequently, it was determined by Cabinet this policy should move away from the ambit and purview of the Attorney-General and find its way exclusively into the Health department, because this is about interrupting the life of a drug addict. Ultimately, their drug of choice is alcohol and they are alcoholics and behave in that fashion.

The criminal justice system was simply a vehicle to get them into that process, but it appears we do not need to use the criminal justice system so have eliminated that point. Consequently, responsibility for the implementation of that health outcome has now moved entirely to Health. The unit which I was working with

was made up of people involved both in the Department of Attorney-General - I also had Mr John Dalby, a former Assistant Commissioner of Police in the Northern Territory, assisting in my office ...

Ms WALKER: Yes, he is mentioned in the media release.

Mr ELFERINK: He has done his work for the Northern Territory government. He assisted Health with this policy. What you now see is the Health legislation that will, hopefully, be passed by the House for the commencement of the policy.

I will assist the Health minister wherever I can, but I no longer have carriage and lead of that policy because it is inappropriate to leave it in the Attorney-General's portfolio.

Ms WALKER: Given the election commitment was for drunks to be immediately removed from our streets, yet, nearly nine months down the road - it has been a complex and challenging area right across government, what confidence do you have it will work?

Mr ELFERINK: Several things come out of that and ...

Ms WALKER: In light of so much publish backlash.

Mr ELFERINK: Certain quarters have taken exception to it ...

Ms WALKER: Health and legal experts.

Mr ELFERINK: ... because they come from the basis of a single presumption - the same presumption which underlies the BDR approach, the former approach because of the Labor government - that society in some way carries responsibility for the conduct of individuals within the society. All of the objections I have heard are couched in that simple assumption. Being a good Liberal, I believe people are ultimately responsible for their own actions. That is not just my philosophy but that of my colleagues. As a consequence ...

Ms WALKER: It is not shared by the health and legal sector or social justice advocates. Sorry I interrupted, go on.

Mr ELFERINK: These people will maintain that philosophical approach.

Addressing the first issue, we have continued removing drunks in the same way your government was removing drunks with the same powers.

Ms WALKER: No.

Mr ELFERINK: We have been removing drunks. Your government was quite proud to put out numerous media releases saying you locked up thousands of Territorians.

Ms WALKER: Two-and-a-half thousand people were off the drink.

Mr ELFERINK: You are talking about the people on the Banned Drinker Register. I am talking about the tens of thousands of people who were apprehended, whether the Banned Drinker Register was there or not, for being drunk in public. That is the exercise of section 128 of the *Police Administration Act*, which is the capacity to take people into custody when they are so drunk they are 'seriously affected by alcohol or drug', I believe is the quote from the act.

The Banned Drinker Register listed 2500 people who should not have been able to access alcohol, but in spite of that, a platinum member of the frequent flyer club still managed to do it 114 times while on the register because the assumption underlying the Banned Drinker Register was somehow you can manipulate this by creating a social measure.

That returns me to the observations I am making about what we are talking about. We are saying if a person has an alcohol or drug problem which is so pronounced they are regularly being arrested by police for that intoxication and no other reason, we are looking for two types of interventions.

First, we will bring them into a mandatory environment of rehabilitation. If they commit offences they will be answerable for those offences, whether they are drunk or not. Ultimately, and in the course of this year, we

will also have the alcohol protection orders legislation rolled out. The philosophy behind each of those approaches is the person is responsible for their conduct. That is not an absolute statement otherwise we would repeal the *Liquor Act* and have vending machines of liquor in the mall. Of course, that is not what we are talking about. However, people who demonstrate they do not have a capacity to deal with their alcohol addiction are the people we will specifically target rather than the community as a whole.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, Attorney-General. I want to continue on your election commitment to enforce mandatory rehabilitation for drunks. Obviously, the Mandatory Alcohol Treatment Bill is going to criminalise drunks. It is unlikely to withstand legal challenge. It sits within the purview of the Health minister. We have had a number of organisations from APONT to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, legal advocacy, Northern Territory Criminal Lawyers Association and NAAJA saying it is not going to work. On ABC *Lateline* last week, the Chief Minister was unable to name a single health or legal expert who supported the bill.

The Health minister has carriage of this bill but, as the senior law officer in the Territory, how confident are you this bill will withstand legal challenge and work, given there is no evidence to support that and no expert who thinks it will work? Are we at risk of an incredibly expensive exercise on the taxpayer in wasting money for no outcome?

Mr ELFERINK: Which question would you like me to deal with first?

Ms WALKER: You decide.

Mr ELFERINK: The short answer is I am confident any legal challenge to the legislation will not succeed. That is the advice I have received from the Solicitor-General, a man of impeccable legal credentials who demonstrates an understanding of our legal system which has more than entitled him to the rank of QC.

Every government policy has, by its very nature, some type of risk element attached to it. I would love to say with absolute certainty everything we do will work but, in the real world - and the Labor government had the same problems - things do not always go according to plan ...

Ms WALKER: The BDR was working. The police said it was the best tool they ever had, but have not been able to say so since you gagged them from commenting.

Mr ELFERINK: When you roll out a policy, one of the first things you hope for is some third party endorsement. By the way, there has been third party endorsement of the government policy ...

Ms WALKER: Who?

Mr ELFERINK: In the case of the Assistant Commissioner, who you say I gagged, I reject that entirely. He had spent 10 minutes in that media conference talking about all types of operationally-oriented things. The problem was he was then asked to speculate on a policy that was no longer policy. That could have led to a certain amount of embarrassment for him because he had made some comments in the past.

I am not going to use public servants as a shield for government policy. Public servants serve the government of the day faithfully and loyally, and I expect nothing more and nothing less from them. I will not have them exposed, particularly when it is contrary to the code of conduct the former government placed on them, to public embarrassment or ridicule. For those reasons, I put a clear line between operational and policy statements.

I will never ask a public servant to give a third party endorsement to a government policy. I will ask public servants to describe operational matters which refer to their own departments.

Ms WALKER: Should they wish to offer a view on the effectiveness of something that assists them carrying out their operational duties, would you allow that?

Mr ELFERINK: If it is a breach of the code of conduct, no.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, Attorney-General. I am wondering if the member for Nelson wants to jump in as I continue to progress through election commitments.

Mr WOOD: No.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, Attorney-General. I have now received a printed copy of your written questions.

The election commitment to reduce crime by 10% - Attorney-General, far from delivering an election promise to reduce crime by 10%, the statistics released in the data available from 24 May 2013 show in the period from the end of June 2012 to end of March 2013, which correlates with seven months without the BDR, violent crime has gone up 17%, alcohol-related crime is up 17%, and domestic violence up almost 25%. How do you propose to meet that election commitment when the rivers of grog have re-opened and there are no supply measures in place since the removal of the BDR? In fact, there has been nothing for nearly nine months.

MR ELFERINK: Let us deal with the 17% figure. Where did you get that from?

Ms WALKER: Page two of table one.

MR ELFERINK: I want to ensure we are looking at the same document.

Ms WALKER: This is the Northern Territory Quarterly Crime Statistics, March Quarter, 2013. I am looking at total offences against the person - the total figures - end of June was 1912. At the end of March 2013 that figure has risen - total offences against the person to 2242 - which calculates to an increase of 17%.

MR ELFERINK: I am sorry, say that again. The March quarter 2012 versus the ...

Ms WALKER: No, I am looking at the quarter from June 2012 to the end of March 2013.

MR ELFERINK: Yes, I see what you are referring to. I draw your attention to the same page the year before. If you look at the year before - the BDR commenced on 1 July 2011 if memory serves me – You will note there was a sharp increase in offences against the person after the commencement of the BDR. In the September quarter it was 1800, the December quarter it was 2100 or thereabouts, and it started to go down in June and September. You have identified a cycle which existed in the Territory for a long time. The reason that cycle existed is many of the numbers were skewed by the unfortunate amount of assaults we have in Central Australia. In the winter months, those assaults tend to die down because it is cold at night and people tend to hunker down in their homes rather than go out on the streets. You are assuming the rise in the March quarter of 2013, which is reflected in rises in the past during the same quarter, relates to the BDR. That is a long bow to draw.

You mentioned the 10%. In relation to property offences - I guide you to the document in front of you at page 34 of 51, which is Quarterly Offences Against the Property, Northern Territory. In the March quarter of 2012, during the operation of the BDR, and the March quarter of 2013, offences against property fell from 6124 to 4986; a substantial fall in property offences and substantially more than 10%.

In relation to the 10% target, we can take some comfort that at least in the property area we are on track. The reality is the operation of the BDR drove many of these addicts to commit property offences to steal the liquor they could no longer purchase. In regard to a 10% drop - tick in that environment.

In regard to the assault rates, once our policies relating to alcohol protection orders and mandatory rehabilitation bite, we anticipate a positive result. I am sad we have to go through the difficult process of getting stuff through parliament, but that is how our system works ...

Mr WOOD: A fairly important part of our process.

MR ELFERINK: I expect to see positive results. I am a bit of a purist in this, despite what people think ...

Ms WALKER: So is consultation.

Mr ELFERINK: We can read those statistics in many ways. I have noticed in your pamphlet in the newspaper recently you quote that 17% number, but to compare a June quarter with the following March quarter is challenging.

Ms WALKER: Attorney-General, if I refer you to page 18 of 51, assaults associated with domestic violence are up 17%, assaults associated with domestic violence up almost 25%.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, and I will give you exactly the same answer given year in and year out by the former government. If you look at the Northern Territory crime statistics comparison of March quarters dating back to 2008 you will see assault rates have gone up consistently since 2008. Total offences against the person

in 2008 were 1469. Total offences against the person in 2013 are 2242 - that is when the year ends in the March quarter. They are consistently up all the way through. Notably, in the year of operation of the BDR, there was a sharp increase of assaults.

Once again, there is a desire in the material propagated by the Labor Party to link an increase in assault numbers with the BDR, when in fact every year, with the exception of 2011, assault rates have gone up and there is a reason for that. A large slice of the increase comes from two areas. First, in places remote from Darwin, things like Operation Themis have seen much greater police activity. Therefore, assaults and domestic violence situations, which have always occurred, are now being reported. Second, police policy in relation to the pursuit of domestic violence has been far more aggressive over recent years than in the past. Naturally, when you find the police focus on a particular area you will see an increase in reported numbers in that area. That point was made on repeated occasions by the Leader of the Opposition when in government, and is a point I understood.

If you look at the March quarter comparisons, the NT balance - that is out bush - shows a sharp increase of assaults, but there is a reason for that. Assaults, unfortunately, have always been committed out bush, but that is where the police have become active. There has been an issue in Tennant Creek, and I am sure the member for Barkly will tell you that. However, if you look across Darwin, Katherine, Palmerston and Alice Springs, whilst there have been unfortunate increases in March on March quarters, they are nowhere near the 17% you claim. That 17% is a product of police activity and policy in the more remote areas of the Northern Territory.

Ms WALKER: Can I highlight, Attorney-General, you have done away with a system which was given no opportunity for evaluation. Based on the 'we know best' attitude of the CLP, it was axed. Being the member for Nhulunbuy and having lived there for 23 years, Nhulunbuy, following in the steps of Groote Eylandt, which my colleague the member for Arnhem represents, has, effectively, had a BDR in place since March 2008 and, almost overnight, alcohol-related crime, domestic violence and antisocial behaviour have reduced dramatically. People resisted the system initially and, in nearly five years, that community continues to have, I believe on record now, the lowest criminal statistics in the Northern Territory.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Assistant Commissioner Jamie Chalker when he visited Nhulunbuy recently to take part in community stakeholder meetings about policing. I was able to tell him that result was due to excellent proactive community policing, not only in Nhulunbuy but across the region, and because of the existence of a strong alcohol management plan - stronger than the Banned Drinker Register - which, over a period, worked and was proven to be incredibly effective.

If you had allowed the BDR to stay in place longer and go through a formal assessment and an evaluation, you might have seen the same results. Unfortunately, it has been thrown out the window and we have had nearly nine months with nothing in its place ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, is there a question?

Mr WOOD: Can I ask a question on the stats, please?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, one second. There is no question member for Nhulunbuy?

Ms WALKER: It was commentary in relation to the stats ...

Mr ELFERINK: She has put something which clearly invites a response. If you are advocating Nhulunbuy style alcohol restrictions in Darwin you will find a great deal of community resistance.

Ms WALKER: No, I am advocating a ...

Mr ELFERINK: You are not advocating that?

Ms WALKER: I am advocating a model which demonstrates when you reduce and control supply ...

Mr ELFERINK: You use Nhulunbuy as an example, but you do not advocate the use of its systems?

Ms WALKER: I am advocating a model. I recognise ...

Mr ELFERINK: Why are you using Nhulunbuy as an example?

Ms WALKER: Do not be cute, Attorney-General.

Mr ELFERINK: I am not the one saying it, you are.

Ms WALKER: I am advocating a model which demonstrates where you restrict supply, which your model does not, you will see results, drive down crime statistics, and reduce the misery associated with alcohol.

Mr ELFERINK: You use Nhulunbuy as an example but do not believe that should be done in Darwin?

Ms WALKER: That is not what I said. Do not verbal me, Attorney-General.

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

Mr ELFERINK: It is very difficult to listen to the arguments being rolled out by the member for Nhulunbuy, saying Nhulunbuy is the best example and we should look at that model, then saying do not do it.

Ms WALKER: That is not what I said at all, Attorney-General.

Mr ELFERINK: As a government, we have said any community ...

Ms WALKER: You have listened to nobody. You have not listened to Health experts, legal experts, or social justice advocates.

Madam CHAIR: We are not here to debate; we are here to ask questions. Perhaps this is better saved for Thursday

Mr WOOD: Attorney-General, I have statistics from the Police annual report for last year, which is why I am putting the case the BDR did not run long enough to show proper trends. The total number of acts intended to cause injury increased by 2.9% from 2010-11 to 2011-12 - the BDR was in place. However, the number of sexual assaults and related offences decreased by 23.2%. I could argue it reduced the number of sexual assaults. You would probably say it has increased the number of acts intended to cause injury. I am saying neither of us can make a judgment because the BDR did not run long enough to get statistically sound figures.

Mr ELFERINK: This comes to the heart of how a government works. You are right. You can say that, I do not happen to agree with you. When we took that to the people of the Northern Territory they made a decision which fell with this government. We kept the promise we made to the people of the Northern Territory that the BDR would not operate.

Whilst I understand, and have heard your argument in parliament that people do not understand, I will not presume that ...

Mr WOOD: I did not say that.

Mr ELFERINK: I can refer you to any number of debates where you said if people were a little more educated they would understand it.

Mr WOOD: That was a different debate.

Mr ELFERINK: That is not the attitude I take to the people of the Northern Territory. I do not consider them to be so ill-informed that only the wise ones are the ...

Mr WOOD: My criticism is was not of the public, it is of you. It did not run for long enough. That is criticism of the government's logical behind ...

Mr ELFERINK: That is the question we took to the public. This is how democracy works. What part of ...

Mr WOOD: Do you really believe, when you have 100 promises, all the people who voted for you supported those 100 promises? I have heard politicians say, 'We have a mandate'. Come on. The people might agree with some of the promises but it does not mean they agree with all of them. That is a political nicety. How do you know people agreed with that one?

Mr ELFERINK: If people find a policy so abhorrent or objectionable, such as the promise to remove the BDR, that becomes a major issue in an election campaign ...

Ms WALKER: Without assessment or consultation.

Mr ELFERINK: This was a major issue in the Northern Territory election campaign. It was a clear point of difference. If people were so focused on it they would have voted one way or the other. We were not furtive or secretive about it. We told people what we were going to do and we did it.

Ms WALKER: You have not yet.

Mr WOOD: Not because of statistics. You voted against it from Day 1 before the statistics were even available.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not believe in social manipulation as a vehicle of government and you do.

Mr WOOD: I did not say that. That should have been your reason, but when you were asked why you scrapped it you said it did not work. You did not know it would not work when you voted against it in parliament.

Mr ELFERINK: It clearly did not work when a person who had been issued 114 Banned Drinker Register notices was still able to get on the turps. That system does not work.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you did not know until later. You voted against it before.

Mr ELFERINK: I could walk through the parks and streets of this town and tell you it was not working.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Madam CHAIR: While there is a break in the proceedings, I acknowledge and welcome the former Deputy Chief Minister and member for Nhulunbuy, Syd Stirling. Thank you.

Are there any further questions for the Attorney-General?

Ms WALKER: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

Attorney-General, can I ask you about the election commitment 'action on law and order' under the 'we will immediately provide safe homes for victims of crime'. I understand that involved the development of the Safe Homes policy, which is highlighted as a strategic issue in the budget papers. What budget has been allocated, what is the scope of this policy, who are you consulting with to develop this, who is developing the program, is it a consultancy, and could you provide a ballpark figure on establishment and operational costs?

Mr ELFERINK: \$2m. You will find it in Question 1 of your tabled papers.

Ms WALKER: Yes, I see \$2m from 2014-15. If there is no budget attached to it at the moment does that mean there is nothing happening in that area?

Mr ELFERINK: That is not correct. The Pillars of Justice system has a whole pillar dedicated to looking after victims. We, of course, step in that direction. However, being a responsible fiscal manager, I also ensure we can do certain things within existing budgets. We have a Legal Policy unit attached to the Northern Territory government and the Department of Attorney-General and Justice.

Ms WALKER: Attorney-General, when might we expect to see a progress report on how this new program is going?

Mr ELFERINK: As the Pillars of Justice system is rolled out you will be kept up to date, believe me.

Ms WALKER: Do you have a time frame, a target date, as to when we might see ...

Mr ELFERINK: I have said to staff running the Coordination Committee for Pillars of Justice that we are aiming to roll out the package within 12 to 18 months. The reason I have created such a flexible environment is some of these things might be a more technically difficult than others. As a general principle, I am anxious to ensure the criminal justice system of the Northern Territory, and support for

victims, is rolled out in a timely, effective manner in which these policies get traction for the people who need them.

Ms WALKER: I understand entirely the need to support victims of crime, but I also understand we cannot expect a progress report. We will wait for the package to be out in 12 to 18 months, is that correct?

Mr ELFERINK: That is not what I said.

Ms WALKER: That is what we heard.

Mr ELFERINK: No, that is not what I said. I cannot help what you choose to interpret as an answer.

Ms WALKER: I asked when we could expect a progress report.

Mr ELFERINK: I said you will get progress reports as we roll the package out, which will be regular and timely.

Ms WALKER: The next election commitment I would like to go to is around introducing tougher sentencing for violent crimes. I completely understand any government has an obligation to ensure we have adequate law and order to keep people and communities safe. Obviously, we have seen a return to minimum mandatory sentencing. That bill has gone through the House.

Mr ELFERINK: Did you support it?

Ms WALKER: Did we support it?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes! Do you support mandatory minimum sentences for violent offenders?

Ms WALKER: You will recall the debate. We had real issues.

Mr ELFERINK: I recall it and recall you arguing passionately against it and then not voting.

Ms WALKER: We had real issues. It did not go to a vote.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes it did, it was passed on the voices. You did not divide the House so I presumed you were dodging the issue. Do you support it or not?

Ms WALKER: Member for Port Darwin, there were members on your side who I recall – the member for Stuart is sitting there - around this area of policy. As we debated at that time, there is no evidence to support this regime reduces recidivism. Legal advocates and members of the judiciary were very outspoken against it. Even the Chief Minister, on the floor of the House, highlighted the fact he does not support mandatory sentencing. He is on the record at an election function in Alice Springs - when asked he said:

No, we won't be pursuing mandatory sentencing. I can say I am emotionally disturbed by the level of Indigenous incarceration and the recidivism rate. I think in 2012, in a nation such as Australia the level of Indigenous incarceration is appalling.

That was *Alice Springs News Online* on 8 August. You are clearly at odds with the Chief Minister. In relation to budget matters ...

Mr ELFERINK: Can I have a cup of tea while this question is rolling?

Ms WALKER: ...clearly this will see more people incarcerated. What will the costs associated with minimum mandatory sentencing be?

Mr ELFERINK: That is the cost of violence of in our community. That is what minimum mandatory sentencing is about. As far as I am concerned we, as a government, have a duty to protect the population of the Northern Territory. Whilst this photo is from outside the Territory, it is indicative of what happens all too often. I heard you argue passionately and stridently why mandatory minimum sentencing for violent assaults was wrong. You have done it again but do not have the political courage to vote against it. You are having an each way bet ...

Ms WALKER: No! No! You are verballing me.

Mr ELFERINK: ... and that is why we introduced mandatory minimum sentencing. That type of thing drives public expectation. Mandatory minimum sentencing is about satisfying that public expectation. We went to the election on that issue and, once again, it was a front and centre issue. I am unashamed to support mandatory minimum sentencing. The public who speak to me in the mall, at the Parap markets and on street corners, tell me they support doing something about it.

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, nobody would say people who are severely injured as a result of an assault should be facing a prison term. The debate rested upon the fact you have removed from the judiciary any scope to look at a scale on assault. It is assault, it is assault. People will go to gaol for a minimum of three months.

We know most impacted among that cohort will be Indigenous people. There is clearly going to be, from a budget perspective - this is about the budget - a dramatic increase in cost for the Northern Territory government in incarcerating people and an increase in cost for legal aid services. Where have you budgeted for additional legal aid? People are still entitled to representation. This is a budgetary matter I am asking you about.

Mr ELFERINK: Then restrict your comments to the budget. If you introduce a question ...

Ms WALKER: You have to talk in a broader policy perspective.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, I draw your attention to Standing Order 112: questions should not contain statements, arguments, inferences and imputations. If you could trim back some of the statements and get to the question succinctly.

Mr ELFERINK: I will pick up on some of the introductory comments, Madam Chair. The first thing is the reference to Aboriginal people. Nowhere in the legislation does it target Aboriginal people based on their race. Yes, Aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system. However, if you want to start railing against the stupidity of what happens in relation to those things, commence your argument where I commence my argument – we have a passive welfare system which pours millions of dollars into this jurisdiction every fortnight so this government can spend millions of dollars cleaning up the mess because there is no synergy between that expenditure.

Aboriginal people, like any other class of people who are welfare dependent, show increased signs of social dysfunction. Unfortunately, since the early 1970s with the introduction of welfare systems, we have seen that social decay particularly pronounced in Aboriginal people through generation after generation. We do not feel that is an excuse for thumping people, hurting people or for injuring people. The second correction is you say it applies to any assault; that is not correct. It applies to assaults in which physical harm is an element; something you neglected to point out in your opening statements.

We are dealing with a crime problem, which is, in part, generated by a passive welfare system that undermines all the work we do in this jurisdiction, including the work done by the former Labor government. I do not believe Labor people entered parliament because they are wicked or evil. I believe they genuinely want to make a difference. However, you need to see what is happening in this jurisdiction in its entirety, and the contribution from the federal government to the social problems we have is substantial, if not enormous.

Ms WALKER: You have not answered the question about the cost with the increase ...

Mr ELFERINK: Budget Paper No 3 has the Corrections budget in it.

Ms WALKER: ... but I am happy to leave that until we get to the output.

Mr ELFERINK: You asked the question, I will answer it.

Ms WALKER: Thank you.

Mr ELFERINK: The answer is \$162 351 000.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, Attorney-General. The last question I have in relation to election commitments is in regard to the promise to public servants of 'your job is safe' - a CLP commitment. This is a photograph

of you with a nice smiley face holding a sign which appeared on *Facebook* assuring public servants their jobs were safe. This is a personal commitment from you, but the reality is hundreds of public service jobs have gone, including in your own agency.

How many jobs have gone from your agency, how many were executive contracts, how many were temporary contracts, and any other figures would be most helpful.

Mr ELFERINK: No public servant under \$110 000, as per the commitment we made in that election campaign, has been sacked - not one.

Ms WALKER: Not in your agency, perhaps.

Mr ELFERINK: No, I will answer it for the whole-of-government - not one.

A number of people were on contracts which expired, but the very nature of a contract is it is an arrangement which has a date when it comes to an end. We were left with a \$5.5bn projected debt from your former government. We did not go to the election campaign saying everyone's job over \$110 000 is going to be safe which was, if you think about it, politically fairly gutsy in an election campaign, because we knew we had to reform.

As far as the agency I have carriage of, there were a number of positions where contracts expired and people earning over \$110 000 reached a point where there was no more room for them. I take no pleasure in telling a department it has to find savings, but I do it because of the legacy environment left by your government. Government is not a charity or sheltered workshop for people, unfortunately. It is a vehicle by which we deliver services to the people of the Northern Territory.

One of the areas of enormous expansion under your government was the amount of lawyers embedded in other departments. It had reached the stage, and it had come to my attention, many of those lawyers were being asked to review decisions by managers which had nothing to do with their function. As a consequence, I have told the department we will do several things, not the least of which is ensure we charge, as best we can, commercial rates to departments for the services we supply.

Ms WALKER: You also made every lawyer re-apply for their job.

Mr ELFERINK: That is right.

Ms WALKER: Their jobs were not safe?

Mr ELFERINK: All those positions in question were over the \$110 000 limit. These are expensive things. I will say it again so we are absolutely clear: no public servant earning under \$110 000 has been sacked.

Ms WALKER: That would appear to be at odds with a perhaps misleading sign from you - misleading because it says 'your job is safe'. It does not say 'unless you earn over \$110 000'.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, you know you cannot accuse ...

Mr ELFERINK: I can produce any number of documents where we talked about the \$110 000 threshold during the election campaign. That is too cute by half. Providing government services is a matter of being able to do so in a financially sustainable way. The legacy of a \$5.5bn debt is not sustainable. What is your solution? Is it the Greek solution, the Italian solution, or perhaps the Irish solution? Which one of those countries would you seek to emulate for the future of the Northern Territory, because you do not want to deal with the budget problems you have today. I did not think you had an answer.

Ms WALKER: I am not here to answer the questions; you are.

Mr ELFERINK: You have to offer something, do you not? Is it a case of criticising and whinging, and that is all you have to offer?

Ms WALKER: I am here to ask questions. I sat here as Deputy Chair for four years, listening to you. That is the way you operated.

Madam Chair, that is all the questions I have about election commitments - whole-of-agency. In the interests of time, perhaps the member for Nelson has whole-of-agency questions?

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

OUTPUT 1.0 – LEGAL SERVICES
Output Group 1.1 - Solicitor for the Northern Territory

Madam CHAIR: We will now move on to consider Output Group 1.0 Legal Services, Output 1.1 Solicitor for the Northern Territory. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Attorney-General, how much money was spent seeking the views of the solicitor for the Northern Territory on the interpretation of specific sections of and possible amendments to the *Sentencing Amendment (Mandatory Minimum Sentences) Act 2013*?

Mr ELFERINK: That would have been done within budget.

Ms WALKER: Can you put a figure on it?

Mr ELFERINK: Not immediately.

Ms WALKER: Could you take that as a question on notice, Attorney-General?

Mr ELFERINK: It would be a fairly difficult question to answer because when you do something in-house - the lawyer would be working on several projects at any given time. You would get, at best, a guesstimate. We have a whole section dealing with Northern Territory government policy, and all manner of policies go through those lawyers. To ask how much was spent on policy A and policy Y - I draw your attention to the overarching budget for the policy unit in the department of the Attorney-General. The answer is: for all policies that is the total figure.

Ms WALKER: Even if I clarified it by asking how many legal policy staff in the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice have been allocated to work on this legislation since it was introduced?

Mr ELFERINK: It would go over a number of desks.

Ms WALKER: How many drafting staff have worked on this and, as a result, the total cost of work?

Mr ELFERINK: Drafting is a function of the parliamentary draftsman which is an extension of the Department of the Chief Minister. I urge you to refer that question to the Chief Minister.

Ms WALKER: Essentially, you cannot answer the question and quantify it to a dollar value?

Mr ELFERINK: No, what you are asking for demonstrates a certain naïvety of how these systems work.

Ms WALKER: Do not patronise me, Attorney-General. I am asking questions not only because the opposition has a number of questions, but we have questions from stakeholders as well. I will feed that back to the lawyer who asked that question.

Attorney-General, how many Northern Territory government contract positions were in Solicitor for the Northern Territory, including those in agency-based service agreements, immediately after the August election, and how many now?

Mr ELFERINK: We will have to take that on notice. Can you restate the question?

Question on Notice No 4.1

Ms WALKER: How many Northern Territory government contract positions were in SFNT - total number including those located in agency-based service agreements, immediately after the August election ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, Hansard is being replaced by Mr Keith for questions on notice. If you can go a little slower he can capture the question.

Ms WALKER: You could take it straight from my notes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Nhulunbuy to the Attorney-General will be number 4.1.

Mr ELFERINK: Are we talking about standard contracts or executive contracts?

Ms WALKER: Let us include both.

Madam CHAIR: Do you accept the question, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: I do. Do you want them broken down on a contract-for-contract basis, or do you want it under the general umbrella of executive or standard contract?

Ms WALKER: No, if you could break them down for me it would be extremely helpful.

Ms WALKER: How many more positions will cease once contracts have expired?

Mr ELFERINK: The overall number of change in staff numbers is down 22. That has already been reported publicly. I have never made any secret of that because the importance of delivering these services has to be balanced against the numbers of lawyers you need.

I do not take the attitude that we employ extra people for the sake of employing extra people. The Solicitor for the Northern Territory, and the policy units, can effectively do their job with the numbers and support we supply. So far, that has been the case.

However, you need to remember a number of those former contract officers are now permanent employees of the department.

Ms WALKER: How many?

Mr ELFERINK: A number. Ten or 12. We will get an exact number for you.

Ms WALKER: Do you want that as a question on notice, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: I give you a commitment we will do that.

Madam CHAIR: It is up to you, member for Nhulunbuy.

Ms WALKER: Thank you Attorney-General. What advice was provided to you about how outsourcing of legal work to private law firms, as opposed to recruiting lawyers into the Northern Territory government, builds career paths and retains specialised corporate knowledge?

Mr ELFERINK: There are a number of areas where I specifically want to retain lawyers, not least of which is native title. It is a very specific area of the law ...

Ms WALKER: I am pleased to hear that.

Mr ELFERINK: ... which has a substantial impact on the budget position of the Northern Territory. However, you have to understand many people who worked for the Solicitor for the Northern Territory were not in the solicitor's office, they were in departments scattered around. The departments, ultimately, paid those lawyers for their services.

What was happening in those departments was the lawyers, once on deck, were rubber stamping, if you like, management decisions. We pay our managers in the public service much money - I suspect I am probably the lowest paid person sitting at this table at the moment, so we expect those managers ...

Ms WALKER: Lunch is on you.

Mr ELFERINK: Perhaps not.

Mr WOOD: How can we prove that?

Mr ELFERINK: I am certainly not the best paid person at this table.

Mr WOOD: Not the best looking.

Mr ELFERINK: Amen to that. I can cop that one on the chin.

This government expect the managers it employs to manage without having everything rubber stamped by a lawyer. Unfortunately, when a lawyer is there they tend to be used in that fashion. The experience thus far has been where lawyer services have been withdrawn the managers have gone back to managing, and I am glad to see it. You do not need a lawyer to rubber stamp a decision, particularly when the potential damages that flow from that decision are substantially less than the legal advice. Common sense applies here, and there is always an urge, particularly in the public service, to be careful. The expression is, 'Cover your A', but it does not need to be done to the degree where it goes from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Ms WALKER: Attorney, you mentioned native title as being one area of specialised corporate knowledge you are retaining in-house?

Mr ELFERINK: Sure.

Ms WALKER: I applaud that; that is sensible. Are there other areas of particular legal expertise you are retaining?

Mr ELFERINK: The Solicitor for the Northern Territory, as well as policy units, undertakes all types of work for government. Native title is a specific area where the Northern Territory government needs to have a good presence, land rights as well, because we are still not through things like Kenbi in spite of the best efforts of the former Labor government et al. We would like to get through that and would like to keep that legal work in-house. However, there are other things in departments that will be sent to lawyers in-house. Other departments may determine they want external legal advice. That is their business; they can pay for it.

Ms WALKER: During the estimates debate last year when you were sitting on this side - I have the *Hansard* where you were talking to the Solicitor for the Northern Territory. He highlighted child protection was an area of strong demand for legal services. It is an area of law which requires practitioners who are best employed in-house because they need to be familiar with policies and process and not just with relevant acts regarding children. Are you retaining that area of legal expertise within your ranks?

Mr ELFERINK: When the former Labor government took power in 2001, the Solicitor for the Northern Territory number of lawyers was four. When I was asking those questions last year it was 95.

Ms WALKER: Yes, that is because when it was four they were outsourced.

Mr ELFERINK: It was 95, so there was a substantial increase in the Solicitor for the Northern Territory. The department of Children and Families, I understand, does its own legal work but if it needs assistance from the Attorney-General's department, through policy or Solicitor for the Northern Territory, we are happy to provide it.

Ms WALKER: Are you saying in the area of child protection an in-house agency-based lawyer provided through SFNT is not working in that agency, it is an outsourced lawyer? Is this person employed ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, we have two in there. We are providing the assistance I described.

Ms WALKER: Will they remain, Attorney? They are not on contracts due to expire in six months' time?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not expect them to at this stage. I am also mindful of the probity of certain things. When I ask the department to deal with its staffing numbers, I do not dictate where those staffing numbers go. I leave that to the decision-making processes of senior managers. I do not pick individual winners and losers, nor should I. It may have been a habit of the former government, but not one of mine. The services provided will be sufficient for purpose.

Ms WALKER: I certainly hope so, Attorney, given child protection is such a critical area and was highlighted last year as a big area of litigation.

That is all the questions I have in Output 1.1.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions in Output 1.1?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Crime Victims Services Unit

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2 Crime Victims Services Unit. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: As much as I would like to, no. I applaud the Attorney-General for allocating additional funds to victims of crime in the mini-budget, but I have no questions.

Mr WOOD: Attorney-General, why do you expect there to be no increases in the number of people on the victims register?

Mr ELFERINK: These things are always hard to project, but they are based on what is known at the time and we respond accordingly.

Mr WOOD: Would you have hoped it went down?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I would.

Mr WOOD: Do you believe it would have been a good budget estimate so you had a goal to achieve?

Mr ELFERINK: We have set a number of goals and have discussed some of those today, for example, the 10% reduction in crime. These figures are put together by looking at past trends so you put out a future estimate, but, unfortunately, the trends over the last few years have seen the number of victims increasing, particularly in relation to offences against the person. When the department calculates the trends you expect to see that manifest in the future projections and that is, essentially, what occurs.

The budget is not an aspirational document; it says this is where we expect to be. It is an educated guess, but a guess nevertheless. That is why we call this the Estimates Committee. That is the estimate they have, but if we come in under that list I would be more than happy to trumpet that and you can expect to see a press release from me doing that.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Legal Policy

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 1.3 Legal Policy. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Since coming to government, how many bills or matters have been referred to the NT Law Reform Committee seeking advice?

Mr ELFERINK: I have referred two or three matters, not bills.

Ms WALKER: Could you advise what those matters were specifically, or take it as a question on notice?

Mr ELFERINK: I will take it as a question on notice. I am happy to answer this and would have been happy to in the past. We invited questions from the opposition, but no questions of this nature were forthcoming. We have referred several things but I would have to double check.

Ms WALKER: Let us make it a question on notice.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, let us do that.

Question on Notice No 4.2

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, could you please restate the question slowly.

Ms WALKER: Since coming to government, how many bills or matters have been referred to the NT Law Reform Committee seeking advice?

Madam CHAIR: Attorney-General do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: I do. I have also accepted a number of reports from the Law Reform Committee.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Nhulunbuy to the Attorney-General is number 4.2.

Madam CHAIR: Any further questions on that output, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Attorney-General, should native title questions have gone to the Solicitor for the Northern Territory or Legal Policy?

Mr ELFERINK: Solicitor for the Northern Territory, but in the interests of being an open and accountable government ...

Mr WOOD: How many native title cases are you handling at the present time?

Mr ELFERINK: There are about 70. Government is almost at the stage where it will be able to deal with these things in a straightforward way.

There was a case called King arising out of Newcastle Waters which established a benchmark model for what a native title claim over a pastoral lease should look like. That sets the template for any future consent agreement. There has been some concern from the Cattlemen's Association in relation to stock routes and access to watering points along those routes. I referred the matter back to the department for advice and I have recently received advice from the department and am circulating it to my Cabinet colleagues.

The nature of the title being sought over stock routes and watering points is not exclusive and, therefore, will not have the effect of carving out pastoral leases into separate lots. Once that issue has been nailed down there will be no reason or impediment other than having a straightforward template consent agreement in place. I am hopeful of getting through this process quickly because - 143 active native title claims - most of them will come under the pastoral lease type claim. Once that template is settled, we hope consent agreements become the yardstick. If they do, litigation will largely evaporate.

Mr WOOD: Are you involved in the review of the *Native Title Act* which is happening at the moment?

Mr ELFERINK: It is a federal act. We have not received an invitation to be involved, have we Mr Shanahan? We have; we have made submissions. We would be making submissions in the best interests of the Northern Territory. We will not go through the process of denying native title exists, because it does, but we have to determine where it exists and to what extent. In those instances, we would seek to do it through a process aimed at resolving these issues as quickly as possible so everybody knows where they stand and we can get on with development of the Northern Territory to the advantage of all Territorians.

Mr WOOD: Does your department deal with leasing arrangements for government property on Aboriginal land? I asked a question yesterday of the police regarding what lease arrangements they had for their facilities?

Mr ELFERINK: We give advice, but it would be either Lands or Regional Development.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes Output 1.3 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – COURT SUPPORT SERVICES
Output Group 2.1 - Higher Courts

Madam CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output Group 2.0 Court Support Services, Output 2.1 Higher Courts. Are there any questions?

Mr WOOD: I have a question on the Darwin Youth Justice Court. Where does that sit?

Mr ELFERINK: I can answer that.

Mr WOOD: Where is it to be built, when is it to be started, and when is it to be finished? Will it cost \$1m?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I am concerned about this issue. It is one of the first things I dealt with after becoming Attorney-General. The cells in the current court house at Nichols Place are not appropriate for kids. I could blame the former government, but I will not.

Ms WALKER: We allocated a budget of \$1m; you have just revoted it.

Mr ELFERINK: Wow, for somebody who is not being blamed you are very sensitive.

Ms WALKER: You announce it as new but they are revoted works.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, because as time passes different opportunities arise. Negotiations are under way at the moment. If we can make those happen, we will have a very good place to run a juvenile court. I am desperately trying to make those negotiations occur and we are almost there. I am mindful of saying too much publically lest somebody becomes upset, and I do not want to get upset, but I am happy to brief you afterwards so you can be comforted. I extend that briefing to you too, Ms Walker, so you understand what we are doing and understand the complexity of it. Hopefully, as a result of that, we will end up with a good children's court.

Ms WALKER: I am unsure if I am in the right output, but the Attorney-General will soon tell me. Do you plan to continue being the legal water boy and assist the Solicitor-General do his job? If so, what are the projected savings for legal counsel by having your presence?

Mr ELFERINK: I suspect very little. I understand the politics of what you are doing. I say: get over it.

Ms WALKER: Too smart, Attorney-General, you are too smart.

Mr ELFERINK: The business of a practising Attorney-General has been around for a long time. A number of Attorneys-General have done it, including South Australian Labor Attorney-General John Rau. I believe he is on his way to the High Court this month and is leading the matter.

I do not pretend to be a QC or a whiz bang lawyer but, as Attorney-General, I take it on as a duty to understand what is happening within the profession and the judiciary of the Northern Territory and, in some instances, I will become involved.

An issue arose in Alice Springs in the McNamara case which went to the heart of the administration of justice in the Northern Territory. What better way to inform myself, as the Attorney-General, than to read all the authorities which were used by the Solicitor-General in that case and become involved in the process of putting that case together. I did that, and am not ashamed to have done so, because I understand the issue of apprehended bias probably better than any other person in this room by virtue of going through that process. An involved Attorney-General who wants to understand what is happening in the law is not a bad thing.

Whilst I understand some people titter behind their hands, I do not much care for their small mindedness. It is my duty and responsibility as the first law officer to be as well-versed in what is happening in the profession and the administration of justice as I possibly can. I will do so unashamedly, and continue to do so where I see I become best informed. The feedback I have received from many lawyers is they are finally saying: "Godzijdank, there is an Attorney-General who understands the profession and wants to be engaged". When I stand in front of lawyers at lunches etcetera saying I want to be an engaged Attorney-General, the feedback is good.

I understand there will be lawyers who want to whisper things in your ear ...

Ms WALKER: They will hardly say it publicly in such a small jurisdiction, but you are quite right. That ...

Mr ELFERINK: I do not believe lawyers are cowards, as a general rule, and object to your suggestion they might be ...

Ms WALKER: I am not suggesting they are cowards at all.

Mr ELFERINK: I have found lawyers to be generally forthright in their approach to things. If you want to become the conduit for a few, that is up to you. I am an engaged Attorney-General and care very much about what happens in our profession.

I am also not upset to have become involved in the McNamara matter because, as a result, we have an excellent person in Alice Springs able to continue her role from time to time as an acting Magistrate, much to my delight and the delight of many lawyers, particularly in Alice Springs.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any other questions for Output 2.1?

Mr WOOD: No, I have no questions on that.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1

Output 2.2 – Lower Courts and Tribunals

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 2.2, Lower Courts and Tribunals. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Attorney-General, in your mini-budget release dated 4 December 2012 you stated:

Savings of \$4.2m per year by 2014-2015 will be made by disbanding the Substance Misuse and Referral for Treatment (SMART) Court, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Tribunal and the Community Court.

Attorney-General, quite apart from savings, what advice did you receive, and what evaluation was undertaken about abolishing the SMART Court and the AOB Tribunal ahead of announcing that these two would be gone in December's mini-budget?

Mr ELFERINK: The first part of the advice we received was a \$5.5bn debt. Let us be clear about that. Does that get a mention in the media release - because it should? That is the legacy of the former Labor government. The SMART Court, as it was rolled out by the former government as a matter of policy, had very little success. After spending millions of dollars, I believe 26 people successfully went through the SMART Court process. A whole bunch of other people had dropped off, and there were a number in train at the time. Also, the SMART Court was done at some expense to government ...

Ms WALKER: Your media release says a total of 52 graduated from the SMART Court.

Mr ELFERINK: It was 52. You have the numbers. How many started.

Ms WALKER: You do not say.

Mr ELFERINK: I would like to get the numbers because it is much more than that.

A similar model was being run by Justice Blokland when she was Chief Magistrate called the Credit Court. It was being done within budget inside the Court system.

It is the Labor way to throw money around and say, 'We have a solution to a problem'. There is nothing within the powers available to the courts under their probation and parole systems, bail systems and other legislative instruments, to re-establish something that looks and smells like the SMART Court. The power has always been there, as evidenced by the operation of the Credit Court, if that is what the courts choose to do.

This government is stuck with a \$5.5bn projected debt and we have to respond to that because if we do not, in five or 10 years' time not only do we have to get rid of things like the SMART Court, but we would have to get rid of a substantial number of courts.

Ms WALKER: You are sending people to prison. You are topping up an already stretched system. You are ignoring the principle that the SMART Court is about keeping people out of the Corrections system.

Mr ELFERINK: Why are you so keen on keeping people out of gaol all the time? You have said it several times. What do you have against putting people in gaol? Is it a general principle of the Labor Party that nobody should go to gaol?

Ms WALKER: Why are you so keen on locking people up is my question to you?

Mr ELFERINK: Because I expect people to be answerable for the consequences of their actions.

Ms WALKER: You are not interested in justice reinvestment ...

Mr ELFERINK: That is what I, and the community, expect.

Ms WALKER: ...you are not interested in alternative methods of dealing with offenders who have substance and abuse problems.

Mr ELFERINK: You could hardly accuse the Northern Territory ...

Ms WALKER: You are not interested in going to the heart of the offending, namely alcohol and substance misuse.

Mr ELFERINK: That is not true.

Ms WALKER: You are the member for locking up, Attorney. Of course prisons have a place.

Mr ELFERINK: This is the each way bet. You do not want anybody locked up but prisons have a place. You want to do something about alcohol but will resist the government's alcohol policy. It is really fatuous for you to continually run this line that Aboriginal - that people ...

Ms WALKER: I did not say Aboriginal.

Mr ELFERINK: ... I corrected myself - as a general principle, should not go to gaol.

Ms WALKER: I have not said that at all. You are verballing me.

Mr ELFERINK: Then stop saying it.

Ms WALKER: You are verballing me.

Madam CHAIR: This is best dealt with in the Chamber on Thursday. Let us move to a question.

Ms WALKER: In removal of the SMART Court and the AOD Tribunal - you can clarify this for me - you did not seek the views of the Chief Magistrate. If not, why not, given she is the head of the jurisdiction and therefore in a position to offer advice? Further to that - this is why I believe you did not ask her opinion - she is quoted in national media with a certain position and your response to her was, 'the Chief Magistrate continues to comment on social policy which remains the domain of policy makers. If the Chief Magistrate wishes to influence policy she has the opportunity to stand for parliament'. Why are you gagging the Chief Magistrate?

Mr ELFERINK: It is impossible for me to gag the Chief Magistrate. Such an assertion is absurd and demonstrates your lack of understanding on how our system of government works.

Ms WALKER: You told her if she wants to comment she can become a member of parliament.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, the minister is answering the question.

Mr ELFERINK: It is the duty of jurists - let us talk about duties. My duty is not to criticise the courts; to be the public voice and defend them, and I do. In spite of invitations, even in the parliament to do so by members who are not of government to criticise the courts, I have resisted that because of that duty.

The duty of an Attorney-General to protect the courts is considered so important a principle that in the United Kingdom, the Attorney-General is not even a member of Cabinet because they stand alone in that

duty. That is not the case in Australia, so occasionally that places an Attorney-General in a difficult situation when we have to navigate the shoals of political debate.

Another duty at play is that of a Chief Magistrate or Justice to ensure their court continues to enjoy public support by being predictable and representative of the interests of justice. If the Chief Magistrate, or any other jurist for that matter, seeks to involve themselves in public debate they run the risk of bringing their court into the realm of political and policy matters. What I said in relation to that - and I was quite correctly quoted in *The Australian*, is if a Chief Magistrate, or any other jurist, is so concerned about matters of public policy then they have the option of being elected and one of the policy setters in the parliamentary system.

Ms WALKER: In other jurisdictions we know Chief Magistrates regularly comment on public and social policy.

Mr ELFERINK: They do. However, they have to be mindful of the fact they have to impose limits upon themselves lest they bring their court into substantial public controversy. We do not want that and know jurists do not want that.

Ms WALKER: Did you seek the Chief Magistrate's advice on the abolition of the Smart Court and AOD Tribunal, yes or no?

Mr ELFERINK: It would be impertinent to tell me how to answer questions. I would like you to listen to the answers. I am trying to answer your questions fulsomely, and would like an opportunity to do so. Again, you are directing me to answer questions. I told the Chief Magistrate the intent of the Northern Territory government. Clearly, in the public domain, she does not like that decision but government money supported the program in the courts and if she finds that so objectionable she has certain courses of actions open to her. I speak with her on a regular basis on a number of issues and we will not see eye to eye on all of them.

Ms WALKER: Thanks Attorney-General.

Mr WOOD: Attorney-General, one of the downsides of mandatory sentencing is the need for extra time for trials. Anyone who believes they will not receive a light sentence – thank you for the figures on sentencing over the last 12 months – people who believe they will be sentenced for three months will plead not guilty, which means time waiting for a trial. From a budget perspective, will that be a cost to the government?

Mr ELFERINK: All trials are a cost to government. If you are asking whether or not we will have more sitting days, we will see how that proceeds. We have to look at demand on the courts to sufficiently fund them. There have been initial indications from some lawyers that they might go down that path, but this has yet to become manifest. Nothing prevents a court sending a person to prison for committing an assault which occasions some sort of harm. In fact, I was in a court recently in Nhulunbuy where a gentleman was sent down for a number of months for breaking another gentleman's arm with a didgeridoo. There was no mention in the sentencing remarks from the Magistrate of mandatory sentencing. This Magistrate simply determined the sentence was appropriate to the case.

Bearing in mind for serious criminal assaults there is a maximum of 14 years, we have given the courts a frame of three months to 14 years in which to determine an appropriate sentence. If it turns out we have an increase in not guilty pleas, in our criminal justice system people can plead not guilty to test the evidence the Crown brings against them in any circumstances. That is right a person may choose to exercise. If a person exercises that right any discounts for an early guilty plea are forfeited. If that person has committed a serious assault for which 14 years is the maximum penalty, they can probably expect to go to prison for three months at least. The discount would not be substantial.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I have the figures here and the majority of people go to gaol for three months or more. I agree with Justice Mildren: you have taken the discretion of the Judge to make a decision based on all the circumstances not one particular circumstance, and that is what worries me ...

Mr ELFERINK: We do that all the time. Every time we pass a legislative instrument it removes a discretion.

Mr WOOD: Yes, there is no discretion. Some people were given sentences of less than three months and some had suspended sentences. Would you at least consider - I raised this with you in parliament - that you reintroduce the option of allowing the three month sentence to be home detention? We know the cost of imprisonment and that here are advantages to home detention from the point of view of a person staying

with their family and continuing to work. From my knowledge, it is one of the hardest sentences because there is a temptation to leave the premises. Has the government given any consideration to the fact what it has introduced means more pressure on prisons and, to offset that to some extent, reintroducing home detention?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, 22% of the prison population is traffic offenders: people who drive unregistered, uninsured cars. I also suspect they are exceeding 0.08 and driving disqualified particularly. The nature of an assault is such that it is an offence against a person. I always consider an offence against a person to be more serious than an offence against property. If you take a person's property, but not their ability to restore their loss, they can restore their loss.

An offence against a person takes away, occasionally, their ability to restore their loss because they are injured as a result and cannot earn money to look after themselves and their family. This government has taken that philosophy to a particularly high level by ensuring a person injured in the workplace is protected by this legislation because the workplace is sacred to a person earning money to look after themselves and put a roof over the head of their family and dependants.

As Attorney-General, I am looking at things like bracelet technology- electronic monitoring - primarily for the lower type offences. You would have to go some distance to convince me a person who injures another person as a result of a criminal assault is at the lower end of offending.

Mr WOOD: I am not saying that, Attorney-General. In most cases it is due to alcohol, as we know. Are you bringing in the alcohol orders or the Treasurer?

Mr ELFERINK: Are you talking about the alcohol protection laws?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Not only could you put people in home detention, which will have conditions about drinking, and the parole officer would ...

Mr ELFERINK: You ought to see some of this technology. They have bracelets which can drug and alcohol test.

Mr WOOD: Is the government thinking of introducing a system where police check a person who has been told they are not to drink - they will have a banning order on drinking. Why not do it through your department as part of a sentence? They are getting picked up, they have committed a crime ...

Mr ELFERINK: You are talking about community Corrections. In bracelet technology, part of the pillars program is to get it up and running. Guess what? The coppers, the judiciary, and Corrections can all use this technology because it is good technology.

The former minister for Corrections had the foresight to bring legislation into the House which enabled bracelet technology to be introduced. Bracelet technology is a useful tool. The class of prisoner you target that at – well, that is a different issue. One of the reasons we have pillars is because police, the judiciary and the Corrections system all have buy into this technology. Having an oversight of a simple system that runs across all three departments makes sense. That is not a criticism of the former Corrections minister because he did not have that latitude. I, fortunately, have.

Mr WOOD: That is the problem with this debate. One minister will have alcohol banning orders, Corrections ...

Mr ELFERINK: Hence, pillars. It all tracks back to yours truly.

Mr WOOD: When I am directing my debate one minister will say, 'That is not quite my area'. The global approach to this legislation I am looking at, or trying to get a more practical approach to it - I do not know where to take the debate.

Mr ELFERINK: The way I see it is the bracelet technology is run by a lead agency, let us say Corrections, which will probably have most use for it. However, that does not prevent the coppers using it, and it is being run. The flag goes up on this stuff - this technology goes down the phone line or, nowadays, down a GPS. There are different types of technology.

The people who monitor it are in San Francisco, Europe, or somewhere else. They make a phone call back to the customer - the Northern Territory government - and let us say you have a bracelet on that can test for alcohol, all of a sudden the bracelet reports alcohol in the sweat of the person wearing it. If that person is on bail the coppers might knock on his door and say, 'Blow into this, stupid'. If that person is on court bail, it will still be the police who go around.

If that person is on probation as a result of a court order or is a parolee, it could well be community Corrections. We will empower community Corrections to do their bit and the coppers theirs. Having this oversight role enables me, and the senior officers, to determine how broad this technology rolls out across government.

Mr WOOD: In summary, are you saying if we had the bracelets there is a chance more people could be on home detention?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, I needed to clarify that.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 - Fines Recovery Unit

Madam CHAIR: We will now consider Output 2.3, Fines Recovery Unit. Are there any questions?

Mr WOOD: If clearance rates are the same but the number of fines and penalties increases, does that mean most fines are outstanding?

Mr ELFERINK: Prima facie, that is the conclusion you can draw. Unfortunately, recovering fines has always been a challenge. In the old days we had Warrant of Commitment, which were called the Money or the Body warrants. If a person did not pay a fine it would convert into a warrant of arrest and the person would then cut out that fine - \$100 a day was the last time. Now we cancel licences and such things. Fines recovery is always a challenge, as it was for the former government, and will continue to be for this one.

Mr WOOD: Yes, you often criticised them. If you have a solution I am interested to hear it.

Ms WALKER: He has to fix it now.

Mr ELFERINK: I Have not turned my mind to it in recent times because I have been busy. However, if a Warrant of Commitment exists at the tail end of it there might be a system by which, if you jump through every other hoop, we could reintroduce a Warrant of Commitment so a consequence flows from not paying your fine.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of output 2.3.

Output 2.4 - Integrated Justice Information System

Madam CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 2.4, Integrated Justice Information System. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Not from me, Madam Chair.

Mr WOOD: One which harps back to a debate we had in the Council of Territory Cooperation. Are police crime statistics, and crime statistics the Department of Justice collects, in sync now?

Mr ELFERINK: My understanding is all statistics used by the department are produced by police. The IJIS system, a unique system which does not exist anywhere else in world as far as I know, links police computer access to the same system as the courts. It becomes the source of all truth for the criminal justice system. We are revamping it and spending money on it because if we get a good product we might be able to sell it into other jurisdictions as a useful tool. That is why we have rolled the cash over from one year into the next. We are rolling out the IJIS system because we want to do a good job of it. Anne

Bradford, the senior public servant who had carriage of it originally, handed it over to the department in very good condition before she commenced work on the debacle which is the AMS. We continue to roll the IJIS revamp out.

In regard to whether police have reconciled the two sets of numbers, I cannot answer that because I do not know. Suffice to say the statistics the police produce, such as the statistics we were operating off earlier, are a benchmark used by all jurisdictions because you see them reflected in the ABS numbers when they come out. They are presented in exactly the same fashion by the ABS. I believe the numbers coming out of police will be consistent with ABS requirements. Hang on.

We produce the statistics using police data. Did I not say that? If I did not say it, I intended to. We produce the numbers, but the police data is the raw data which throws up the statistics.

Mr WOOD: On the issue of statistics, I am unsure if this is a Department of Justice or DPP question, but when the mandatory sentencing bill was introduced my biggest complaint was there was no evidence magistrates were not handing out proper sentences in relation to serious assaults. I received that information several weeks after we passed the legislation. Why are those statistics not easily available? For a government making policies, hopefully not just because people like it but because they have basic, sound evidence for the legislation, it would be relatively easy to get what I have in front of me. I have various types of severity of the assault, the number of judgments where the judge said the person could have a fully suspended or non-custodial sentence, I have columns for less than three months gaol, three months to one year and 12 months or more - that is for no prior convictions - and I have exactly the same with prior convictions.

That information was really important for me to make an intelligent decision about the legitimacy of what you wanted to do with mandatory sentencing. Why is that difficult to get? That is the nuts and bolts information the department needs?

Mr ELFERINK: The assumption in that question is we were after some preventative exercise. We hope people are prevented from committing offences based on the nature of the penalty they will receive. My starting point is I hope people will not commit offences because they believe doing so and punching people is morally wrong. Therefore, your question assumes the primary motivation of government was to use this as prevention. That is one of the motivations, but the primary motivation of government, as I explained in the House on that occasion, is punishment to hold people accountable for the things they do wrong.

In relation to the numbers and how they are expressed, when you look at it through that lens it becomes less important and just public reassurance that people who commit serious assaults go to gaol.

Mr WOOD: Your ...

Mr ELFERINK: I hear what you are saying.

Mr WOOD: Your argument for mandatory sentencing was courts did not let people off and they ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, I did not that. I was careful not to criticise the courts through the whole process.

Mr WOOD: You said people get off on the rising of the court. They spend one day in the watch house ...

Mr ELFERINK: That is right, but I was careful to say, when making that observation, that was contrary to the public expectation and to the promises of the former Labor government which introduced the system.

Mr WOOD: We could argue that until the cows come home, but some people were released and many more went to prison. My difficulty is I do not know why the judge let those people off.

Mr ELFERINK: There is an exceptional circumstances clause in the legislation.

Mr WOOD: Yes, and it is hard to fill.

Mr ELFERINK: For a reason. However, there is an exceptional circumstances clause in the legislation and the jurisdiction which is exercising that exceptional circumstances clause will consider exceptional circumstances in those situations where required.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. We could go on forever.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.4 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS
Output 3.1 – Director of Public Prosecutions

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0 Director of Public Prosecutions, Output 3.1 Director of Public Prosecutions. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Attorney-General, I understand during estimates last night the Police Commissioner advised allegations about breaches of the law in polling booths at Wadeye and Nyirripi during the August general election were referred to police for investigation and have been forwarded to the DPP. Can you confirm this? When did the DPP receive this referral and when might we expect to see an outcome?

Mr ELFERINK: No! I do not make it my business to intrude into the DPP. It is an independent office which comes under the Department of Attorney-General and Justice but I am careful not to ask questions of the head of the DPP as to what they might or might not be prosecuting this week. That would be highly improper.

Ms WALKER: I am not asking you whether or not they are prosecuting. Can you confirm, as per what the Police Commissioner said last night, this matter has been forwarded to the DPP?

Mr ELFERINK: No, I cannot because it would be improper for me to ring Jack and say, 'Hey, mate, what are you prosecuting this week or what is on your table'. I am not going to do it. I cannot confirm it.

Ms WALKER: We will take it as a given that it is with the DPP. Would that be good?

Mr ELFERINK: It is an independent office. If the Police Commissioner says he has forwarded it to the DPP I believe the Police Commissioner.

Ms WALKER: Good, thanks Attorney-General.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have questions for DPP?

Mr WOOD: No, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – INDEPENDENT OFFICES
Output 4.1 – Consumer Affairs

MADAM CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0 Independent Offices and Output 4.1 Consumer Affairs. Are there any questions?

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.1

Mr ELFERINK: Can I go back whilst we are shuffling deck chairs? A total of 18 lawyers on fixed term contracts were appointed as ongoing employees following the restructure of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory effective 5 April 2013. The levels were SP2 - seven; SP1 - one; P3 – eight; O2 – two; a total of 18. In addition, five ongoing NTPS employees on temporary arrangements were confirmed for ongoing transfer or promotion effective 5 April 2013 as follows SP2 - three; SP1 - one; P3 - one; making a total of five.

Ms WALKER: Attorney General, I appreciate you reading that off an iPad. Could we receive a tabled document?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, we can give those details to you.

Ms WALKER: That would be great thanks.

Madam CHAIR: The Attorney-General has answered Question on Notice 4.1 and the member Nhulunbuy happily received that answer.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions on Output 4.1.

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, thank you for joining us. How many complaints have you received in Consumer Affairs about power and water price increases? Could you break that down into numbers for residential and business?

Mr CLEMENTS: Power and Water being a government authority, we do not accept complaints about it. I do not have any statistics.

Ms WALKER: Yesterday I heard some went to the Ombudsman. That is fine, thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I have asked the Consumer Affairs Commissioner questions previously and they have all been satisfactorily answered.

Ms WALKER: Commissioner, on that basis there is no point asking how many complaints you have received from public housing tenants about rent increases.

Mr CLEMENTS: If we received complaints we would have directed them to Territory Housing. If the tenant had asked a question in regard to the *Residential Tenancies Act* we would have responded to that, but it is unlikely we would hold data where the landlord was Territory Housing. They would have been specific responses to tenants with regard to the *Residential Tenancies Act*. My understanding is it would be a low level, if any.

Ms WALKER: Could you check if you have received some? Could that be a question on notice, Madam Chair?

Question on Notice No 4.3

Madam CHAIR: For the purposes of Hansard, will you please restate the question.

Ms WALKER: Have there been any complaints about the dramatic increase in rents in public housing?

Madam CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, of course.

Madam CHAIR: For the purposes of Hansard, that is question number 4.3.

Ms WALKER: I have finished, Gerry.

Mr ELFERINK: Before you go, I can throw this into the mix. This is an answer to a question relating to the SMART Court. Figures from November last year, which is when the media release was dated: the number of defendants referred was 230. The number of defendants who accepted, or made it through the first cutoff and were accepted into the SMART Court program was 146. The number of defendants who graduated was 52. The number of defendants who discontinued was 37. The number who had not graduated at that time was 57.

There were 52 graduations for millions of dollars of expenditure. Whilst it would be nice to see these type of programs continue, in effectiveness and bang for buck, 52 graduations from millions of dollars' worth of expenditure is disappointing.

Ms WALKER: All relative, is it not, Attorney-General? Fifty-two out of 230 is not too bad in my books.

Mr ELFERINK: Well, \$5.5bn worth of debt is a figure relative to the future of Territorians.

Ms WALKER: We are not talking that. We are talking about ...

Madam CHAIR: We can save this for debate in the Chamber. Are there any further questions?

Mr WOOD: In your annual report for 2011-12, Commissioner, the container deposit scheme was mentioned. In relation to excessive price increases, which I have been following, prices rose considerably but you said no regulatory breach was evident? Are you saying legally there is nothing to stop any shop increasing prices?

Mr CLEMENTS: The only price regulation in the Northern Territory I am aware of is in regard to taxi services. The Consumer Affairs role in regard to Australian consumer law is to investigate misleading and deceptive practices, and we did that in regard to the increase in pricing. That was about what businesses were advertising their prices at, and whether they were misleading consumers in regard to how that pricing was formed.

There were earlier concerns about whether or not business was blaming the container deposit legislation for the increase in price and we investigated that. We did not find any breaches so we did not pursue it further. That is what the report indicates.

Mr WOOD: The only way you can discover that is find the wholesale price. If the wholesale price was such and such before the container deposit came in, and 12 months later the wholesale price has shifted by 10¢ or 20¢ to cover the cost of CDL but the price of beer went up by – say a 30-pack would go up by \$6 if you counted the deposit plus the working fee, but you found it went up by \$10 you would have to ask how come. Did anyone do that calculation?

Mr CLEMENTS: The law we regulate talks about misleading and deceptive. A business would have to say in that situation the increase was solely in relation to the CDL. When we investigated we looked at businesses indicating why the price went up and looked at the background to that. No one said it was all CDL and nothing else. They spoke about CPI increases happening at that time, and also the handling fees and associated costs of the CDL. There was logic behind why the price increased more than we would have expected under the CDL.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I understand that. My approach has been to find out what the price of beer in Kununurra and Cloncurry is, because I know freight is evened out across Australia. I worked for Mitre 10 for donkey's years. The reason you pay the same price for fertiliser in Darwin as in Mount Isa is because freight is levelled out. You did not look at comparing between states?

Mr CLEMENTS: No, we did not because we are not price regulators. That is not our function.

Mr WOOD: I did not mean that. I rang to ask them how much their beer was.

Mr CLEMENTS: A business in the Territory can charge whatever they so desire for their product and, if they wish to charge twice as much, supply and demand and market forces will dictate whether they will sell that product.

Mr WOOD: The only comeback I have is to advertise the fact someone is making much more money than their neighbour over the border. It is not really a matter for you?

Mr CLEMENTS: It is not a misleading, deceptive practice, and that is our role.

Mr WOOD: I call it a rip-off, but that is another matter.

With regard to the travel company that went bust several years ago where many people were left high and dry, is that matter finished now?

Mr CLEMENTS: I believe ...

Madam CHAIR: Sorry, to interrupt, Commissioner. Member for Nelson, is this related to the 2013-14 budget?

Mr WOOD: It is related because it comes out within the financial year. This is the only time I can question the annual report and it is part of the budget process. I was asking the Commissioner, as this was an issue of compliance, if the matter is completed and did customers receive positive results.

Mr CLEMENTS: A number received cash refunds through credit card systems, and we assisted quite a few people in that regard. I believe the proprietor of the business has recently been before the courts. I am not

sure what the sentencing result was. Certainly, there has been a process. The police pursued it vigorously as far as I am aware. We took every step we could to assist those people get their money back.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thanks.

Madam CHAIR: If there are no further questions, Commissioner, I would like to thank you very much for joining us today. It is 12.59 pm so we will have lunch before calling on the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. Thank you also to the Attorney-General.

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, do you want to check if Mr Wood had questions for the next two officers because I do not.

Mr WOOD: No, I do not.

Madam CHAIR: Okay.

Ms WALKER: In which case ...

Mr ELFERINK: Really?

Madam CHAIR: You are off the hook.

Mr ELFERINK: Hang on.

Madam CHAIR: I will confirm. Are there any questions for Outputs 4.2 or 4.3, member for Nhulunbuy?

Ms WALKER: I would have normally, but in the interests of time and expediency ...

Madam CHAIR: Yes, understood. Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam CHAIR: Attorney-General, you will be able to tell your Information Commissioner and Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to go back to their job.

Ms MONAGHAN: With respect, I am also the Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner.

Madam CHAIR: Sorry.

Ms MONAGHAN: Output 4.4.

Madam CHAIR: Very Well, then you CAN stay. Thank you.

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, were there questions to that output as well?

Madam CHAIR: You do not have any?

Ms WALKER: That is all I am asking, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: Sorry, I thought you said 4.2 and 4.3. Member for Nelson, do you have any questions for 4.4?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr ELFERINK: One observation, I believe you were specifically asking for her presence in that role.

Ms WALKER: I have no questions in that area.

Mr ELFERINK: This is one of the reason we ask people not to bother coming. No questions were forwarded to us originally then we received a list from Mr Gunner requesting people required for estimates. A number of those individuals have taken time out of their day waiting to be called for questions and are not asked questions.

Ms WALKER: I appreciate that, Attorney-General, but we have had to rejig how we ask questions on the strength of ...

Mr ELFERINK: Ill-discipline.

Ms WALKER: No.

Mr ELFERINK: Your ill-discipline, madam.

Ms WALKER: It is about reading out questions that took up hours and hours ...

Mr ELFERINK: Can we get some direction from this committee in relation to the Public Trustee and the Registrar-General? Are there any questions for those people?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have questions for the Registrar-General or the Public Trustee?

Mr WOOD: No, I do not, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: The entire Output Group 4 has been dealt with. Any staff associated with that are free to go. Thank you to the Department of Attorney-General and Justice. At 2 pm we will commence with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: For the benefit of Hansard, we have Gerry McCarthy, member for Barkly; Nicole Manison, member for Wanguri; myself; Larisa Lee, member for Arnhem; Terry Mills, member for Blain; and Gerry Wood, member for Nelson.

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

Madam CHAIR: I welcome you, minister, as Minister for Public Employment, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

Mr ELFERINK: I introduce Ken Simpson, Commissioner for Public Employment, and also Shelley Hewitt, Chief Financial Officer for the Department of the Chief Minister. In the interests of time, I can forgo the introductory statement and am happy to take questions. I believe you all want to know about the 20 questions.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, do you have them in a format you are prepared to table, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I do. In accordance with the new wishes of the committee, I table eight copies of answers to the generic questions.

Mr WOOD: Is that decision on overall policy or just for the previous one, which was that thick, as against thinner ones?

Mr ELFERINK: I assure ...

Madam CHAIR: We can vote every time.

Mr ELFERINK: If you like, Madam Chair ...

Mr WOOD: No, that is all right.

Madam CHAIR: I take your point and am not trying ...

Mr ELFERINK: Madam Chair, my guesstimate is I would be reading for an hour or so at least.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Wanguri?

Ms MANISON: Yes, we are more than happy with them being tabled.

Madam CHAIR: Okay.

Mr WOOD: I am not, but I will – could I just ...

Madam CHAIR: The member for Nelson notes his objection.

Ms MANISON: Minister, with regard to the other agencies that have come through, there have been many references to questions about staffing matters being addressed in the written questions. Have they been captured?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms MANISON: Yes, fantastic, thank you.

Mr ELFERINK: I draw your attention to question 8 in that pack which gives a detailed breakdown in a table comparing the old structure of the former government under Pay 5 and then the new structure of the agencies cycled forward to Pay 20. You will see a clear breakdown as to the movements across government in that table.

If you want me to comment on them now, because I have already opened my book in anticipation of this question - I told you a lie. I have it attached to question 6. For some reason it is a question 8 attachment, but this is the chart I am talking about. Check the back of question 6.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I am looking at the number of outputs and how we have commenced already. Are you happy to take questions in relation to this portfolio?

Mr ELFERINK: The budget for the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment is very small. If I wanted to be a control freak about it I would say we could go through it line item by line item. In truth, the questions I anticipate receiving have very little to do with the line items per se, but deal with employment throughout the public service. I am happy to answer those questions but, as a consequence, without telling the committee how to do its job, I anticipate the committee would expect to want move into that rather than trawling through the bureaucratic line item by line item autopsy of the budget.

Ms MANISON: Minister, I am happy for you to go over this table with us to explain it.

Mr ELFERINK: That table - I am glad you brought it up - is marked as question 8 attachment A, but in Pay 5 dated 30 August 2012, the last pay under the former Labor government, you can see the various departments and the total list of employees. I draw members' attention to the bottom of that list where it has totals, and at Pay 5 there were 20 111 FTEs in the public service. Pay 11 saw that shrink slightly to 20 016 FTEs, and in Pay 20 the number was 19 640 FTEs and, as of 20 June, there were 19 851 FTEs. You do not have that number in front of you, but that is simply a list. Up until ...

Ms MANISON: Minister, that was 19 851.

Mr ELFERINK: That is still 260 positions less than from Pay 5, but, nevertheless, shows an increase since Pay 20. The rationale for the increase deals with areas such as our policy in relation to habitual drunks legislation. There is also a wash-over effect from increased police numbers. In Corrections, because we were under establishment, we have started moving towards establishment. There have been ups and downs.

If it assists the committee yes, there was a recruitment freeze. The effect of a freeze means as people bleed out of the system, for lack of better words, we do not recruit new people other than those given specific approvals for recruitment. That is the way you can reduce public service numbers. Unfortunately, we have a \$5.5bn projected debt to deal with. We are anxious to deal with that in a way which does not unnecessarily or negatively affect the service to the people of the Northern Territory.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions? Normally we would go through agency-related whole-of-government and then line by line; however, the minister is happy to take the whole portfolio.

Ms MANISON: I am happy to go then.

Madam CHAIR: Hit him with your questions and when you are done, we are done.

Ms MANISON: To be clear you are saying as of today – if we look at the last intake before the numbers you provided - the period between the pay day of 28 March 2013 and the pay day of 30 August 2012 - would it be correct to say that was 471 public servants?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, the change from Pay 5 is correct. There were 471 less people employed at Pay 20. That has increased slightly over recent times based on the figure I gave you.

Ms MANISON: As of the latest figures you can provide, there are now 260 less public servants than on 30 August 2012?

Mr ELFERINK: That is correct.

Ms MANISON: Minister, in the lead-up to the election a firm commitment was made by yourself and your colleagues to Territory public servants that their jobs were safe. I am sure you are familiar with this given you and your colleagues handed this out prior to the election.

We have established the difference between the election and the March pay is almost 500 less public servants. Today there are almost 260 less public servants; however, at that time about 500 people, based on the March pay, were without jobs. Did you break your election commitment to public servants?

Mr ELFERINK: I draw your attention to the answer in Question 1. I will read it out because I know you have not had the opportunity to read it yet.

Question 1:

Details on progress of all CLP election commitments, including all commitments and policy announcements made to Territorians in CLP election policy documents, summary snapshots, media releases and announcements, 100 day plan, costings and savings documents, media advertisements and other printed material.

The answer is: guarantee jobs of all frontline workers and public servants on \$110 000 base salary. We made no secret in the campaign that we had a threshold of \$110 000. It was perfectly clear in that environment, and politically courageous, to walk into a Territory election talking about public service numbers. Nevertheless, that is what we did. No non-executive contract officer public servant with a base salary of \$110 000 or less has been terminated as a result of restructuring of the public service. When you say 'lost their jobs', we have not terminated anybody; nobody has been sacked. Let us be quite clear about that. Many people move on; we have a high turnover of public servants in the Northern Territory for a number of reasons.

Ms MANISON: When you say nobody has been sacked, is that under the \$110 000 threshold?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. We have a high turnover of public servants so you do not need to fire people, engage in retrenchments, or anything else because they bleed off over time. There has also been an allegation that contract officers have not had contracts renewed. The nature of a contract is, by its definition, finite in the temporal world. We are aware we have to be fiscally responsible. I do not enjoy seeing people lose their jobs. That is why a recruitment freeze was put in place - those jobs were allowed to seep away via attrition. Many of the positions now not filled have become vacant because people have moved on, gone interstate, retired or become ill and gone on sick leave and we do not have to cause the trauma implied by your question.

Ms MANISON: Towards the last few days of the election campaign there were some highly publicised interviews about your party's commitments to public servants around job losses. I will quote from an interview with the former Chief Minister, the member for Blain, with David Speers on Sky News on 23 August, where he was asked how many public service jobs would go. His response was none. Mr Speers then said, 'No public service jobs will go?' to which he replied, 'No public service jobs will go'. On 24 August, the former Chief Minister, the member for Blain, spoke on the ABC breakfast program and was asked, 'Can you guarantee there will be no public service job cuts, both frontline and backline?'. He said, 'Yes'.

Minister, the difference between August and March was almost 500 public servants out of a job. Why did you break your commitment to public servants?

Mr ELFERINK: We did not, and I have explained that very carefully. I know you understand it. You are stuck with a problem. You have some written questions and your approach is to read them out irrespective of what answer I give. I ask you, as the shadow minister, to demonstrate some mental acuity and listen to the answer given and respond in accordance with that.

The world passes and changes over time. One of the changes that has occurred is, by virtue of the way disabilities are calculated under horizontal fiscal equalisation, the Commonwealth Grants GST Review Panel has cut from the Northern Territory's income over \$100m a year, pressed out as far as our projections will allow us. That is a big problem. I listened carefully to the protest orchestrated, I presume, by the Labor Party, but there are anxious people and one story struck me.

Ms MANISON: Are we talking about the public servants protest? Sorry, the unions protest? That was not orchestrated by Labor.

Mr ELFERINK: The protest out the front. Yes, the union protest. The one where they quite rudely yelled and screamed over the top of the former Chief Minister, not enabling him to address them after he had the courtesy of listening carefully to their complaints. I also listened very carefully. I remember a fire officer saying: 'What happens if these cuts occur and I am holding a little girl's hand and she is dying on the side of the road?' That paints a very emotive picture. However, in the real world, if we do not restrain our expenditure now, what happens to the fire officer in 10 years' time who is holding a little girl's hand for two hours because we are paying more on an interest bill on a daily basis than we can afford to pay to support the fire service?

That is a problem with the here and now snapshot of budgetary management. You go 'click', here is the here and now snapshot and, yes, it paints an emotive picture. However, if we do not contain our reckless expenditure as a jurisdiction what happens in the future?

I do not govern for Territorians just for today; I govern with one eye on the future of the Territory and the people who live here. If that had occurred in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal or Ireland the problems they have would not be as pronounced as they are.

Ms MANISON: Minister, you have, effectively, said you changed your mind and broke your promise to Territorians.

Mr ELFERINK: No, I said the world changes. I again draw your attention to the answer to Question 1. We clearly explained our position prior to the election. We went into an election campaign talking about public service numbers because we knew there was a problem. We were not sneaky or furtive about it. We wanted to reassure public servants on wages below \$110 000 a year that their jobs would be safe – and they were ...

Ms MANISON: Minister, people earning under \$110 000 lost their jobs.

Mr ELFERINK: No, they did not. This is the problem your rhetoric has to get over. No one was fired, no one was terminated. Contracts expired and people left. With a public service freeze, we were able to restrain some areas of employee expenses. If you do not do that, and if you borrow to continue paying staff wages, as the member for Casuarina said in parliament recently, you are on a fiscal disaster slope. Unfortunately, if we follow the rationale recommended and exercised by the former Labor government, not only are we on the slope but we have slipped off the skis and are using our poles frantically to go down the slope faster.

Ms MANISON: Minister, going back to the point you made about contracts ending, on 28 August you had an interview with Kate O'Toole on the ABC where you discussed the Country Liberals' policy around public servants. This is also part of your 100-day plan when coming to government. You said:

Fully a third of our public service is currently on temporary contracts and it is being used as a management tool - a sword of Damocles if you like, over those public servant's heads. And the CPSU has been utterly silent about that situation. It is something that the Country Liberals will be turning our minds to because we want to also let people know that where this is being used as a management tool and not actually a pragmatic tool, then we will, of course, be looking at trying to burn some of those jobs up and give people a real sense of permanency.

Mr ELFERINK: Sure.

Ms MANISON: Minister, was that sense of permanency the sense of not having a job?

Mr ELFERINK: I just answered in a previous section I made 18 people permanent in the department by taking them off contracts.

Ms MANISON: What other initiatives, minister, have you put in place to ...

Mr ELFERINK: I have told you.

Ms MANISON: ... to give public servants a sense of permanency.

Mr ELFERINK: The number of ongoing public servants at Pay 5 was 14 460. We have moved to make 409 of those more permanent than they were on contracts. There are now 14 869 permanent public servants, which is an increase of 409.

Ms MANISON: Minister, how many people on temporary contracts have lost their job since you have come to government?

Mr ELFERINK: A number. Can I pull you up again? They have not lost their job. Contracts, by their very nature, have a date on which they expire. I am trying to remember, in contract law, if there is a perpetual contract. There may be, but even that will have steps in it. People who enter into contractual arrangements do so willingly and understanding the documents they sign. We have taken 409 of those people off a contractual arrangement and placed them into permanent employment. You ask what we are doing - that is your answer.

Ms MANISON: How many people who were on temporary contracts are no longer employed with the public service since the election?

Mr ELFERINK: The short answer is we do not know. I expect there would be a number. I draw your attention to Attachment A which clearly demonstrates at Pay 20, 471 less positions were filled. As a general rule, the public service and government is not a charitable institution when it comes to employment. We have to manage within our fiscal parameters. If our fiscal parameters were not loaded with a \$5.5bn projected debt we would be in a much stronger position to deal with some of these things. I would love to start government every time with a clean slate but, unfortunately, we carry the legacy of irresponsibility with us.

Ms MANISON: Minister, is it possible to put that question on notice and get answers about how many public servants from each agency have not have their contracts renewed since 26 August 2012?

Mr ELFERINK: You can put the question on notice and we will see if we can get an answer for you.

Question on Notice No 4.4

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

Ms MANISON: How many public servants have not had their contracts renewed in each government agency since 26 August 2012?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. I am unsure if there is a guaranteed answer because of the way these things are worked out, but if that is the answer that will be the answer.

Madam CHAIR: The question from the member for Wanguri to the minister is number 4.4.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I was advised recently through a school council that contract administration staff at a school in the rural area were on continual six week contracts. Why are people on such short-term contracts? In this case, they were continuing to work in the school and not being paid. What is the rationale behind keeping people on those contracts?

Mr ELFERINK: I would be very surprised if a person was working for a school and not being paid. However, I will look into that allegation. I encourage you to report such matters to the Commissioner for Public Employment.

Mr WOOD: It was done publicly because the school council passed the information to me. I issued a media release on it and the person had their job made permanent.

Mr ELFERINK: Let us look at that. Frankly, I would be very surprised and, as the Commissioner has just whispered into my ear, it may well be that person is an employee of the school council. However, if you have questions like this I encourage you to put them on notice so we can give you fulsome answers before we attend estimates, as you were invited to do. Asking me about one of 20 000 people, and that is only FTEs – I imagine non-FTE is more – and to know about a specific contract is probably a long bow to draw.

Mr WOOD: No, I did not ask you about a specific contract. I was asking whether admin staff in schools were being kept on six week contracts. Minister, I know you want it in writing, but I do not have time. You can see what happens when you put things in writing; it is not repeated in this forum. We had nearly all our questions answered by previous ministers in quick time. It was a broad question.

Mr ELFERINK: It took hours.

Mr WOOD: It is a broad question. The answers to questions on notice were back in very short time. The question is, and this relates to the issue of contracts, people have lost their contracts, but there are also people who do not know their future. For all I know, at the end of this budget determination those contracts might disappear.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not know why certain departments want people specifically for temporary purposes. I am mindful of the lawful boundaries that restrain me as a minister of the Crown. Whilst the Chief Minister is capable of hiring and firing chief executives they determine what happens within their departments, particularly in relation to specific employment arrangements.

You cite an example of which I know nothing and give me scant extra detail on which to hazard a guess. It may well be the required work for that school meant, for pragmatic reasons, it needed people on six week turnaround contracts.

Mr WOOD: My understanding is the department of Education did that.

Mr ELFERINK: There might be a good reason for it. Give me an example, cite the details. If you do not want to do it in a public forum that is fine. E-mail me and I will get an answer for you.

One of the reasons governments use temporary contracts is as a management tool – sometimes you need work done that is temporary in nature.

Mr WOOD: Unfortunately, for people who have a mortgage, kids, a six week contract and are not paid because the next contract is being written, there is major difficulty. That is why people brought the complaint to me. The funny thing is, after doing an ABC interview it was fixed the next day. The lady rang me to say, 'Thank you very much, I have a permanent job'. It is a funny system if it requires me to issue a media release to change the job classification.

Mr ELFERINK: Once again, if that person was not being well looked after and is now, it is well and good if it was oversight in that school by that department. However, there are good reasons why people are temporarily employed by the government. If a person enters into a temporary employment arrangement and takes out a mortgage, it is that person's job to meet the duties and expectations under the mortgage to ensure they cover repayments.

In the private sector, many people take out mortgages and their jobs in that environment are often uncertain from week to week, as it is in ours. Our contracts are four years and I could well be unemployed in three and a bit years, as could you or anybody else.

There is an element of risk with life. It is not government's job to provide certainty for every person in the world. It is government's job to provide services to the people of the Northern Territory in a fiscally responsible way as demanded by the financial management legislation which governs us, something the former government did not feel bound by.

Ms MANISON: Minister, you spoke about natural attrition. Do you have numbers around when people have left their position because of retirement, deciding the job is not for them or leaving the job and their position has not been replaced? Do you have any figures on how many since 26 August across the government agencies?

Mr ELFERINK: We can probably find out the amount of separations, but you would have to subtract the amount of new employees. That would throw up a figure you would have to compare on a pay to pay basis. Ultimately, if you compared Pay 5 and Pay 20 the answer would be 471. If you compared Pay 5 to today, it would be 260. The answer has been provided to you in the documentation.

Ms MANISON: It is important to get the information agency by agency. I know you are targeting certain policies and programs where you want more employees. I am hearing some agencies are being hit by natural attrition and people are carrying immense workloads. I would appreciate it if it is possible to get a breakdown by agency?

Mr ELFERINK: Before I accept the question - I will probably accept it on notice anyhow - how will you be any better informed about an individual's workload by the fact their agency has had retirements and separations?

Ms MANISON: We hear people are feeling the strain of the additional workload and are doing other people's jobs on top of their own. We are hearing plenty about this. It would be really constructive to get a breakdown by agency to look at that.

Mr ELFERINK: You assume government does not change; it is a monolithic beast and everything is writ in stone. Agencies constantly change the work they do. Some will increase the amount of work they do, some will do less. It will be a long bow to draw to suggest a person's individual workload is exclusively the product of separations through a government department.

You will discover workloads change because ministers like me demand things of our public servants. In the Corrections environment I have been demanding. Workloads in Corrections for individual public servants have increased sharply.

Ms MANISON: I do not doubt that minister, but talk to people, go to training, talk to people in the mall and they will tell you they are carrying heavier workloads as people disappear around them. That is why it would be very constructive to get a breakdown, agency by agency, of jobs where you say natural attrition is being used as a management tool.

Mr ELFERINK: Without identifying them individually, who are you talking to?

Ms MANISON: You just need to go to a barbeque, or go down the mall and chat to people.

Mr ELFERINK: I do.

Ms MANISON: This has been the talk of the town.

Mr ELFERINK: I sit in the mall all the time and, whilst I hear the argument you are trying to construct, you have to remember an EBA process identifies the pay conditions of a job. Those EBA processes and workplace agreements also determine workloads. If conditions were being breached, I anticipate the Commissioner for Public Employment would be receiving complaints about breaches of the EBA.

Commissioner, how many complaints have we had?

Mr SIMPSON: Since the election last year, none.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you, Commissioner.

Ms MANISON: Minister, if there are no problems, why do you not want to provide this information?

Mr ELFERINK: Because on several occasions you have made assertions which are completely wrong ...

Ms MANISON: Minister, what are you hiding?

Mr ELFERINK: ... and you know them to be wrong. I am hiding nothing, but I will not allow figures to be supplied to you to use, deliberately and mischievously, to mislead Territorians.

Ms MANISON: Minister, this is about being clear and transparent around staff movements in agencies.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Wanguri, let the Attorney-General answer the question.

Mr ELFERINK: I am asking you to demonstrate your rationale. As you explain your rationale you clearly demonstrate an inability to tell the truth.

Ms MANISON: Minister, I am asking you to provide information on the public record, in your capacity as Minister for Public Employment, about the number of people who have left individual agencies and not been replaced. Many public servants listen to estimates and will be keen to know that, particularly those in agencies with heavier workloads.

Mr ELFERINK: I refer to the answer I gave you before. The answer to your question on an agency for agency basis is on the attachment I have been referring to. The Commissioner has quite rightly reminded me of what I said in the opening statement: on an agency for agency basis the breakdown is given pre-restructure and post-restructure. What you are asking for is in the attachment I have been referring to.

Ms MANISON: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, minister. I appreciate that, and my apologies for missing that level of detail. We shall move on.

Mr WOOD: Could I ask a general question?

Ms MANISON: Yes, please do, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: The Children's Commissioner was interviewed on the ABC in relation to matters around the departments he has responsibility for. I do not have the quote in front of me, but he said one of the biggest problems at present is morale in the department. Low morale was due to uncertainty in what was happening with the changes to employment. The proof of the pudding is the budget says there will be 10 000 child protection notifications received and only 4000 child protection investigations finalised.

Is the matter of low morale in the Office of Children and Families raised by the Children's Commissioner correct? Is that not an indication an independent commissioner feels government decisions in regard to management of employees has, in this case, caused low morale? I know people in some of the departments, so I also know it is the case.

Mr ELFERINK: I will deal with several issues here. Whilst this is not my area of governance, I find it objectionable in the extreme that child protection is misrepresented the way you just did. It is the same misrepresentation – lie - which exists in the document placed into newspapers recently. It says - and you quoted the same set of numbers ...

Mr WOOD: I just read them out.

Mr ELFERINK: ... 'Six thousand child protection reports will not be investigated next year'. Not true!

Mr WOOD: I did not read that. I said child protection investigations finalised will be 4000.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, okay. Let us look at this process ...

Mr WOOD: You are misrepresenting what I said.

Mr ELFERINK: We have to be exceptionally careful when dealing with the issue of child protection. It generates enormous emotional responses which means, as parliamentarians, we all share a duty to ensure we are clear about what happens. I am now obliged, as minister - whilst this is not strictly my area of control - to explain that 6000 figure, as I was forced to in front of a camera recently because of the recklessness of the Australian Labor Party.

A number of complaints are received every year, largely because of mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse and neglect. The majority of those cases - the 6000 to which you refer - are dealt with at the point of complaint because they are vexatious and vicious ...

Mr WOOD: Can I just ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, stop.

Mr WOOD: No, you are misquoting me ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do not interrupt the minister.

Mr WOOD: I did not quote 6000. I read exactly what is here.

Mr ELFERINK: You represented it in the same reckless fashion. You are a disgrace, sir.

Mr WOOD: You are a disgrace! The Children's Commissioner said morale in his department is low.

Mr ELFERINK: I am explaining your misrepresentation of the facts to people listening and you have a ...

Mr WOOD: Explain why the Children's Commissioner ...

Mr ELFERINK: You are covering yourself in disgrace, sir.

Mr WOOD: Explain why the Children's Commissioner said it is low?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do not interrupt the minister.

Mr ELFERINK: Of those 6000 complaints, a number are dealt with at the point of complaint by the department because they are vexatious, malicious or, much more often, genuine in the nature of the reporting but, even in the quality of the report, do not satisfy the requirements of the legislation in relation to the complaint. Where a person believes there might be neglect they report what they have seen to the department and, if it does not amount to neglect, there is no requirement to further investigate. To misrepresent that number in that fashion is irresponsible, reckless, particularly considering the emotive nature of this area.

I note on this tawdry pamphlet a crying baby being used to generate exactly the emotion this type of reckless line of questioning generates. Having said that, in relation to morale, change inside departments is difficult from time to time, we accept that. However, in the area of child protection, if we are changing a system we are changing it for the better, and it is about protecting children.

Ms MANISON: Following on the issue of morale, you hear much about staff morale being at an all-time low across the public sector. They have been dealing with much change and uncertainty. One tool which was quite effective was the Northern Territory Public Sector Survey - the staff survey - which was conducted in 2009 and 2011. Another one is due to happen this year.

Minister, will you be conducting the Northern Territory Public Service Survey again? Will you be asking questions about staff morale and how the agencies have managed the immense changes they have gone through as part of that survey?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, the survey will be conducted again.

Ms MANISON: Excellent. I am glad to hear that.

Minister, going to changing structures in agencies and what you see as requirements within the agencies, people in permanent positions have been classified as redeployees. Do you have an overall figure of how many people have gone through the redeployment process in the public sector?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not have a figure at hand, but I know it has occurred. Please give me a tick - 70 and 25 placed.

Ms MANISON: In relation to the ones placed, did any have to change agency?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms MANISON: Can we have an exact number on that, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: On notice.

Ms MANISON: On notice.

Question on Notice No 4.5

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

Ms MANISON: The number of redeployees moved to another agency.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Wanguri to the minister is number 4.5.

Ms MANISON: Were any of those redeployees placed into positions on lower wages, minister?

Mr ELFERINK: I do not know. We will look at it. However, if you are hearing that it may well be that some people who were not substantive have moved from higher duties. They may have been moved into positions at their substantive level. Sometimes that is interpreted as being moved to a lower pay scale. We only do it by agreement.

Madam CHAIR: Would you like that on notice?

Ms MANISON: If that could be included on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.6

Madam CHAIR: Could you repeat the question please?

Ms MANISON: Have any of the redeployees been placed in positions on lower pay?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question? That will be number 4.6.

Ms MANISON: Minister, of the people who still have not been placed in positions, are any looking to move? Will you continue trying to place them? What is the future for people who have not been placed yet?

Mr ELFERINK: A placement will be found for them. These people are, essentially, supernumerary. The government wishes to deliver services of a certain nature and there is a tension between the requirement of individual employees and the requirement of government. When situations arise where people become supernumerary they are exactly that: above establishment numbers and we will find placement as there is a bleed off. In the case of administrative jobs, that can happen in a number of departments.

Ms MANISON: If a position cannot be found for them what happens?

Mr ELFERINK: Generally, I expect a position could be found. We have a very high turnover rate in the public service. What is our attrition rate, Commissioner?

Mr SIMPSON: Somewhere between 23% and 25%.

Mr ELFERINK: So 23% means every 12 months one in five public servants move on. We will find jobs for these people.

Ms MANISON: That is good to hear, minister. Regarding the Employee Assistance Program that runs across the Northern Territory Public Sector, a program where public servants know they can freely access this to give them the support they need - those inquiries tend to be confidential but does the government have a fee for service type arrangement?

Mr SIMPSON: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms MANISON: Would the OCOPE have any oversight in usage of the program and whether there has been an additional need for the program since 26 August?

Mr ELFERINK: I will ask the Commissioner to respond on operational areas.

Mr SIMPSON: I am sure I can get an overview from them although I do not have it at hand. It is normally organised on a one on one basis by the employee. Most times the agency only finds out about the approach from the employee when the bill comes in. I am not aware if there has been a spike in contacts but I can find out.

Ms MANISON: Commissioner, would it be possible to get a breakdown in the number of people who have accessed it based on this financial year and last financial year for a comparison?

Mr SIMPSON: I imagine so, yes.

Question on Notice No 4.7

Madam CHAIR: Would you like to restate the question clearly for the record?

Ms MANISON: The amount expended by the Northern Territory government on access to the Employee Assistance Program in the 2012-13 financial year and the 2011-12 financial year?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I do.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Wanguri to the minister is question number 4.7.

Ms MANISON: That is all for me on whole of agency questions.

Madam CHAIR: Its open slather, ask your questions.

Ms MANISON: Minister, a question regarding the EBA currently under way. As part of the EBA you have been asking public servants to consider including the normal span of work hours to include Saturdays 6 am to 1 m, traditionally a time when families spend time together, people play sport, go camping and that type of thing on the weekend. I understand the MVR is working outside normal hours at the moment, something they negotiate and are paid overtime for. Is this a case where people would work on a Saturday morning and be paid at single time?

Mr ELFERINK: I understand there is a negotiation on foot. My job is to authorise the Commissioner to engage in those negotiations. Those negotiations often deal with a number of issues, some of which may be delicate, some of which may not.

As minister, I do not insert myself into those negotiations. I leave it the Commissioner to deal with negotiations in good faith, which I think is required under the legislation. I will leave it at that point. I am not going to pre-empt, second guess, or in any way make a public statement which reflects on the details of those negotiations. I would not even ask the Commissioner to do it because it is a matter for the negotiation process.

I courteously suggest it is not an area you should involve yourself with either because we allow these negotiations to occur in what is, essentially, a vacuum outside the political environment. This enables people who represent the employees to work the best deal for them, and those who represent the needs of government to do so unhindered and unfettered by political interference.

Ms MANISON: Minister, it is a fairly big headline ask ...

Mr ELFERINK: You have my answer.

Ms MANISON: ... in regard to the extra hours. Do you have any indication of which public servants you want to extend hours for?

Mr ELFERINK: What part of the answer do you not understand?

Ms MANISON: It is reasonable to give people an understanding when going into those types of negotiations - for public servants to know whether this change would impact on their working hours.

Mr ELFERINK: What part of the answer are you struggling with?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Wanguri, the minister has answered the question.

Ms MANISON: We will move on, but it is a fair question. Public servants who would be asked to work Saturday mornings as part of their normal job should know before they agree with the terms and conditions of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, but that is why you have negotiation - to deal with whatever issues arise. I am not going to wade into that. It is not my job, nor is it yours.

Ms MANISON: How many apprentices and trainees do we currently have across the public sector?

Mr ELFERINK: I will have to take that on notice. We invited all these detailed questions be forwarded to us so we could provide that to you. That has not happened, but that is by the by. I am happy to take that on notice and we will get it to you.

Ms MANISON: I appreciate that, minister. It is a good the government, for a long time, has created work opportunities for young Territorians entering the workplace to get an apprenticeship or traineeship through the NTPS. It would be great to see that work continue in the future.

Question on Notice No 4.8

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

Ms MANISON: Within the Northern Territory Public Service, how many apprentices and trainees are there?

Mr ELFERINK: I accept the question. The Commissioner has quite correctly whispered they are exempt from the freeze we had in place.

Ms MANISON: That is really good to hear.

Madam CHAIR: The question is number 4.8.

Ms MANISON: The Territory public service has an opportunity to develop workers for the future and put people on some fantastic careers paths for the rest of their lives. We had the Willing and Able strategy in place, which was set to expire at the end of year and targeted Territorians with disabilities - getting them into public service jobs. Given that has expired, can you tell me what your future plans are to find work placements in the public sector or to encourage public sector agencies to take on people with disabilities?

Mr ELFERINK: I have just signed off on a new policy so has Cabinet. I baulk at the word 'disability' because people who are less able than I because they are missing an arm or a leg or are blind, are still quite able in this world. We want to employ people who can do a job. Whilst we have a policy targeted at disabled people, if you look back through history, disabled people just got on with their lives and were part of the workforce. I hope people facing challenges feel that way about the public service. If we have a job for a person and they can do it, so much better. That is, essentially, the thrust of the policy.

What is generally true about people who are not as able-bodied as me is they tend to be very grateful, as a sweeping generalisation, for the opportunities given to them and turn out to be very good employees. I am fully aware throughout history people who were not able-bodied have still made enormous contributions to whatever their work environment has been. I cannot see that changing under a County Liberal government.

Ms MANISON: I am glad to hear you want to create more opportunities for people with disabilities. I look forward to seeing that policy.

A question into the functions around promotion, disciplinary and inability appeals and grievance reviews within the OCPE – can you confirm how many requests for grievance reviews the OCPE has received this financial year to date?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, good question. Once again, that is an operational issue and, as minister, I do not want to be seen within cooee of that. It is a matter for the Commissioner and I will ask him to answer the question.

Mr SIMPSON: The number of appeals and grievances are published annually in the *State of the Territory* report. Numbers for last financial year are already in a report issued in September last year. Of course, there will be a new report coming out this September or thereabouts.

I do not have precise numbers on me; I can get them for you. I am confident saying there has not been a large spike, if you are drawing some connection between the changes in the public service and the number of grievances I might have received. I am not aware of a spike, but I will get the numbers.

Ms MANISON: Thank you, Mr Simpson, I appreciate that.

Madam CHAIR: Do you want me to put that on notice?

Ms MANISON: Yes.

Question on Notice No 4.9

Madam CHAIR: For the purposes of Hansard, will you please restate your question, member for Wanguri.

Ms MANISON: If I could get the number of grievance review requests and the number of appeals that have come before the OCPE this financial year to date?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, will you accept the question.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Wanguri of the minister is number 4.9.

Ms MANISON: Minister, I have more questions but know there is much business to get through in the estimates process today, so that is pretty much it for me.

Mr ELFERINK: Thank you, Ms Manison.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Can I ask about teachers? Has the government worked out, in its new formula for middle and secondary school and a theoretical relocation of some teachers to earlier primary, what the overall loss of teachers will be with the restructuring?

Mr ELFERINK: I cannot second guess what is happening in the Education department. Those questions would be best asked of the Minister for Education.

Mr WOOD: Right.

Madam CHAIR: If there is no further questions, that concludes considerations of the output in this portfolio. On behalf of the committee, I thank the Commissioner and CFO for attending today.

Ms MANISON: Thank you, minister, and thank you, Mr Simpson. I wish you well in your future endeavours in retirement.

Mr ELFERINK: Last time I was here he was retiring. I was talking to him about a banana lounge with a pineapple and little umbrellas, if memory serves me.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consideration of the Department of Correctional Services. The officials can come forward.

For the purposes of Hansard, we will be joined by Gerry McCarthy member for Barkly; Lynne Walker, member for Nhulunbuy; me; Larisa Lee, member for Arnhem; Terry Mills, member for Blain; Gerry Wood, member for Nelson. I invite you, minister, to introduce officials accompanying you and, if you wish to, make an opening statement regarding the Department of Correctional Services.

Mr ELFERINK: I would love to make an opening statement. I introduce the Commissioner for Corrections in the Northern Territory, Mr Ken Middlebrook, and also Ros Lague, Executive Director of People and Business Strategic Services for Northern Territory Corrections.

This portfolio has been a revelation to me in many respects. In relation to an opening statement, when I was told I was going to be the minister for Corrections I confess I said, 'What?' Yet, in spite of that, it has been the portfolio which has given me enormous satisfaction and I am sure that – I remember the shadow minister's enthusiasm for his portfolio when he was the minister for Corrections and understand that enthusiasm. What I try to bring to this portfolio is a sense of passion and drive to get a number of things done.

I want to share my enthusiasm for this portfolio area with the committee. It is well-supported and is, I hope, going to achieve a number of really special things. This government has been quite experimental in this area because of the recidivism rate which was identified by the former government and continues to be a challenge for this government. However, in the pursuit of better results, we are philosophically sifting several thoughts on how we deal with Corrections.

I am often, annoyingly, asked what the proportion of Aboriginal people in custody is. That is an irritating question because the person who asks, genuine as they are, is trying to find a correlation between offending and some other factor. If it is correlations you are looking for then the better question to ask will always be how many people in custody were unemployed and welfare dependent at the time of offending. The answer to that is much higher than 80%. Anecdotally, that is the case. His government is looking at the Corrections environment not in Aboriginal issues, but in relation to employment issues. The whole structure of what we are doing in Corrections is aimed at generating employment.

It would be a great joy to me personally, but I believe a joy to all Territorians, if the federal government, to whom I have spoken about this, including no less than the Deputy Prime Minister himself, were to realise the way welfare is spent in this jurisdiction is as destructive as any other force. In fact, I would say singularly the most destructive force operating in this jurisdiction and the greatest driver of recidivism in the Northern Territory. It is high time the federal government, no matter what persuasion, and the Northern Territory government no matter what persuasion, got together to create some synergies between expenditure, particularly in the area of offending. If we do that I suspect we will see a significant change. In the meantime, we continue to be positive and I am enthusiastic about what we are doing in Corrections, particularly ably supported by Commissioner Middlebrook.

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

Ms WALKER: Not from me, Madam Chair.

Mr WOOD: I support what the minister said.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you have answers to written questions?

Mr ELFERINK: I do, yes. At the risk of going through the same pantomime ...

Madam CHAIR: I will be happy to accept a tabled version ...

Mr WOOD: It was a principle not a pantomime.

Madam CHAIR: ... rather than it being read out aloud, or would you like them read?

Ms WALKER: Tabled.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, we accept them as tabled.

Mr ELFERINK: Okay.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: I will keep a copy for myself.

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2013-14 as they relate to the Department of Correctional Services.

Agency Related Whole-of-Government Questions

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

Ms WALKER: In the interests of time, not for me, Madam Chair.

Mr WOOD: I am not sure. Mine will probably come under Custodial Services.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CUSTODIAL SERVICES Output 6.1 – Custodial Operations

Madam CHAIR: We will now move on to consider Output Group 6.0 Custodial Services, Output 6.1 Custodial Operations. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, given both the Alice Springs and Darwin correctional facilities - I am referring to Berrimah of course - are full to capacity, as is the Barkly Work Camp - perhaps I am not correct there - where are you planning to house the additional prisoners who will be incarcerated, given the new laws you have passed?

Mr ELFERINK: We are not only full to capacity, as of this morning we are about 121% across our jurisdiction of design capacity, which is a problem the former government had as well. You were well over design capacity and that is a challenge and why the former government moved to build a new prison. Whilst I do not necessarily agree with the design of the new prison, it is the legacy item we have received from the former government and will deal with prisoner numbers into the future unless you suggest the former government was not able to effectively design the prison to deal with increasing prisoner numbers.

Mr WOOD: What was that number?

Mr ELFERINK: We are at 121% of design capacity.

Mr WOOD: What does that mean in inmate numbers?

Mr ELFERINK: We are at 1445 as of this morning.

Mr WOOD: I am comparing it with last year.

Ms WALKER: Attorney, whilst you may not be happy with the design the previous Labor government had drawn up for the new correctional facility, the Minister for Business is delighted with what it is contributing to the Territory economy, as per his media release on 30 May this year. He attributes it to a 177% increase in private sector and non-residential building permits.

Mr ELFERINK: Did he approve the design or the expenditure?

Ms WALKER: No, was talking about what a good project it is in regard to expenditure.

Mr ELFERINK: There is a difference between expenditure and design?

Ms WALKER: Of course there is, but one of your colleagues is at odds with you in recognising it adds value to the Territory's economy as well as addressing prison number issues.

Mr ELFERINK: No, he is not at odds with me at all. I just explained that to you. He was talking about the expenditure; I spoke about design.

Ms WALKER: Minister, when do you anticipate closing down the current Berrimah correctional facility, or are you planning to keep it open to house the overflow of prisoners we anticipate will flow from your new laws?

Mr ELFERINK: This question presumes the new laws we have in place will be directly responsible for Berrimah staying open, if it stays open at all. I hope Berrimah will not stay open; however, because of one of the shortcomings of design - the number of beds inside the new prison - it is not inconceivable that government's hand may be forced in this area. I am merely keeping our options open.

Having made that observation the extra prisoners, if any, to flow from government policies is a duty of government. As those policies become apparent, we anticipate we will deal with the prison population as and when it occurs. It is almost universally recognised one of the shortcomings of the legacy item of the new prison is it will be almost full on the day it opens. That is not the Country Liberals' fault; that is a shortcoming of the former government.

Ms WALKER: You alluded to increasing prison numbers and it is due to open in mid-2014. Predictions from the NT Police Association are by 2016 the Corrections system will be 1000 beds short and an additional 300 prison officers will be needed. How will the current government meet these costs, and will you be keeping Berrimah open or building another Corrections facility?

Mr ELFERINK: The guy sitting to your left is the former Minister for Corrections and he often alluded to the growing numbers of recidivists in the Corrections system. Your government predicted this problem well in advance of the current situation. The numbers the former government was relying on are not that different to the numbers we are relying on. If there is a shortcoming of beds in the prisons it is because of a design fault by the former government not the current one.

Ms WALKER: Given you are now the current minister, what plan do you have to address this?

Mr ELFERINK: I am glad you asked that. Put your seatbelt on; I am very enthusiastic about what we are doing. When I became minister for Corrections I started ringing people asking, 'How are you off for employees?' The former minister used to talk about people going out to working.

Ms WALKER: Are you are talking about Sentenced to a Job?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Ms WALKER: Which is a re-badge of a program Labor started.

Mr ELFERINK: Where were all the jobs when I took over? You were in power for 10 years, where were all these working people? If you had the policy why did you not put it in place? This morning 64 people left prison to go to work, many being full-time, paid employees and the rest trainees. By the end of this year, if the classification system allows it, that will grow to 200. That is in a handful of months. If you had the policy you had to do one thing: implement it.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I also have a passion for what you are doing but have been around the issue of the new prison for a long time. Mr Middlebrook knows I did not originally support a prison for 1000; I supported a prison for around 800, with a prison farm and a work camp at Katherine.

I have long been a supporter of work camps and went to Wyndham to look at the work camp about five years ago and spoke to the government about it. I also went to the one near Kalgoorlie and spoke to the government about it. In your election promises you were promoting a prison farm. The prison farm the previous government was looking at would have accommodated 170 people. If you added a work camp, which would be about 50 prisoners - the one in Tennant Creek has 75 - you would take pressure off the big prison. There was a bigger model than just having a big prison.

The size of the prison was not up to me, but it was put to me, and has probably been put to you – I attended the Sentenced to a Job conference where you showed a graph. I could not say, 'I am not going to support this prison being expanded to 1000 beds' that would be stupid. As much as I do not like the big prison and prisons should not be the only option ...

Mr ELFERINK: You will be happy with my next answer.

Mr WOOD: I want work camps, prison farms, and people in their communities.

Mr ELFERINK: You will find money in the budget associated with prison farms. When I said we were getting experimental, we are doing it in a sensible way. I have just returned from Groote, have been to Nhulunbuy, am about to go to the Tiwi Islands, we are scratching the surface in Central Australia and the Wadeye region - we are across the Northern Territory. We are looking at programs to be rolled out in those environments. I will talk about Groote because I am familiar with it. I was there last week and there is a facility which could comfortably house 40, at a squeeze 60, which would enable us to have a prison farm operating on 47 acres directly behind that facility. It is at Angurugu.

We have had initial conversations with the Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust, the owner of the property, as well as the Anindilyakwa Land Council and Anindilyakwa traditional owners. We are cautiously confident, as we proceed down the negotiation process, that there will be good community support for the establishment of a prison farm in that location.

Naturally, what we would expect to be operating in that sphere is L2s and opens. We do not want higher security prisoners - in the same way it works in the Barkly Work Camp. I have had tentative conversation with the Gumatj Association in Nhulunbuy along the same lines. Those talks have now been put on hold in deference to the recent death of Mr Yunupingu.

We are already exploring options in Central Australia as we have had initial conversations with the CLC, as well as initial conversations with the NLC for other areas.

There is an interesting 1983 report called the Briles Report. Professor Briles, then Deputy Head of the Australian Institute of Criminology, went to Groote Eylandt and suggested almost exactly what we are trying to do. Mr Briles' report was, for whatever reason, shelved and forgotten. Fortunately, some of the people around me are old enough to remember this report. It was dusted off recently and has given us some confidence. Once again, this is out of the box stuff now. It is not new, but the way we do it will be assertive.

Mr WOOD: It is not new because 40 km from me is Gunn Point prison farm which was closed down in former CLP days. Here we go around in a circle again. I am not going to worry about it.

Mr ELFERINK: I believe Gunn Point was shut down for want of prisoners at one stage, if memory serves me.

Mr WOOD: There might have been some industrial issues.

Mr ELFERINK: That is a shame, if that is the truth.

Mr WOOD: A brand new bakery was built out there.

Mr ELFERINK: Hopefully, we will be able to avoid any such problems because I believe this is not an Aboriginal problem, it is an employment problem. If we deal with this as an employment response - that is the type of result I want.

Mr WOOD: Minister, will you be looking at mobile work camps? I will give you an example and am praising you for it, and also someone who just received an Order of Australia Medal, Trevor Horman.

You have a more or less temporary work camp at Adelaide River. Those prisoners have been doing some fantastic work. In fact, by putting it there you have shown people should not necessarily be frightened of these programs; that they can be of benefit to the prisoners and the community.

Mr ELFERINK: Through Sentenced to a Job, one of the things which really surprised me was the number of people who have never had a job - never experienced the dignity and self-worth that goes with economic independence. Work camps are slightly different, but also demonstrate work has a value.

From time to time, you will hear the comment a group of Territorians is inherently lazy. That type of racism really annoys me because it is targeted at Aboriginal people. When I see Aboriginal prisoners - and it is not exclusively Aboriginal people, we can have non-Aboriginal people in work camps, I am not focusing on Aboriginality per se - work, they work like Trojans.

I was at Adelaide River during a tea break and, because a couple of the prisoners were bored when the tea break took 15 minutes, they started raking around where they were working. These prisoners, when given an opportunity for work, no matter who they are, embrace that opportunity - with a little structure and management.

This government is trying to create a system where that structure and management become inherent to the prisoners themselves. Not only are we talking about Sentenced to a Job whilst people are in prison, but we are looking at accommodation outside prison where we form a group accommodation and bind people who are in the community corrections environment - people on parole - and say a condition of parole is to keep a job and pay the rent.

Ms WALKER: Like the facility at Tennant Creek established by Labor under the new era.

Mr WOOD: Minister, of course you have ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, like the facility in Tennant Creek. However, are the parole conditions of those people that they have to keep a job? If so, why are there so few? You had been in power for 10 years.

Ms WALKER: Minister, I am commenting on your claim these wonderful new reforms which were in fact – Labor was not just about building prisons, but established work camps, established the relationship with the Gumatj ...

Mr ELFERINK: Where were the prison farms?

Ms WALKER: ... Association three years ago and these programs take time to grow.

Mr ELFERINK: Where are the prison farms?

Ms WALKER: At Barkly Work Camp those ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, that is a work camp and has nothing to do with a prison farm.

Ms WALKER: People at Barkly Work Camp go to work every day.

Mr ELFERINK: This is the thing ...

Ms WALKER: Prison farms were part of the next phase.

Madam CHAIR: Can we save debate for the Chamber.

Mr ELFERINK: I love this, 'It's all our success'. Nonsense! There was no drive from Labor in regard to this.

Ms WALKER: The negotiations had started before you won government and you know that.

Mr ELFERINK: None. There was no drive in regard to this and Gumatj would not tell me they were talking to you.

Madam CHAIR: Is there a question for the minister?

Mr WOOD: Yes, there is. It is unfortunate such an important issue becomes tied up in arguments. I thank the previous minister for the hard work he did. He had financial constraints as well, so nothing is easy in this world.

Minister, you spoke about Sentenced to a Job. That is for people going outside the prison. You are developing a new prison and I have visited it. What will the policy be for prisoners inside the fence?

Mr ELFERINK: As I described in the ministerial statement, there will be a philosophy that all prisoners work.

Mr WOOD: And the large two industrial sheds there ...

Mr ELFERINK: Will be used.

Mr WOOD: Are there plans for what type of industry will be ...

Mr ELFERINK: We are currently in negotiation with a number of potential employers.

Mr WOOD: Will the bakery be run by prisoners?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes.

Mr WOOD: What other industries?

Mr ELFERINK: It depends on the results of negotiations. We currently have a number of prison industries operating, including growing fruit and vegetables in Alice Springs for sale in the marketplace in Alice Springs camel yards. I noticed when I was at the workshop yesterday at the Berrimah correctional facility they are building 600 beds for the new prison and are doing a pretty good job. They are commercial standard beds.

Mr WOOD: Is that through Batchelor Institute?

Mr ELFERINK: That is a local program being run inside the prison. We are taking a commercial approach to this. If we can get a person wanting factory space to do a certain thing we are not going to limit ourselves to a product, we will take whatever comes.

Mr WOOD: As the prison is in the Howard Springs area, is it possible to have an open day before it opens because it is in our community. From a PR point of view, it might stop people going there, or they might think it is terrific and stay there. Since it has been called the 'Hilton' by the Treasurer - people have many misconceptions and they are thrown back at me. We have a positive story to tell, both inside and outside the prison, and it would be good if the government decided – of course it has to be well-managed – to have an open day to explain the programs and what the government is trying to do to turn people's lives around.

Mr ELFERINK: Subject to security issues and those types of things?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not mind ...

Mr WOOD: Before the prisoners are in there.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I do not mind people having a look and it is subject to the security environment. There will be certain systems we do not want to show off for obvious reasons. However, having made that observation, my instinctive response is almost anybody who has asked, including the media, have been shown through on a number of occasions. I would have to look at that and get back to you.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you. That is all the questions I have.

Ms WALKER: Minister, I will go back to programs but will do it under Output 6.2. Under 6.1 Custodial Operations, I wanted to ask a couple of questions and if it is not appropriate in this area you will soon tell me.

With prison numbers set to increase and, like it or not, Indigenous people will feature largely amongst them, are there plans for additional funding to support the Visiting Elders Program? From a personal perspective, I know this to be a very successful program in connecting people in a correctional facility with culture and family?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes. I have met with the Visiting Elders Program and believe they are an enormous resource and will be tapping in to them with enthusiasm.

Ms WALKER: Good.

Mr ELFERINK: I respect them for their seniority and what they have to offer. Sadly, too many of the younger folk they have to deal with are frustrating to them because of the loss of those elements of their lives which can give some direction.

Ms WALKER: I could not agree more, so thank you for that, minister.

Have officers from Correctional Services been involved in the new secure facilities which will be detaining those under the mandatory alcohol treatment stuff?

Mr ELFERINK: No, in regard to the mandatory alcohol rehabilitation stuff ...

Ms WALKER: Providing advice, inspecting facilities and ensuring they are appropriate for mandatory detention problem drinkers.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, there has been assistance from the Health department. As you would expect, experienced prison officers will have something to say from a security perspective in assisting that health outcome.

Ms WALKER: Does that advice - perhaps it is not advice, maybe it is recommendations – go back to the Health minister about what needs to be done to adapt facilities identified to be suitable to mandatorily detain people with serious addiction issues and health issues?

Mr ELFERINK: Health department officials will take that advice and deal with it in accordance with their needs. A program in a Health environment is not immediately a program a Corrections environment is fully across. Corrections will advise in the area of security, but will not tell the Health department how to do its job.

Ms WALKER: No, I did not expect they would. I am talking more, minister, about the physical premises ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I am sure the advice given by Corrections deals with security. However, there might be aspects which have implications the Health department will apply in their own judgment, and that is really a question for the Health minister.

Ms WALKER: Can I ask a question which is, in part, perhaps a health question, but is to do with the recent announcement about beds being made available which are purpose built for a secure care facility? There is a facility in Alice Springs with 16 beds designated to that secure care facility. Eight of those beds are going over to mandatorily detain problem drinkers under the new proposed legislation. These beds are designed for people who, for instance, are not fit to plea and are held in maximum security. What are the implications of giving those beds over other than leaving people in maximum security?

Mr ELFERINK: These institutions have caused me some confusion. When I say confusion, perplexity is a better word. I was somewhat lost. The one in Alice Springs is pretty much built within the parameters of the prison. I has very little to do with the prison. The unfit to plead are a health issue, and whilst we have them primarily in the Ben Johns Unit in Alice Springs, the part I found perplexing is the institution is co-located with what was intended to be an OCP institution.

These are the Anthony Scottys of the world; people who have committed acts which, if found guilty, but for their mental condition would have been heinous crimes but, because of their mental condition, not fit to plead. They are going to be co-located in the same building, essentially, as children in care. I had some disquiet about that co-location, and expressed as much to the Health minister. A kid is taken into care by the Office of Children and Families because they are neglected or abused and we drop them into an institution where, on the other side of an open mesh fence, there are people who have committed enormous acts of violence, that, but for their mental condition, would have probably led to convictions of serious periods of incarceration. It is a bit of an odd fit, to put it mildly. Consequently, conversations have been had and I understand different ministers have determined to use the institution in slightly different ways, but those questions are for the ministers. We do not have any effective control, as Corrections, on those institutions.

Ms WALKER: I understand that, but, by the same token, I would like to place on the record the concerns I have about a purpose built facility being used for a different purpose for half its clients compared to the other.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not believe that is how it will roll out.

Ms WALKER: It is symptomatic that government is desperately trying to find a few free beds to get mandatory detention for problem drinkers off the ground.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not believe putting kids in care next to people who have committed dreadful acts of violence is particularly wise governance, do you?

Ms WALKER: The Darwin secure care facility has adults and children.

Mr ELFERINK: Adults and children - once again, a question for the Health minister.

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, those are all my questions.

Mr WOOD: That is all I have on Custodial Operations.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.1.

Output 6.2 - Employment Programs

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now call for questions on Output 6.2 Employment Programs. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: The minister mentioned Sentenced to a Job and I commented it was a re-badged program built upon Labor's reforms under the new era of corrections under the stewardship of my colleague, the member for Barkly. We welcome people being out of prison and working. Do you have figures on what percentage of participants have dropped out of the work program?

Mr ELFERINK: Too many, I am afraid.

Ms WALKER: For what reasons?

Mr ELFERINK: Largely traditional reasons. I do not have exact numbers. The problem is when rolling out Sentence to a Job, some of them are sticking, which is really good, but many are not. There are often traditional reasons for that? Karen Sheldon Catering has been an enormous contributor to this.

Ms WALKER: I could not agree more.

Mr ELFERINK: Hats off to Karen for the work she has done. I spoke to her recently and she sucked air through her teeth and said, sadly, the traditional men she had going through the system had moved on. They have obviously gone back to country. We are on Groote Eylandt because we hope to get the L2s who do the work programs - Gerry, this is about working in the communities and on work farms.

The other component we want to place in that environment is the opens, which are Sentenced to a Job prisoners. GEET, Groote Eylandt, has a number of full-time positions which can be paid. You would see two flavours in this institution, for lack of a better expression, of prisoners. One is the L2 work gangs, \$44 a week pay maximum doing whatever they have to in the community such as work farm etcetera, and you have guys in jobs.

I understand there is some discussion with BHP as well where we might see guys travelling out of that environment into the mine site then coming back. They will be there under the same conditions everybody else is - \$125 a week board, 5% victims assistance levy, etcetera. That is how it will roll out. There is a graduation for a prisoner who comes into that environment where they have to earn their stripes so they can make the big money on the Sentenced to a Job program.

Making those jobs stick is part of doing it on country. You and I know many prisoners in our system have an emotional bond to a physical location - a spiritual bond. I understand that completely. In an effort to make it more flexible, we introduced Sentenced to a Job in remote communities.

That throws up a few oddities because you have to ask questions about the nature of custody. Who has custody of people in the institution on Groote Eylandt, for argument's sake? That has to be negotiated with the people at Groote Eylandt and their representative bodies. That is what we are working on right now.

By using parole in the way I described - not just doing it in Darwin - we may find we can parole people to a job in the place they come from and, hopefully, make those jobs stick.

One factor which constantly erodes and undermines this program is a welfare system almost designed to muck us about, and that is the frustrating thing. I am not advocating for the abolition of welfare; I advocate for welfare to become a job so every Territorian who needs to turn to welfare because of poverty and not enough work is required to learn through work dignity and self-worth. If we could achieve that in tandem

with the federal government - whoever that is, and I will work with a Labor federal government in a heartbeat - we can make massive inroads in what happens in our communities. At the moment, not enough is sticking; I would love more to stick. We are looking at ways to do that.

Ms WALKER: I understand that. You said too many have dropped out. Can you quantify it for me, whether it be ...

Mr ELFERINK: Not at the moment because we have not counted, but we will be counting once we have a few runs on the board. We have been doing this for eight months. For example, people who have been working for Brendan Heenan who has the BIG4 caravan park in Alice Springs. He gets them, they work like Trojans, are paroled and disappear. It is always somebody from a traditional background. We are looking at ways to improve that.

However, other jobs are sticking. We have had people in Darwin - Foxy has picked up six at last report and is housing them on-site, not least of which was my pin-up boy, Raymond, at the cash for cans location. He came off the tail end of a fairly long lag, and is completely, by every yardstick, rehabilitated. Some are sticking but not enough. I will give you some numbers the moment I get some numbers.

Ms WALKER: Thank you, we will be watching with great interest. That is all the questions I have on employment programs, given time.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.2.

Output 6.3 – Education and Offender Programs

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 6.3 - Education and Offender Programs. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: Noting ministerial media release on 14 June, 'Education a Key to Work Readiness' ...

Mr ELFERINK: Sorry, I was ...

Ms WALKER: We are talking about programs and I note your media release, 'Education a Key to Work Readiness'. We all know education is a passport to people's future and wellbeing. Looking at the written questions you have responded to, I note under the mini-budget on the first page, the QuickSmart literacy and numeracy program has no dollars attached to it. I am wondering ...

Mr ELFERINK: It is there, do not worry about that.

Ms WALKER: ... where the investment is going through into literacy and numeracy, knowing that to be a very good program.

Mr ELFERINK: QuickSmart is a good program. It is a cognitive behaviour program which tries to create new cognitive pathways in the brain through its teaching methods. Professor Pegg has been kind enough to explain how the system works, and I am well attracted to it.

I will give credit where credit is due; the former government picked up QuickSmart and was running with it. We will be too.

Ms WALKER: I am familiar with it, minister, it operates in our schools. I have a child in our local primary school who has been through it so I know how effective it is in driving literacy and numeracy.

In your media release you talk about elective units available to offenders. One is described as learner driver knowledge. What investment is being made into learner driver to the point of licence? One the key things people need to get a job, especially if you live out bush, is a driver's licence.

Mr ELFERINK: A couple of million bucks from Transport.

Ms WALKER: You have listed driver education for prisoners through IS Australia and another contractor - \$56 000.

Mr ELFERINK: I am sorry, say that again.

Ms WALKER: Under driver - there are no numbers on the pages.

Mr ELFERINK: It is a bit more than that. A dual program is being run with the assistance of the Department of Transport which teaches prisoners to drive.

Ms WALKER: Gets their ID so they have the ID points to apply for a drivers licence. DriveSafe NT, is that it?

Mr ELFERINK: Without having to turn to the Commissioner, I anticipate he will pull out all stops to deal with that issue and ensure where licences can be delivered they will be. The Chief Minister has taken a personal interest in this and what needs to be done will be.

Ms WALKER: I remember when Senator Trish Crossin came to Yirrkala last year and we launched the DriveSafe NT program. There are obviously constraints on the budget. We would love to deliver it to everybody. How do you prioritise within the correction system which prisoners are eligible to access the driver education program?

Mr ELFERINK: In regard to priorities, we will deliver those services to the appropriate prisoners. I suspect those prisoners soon to be released – it is better to get them a drivers licence than someone who has another 20 years to serve. I imagine priorities will be set in accordance with need.

Ms WALKER: We will watch that one. Minister, how many prisoners are currently in an alcohol treatment program?

Mr ELFERINK: We have the ...

Ms WALKER: How many are wait listed?

Mr ELFERINK: There are two programs running, both cognitive behaviour programs. One is the STEP - I am lousy with acronyms so please forgive me - and the other one is an alcohol and other drugs dependency program. The acronym escapes me but, from memory, we have 17 operating in Berrimah alone. We deliver them both through Corrections, which is inside the correction system and community corrections, but, in total, we could happily claim 72 in Darwin, which includes what is done by the Catholics and what I was just talking about - the Safe Sober Strong program - and 46 through Don Dale. We have 72 in Darwin, Alice Springs has 156, another 42 in Darwin, and 20 in Alice Springs through NTDCS employment treatment, 15 in the Safe Sober Strong through Berrimah prison, and 46 in Don Dale. Would you like me to table this?

Ms WALKER: That would be most helpful.

Mr ELFERINK: I will table these documents rather than trying to navigate them.

Ms WALKER: Minister, I appreciate that.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 6.3 and Output Group 6.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS **Output 7.1 – Community Corrections**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 7.0 Community Corrections, Output Group 7.1 Community Corrections. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: I have questions, but I will hold off on them.

Mr ELFERINK: The short answer is bracelets.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: No, I am right.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 7.1.

Output 7.2 – Parole Board

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 7.2 Parole Board. Are there any questions?

Mr WOOD: I want to go back to where we were talking before. Government is talking about alcohol banning orders run by the police.

Mr ELFERINK: It is a police power, yes.

Mr WOOD: The people who receive the police order have committed an offence, is that correct?

Mr ELFERINK: Essentially, yes. Any offence, if memory serves me, having a sentence of greater than six months.

Mr WOOD: Would it be more sensible to add that banning order to the sentence as part of parole so that ...

Mr ELFERINK: Or you could make it a condition of parole.

Mr WOOD: ... so the parole officers can do that job as part of their normal ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, make it a condition of parole that you are not to drink liquor.

Mr WOOD: That is right. Why give that work to the police when ...

Mr ELFERINK: I see what you are saying.

Mr WOOD: I am not against banning people from drinking, but I am wondering if we are giving the police more work than they need.

Mr ELFERINK: The police have sought this power out. I recently had a conversation with the Deputy Commissioner of Police regarding the appropriate location for this. The original idea was to push it through the *Liquor Act* which sits in the Department of Business, but it is, essentially, a police power. It is an awkward fit so it will probably come under the umbrellas of pillars and be a freestanding piece of legislation itself, which will be a police powers act and why it is under the police.

The police see this, quite rightly, as a tool for dealing with those miscreant people who continually present a problem in our community. This is a way of restraining them, and we hope it restrains them, but, ultimately, the police will have first point of contact with these people.

A person will be subject to this order, and in the real world you hope those people obey the order. However, if they have a few beers and there are no complaints about their behaviour it is unlikely the police would ever see it. It is the same as the dope smoker having a joint in their lounge room - the police will never see it.

This situation becomes practical when police are called to circumstances like a domestic violence situation. The reason the household is in disarray is because somebody with an alcohol protection order has got back on the turps. The policeman says, 'Hang on, mate, there's an alcohol protection order against you, blow into this. You've had a few beers; you're nicked son'. That is how it will work in a practical world.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I understand that, but what happens in the case of home detention? There is usually an order that you cannot drink.

Mr ELFERINK: That becomes an order of Corrections. In that environment you are looking at the bracelets hopefully ...

Mr WOOD: The parole officer can make a random check for drugs and ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, a police officer can commence an action for breach of parole. There is a wash over of powers from one to the other but, ultimately, a person on parole is under the management of community

corrections and the conditions of their parole determine their liberty. Part of that process of management is you check on this person.

Some people are under heavily controlled parole conditions, other people are under almost no conditions as a limitation on their parole. It depends on each individual prisoner and how that prisoner is case managed.

Mr WOOD: It sounds like the debate we had yesterday about whether liquor outlets in Alice Springs should be charged by the Liquor Commission or the police.

Mr ELFERINK: That is a debate for yesterday.

Mr WOOD: That is right, but still worthy of debate. I would like to look at it a bit deeper.

Mr ELFERINK: This government, and I as the minister with carriage, would like to achieve a seamless system across the departments so you have the pillars working with each other and there is a latticework of flow through communications. Once the bracelet technology rolls out, it will have an effect across those departments. A court order, a parole order, or an order from police, no matter how it is structured, will still require policing. We are hoping to create synergies across those departments so it will become much easier than it currently is.

Mr WOOD: I will leave it at that. I will take some ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, I am more than happy to take you through this over lunch one day, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 7.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – YOUTH JUSTICE **Output 8.1 – Youth Detention**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 8.0 Youth Justice, Output 8.1 Youth Detention. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: I have a question, Madam Chair. The minister may choose not to answer it because I should probably have asked the question at whole-of-government ...

Mr ELFERINK: Try me.

Ms WALKER: This is not the first time you have heard this from me, and it is not just me, stakeholders are asking me to ask ...

Mr ELFERINK: Sure.

Ms WALKER: Why does youth justice sit within Corrections, against internationally recognised best practice models?

Mr ELFERINK: Because it suits this jurisdiction to do so. A good example of why pillars is structured the way it is - if you take what I call the I-Camp, the intervention type camp - we do not want kids, if we can manage it, to be in the criminal justice system. The police, from time to time, and the Education department - by way of an example, in pillars the police will come into contact with a kid. The police have a diversionary program with a numbers of options. One of those options could be the I-Camp, which sits under the pillar of youth term, which deals with youth justice issues.

Having it in the Corrections environment is administratively convenient, particularly with the pillar structure because it comes under a single structure which means a kid flirting with the edges of the criminal justice system can go straight to an I-Camp and bypass the court and Corrections systems entirely. It is not trying to stigmatise kids, but I believe the average 14-year old on the streets of Darwin, Tennant or Alice Springs at 4 am is not too concerned with the administrative arrangements of government.

Ms WALKER: Social justice advocacy lawyers, those who care about children, are. I hear your answer and ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, but the point is ...

Ms WALKER: ... we will agree to differ.

Mr ELFERINK: ... it is good for them to feel that way, and I am sure they can warm their hands in the glow they generate feeling that way. It is administratively convenient and that is why we have done it.

Ms WALKER: That is a shame.

Mr ELFERINK: Would you have us set up a new department?

Ms WALKER: An independent youth justice unit, which goes to the next question about ...

Mr ELFERINK: Now you know why we are \$5.5bn in debt.

Ms WALKER: ... the nine recommendations from the Youth Justice Review completed in 2011 and chaired by Jodeen Carney, who is now working for your government. There were 35 submissions, most of them public, yet apart from boot camps, which was not a recommendation of the review ...

Mr ELFERINK: We can tick off on most of them and boot camps are in the mix. We are working on a youth justice policy at the moment.

Ms WALKER: We will be watching that closely, minister.

Mr ELFERINK: We are pretty busy, I am sure you would agree with that.

Ms WALKER: Thank you. That is all from me.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: The Output Group, Youth Justice, says:

... provide a safe, secure, supportive and humane youth correctional system and implement initiatives targeted to youth at risk.

Yesterday I quoted figures from the 2011-12 report which showed a total of 530 people between the ages of 10 and 14, and 1239 between the ages of 15 and 17 are part of the offender profile. That has gone up considerably from the previous year - this is in the police statistics. We do not want people going to prison. I do not have the figures in front of me for last year, but they have increased considerably. What programs does the government have to try to turn those figures around?

Mr ELFERINK: Boot camps are what we are looking at now. There are two types of boot camps. One is the I-Camp. I acknowledge the member for Blain, Terry Mills, who is in the room, was the brains trust behind this policy originally. I consider it a fortunate privilege to be able to roll that policy out because I now understand, having been the Minister for Correctional Services for some time, the importance of what the member for Blain was doing and describing.

As an educator of a number of years and a man of unquestionable integrity, the member for Blain saw kids need to be challenged in certain ways. Many of the kids who come into these systems are pre-broken; we do not have to break them. Nevertheless, they have to be physically challenged, emotional challenged, and spiritually challenged.

If you take one of the successful trial tenderers, Operation Flinders, they cycle 900 kids every year through their institution in the Flinders Ranges with varying degrees of results, but a surprising level of positive results.

The second group, which are the D-Camps, are essentially detention facility camps. These are kids who are now seriously entrenched in the criminal justice system. We are talking about Don Dale detainees, kids in the Alice Springs Correctional Facility. A completely different level of care needs to be brought to bear upon these kids.

We are still rolling out those programs and they are hideously expensive. However, if we are able to reproduce, with the slim funds something like Operation Flinders operates on, we can see as many as 900 kids go through that system in the Territory, which will be very useful.

I have had some preliminary discussions in several remote places where they can do something similar with some type of grant expenditure with some of these kids on country. Where we can do that, we will look to link what we are doing with whoever the successful tenderer is.

However, the nature of the kids coming through our system is worrying because they have gone from housebreakers and those types of things. The number of sexual offenders in that mix is of grave concern to me, personally, and to the government.

Ms WALKER: I believe I was advised in my briefing that sexual offenders would not be eligible for boot camps.

Mr ELFERINK: No, I am talking about the ones in custody right now in Don Dale and such places. I find it concerning there is an increase. In custody there are ...

Mr MIDDLEBROOK: Fifty-one, I believe, today.

Mr ELFERINK: Fifty-one today. It bothers me that a large slice of that 51 have committed offences of a sexual nature. I am sure it bothers everybody in this room.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I have always believed a dollar spent now is \$100 saved in the future ...

Mr ELFERINK: A stitch in time.

Mr WOOD: You might regard this as whole-of-government – I thank the member for Blain for – I do not call them boot camps and the member for Blain knows that. I support youth camps. They are part of the mix and have to be done professionally. I always criticise the previous government for closing Wildman River. The government before that closed Beatrice Hill. It has been a record sometimes; governments closing things down. Now we are replacing them.

However, I gave you those figures and have just received the other figures - we doubled the number of people in the 10 to 14 age group. It is 272 to 530.

Last week I spent time with Taminmin school council and the teachers. I can only speak about that school, which was renowned for problem kids. It had sniffer dogs checking lockers at one stage. It has picked itself up to become a pretty good school. It has problems, has hardened kids from other places, but the reduction in teachers numbers - whilst it might fit a formula and save the government money, it tells teachers some of the kids are being put at risk because there will be less teachers for early intervention. Do not look at this government policy in isolation. This policy will take that figure higher if we are not careful.

That is early intervention. Boot camps are great but there is a step before that. I do not want them to be in boot camps.

Mr ELFERINK: I hear what you are saying. Part of the reason we are seeing an increase is because of things like Operation Themis and extra coppers on the road. That type of thing contributes to the extra numbers.

Mr WOOD: It is difficult ...

Mr ELFERINK: Your message is received and understood.

Madam CHAIR: We raised this earlier. It is a debate point not a question. Are we finished with Output 8.4?

Mr WOOD: I understand, Madam Chair, you do not like us waffling on. This is the only chance I have to debate, on a two party basis, important issues. This is as important as the minister's excitement about the employment of prisoners.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I do not accept that to be the case. Either way, questions should not contain statements. I have let you make many statements. You raised this in ...

Mr WOOD: This is estimates not parliament.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, are you reflecting on the Chair? If you are ...

Mr WOOD: If I held up a mirror you could reflect.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I consider your conduct to be disorderly and warn you that if you persist I will order you to withdraw from the hearings under paragraph 31 of the Assembly's resolution establishing this committee.

Are there any other questions for Output 8.1?

Mr ELFERINK: A clarification, I said earlier we were selling fruit and vegetables off the prison system into the Alice Springs marketplace. There is an arrangement in place but we are yet to produce it. We are consuming what we are growing within the prison system in Alice Springs. I want to clarify that for the sake of completeness.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. That concludes consideration of Output 8.1.

Output 8.2 – Family Responsibility Centres

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 8.2 Family Responsibility Centres. Are there any questions?

Mr WOOD: Could you give us a run down on how well they are working?

Mr ELFERINK: It is largely an operational issue. Perhaps, Commissioner, you might want to put your two bobs worth in?

Mr MIDDLEBROOK: Ken Middlebrook, Commissioner for Corrections. We have a family responsibility unit at Casuarina and one in Alice Springs. At this point we are working with a number of families, member for Nelson, and are about to appoint the Executive Director for Youth Justice. We will be developing the youth justice framework where we intend to do much more work to make those family responsibility units fit in and connect closely with organisations like the Office of Children and Families and also with community corrections.

Ms WALKER: Minister, one of the recommendations of the Youth Justice Review was to grow those family responsibility centres. Labor was heading down that road prior to the election. What are your government's plans to grow the family responsibility centres?

Mr ELFERINK: Under the Family Responsibility Program there is currently capacity to case manage 20 families in Alice Springs and up to 40 in Darwin. The number of individuals involved in this is many times greater than this given the changing dynamics and composition of families. The majority of the cases addressed by the family responsibility centres do not necessitate a formal family responsibility agreement as issues are often successfully resolved through case management services. They are operating, and we will see what the need is rather than create a bureaucracy then fill the space.

Ms WALKER: I suggest the need is definitely there.

Mr ELFERINK: I do not doubt there is a need, but, once again, I return to my comments about passive welfare and the destructive force it has. That generates a need too, and I would love to see that fixed.

Ms WALKER: As long as we continue to invest in the family responsibility centres. The Stuart Highway is a long highway, and there is a big gap between Darwin and Alice Springs. I know Nhulunbuy is not on the Stuart Highway, as you have reminded me in the past. Let us hope our remote regions also stand to benefit from these things further down the road. Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of output 8.2.

Output 8.3 - Boot Camps

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now call for questions on Output 8.3 - Boot Camps. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: As we know, boot camps go to an election commitment from the CLP's tough on crime approach which promised to send young offenders to boot camps. Given participation is on a voluntary basis, there is no new legislation or extra powers to force young offenders into, or send them off to, boot camps - you are not sending anyone anywhere if they do not want to go.

Mr ELFERINK: Not true.

Ms WALKER: All you have done is re-announce youth camps under a rather offensive new name for many people - boot camps - defunded Balanu at the end of last year, and we have had months with nothing in its place.

Mr ELFERINK: Not true.

Ms WALKER: We will beg to differ on that one, minister. Effectively, you have reintroduced camps. I acknowledge you have a different service provider in the Top End, but it is difficult to see what is different. How long is the trial for?

Mr ELFERINK: The trial period will be for as long as the trial takes in the sense that, if you take the model used - I am familiar with Operation Flinders because I have visited it. They will run a trial program of a group of kids going through over a period of 11 days to two weeks. We then assess the results at the tail end.

In regard to requiring legislation to get kids into the camps; the I-Camps are pre-custody, the D-Camps are post-custody. How we manage a kid in our custody, as long as we are within the parameters of the *Youth Justice Act*, can be done in a way we see fit. That means kids in custody can become the subject of a D-Camp and we expect that will occur.

Ms WALKER: I am sorry, D-Camp or I-Camp?

Mr ELFERINK: I have just explained in some detail how those things work.

Ms WALKER: Yes, I have been at estimates for a long time, I probably did not get as much sleep as you last night. Forgive me if the outcomes are washing over me.

Mr ELFERINK: Once again, your discipline problems are not mine.

Ms WALKER: As you know, I sought out and was grateful to receive a briefing from your office. However, I am still struggling to see the difference between what Labor had in place and what you have now.

Mr ELFERINK: I just explained it to you. I refer you to the *Hansard*.

Ms WALKER: Thanks very much. I still fail to see the difference.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I am interested in this idea. I believe 'boot' is the wrong word for youth camps ...

Ms WALKER: Of course it is the wrong word.

Mr WOOD: ... it is the connotation you see on TV. I hope we are not copying what is on television: sending a kid from England to Utah to climb a mountain through prickly pear in a pair of shorts in freezing cold weather. I hope for something a little more intelligent than that.

Minister, is there a summary of the types of boot camp you will implement we could read?

Mr ELFERINK: I will give you an example of an I-Camp model, google Operation Flinders. Take it from there.

Mr WOOD: What was the other?

Mr ELFERINK: A venture with Tangentyere will be operating from one of the bores south of Alice Springs, and once they are established they will run, I imagine, their model. We will assess those models and, ultimately, pick a winner.

Ms WALKER: That is an extension of the circuit break camps they have been running since 2008.

Mr WOOD: Is this a pilot to start with?

Mr ELFERINK: We went to the industry. There is constant referral from the former government that we are copying its old programs. We went, in Darwin and Alice Springs, to the people who provide this information. We had about 50 turn up to both Darwin and Alice Springs, and these are people with a vested buy-in. We described the parameters we wanted from a boot camp, they filled in the blanks. Out that process we received a number of tenderers. We have selected two tenderers in the youth camps component to roll out their product. Those two will run a trial program. We will assess the trial programs and determine which is best to provide the result at the end of the day.

Mr WOOD: There is no budget item, only ...

Mr ELFERINK: There is \$1m in 2013, and \$2m for 2013-14.

Mr WOOD: This says youth camps are scheduled to commence in May 2013.

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, the initial tenders have been let within that time frame.

Mr WOOD: Where will the Flinders one be based?

Mr ELFERINK: The trial will be in Flinders, South Australia.

Mr WOOD: Kids will be sent there?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, and if they are successful, they will bring their models to the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: Do you have a site?

Mr ELFERINK: We have a number in mind.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Ms WALKER: We are sending Territory kids to South Australia to participate in the trial program ...

Mr ELFERINK: That is right.

Ms WALKER: ... but you cannot tell us how long that trial program will be?

Mr ELFERINK: It will be 11 to 14 days. I have already said that.

Ms WALKER: I am talking about the trial period. We are doing one trial program?

Mr ELFERINK: That is right, we are doing an assessment. From that assessment we will select a final tenderer to produce the result. The successful tenderer will be operating in the Northern Territory, whether it is Flinders or Tangentyere.

Ms WALKER: How will that evaluation be conducted? Will it be independent or in-house?

Mr ELFERINK: I imagine in-house, but if there is independent input we will welcome it. I will leave it to Community Corrections or Youth Justice to determine the best way to assess the operational issue. What I want from them is. 'These are the results of the assessment. That one has performed better on the benchmarks we want. That is the one we will go for'.

Normally I would have a bias to Territory companies, but this is about Territory kids. If it turns out an interstate one happens to be better than the local one - and I am not pre-empting that; it is about results for kids.

Ms WALKER: Is that about taking the Flinders model and transposing it into the Northern Territory?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, it has been made abundantly clear to Operation Flinders that it will reproduce what it does in South Australia, bring it to the Northern Territory, and operate the same model here if it is the successful tenderer.

Ms WALKER: Okay.

Mr ELFERINK: For the record, when I was in South Australia I was quite surprised at the number of Territorians involved. Territory public servants were involved in assistance and counselling work for the way operation Flinders ran. It is heartening to know there is already real input from the Territory into that environment. It will help transpose it to the Northern Territory if it is the successful tenderer.

Ms WALKER: Were they Territory public servants or ex-Territory public servants?

Mr ELFERINK: They are public servants right now. There was a copper and a chalkie, both on rec leave.

Mr WOOD: Who owns Flinders?

Mr ELFERINK: Operation Flinders is its own organisation. It has a budget of about \$1.8m. The South Australian government puts in about \$600 000 and the rest is private sponsorship.

Mr WOOD: Does it have a board?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, it does.

Mr WOOD: Is it based on a church group, a philosophical group or a ...

Mr ELFERINK: No, a grumpy old ex-policeman put it together.

Mr WOOD: It is a grumpy old policeman group.

Mr ELFERINK: It is a bunch of grumpy old soldiers as well, but their dedication and passion for what they do is testimony to their integrity. I was very impressed with what I saw at Flinders. If Tangentyere reproduces the same thing, it is going to be a tough choice.

Mr WOOD: Any of the youth in Don Dale at the moment, could they ...

Mr ELFERINK: No.

Mr WOOD: If you are in Don Dale you ...

Mr ELFERINK: The kids going through that type of philosophy are not - the target is not necessarily to punish them in that environment. This is about diverting them away from criminal justice system. This is why the D-Camps are different.

Mr WOOD: Will they go through the diversionary program we have now where police pick someone up ...

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, they can be diverted through - they come to the system through education or community groups.

Mr WOOD: Has the government given any thought to rehabilitating Wildman River camp?

Mr ELFERINK: No.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 8.3.

Output Group 8.4 – Grants

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 8.4, Grants. Are there any questions?

Ms WALKER: No.

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 8.4 and Output Group 8.0.

Non Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

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

Ms WALKER: No.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs related to Correctional Services. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officials accompanying the minister today - Commissioner -and we will move on to consider Statehood. That is all.

Mr ELFERINK: I place on the record my thanks to the staff in the Corrections department.

Madam CHAIR: We will adjourn for a 15-minute break. I place on the record the Estimates Committee met at 1 pm and made a resolution that, for tonight and the remaining nights of estimates 2013, we will finish at 11 pm on the dot. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

STATEHOOD

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you everyone, welcome back. I welcome you, minister, and invite you to introduce any officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding Statehood.

Mr ELFERINK: No, not at this stage. There are no officials, by the way.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions?

Mr ELFERINK: This government remains committed to Statehood but not this year, sadly, because of the financial position we find ourselves in. I have had discussions with the Chief Minister. We are excruciatingly mindful of how to proceed down this path. I am mindful of the recommendations of the committee under the former government and would, with great caution, stay away from those recommendations in any circumstances. I do not want to politicise Statehood. This is an ambition for all Territorians, or certainly all Territorians in this Legislative Assembly. I look forward to, on the back of the commitments given to me by the Chief Minister, progressing this, hopefully in the next year or so.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: There are no questions from us.

Mr WOOD: What was the budget allocation?

Mr ELFERINK: Zero for this year. That is the problem.

Mr WOOD: Did I not see somewhere in the books there was ...

Mr ELFERINK: There is a \$9m figure floating around.

Mr WOOD: No, for staff allocation. It might have been in the Speaker's ...

Mr ELFERINK: That would be through the Legislative Assembly.

Mr WOOD: You do not know what that ...

Mr ELFERINK: Without knowing what the Speaker is going to do, I represent government's interest in this. If the Legislative Assembly is pursuing something I am sure we will communicate with the Legislative Assembly. It is an extension of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee and I am unsure what the Legislative Assembly budget deals with. As I said, it will not happen this year, sadly. I have been pursuing the Statehood argument since 1969, because that is how long I have lived in the Territory. I am very wedded to the idea of Statehood for the Northern Territory. I would love us to be the seventh state.

Mr WOOD: Thanks, minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. That concludes consideration of statehood. On behalf of the committee I thank the minister for attending.

MINISTER LAMBLEY'S PORTFOLIO

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister, for attending today. I welcome to the committee Natasha Fyles, member for Nightcliff; Kon Vatskalis, member for Casuarina; me, Deputy Chair; Bess Price, member for Stuart; Francis Kurrupuwu, member for Arafura; and Gerry Wood, member for Nelson. Welcome minister. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Accompanying me today is Jeffrey Moffet, the Chief Executive of the Department of Health, and also Michael Kalimnios, the Chief Financial Officer of the Department of Health.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes and then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategies related to questions before moving on to output specific, and finally non-output specific budget-related questions.

I invite the shadow minister to ask questions first followed by the Independent member, other committee members and, finally, other participating members may address electorate issues. The committee has agreed other members may join in the line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning of the output. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Health?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair, thank you very much. I will be introducing relevant output group executive directors as appropriate throughout this evening.

With the committee's indulgence, I will go through the changes in the financial position and structure that have occurred in the Department of Health between Budget 2012-13 and Budget 2013-14, so as to better equip the committee in interpreting information before them as outlined in the 2013 budget papers.

The Country Liberals government has shown its commitment to improving health services across the Territory in a tough budget climate. We have delivered a responsible health budget that targets areas of greatest need and delivers on the government's key election initiatives. In 2013, the Health budget has increased to a record \$1.358bn. This represents an additional \$135.7m from the previous year, and almost \$100m more than the December mini-budget. This represents a \$150m increase in Territory government funding, up 18% on last year.

This significant investment is spread across a range of areas within the portfolio. Extra funding provided for expansion of services includes: \$6.5m for cardiac services; \$4.4m for 400 additional elective surgery procedures per annum; \$2.6m for repairs and maintenance; and \$7.5m to fund outcomes of the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme Review. In addition, extra funding has been allocated to meet the operational costs of unfunded services approved by the previous government, including \$2.3m for the commissioning of the Alice Springs emergency department. The government has also provided a further \$3.4m to offset reductions in Commonwealth specific purpose payments and has provided an additional \$41.6m funding in recognition of significant underfunded growth in services which have occurred over the previous years.

For the first time over the last 11 years this Country Liberal government is not deficit funding health. We are providing appropriate fair and up-front funding instead of an annual shortfall dependent on the Treasurer's Advance.

Along with the extra funding, we have achieved significant efficiencies and reduction in expenditure without impacting on frontline services. These strategies include reduction in agency staff usage and unnecessary overtime, more effective use of permanent staff to replace locum use including revised rostering practices, and general efficiencies in administration and overhead costs.

These efficiencies are expected to provide a cost benefit of \$12.2m in 2012-13. In addition, our own source revenue is projected to increase by approximately \$11.5m in 2012-13 as a result of a focused effort to increase private billing for services, to identify and build compensable patients and ineligible patients, and better identification of interstate patients using NT Health services.

These strategies and a general focus on effective and efficient use of resources means we currently estimate our overall growth in expenditure, including expenditure on new services, will be below 6% when compared to 2011-12. Historically, expenditure growth in health costs over the last 10 years has been around 10% to 11% annually so this is a significant difference.

Before I move on to highlight some of the key areas of the budget for 2013-14, I first thank the doctors, nurses, primary healthcare staff and all the other support staff who passionately care about the patients and clients they help every day. Without our excellent health staff we would not be able to do what we do. Our health system is performing well through the dedicated efforts of our staff and we continue to improve each year.

We had the busiest emergency department in Australia with over 144 842 patients treated in 2011-12, an increase of 2.4% from the previous year. We also had the highest ratio of emergency surgery to total surgery in the nation - 43.4% emergency to total surgery.

We continue to make improvements against the range of national elective surgery targets. In 2012, more people in the Northern Territory had their surgery within benchmark times well ahead of our 2012 national partnership agreement on improving public hospital targets.

Also, the Northern Territory public hospital system has benefitted from our election commitment to increase the number of elective operations by at least 400 per year. Analysis of elective surgery admissions as defined for the national elective surgery targets shows there had been 6458 admissions by the end of April 2012-13, compared to 5994 admissions by the end of April 2011-12. This is an increase of 464 admissions.

Nationally, we continue to resource our hospital and health services well.

As I stated previously, the \$1.358bn budget for the Department of Health in 2013-14 is the largest of any Northern Territory government agency. As occurs each year, the department is negotiating with the Australian government across a range of agreements that will affect funding in 2013-14. We expect an agreement to be reached shortly, after which time these variations will be incorporated into the department's 2013-14 budget and reported in the mid-year review.

In 2013-14, the Department of Health will be transformed from a single organisation into three entities comprising the Department of Health, Top End Health and Hospital Services, and Central Australian Health and Hospital Services. This is the Country Liberals health and hospital services framework.

The Department of Health will transition into focusing on governance, policy development and regulatory functions, while Top End Health and Hospital Services and Central Australian Health and Hospital Services will provide integrated regionally based healthcare services under the operational management of boards.

These fundamental changes will decentralise the delivery of healthcare and are designed to deliver greater control of healthcare decisions to local communities, improve the flexibility, responsiveness and innovation capacity of the public health system, and provide more effective and efficient public hospital and health services.

In line with these changes there has been a significant revision to the output groups, which I am sure you have all noticed. These were to recognise the establishment of the new health and hospital services and bring the outputs in line with functional areas of the Department of Health and the new services framework. This has created a significant change in the output group structure compared to previous budget papers.

For Health and Hospital Services, the old output structure was split between admitted and non-admitted patient services. In line with the National Health Reform Agreement, services have now been split across admitted, emergency department, and non-admitted in the new structure. The division of Health Services was previously allocated to the Health and Wellbeing Services output, which included both remote and urban health clinics and health development and promotion under Community Health Services. In the new structure, each has its own sub-output under the Primary Health Care Output Group: Remote Primary Health Care; Urban Primary Health Care; and Health Development and Promotion.

Mental Health Services remains a sub-output group. It has moved under the Community Treatment and Extended Care Output Group. Disability, Health Development and Promotional and Community Support were previously under Community Support Services for Frail and Aged People with Disabilities and Pensioner Concessions, and the Office of Senior Territorians, now transferred to the Department of the Chief Minister, was under Support for Senior Territorians.

Under the new output structure this split has changed with Disability Services now having its own sub-output under Community Treatment and Extended Care.

Community Support is now Community and Accommodation Services, which is also a sub-output under Community Treatment and Extended Care.

Also included under the Community Treatment and Extended Care Output Group is Alcohol and Other Drugs, previously under the Public Health Services Output Group. This includes the mandatory rehabilitation program.

The new Disease Prevention and Health Protection Output Group include sub-outputs previously under Public Health Services, Environmental Health and Disease Control. These have remained the same, but have increased between the old and the new output structure due to the inclusion of the previous Health Research Output Group which has been split across the two groups.

The new output structure includes the new output group of System Manager. This includes costs which were primarily allocated to Hospital Services outputs and are now allocated to the sub-outputs of Corporate and Clinical Governance, Planning and Development, and Purchasing and Performance. These exist in their own right under the new service framework to support the efficient purchase of activity from the Health and Hospital Services, and to maintain the whole of Territory health network through improvements in corporate and clinical governance and efficiencies in the health system.

As a result of these changes direct comparison to previous year's outputs is extremely difficult. In broad terms, the impact of the changes in our hospitals has been a decrease in costs allocated from the old structure to the new due to the creation of the new System Manager Output, which captures costs previously allocated to Hospital Services, and the redistribution of costs such as depreciation and repairs and maintenance according to use and building value.

Conversely, the new output group of Primary Health Care has had an increase in costs compared to the old allocation due to a redistribution of corporate overheads, and particularly because of the more appropriate split of the repairs and maintenance and depreciation costs which, as mentioned, were previously included as part of the Hospital Services output due to a legacy issue with the system mapping of output costs.

In total, five public hospitals and associated acute care services will be allocated a record \$804.6m in 2013-14. This equates to an additional \$48.6m in funding since the December mini-budget.

For the Top End Health and Hospital Services, this increased funding includes \$4.55m for enhanced cardiac outreach and rehabilitation services and the commencement of low risk angioplasty services. Again, an election commitment and the first time these services have been provided in the Territory. There is \$2.88m to provide an additional 258 elective surgery procedures per annum, \$5.03m to fund outcomes of the review into the Patient Travel Assistance Scheme, and \$22.5m to meet costs associated with increased levels of demand for health services.

For the Central Australian Health and Hospital Services, this increased funding includes: \$5.51m for increased ongoing funding for operational expenses of the new Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department; \$1.95m for enhanced cardiac, outreach and rehabilitation services; \$1.585m to provide an additional 142 elective surgery procedures per annum; \$2.475m to fund local outcomes of the review into

the Patient Travel Assistance scheme; and \$5.9m to meet costs associated with increased levels of demand for health services.

An important area of service provision is the Community Treatment and Extended Care Output, which is responsible for providing alcohol and drug services, mental health, and community and accommodation services. Community and accommodation services provide community and support services for frail, aged people, support for senior Territorians, and support services for people with a disability.

In this budget we are providing a \$47.6m increase in funding since the December mini-budget, which includes \$35m in new funding to meet the operational costs of running and managing alcohol treatment centres throughout the Territory, \$0.5m for operational costs of 24-hour supported accommodation for clients found guilty under Part IIA of the Northern Territory Criminal Code, \$0.94m granted to BushMob Youth Residential Rehabilitation service in Alice Springs for relocation and service expansion, and \$7.9m to subsidise eligible pensioners in the Northern Territory to meet the increase in utilities tariffs.

The primary care output includes the provision of medical, nursing, Aboriginal health, allied health, nutrition, and breast and cervical cancer screening services by government and non-government providers in community care centres, remote health centres, clinics, schools, and in the home.

An amount of \$5.02m has been provided to meet the costs associated with increased levels of demand for health services in this area, with a further \$1.2m allocated for increased nursing and administrative staff to support health screening of detainees in police watch houses in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.

We are continuing our commitment to major capital works projects across the Territory. In addition to the existing capital and minor new works program, projects amounting to \$97.8m will commence in 2013-14, taking the total capital and minor new works program for Health to \$172.7m.

Works to be undertaken in 2013-14 include \$10m for infrastructure associated with the mandatory rehabilitation of problem drinkers; \$29.6m for continuing remediation works and upgrades at Alice Springs Hospital; \$13m to upgrade the emergency department at Gove District Hospital; \$5m for a hospital scoping study and master plan for the greater Darwin region; \$16.6m for the construction and upgrade of remote health clinics at Canteen Creek, Numbulwar, Kaltukatjara and Maningrida; and \$25m to continue the construction and upgrade of the Ntaria, Papunya, Elliott, Ngukurr, and Galiwinku health clinics.

Thank you Madam Chair, and committee members, for your indulgence. I will now answer any questions on my statement.

Mr WOOD: I seek clarification of where questions might go. Now you have split the hospital ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: First I will ask if there are any questions relating to this statement. If there are questions, it will first go to the shadow minister and then to you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, thank you very much for the opening statement. I agree that the system is and has worked well. You have brought quite a few people with you from the department. I would like to say hello to them; I worked with them for a number of years. The system worked well because of these people, despite attacks over previous years by the opposition of the day, now the government, about the shortcomings of the system.

Minister, you said you have a \$1.358bn budget. What was the budget for the previous year?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The budget for the previous year ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Kalimnios has the figures and can tell you what it is today, the spending, and the projected spending to the end of the financial year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We came in on budget the previous year - 2012-13 - perhaps even a little below budget, but the forecast budget was - the mini-budget in December 2012 was for \$1.258bn, and the estimated budget for 2012-13 is \$1.304bn.

Mr VATSKALIS: With CPI it will be an extra \$40m, bringing it to \$1.304bn. In reality, your budget is not as big as you claim, especially when you consider you are putting money in for alcohol rehabilitation. It might be bigger in number but, in reality, the budget is very similar to the budget the previous government had. I agree, it is one of the highest budgets in the Territory because the Department of Health absorbs many resources. We have an obligation to provide good services to all Territorians.

If you take away the CPI and the alcohol rehabilitation part, the budget is not that extraordinarily big. It is a good budget to cover the expenses of the department, but I object to the fact you said it is the biggest budget - bigger than the previous government.

Also, you said you had the highest number of elective surgeries. How many elective surgeries did the department perform in the 2012-13 budget period?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Within our election commitments we committed to an extra 400 elective surgeries in ...

Mr VATSKALIS: That is in the future. In the current budget period how many elective surgeries were performed?

Mrs LAMBLEY: An analysis of elective surgery admissions, as defined for the national elective surgery target, shows 6458 admissions to the end of April 2012-13 compared to 5994 admissions by the end of April 2011-12. There was an increase from 2011-12 to 2012-13 of 464 admissions during that 12-month period.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is very good. You mentioned patient billing, something I had a few arguments about with my interstate counterparts. How will you bill patients when the argument with the South Australian government was, 'We do not have to pay for them, they are Australian citizens. The fact they are treated in Alice Springs is not our problem, it becomes your problem'. How will you bill them for the service you provide if people come from Western Australia or South Australia?

Mrs LAMBLEY: There is a new cross-border arrangement which provides for people from interstate who have surgery in the Northern Territory to be paid immediately from the original place of residence.

Mr VATSKALIS: Which agreement with which states?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a national agreement.

Mr VATSKALIS: A national agreement?

Mrs LAMBLEY: All jurisdictions.

Mr VATSKALIS: South Australia will now pay for people who come to Alice Springs?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Will they also pay for renal dialysis services?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That has been a contentious issue which I remember you were in the thick of, member for Casuarina. This same cross-border arrangement applies for renal services.

Mr VATSKALIS: Finally they will start paying like Western Australia did in the Alice?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is good news. We now have two health and hospital boards, one in Central Australia and one in the Top End. You might recall I introduced the legislation and you supported it. It was a good idea. Are the heads of the boards here today for us to question? Will they appear before the Estimates Committee?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, the heads of the governing councils, as they are called at the moment, are not here. We have the Executive Directors of the Alice Springs Hospital and the Royal Darwin Hospital here if you would like to direct questions through me to them, but we do not have the chairs of the governing councils.

Mr VATSKALIS: The boards are independent, are they not?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The governing councils do not have financial responsibilities. They are still tied to the Department of Health. They are not going to be ...

Mr VATSKALIS: They operate independently? You might have the money and allocate it to them, but they make their own decisions.

Mrs LAMBLEY: They operate independently within the confines of their brief, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: They decide where services will be allocated and how they will be allocated, within the framework?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Within the framework of the legislation.

Mr VATSKALIS: They are not here today and we cannot ask questions? We can only ask questions of the Executive Directors of the hospitals.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, they are not here.

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay. That is it.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions?

Mr WOOD: Clarification rather than questions. In relation to the outputs, are we talking about hospitals in general or overall services?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Is this a question relating to the output? We have not reached that stage yet.

Mr WOOD: The outputs have changed from previous years and I seek clarification from the minister so I know where to ask questions. I need clarification because we now have three hospital groupings. If I ask about hospitals in general should I go to five?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Chair has allowed questions from the statement.

Mr WOOD: No, we are going back to outputs shortly.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Could you wait until the output group?

Mr WOOD: I do not know which output because you said the annual report does not line up with the outputs this year. I want to clarify where to ask questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have a copy of the output?

Mr WOOD: This is the report, these are the outputs. The two do not match, and I want to know where to ask questions.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Questions on Top End Health and Hospital Services are at Output 5.1, and Output 5.2 for the Central Australian Health and Hospitals Service.

Mr WOOD: If I am asking about hospitals in general, is that Output Group 5.0?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, Health and Hospital Services is Output Group 5.

Mr WOOD: As this is the first year you have split them, the figures will be for the whole of the Northern Territory - the services they provide, so someone in there we can ask a question?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I wanted to know where to ask a question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Deputy Chair, can I go back to the question asked by the member for Casuarina about attendance of the chairs of the governing councils at this hearing. We agreed officials with statutory responsibilities would attend the estimate hearings. Those officials do not have statutory responsibilities as such and, therefore, were not invited.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any more questions?

Agency-related Whole-of-Government Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2013-2014 as they relate to the Department of Health. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, yes there are questions.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Deputy Chair, the opposition asked us to prepare responses to 44 questions. When will we get to those?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are happy for you to table them.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You can table them or go through the questions. It is your choice, minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will table them, reluctantly. Much time and effort has gone into preparing responses to these questions. To save time I will table them, but I agree with the sentiment expressed by the member for Nelson earlier today: the down side of tabling them is the important content of the questions is not recorded in *Hansard*. I will table them with that objection.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, in your previous life as Treasurer, you were part of a government which increased charges for water, sewerage and power significantly. Considering hospitals are huge consumers of these services, can you tell us the financial impact on the department and the hospitals and facilities following the increase in electricity tariffs?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have a breakdown of electricity, water and sewerage tariffs if that satisfies you. It pertains to output ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The question relates to whole of department.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are getting used to the new output groups too. You will have to bear with us in making sense of it. I am sorry, member for Casuarina, we will have to find it and get back to you. It is somewhere in this huge pile of information.

Mr VATSKALIS: Would you like to take the question on notice?

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: We will get back to you in the next half hour.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will go to the next question, member for Casuarina.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, considering the increase in charges and tariffs, has it been difficult to fund the department sufficiently to pay for the extra charges?

Mrs LAMBLEY: With any increase in costs you manage your budget. There has been a significant increase in our tariff cost but, like any business, like any school or health service, you find the money to pay for it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Does that mean people have to find the money from within the existing budget? That means they have to absorb the costs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Essentially that is what I am saying, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: You previously mentioned the unfunded liability of the Alice Springs emergency department, which means people have unfunded liabilities to pay for the increase in charges. Is that true?

Mrs LAMBLEY: If you want to talk about unfunded liabilities, you proceeded with the amazing new construction of the emergency department at Alice Springs Hospital. Similar to your federal counterparts, you did that without considering how the operational costs would be funded. We have had to cough up over \$20m within the forward estimates to pay for it. Similar to the tariff increases, we have had to find that \$20m from within budget. If you want to draw that correlation you are right, but \$20m over the forward estimates is greater than the increase in tariffs. For example, from July 2011 to March 2012 the whole of

the Department of Health was rounded off the cost of power to \$10.9m. However, during the same period - July 2012 to March 2013 - it was \$12.2m, so you are talking about \$1.8m difference.

Mr VATSKALIS: Unfunded liabilities?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is an increase in power consumption for the Department of Health, which was an unfunded liability, yes. It was unfunded just like when we came to government and found the essential \$20m needed for the emergency department at Alice Springs Hospital.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is amazing when you are on a different side of the table. When you are minister you ask the department to fund within existing resources. If you are the opposition you accuse the government of unfunded liabilities. I want to draw this parallel for you ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, let me remind you of Standing Order 112. A minister should not be asked for an opinion about being on the opposite side of the House.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Chair, I did not ask for her opinion ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If you have a question, direct it to the minister so she can answer it but do ask not for an opinion ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I did not ask for an opinion. I was pointing out ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: ... about being on the opposite side of the House.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to continue.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can I provide more information on the tariff increases? Water and sewerage consumption for the Department of Health from July 2011 to March 2012 was \$1m, rounded off. For the period from July 2012 to March 2013 it was \$1.5m, an increase of \$400 000.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is nearly 30%. I am happy with that, but my point was the department ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is accurate. There should be a 30% increase unless overall consumption increased.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, can you provide details and costs of all ministerial travel and ministerial staff travel, including accommodation, hospitality, and flight travel class since August 2012? I understand you might not be able to answer some of these questions and might take them on notice and I am happy with that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That information is not held by the Department of Health, it is held by the Department of the Chief Minister. You have missed your opportunity to ask that question in the estimates process.

Mr VATSKALIS: What about details and costs of all advertising, marketing and communications since August 2012?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That was a Written Question; one of the questions you put to us. If you want to go through these questions, member for Casuarina, I will be tempted to start reading out my answers.

The member for Nhulunbuy did not want the Attorney-General to read out the answers to Written Questions then the first question she asked was a Written Question. If you want to do that I will start reading them verbatim.

Mr VATSKALIS: If any of these questions were put in - I am quite happy to take your word for it ..

Mrs LAMBLEY: If you are asking Question 11 of the questions ...

Mr VATSKALIS: If you want to give a summary, I am happy.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, let the minister answer the question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Question 10:

Details and costs of all government advertising and communications since 26 August 2012.

Total advertising cost for the period 1 September 2012 to 31 March 2013 was \$179 352.75, compared to \$258 620.11 the previous year. We have reduced our expenditure on Department of Health advertising by \$90 000 since coming to government, compared to what you spent in the equivalent period the year before. The cost of Department of Health marketing for 1 December 2012 to 31 March 2013 was \$170 393.91, compared to the amount you spent in the same period for 2011-12 of \$302 052.10. That is a \$130 000 reduction in marketing expenditure. That has been given to you as a written response.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have illustrated that this government is about saving money and trying to pay off the hideous debt we inherited from the former Labor government.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you give details of any forced redundancies in your ministerial office since August 2012?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is another question for DCM.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you give us a list of forced redundancies across your agency?

Mrs LAMBLEY: There have been no forced redundancies in the department.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, one thing we both agree on is it is unacceptable to bully staff or for staff to be assaulted. Can you tell us how many complaints regarding bullying the department has received?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Bullying and harassment of Department of Health staff since we have come to government? We do not have information available for you on instances of bullying and harassment of staff. We will get that for you before the end of the evening. However, we have some statistics on assaults on staff and we can table that if you want.

Mr VATSKALIS: If you can provide that by the end of the evening that is fine, otherwise table it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you want me to describe what I am looking at? I can give you totals from 2012-13 to April. From 1 May 2012 to 30 April 2013 there were 300 incidents of physical or verbal aggression towards staff. That is an increase since the same period last year - 218.

I can table that for you. We have the figures around complaints of bullying and workplace harassment. During 2011-12, a total of 22 formal section 59 grievances were received by the Department of Health, of which three were related to agency handling of bullying and harassment. In 2012-13 year to date, 25 formal section 59 grievances have been received, of which only one relates to bullying and harassment. There was not a huge difference between the figures from 2011-12 to 2012-13, but still probably more than acceptable.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you. Minister, how many staff are currently employed in the Northern Territory health system?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In the Northern Territory health system there are 5848 FTEs.

Mr VATSKALIS: How many of these are frontline staff?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We will get back to you on that.

Mr VATSKALIS: What is the definition of frontline staff? What do you consider to be frontline staff?

Mrs LAMBLEY: This issue will be hotly debated over time ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, you cannot ask the minister to express an opinion in regard to ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not asking for an opinion. I am asking for a definition of frontline staff ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is the same thing.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... just as I would ask for the definition of a surgeon, a doctor or an orthodontist. I am not asking for a personal opinion, I am asking ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: As the Minister for Health, I do not have a strict definition of frontline services at my immediate disposal. The question should be asked of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

As the allegations we are affecting frontline staff becomes more intense as a hit back from the opposition, this will, clearly, need to be defined within the public realm. You have missed your opportunity to ask that question, but I am sure you could look on the Internet.

Mr VATSKALIS: How are the ongoing EBA negotiations going with the Nurses Federation?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It has not formally started.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, that is all for me.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PRIMARY HEALTH CARE **Output 1.1 – Remote Primary Health Care**

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The committee will now move on to Output Group 1.0 Primary Health Care, Output 1.1 Remote Primary Health Care. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, have there been any changes to breast or cancer screening programs?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like to introduce Mike Melino, Acting Executive Director of Health Services, who is responsible for this area.

In regard to changes to breast screening, we are dealing with - Madam Deputy Chair, can we go down the output groups starting with 1.0 Primary Health Care, 1.1 Remote Primary Health Care, rather than jumping to breast screening?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: At the moment we are on Output 1.1.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Everything comes under the sub output group. If you want to go to breast screening it is probably ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It falls under remote and urban because breast screening happens in both environments.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There have been no changes in breast screening practises except we funded additional services in the mini-budget. There are more services but no changes in the practice.

Mr VATSKALIS: .Are nutrition education awareness programs still being delivered in the bush?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have you reduced any diabetes education and awareness programs in the bush?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No. I have travelled extensively through the bush communities and visited many community health clinics. They all talk about their nutrition education program and their diabetes education program. I am not aware of any reduction or change in those education programs.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions?

Mr WOOD: Minister who paid for the establishment of the Red Lilly Health Board? Has the clinic just been set up?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In Arnhem Land?

Mr WOOD: Has it been completed and who paid for it?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was funded by regionalisation funds through the Commonwealth. I am not aware of its current status.

Mr WOOD: Could I just put that on notice?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We might answer that within the capital works program section. It is a project under the capital works program, I am advised.

Mr WOOD: It came under Remote Health.

Mrs LAMBLEY: West Arnhem: The Red Lily Health Board has completed its incorporation requirements and is now registered with the Office of the Register of Indigenous Corporations. Activities with Red Lily have been affected by funding difficulties with DOHA -Department of Health and Aging – Commonwealth department, and the first meeting of the year was planned for 3 and 4 June. As Red Lily is not a funded organisation, ORIC has advised that postponement to its regular meetings will not affect incorporation with ORIC. There is obviously a problem with Commonwealth government funds and its status as an organisation.

Mr WOOD: Are you saying it is not operating yet?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes. This is not within our purview at the moment. It is in the Health report.

Mr WOOD: It is under Remote Health.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We do not fund it but if you require ...

Mr WOOD: It is a key achievement. I was not being silly; I noted it said it was established and I was going to ask where its centre was.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When we get to the infrastructure projects - the works project.

Mr WOOD: I will try to remember.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will remember and we will see if it is there.

Mr WOOD: Is there still a requirement for more housing for health workers in remote communities? Housing being provided is noted here. Is that an ongoing requirement for the Department of Health?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are jumping around a bit. Housing does not come under the Primary Health Care output. Can we hold that over to Output Group 6?

Mr WOOD: Minister, if you look in the annual report under Key Achievements – Remote Health, facilities upgrades including new health centres. It is difficult to know if it goes in there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can I ask that the member for Nelson be given this list? Perhaps the member for Casuarina too so you know what the output groups are.

Mr WOOD: We have this one.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have that?

Mr WOOD: I am matching it to the old Department of Health Annual Report which has a heading called Remote Health, then it has Key Achievements. That is where I get some of my questions from.

Mr VATSKALIS: I understand the problem because we said before there have been significant changes from the previous structure of the department and we are facing this difficulty now.

For example, we have NGOs which operate in both remote and urban environments. Do I ask those questions in remote or urban? We have to be more flexible, at least in this estimates, because of the change to the department.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will answer the question on staff accommodation, member for Nelson. I will try to accommodate the fact it is difficult to follow the new output groups. I will do my best. The Department of Health provides housing for staff on hospital campuses through private head leasing arrangements managed by the Department of Housing, and in government owned housing stock in regional and remote areas.

The breakdown of housing by provider - at the moment we have 1184 dwellings in total, a huge number:

- 361 NT government owned dwellings occupied by Department of Health staff in regional and remote areas
- 362 head lease properties across Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Darwin
- 461 dwellings on hospital campuses.

Is there enough? I am not sure. The impression I get is there is certainly enough in some places, but in other places there could be more. That is an ongoing issue throughout government. It was a major problem when I was Minister for Children and Families, and there are ongoing issues for Education and other government agencies. My answer, loosely, is there is never enough, but we are doing okay within Health. We recognise it is essential to assist people living and working in remote areas with suitable accommodation.

Mr WOOD: Could I follow up with a question I asked the police? Do you have a table which shows what leases on Aboriginal land you are required to pay for? I would need to know where those leases were and how much they cost.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We will take that on notice. I remember you asked something similar last year. It was a particular interest of yours, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: It is a cost to government.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, it is.

Question on Notice 5.1

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, could you please restate the question for the purposes of Hansard.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you supply details on all leases of Department of Health assets, the costs of those leases, and where those leases are located?

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I have more specific ones.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to change the question?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Nelson of the minister has been allocated number 5.1.

Mr WOOD: The budget shows the proportion of Indigenous babies with low birth weights continues to be at a stable 12.5%. Could the minister explain why children are being born with low birth weights, and why is the estimate the same as previous years? Is there any chance of reducing that percentage? In the budget papers it shows 12.5% for consecutive years. It is in the Remote Health section.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Children continue to be born in the Northern Territory with low birth weights partly due to the mother's health, and perhaps unsatisfactory antenatal care. They are the traditional reasons for babies being of low birth weight. I am sure there are many other factors. Not being a medical person, I do not have the full explanation in front of me, but ...

Mr WOOD: I always harp back to accrual accounting. We put money in and get results out. What is the outcome? If the outcome is not changing, why is it not changing? Why is it not improving? Why is the percentage for next year not 10.5%? Why can we not bring it down to a much lower percentage?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In 2012-13, the proportion of screened Indigenous babies with low birth weight was 13%. For the same period next year we hope to bring that down to 12.5%.

Mr WOOD: The figures show the mini-budget at 12.5% and the estimate for 2012-13 at 13%. Those figures are sometimes ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are seeing a reduction in the proportion of Indigenous babies born with low birth weights. Although it is quite small, I agree, a 13% estimate in 2012-13 to a forecast of 12.5% is only a reduction of 0.5%, but it is an indicator of more effective interventions in maternal and midwifery primary health care services. It is obviously a slow process trying to track these, usually young, women and assist them with their maternal and midwifery needs. It is an ongoing process. It has been a battle ever since I have been in the Territory and involved in health services. Small gains are not particularly impressive on paper, but we are making some headway.

Mr WOOD: Tell me if I am in the wrong area - the Indigenous mothers' accommodation facility at RDH. Is it under remote, or is it under facilities in Health and Hospital Services? It is for remote people, which is why I am unsure where it should go.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is part of RDH.

Mr WOOD: I will leave it until we get there. That is all the questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any more questions? That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Urban Primary Health Care

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2. Are there any questions on Urban Primary Health Care?

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, you agree NGOs provide valuable services and assistance to the health system in the Northern Territory by providing health and community care services. Can you tell us which NGOs have had their funding cut?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Casuarina, this is not the output area for NGOs. That is in Output 4.3.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will come back to it then.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If you like I can answer it for you now.

Mr VATSKALIS: Happy.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Casuarina, coming to government we had to make some difficult decisions around how we were allocating funds within Health. The department provides over \$150m a year in grants to approximately 100 NGOs. I am sure you are aware of this.

The Department of Health conducted a review of the grants it distributes on 2 May this year and wrote to each affected organisation. The Health department has adopted several key strategies to better manage their grants, including improved relationships with organisations to better support good contract management.

There will be no indexation of grants in 2013-14, but affected NGOs will still receive a 1.25% increase on the funding they receive when compared to 2012-13. This approach has been pursued in order to minimise the impact on specific organisations and their clients.

The department has reduced funding beyond the indexation freeze to only six of the nearly 100 organisations based on consideration of whether the funding was provided for an activity primarily an Australian government responsibility and, therefore, able to apply for federal funding, or where there is an opportunity for users to contribute to services to provide revenue for their organisation. The reductions those six NGOs face amount to less than 0.5% of the total funding to the NGO sector by the Health department.

AMSANT – do you want me to go through which NGOs were affected?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, please.

Mrs LAMBLEY: AMSANT will see the funds they receive for secretarial services reduced by \$100 000 as their activity is primarily an Australian government responsibility. They will still receive \$330 250 from the Health department in 2013-14.

Aboriginal Hostels will see a reduction of \$37 500 as they are a fee for service provider. They will still receive \$433 939 from the Health department in 2013-14.

Amity will see a reduction of \$32 767 to replace 50% of funding for court order driver education programs with fee for service. They will still receive \$473 851 in 2013-14 for this and other programs.

In addition to reduced funding to those three NGOs, the department will cease funding for the following NGOs: the Red Dust Role Model program run by a Victorian for profit organisation saving \$24 782; funding for Tangentyere Day Patrol as this is an Australian government responsibility - Tangentyere will still receive \$410 607 from the Health department in 2013-14 for other activities; and funding for the Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation run mobile service in Tennant Creek. This is an Australian government responsibility and the department runs a similar service. The Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation still receives \$188 769 from the Health department in 2013-14 for other activities.

We are working closely with organisation to agree on any transition plans needed to implement changed funding arrangements. Work is also progressing to implement improvements to grants, management, and address issues raised by the Auditor-General. The Northern Territory government remains committed to strengthening the non-government organisation sector and will continue to work closely with them to improve outcomes for Territorians. It is about different priorities, not funding areas which the Australian government is responsible for.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, that is very good in theory, but had you worked in an Indigenous health organisation you would know every time you lose some funding from the Health department here and you apply for funding from the Commonwealth it might take one to two years. That means for one or two years you do not provide any services.

Has the department done any modelling on the effect of cutting money from organisations because it will get it from the Australian government? When do we get it, how much do we get, and what will the effect be on the community?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Much work has been done into the 0.5% reduction in non-government organisation funding across the board. We have had to trim back. We had to make this decision because of the dire financial situation we were faced with coming to government. We had to make some tough decisions. I have just described the process we used to reach these decisions, and we did not do it lightly. We did modelling on how it would affect the various communities involved. For example, Tangentyere Council night patrol service has been running as an institution in Alice Springs for many years. The day patrol service is relatively new, and we felt it was definitely the Australian government's responsibility and the Australian government has much more money at its disposal than we do. We felt the likelihood of them getting funding through the Australian government was quite high. Yes, we have done the modelling and analysed the effects. It is one of those difficult decisions you have to make.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, I had a question about the pressure on the emergency department but you answered that in your interview on the radio recently. You said how busy the emergency department was, and I thought you were reading the *Hansard* of the statement I made previously in parliament: the super clinic in Palmerston could alleviate the pressure on the emergency department and GPs can do that. Following from that statement on the radio, will you support the establishment of a super clinic in the northern suburbs in order to alleviate further pressure on the emergency department at Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Ironically we are back to Output 1.2, which is excellent – super clinics. We have supported the establishment of a GP super clinic in the northern suburbs of Darwin but it is not our initiative. We are not funding it; it an Australian government project. The first round of advertisements to attract interest in the super clinic from providers was unsuccessful. There was no interest whatsoever in the community then someone raised their hand.

We have had a few challenges, as you would know, finding a suitable piece of land. A block of land adjoining Sanderson Middle School was originally earmarked but is now deemed unsuitable. We now have an alternative site in the Leanyer area which we have offered to this group so we feel quite comfortable we have done all we can to assist in this process. It really comes down to the Australian government and this provider to work out what they are doing, and working in consultation with the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment.

Mr VATSKALIS: Do you have the \$5m originally put forward by the federal government still on the table to be spent in Darwin?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is not something we need to do. It is a negotiation between – we are providing the land - DOHA and the group interested in setting it up. I do not know about the \$5m, but if we could approach the Australian government – we understand it is still on the table.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you.

Mr WOOD: Minister, in relation to establishing nurses in the police watch house four nights a week, is that in Darwin and Alice Springs? Who will be paying for the nurses?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Health pays and they are in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.

Mr WOOD: Is there any consideration of the other three nights? Are you saying four nights are busy and three nights are light on?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The hours are not quite as you described, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I took it from your annual report.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is open in Darwin on Tuesday from 2.00 pm to 11.30 pm, and Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 7.00 pm to 3.30 am and nurses are available. That is five nights a week with shorter hours on Tuesday. Katherine and Alice Springs are exactly the same. That is the current provision of nursing services in police watch houses in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. However, there is a staged implementation program. Stage 2, which commences on 1 August 2013, provides a minimum of 12 hours per day, seven days per week in Darwin and Alice Springs, and six days per week in Katherine. Stage 3, from 1 September 2013 onwards, is 72 hours per week in Katherine, and 124 hours in Darwin and Alice Springs. By 1 September 2013 you will have seven day coverage in Darwin and Alice Springs, and Katherine six nights per week.

Mr WOOD: Will those nurses need any special training for this job?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Most definitely, they will be specialists in their area. Recruitment is under way at the moment with more applicants than positions, which is very encouraging. Initially I was told we would have a great deal of difficulty recruiting to these positions because of the peculiar nature of what they would be doing. The Department of Health has appointed a dedicated nurse manager to the service to facilitate the expansion and transition of the service to the acute sector for ongoing management. I can only assume there would be training and much support built into the provision of that service. I hand over to Mike Melino, Executive Director of Primary Health Care.

Mr MELINO: Mike Melino, Acting Executive Director Health Services. The nurses in watch houses will be linked into the hospitals. In regard to professional clinical support, any further training they require will be part of the hospital support network.

Mr WOOD: Minister, will there be a requirement to upgrade the watch houses into an office - a place for computers, medicines and that type of thing?

Mr MELINO: That was taken care of when they first started - some modifications had to be made. The situation will depend on the volume of work. We will need to re-assess that if we need more space, but at the moment they have proper clinical areas for triage assessment of people in the watch house and the secure drug storage when they need to administer drugs. As it stands now, that has been factored into their workplace.

Mr WOOD: When will they start operation?

Mr MELINO: The nurses are already there. The minister just went through a staged increase to the hours, which will commence from 1 July. Recruitment is close to 80%-plus already in place for July, and we expect by September we will have all positions and shifts filled.

Mr WOOD: What cost have you allocated for next financial year?

Mr MELINO: There is an additional \$1.2m provided as part of the additional application of the mini-budget. That will bring the total budget to around \$2m in total.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the hospice, which is one of the wonderful places the Health department operates - the palliative care people are fantastic, especially in this day and age where there is movement by the media about euthanasia. The hospice does not get enough publicity. Minister, does the hospice need upgrading, expanding or anything like that?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Nelson, the hospice comes under the Health and Hospital Services Output. I might hold off answering that until we get to Output Group 5.

Mr WOOD: I am happy to do that. What section was that, minister?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Five - Health and Hospital Services.

Mr WOOD: That will include any discussion about palliative care services as well? Not just the building, but the service provided?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, that is correct.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any more questions? That is it?

Mr WOOD: Not on that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Health Development and Promotion

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1. The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Health Development and Promotion. Are there any questions?

Mr WOOD: Health development is responsible for provision of the majority of public children's and adults' dental services throughout the Territory. How many dentists does the government employ? Will I read these out? I have a series of questions.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: How many dentists does the government employ? Is that figure going up or down? Where are they located in the Northern Territory? What is the average waiting time for a dentist? Has the number of school children seen by a dentist increased or decreased since the changes in relation to the provision of dental services in schools? I hope that makes sense as a couple of years ago there was a change to the provision of that service.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I can answer at least one of those questions. The average waiting time for a general dental assessment is 14.6 months, but that depends greatly on where you live. In the Darwin/Palmerston area the average waiting time is 19.5 months. In Alice Springs it is only five months.

Mr WOOD: I will go there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Overall, the average waiting time is 13 months.

Mr WOOD: If I live in Yuendumu and I have bad teeth, do I have to wait five months or 19 months if I cannot afford a private dentist? They are not cheap, I know. Recently half my bank disappeared. How can we improve that waiting time?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will pass over to Mike Melino, who can give a better description of what is going on.

Mr MELINO: The oral wait lists are a little problematic in that we do not carry wait lists for remote areas for obvious reasons. This is not representative across the board. There are also some nuances within the system that maintains the wait lists. Without going into the details other than to say from 1 July there will be a centralised booking system which will assist us to track those appointments and the wait lists much better than we do now. Whilst they are the figures we get out of the system now, quite often some of those cases are not followed through or closed off after a period of 18 months or two years. They artificially lift the wait list.

Mr WOOD: It is an important issue. Dental health has always been an area which probably does not get enough attention. If I live out bush and have a rip-roaring toothache but cannot afford a private dentist what do I do? Do I go to the hospital or do I put up with the pain? Chewing a bit of tobacco and ash used to kill the pain.

Mr MELINO: If I may?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr MELINO: If you are in need of urgent or emergency dental care and cannot access a private dentist, a public dentist will provide emergency care and treatment to get you to the point where you need to go into Alice Springs or Darwin for ongoing care. Emergency dental care is not such a problematic issue if you can get to one of our public dental clinics.

Regarding improving access, oral health is probably one of the good news stories for the Northern Territory in achievement of some of the targets we have set for, particularly children, as well as adults.

There has been a significant increase in our capacity to provide better access in remote areas. We currently have two dental trucks which operate out of Central Australia, but we are also in the process of a tender for a further dental truck to operate in the Top End. Those trucks are the equivalent of a clinic and can include a dentist or a therapist, or a therapist and a dental assistant depending on the purpose of the visit. That will give us much better capacity to service some of the more remote areas, particularly in the Top End.

The additional investment through the new national partnership agreement around oral the health service as well as the capital investment in a new dental truck are significant increases in resources for dental over the next three to five years.

Mr WOOD: When do you expect the Top End truck to be up and running?

Mr MELINO: The tender process is under way. I expect to have the beginning of building that if the tender process closes by September. It should not be too long before we can start any other modifications we need for the vehicle.

Mr WOOD: Are dentists hard to attract?

Mr MELINO: Dentists are always difficult, but we have been fortunate through some key partnerships with Health Workforce Australia and James Cook University, where we have additional placements of graduate dentists. There is a new graduate dentist program, as well as support for additional training posts. Over the next few years we will be in an extremely good position with dentist supply in the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: That sounds a bit more optimistic. Thank you for that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you advise how much refurbishment of the truck will cost, and how much it will cost per year to run the truck?

Mr MELINO: Yes, the figure for the truck is just over \$0.5m. I cannot give you the figures on the operational cost; I do not have that.

Mr VATSKALIS: This is new money or ...

Mr MELINO: These are additional moneys through the Commonwealth, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any more questions?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure which output this is, but the rationale behind the 5% cut to non-government organisations - is that the non-government organisation cuts you were speaking about before? The 5% cut to health non-government organisations we saw?

Mrs LAMBLEY: What you are saying is incorrect. There was a 5% cut to non-government organisation funding in the last quarter of this financial year. It works out to be 1.25% over the full year.

Ms FYLES: They were cut 5% in the last quarter. Did they see that in this budget rise? Stay the same?

Mrs LAMBLEY: What do you mean?

Ms FYLES: The NGO sector has had a cut, has that figure been reinstated this year?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Ms FYLES: What was the rationale behind that cut? You are talking about small NGOs. Childbirth education receives \$30 000-odd a year, so it was a minor saving to the government but a huge impact on those organisations.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The rationale was trying to fix the financial debacle your government left us in.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any more questions?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The questions the member for Nelson asked earlier about the number of dentists and the location, would you like those on notice, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We can get back to you with those figures tonight. Put them on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.2

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

Mr WOOD: Minister, can you supply information regarding the number of dentists the government employs and the location of those dentists?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Certainly.

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Nelson of the minister has been allocated number 5.2.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3, Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – DISEASE PREVENTION AND HEALTH PROTECTION **Output 2.1 – Environmental Health**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The Committee will now move on to Output Group 2.0 Disease Prevention and Health Protection, and Output 2.1, Environmental Health. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have any.

Mr WOOD: Minister, there was much fuss over the water quality of Darwin Harbour when you were in opposition. Much work was done on monitoring beach water. Is that monitoring continuing and could you give us an up to date report on the quality of water in Darwin harbour?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The work is ongoing, member for Nelson. I was briefed by the Chief Health Officer several weeks ago. I would like to introduce Dr Christine Connors, Acting Chief Health Officer, who can provide you with that information. Would you like to repeat the question, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Could you give us an update on water quality in Darwin Harbour, especially the beach quality, which was a matter debated for many years in parliament and the public arena?

Dr CONNORS: As you know, the Department of Land Resource Management instigated a beach water monitoring process in collaboration with the Environmental Health Branch. Basically, the results over the last few years have shown some fairly consistent findings with quite good results in the majority of sites. We are now looking at monitoring the sites which were showing higher risk on a weekly basis, and the lower risk sites on a monthly basis. All the results are on the Environmental Health website and publicly available.

Mr WOOD: Without going to that website, one fundamental change is the closing of the poo shooter. The other one might be disturbance of the harbour from dredging. Was there any change prior to those two things? Does anything crop up which might show that has made a difference?

Dr CONNORS: The closing of the poo shooter - the results have been fairly consistent over that period. There does not appear to be an increase with regard to the dredging, and most of the sites monitored have come in at quite low levels. Possibly the only site that causes some concern is Rapid Creek.

Mr WOOD: To make it clear, there was no great difference between when the poo shooter was in operation and since it has closed?

Dr CONNORS: It is not a clear relationship, no.

Mr WOOD: Will we ever really know?

Dr CONNORS: Probably not. Part of the difficulty was the results were quite variable. Some of the factors underlying why, at certain times, the *E. coli* goes up are not totally clear.

Mr WOOD: Is there any indication why Rapid Creek causes a problem? There is quite a bit of development along parts of Rapid Creek.

Dr CONNORS: That is not really clear. As you know, the harbour has an enormous tidal shift which is, potentially, part of it. Going in to quite a narrow space - there is greater usage of recreational activities around Rapid Creek. From the environmental health perspective, all we can say is the levels of bacteria are higher at that site than at other sites, and we probably would not recommend swimming at that site.

Mr WOOD: Is the Disease Control section your area too?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: In the annual report ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Before you go on, can I ask some Environmental Health questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, a number of tourists come to Darwin, we have a number of markets in Darwin, and we have seen some unfortunate incidents in other places. Does Environmental Health have a program to monitor the quality of food sold in the markets in Darwin?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have a food regulation policy.

Mr VATSKALIS: Is it an active testing program?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Dr Connors.

Dr CONNORS: Food outlets are monitored on a regular basis and need to be registered to ensure public safety, as you have highlighted. That is done on an annual basis. When there are new activities, for example, we recently had a number of one-off events - International Day and the Glenti etcetera - Environmental Health Officers inspect and ensure they are safe. At one recent events a particular store was showing problems and the Environmental Health Officers worked closely with the event manager and the store holder to ensure nothing was sold until they were confident about the safety of the food.

Mr VATSKALIS: Bearing in mind what happened in a private hospital in Queensland recently with Legionella, does the Environmental Health Branch test towers in the Darwin region? Is there a register of towers and how often they are sampled? Is it a requirement for the owners to provide results to the branch?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We will take that on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We might defer that to the hospital section - Output 5.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I was not referring to the hospital. It was a general question because the towers are all around Darwin. They are clearly Environmental Health issues. I am not referring to a hospital.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The towers?

Mr VATSKALIS: The cooling towers.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Water towers, okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you still want to take the question on notice?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Question on Notice No 5.3

Mr VATSKALIS: Does the Environmental Health Branch monitor cooling towers in the Darwin urban area? Is there a register, and how often are they tested?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you accept?

Mrs LAMBLEY: What do you mean by cooling towers?

Mr VATSKALIS: On the roof of buildings with air-conditioners they have cooling towers where water circulates to get rid of excess heat. That is where Legionella develops if it is untreated or not maintained.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is one place it can be generated.

Mr WOOD: We had an issue, which the Leader of the Opposition ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, member for Nelson, I am trying to put the question on notice, if you could let me do that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will take that on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you accept the question?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Casuarina of the minister has been allocated number 5.3.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, in all other jurisdictions the Environmental Health Branch is devolved to local government. Why do you still have an Environmental Branch in the Health department and have not devolved it to the City of Darwin, City of Palmerston, or other councils? Why do you keep it as a function of the department and not ask local government to take over?

Mr WOOD: Thank you, ex-minister. You want our rates to go up.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Obviously ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I have to ask questions about Environmental Health. I do not like it, but I have to ask the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, no interrupting when another member is speaking. That is irrelevant!

Mr WOOD: We have some leeway for the odd joke; otherwise it would be like a morgue.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There should be a sense of humour, but you should not use it to intimidate the minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is a curious question. I inherited Health from the member for Casuarina. He obviously decided to keep it within the Health portfolio. I would like to ask him the same question but am not in a position to do so. I will provide a response before the end of the session. After 10 months in government we have come a long way and made many changes. We are in the midst of reforming the Department of Health. We will get to the smaller areas as time goes on and will be looking at Environmental Health in that process. That is probably the best you are going to get from me tonight.

Mr WOOD: Right.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We will get to Environmental Health and look at ...

Mr WOOD: The government is not going to give us planning, so do not try to give Environmental Health to local government. I have questions on disease control. Do you have questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any more questions for Output 2.0, Environmental Health? That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Disease Control

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We now move on to Output 2.2 - Disease Control. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: In the budget there is a reduction in funding for disease control and you stated this is because negotiations with the Commonwealth have been finalised. Can you give us an update on the negotiations with the Commonwealth?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are still waiting to complete negotiations with the Commonwealth. I referred to this situation in my opening statement. There are still some variations to the budget and this is one of them.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you guarantee this cut in funding for disease control is not of the Territory's making but the Commonwealth's?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, I can.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, any more questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes, and, doctor, you might help me with this. Under the key deliverables for disease control services, notification of sexually transmitted diseases has risen quite a bit since 2007-08 - from 6095 to

8400 in 2012-13. Your table on selected notifiable diseases in the Northern Territory for 2006-11 says chlamydia - do those figures have anything to do with the sexually transmissible section? Do they match the sexually transmitted infections? Are the two related?

Dr CONNORS: Yes, they are the same.

Mr WOOD: In relation to legislation passed last year which was part of the *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act*, which allowed the partner antibiotics - the reason was to reduce the fairly high incidence of chlamydia. Is it too early to see whether this legislation had some effect on that?

Dr CONNORS: It is always a challenge in reporting these STIs because if we increase activity and start screening more people we will identify more. We might have done more activity. In fact, over the last few years we have had a process of quality improvement to look at how we are screening and treating much more effectively. Of course, that leads to us identifying more STIs.

It is always a challenge to demonstrate you are making a difference. It is too early in the partner-initiated treatment to know if that will help reduce rates of STIs. That is one of our strategies. As I said, we have a number of strategies with increased sexual health coordinators, providing education, targeting of young adults and the quality improvement processes. With all those strategies, we are hoping to have an impact because this caused a significant burden of disease.

Mr WOOD: Most people in the rural area, and elsewhere, know there has been a high number of mosquitoes this year. Generally speaking, the government does not spray any further than Holmes Jungle and, then, when it hits the rural area it says, 'Too hard'.

Has the government given any consideration to expanding its mosquito spraying activities further south?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will hand over to Dr Connors. She described to me in some detail the work done in the Barkly and Tennant Creek in this area.

Mr WOOD: Not too far south at the moment. I am getting ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay, too far south for you?

Mr WOOD: No, well ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: In your area.

Mr WOOD: The problem is when you hit the end of Darwin city there are plenty of mosquitoes across the road and people living in there. I am now receiving complaints, which I do not always get. They are asking, 'How come there and not this side of the boundary?' There would probably be an obvious answer, but I need to ask it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Dr Connors.

Dr CONNORS: With mosquito control there is a range of strategies and, clearly, spraying is one. Environmental Health officers are also engaged with local shires in regular monitoring of drainage pipes and outlets to ensure we are not getting stagnant water, which is likely to increase risk.

Basically, the current entomology program tries to focus on the highest area of risk. Obviously, Holmes Jungle is a particular risk area. Again, there is a cost involved in increasing the amount of aerial activity. They are continuously monitoring, through different areas, the numbers of mosquitoes, the known areas of tidal influx and rain and, as I said, ensuring we do not have stagnant water. At the moment, they are not doing a spraying program beyond that area but, if there are concerns with mosquitoes, the Medical Entomology Branch will always take concerns from community members.

Mr WOOD: Your predecessor used to live near Howard River Park. They had counts where they could not stop counting they were so high.

Minister, with growth of the rural population, it should be considered from time to time.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any more questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes, immunisation. Page 81 of the report said the number of children fully immunised at the age of 12 months is around 92%, and children fully immunised by the age of two years - the actual for 2012 is 95%, with the budget for this year saying 93%.

There has been much discussion in the media recently about people concerned with immunisation. I am a little passionate about immunisation. I have a hand which is not quite as big as the other one because of polio. What is the government doing to actively encourage that percentage of parents to ensure their children are immunised?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are doing much in this area and, compared to other jurisdictions around Australia, we compare quite well. Government is currently considering its position on immunisation and the requirement of childcare centres and schools to mandatorily expect parents to provide that information. It is important we have our children immunised. Dr Connors, can you provide some extra information?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Michael Gunner, member for Fannie Bay, has replaced the member for Casuarina.

Dr CONNORS: Could you repeat the question?

Mr WOOD: I am asking the minister what the government is doing to address the shortfall in percentage regarding children immunised. We have 91% or 93% of children immunised, a 7% difference. How can we bring that closer to 100%?

Dr CONNORS: As with anything in health, or anything involving people, it is rare to get 100%. There will always be reasons why we have not quite made it. We would like to get it to 95%, and for the majority of our vaccines population coverage of 95% is very protective. There are some, such as measles, where you need to go even higher.

When you look at those coverage rates, there are sometimes issues of timeliness for children getting their vaccines at the recommended time. If we looked at children aged three, for example, we would probably find a higher coverage in that they completed their vaccines up until that age. That is another reason why we might not see the coverage at the age of two, but they continue getting their vaccines even if they are older than two to ensure they complete their full schedule.

Mr WOOD: There is a section named Tuberculosis and Leprosy Management. My mother-in-law had leprosy and I have always taken an interest in it. Are there any cases of leprosy in the Northern Territory?

Dr CONNORS: Yes, but very few. Leprosy, the public health management of leprosy, Dr John Hargreaves and many of the nurses who worked with him are the major reason for this. It has been a huge success in the NT. We had many cases going back, and we had follow-up for many people – both contacts as well as the cases - and we are down to very few cases now.

Mr WOOD: Dr Hargreaves is a saint, by the way.

Dr CONNORS: He is a fantastic bloke; I worked with him for many years. He, and his team, did an extraordinary job.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – GROUP COMMUNITY TREATMENT AND EXTENDED CARE **Output 3.1 – Alcohol and Other Drugs**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0 - Community Treatment and Extended Care and Output 3.1 - Alcohol and Other Drugs. Are there any questions?

Mr GUNNER: Minister, you promised to immediately remove problem drunks from our streets and enforce mandatory rehabilitation for problem drinkers. How many problem drunks have you removed from our streets and at what cost to the taxpayer?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Fannie Bay, I do not have those figures because I am not the minister for Police or the minister for Alcohol Policy.

Mr GUNNER: This is mandatory rehabilitation. This is the promise. How many problem drunks have you removed from our streets and what cost to the taxpayer? This is your output now.

Mrs LAMBLEY: As you know, member for Fannie Bay, we are about to roll out a mandatory alcohol treatment program from 1 July 2013. At this stage we have not taken – how did you express it?

Mr GUNNER: Problem drunks ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Problem drunks off the street ...

Mr GUNNER: ... and enforce mandatory rehabilitation for problem drinkers immediately.

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... directly because of the alcohol mandatory treatment ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, let the minister answer the question.

Mr GUNNER: She answered it. There were none.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have not commenced the program yet, member for Fannie Bay. When we commence the program we will keep you updated as to how our bed capacity is being managed.

Mr GUNNER: To date, 10 months in?

Mrs LAMBLEY: You know the answer, Member for Fannie Bay. We will start on 1 July 2013.

Mr GUNNER: The status of the promise in your budget is none.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have a whole range of other alcohol strategies in place which are managing the problem of alcohol quite adequately at the moment. However, we expect to see a dramatic change in the landscape as of 1 July due to our mandatory alcohol treatment programs.

Mr GUNNER: Are you expecting problem drunks to be picked up from 1 July and go into mandatory rehab on 1 July?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Correct.

Mr GUNNER: Where will they go on 1 July?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are you asking about the nature of the facilities and where they will be based?

Mr GUNNER: Where will they go on 1 July?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you be a bit more specific, member for Fannie Bay.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You said on 1 July the landscape will change dramatically and problem drunks will be picked up and taken somewhere. Where will they be taken on 1 July?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, Standing Order 112. You cannot ask the minister to announce new policy of the government, but may seek an explanation regarding the policy of the government or applications but for legal reasons - does that make sense to you? I do not believe anybody gets that.

Mr WOOD: No, but it is a policy of the government.

Mr GUNNER: It is not a new policy.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You cannot question a policy that has not been introduced yet is what I am saying.

Mr GUNNER: It is in the budget. This is output.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The policy will not be released until 1 July.

Mr GUNNER: That is when it is coming into effect.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Exactly.

Mr GUNNER: That is the point. If we cannot ask questions about money being sent from 1 July on we cannot have an estimates process. The whole process stops. That is the whole point of estimates.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, you have the call.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Chair, I would be more than happy to answer the question the member for Fannie Bay has asked. Our alcohol mandatory treatment program will provide a real opportunity to impact on the harm caused in our community when people continue to drink to the extent they are taken into custody in police watch houses for their own protection. This policy initiative is one approach as a part of the Northern Territory government's broader strategy to tackle alcohol-related harm in our community.

The question was: where will they go? They will go into treatment facilities. There will be a treatment facility in Darwin; a 100-bed facility in the grounds of Royal Darwin Hospital. There will be a treatment facility in Alice Springs managed by the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Program Unit, and a treatment facility in Alice Springs currently known as the secure care facility. We will also be working on developing beds in Tennant Creek and Katherine over time. We will also be using beds in the current Nhulunbuy alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre.

Mr GUNNER: The Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Program Unit and Vendale are full. What will happen to the people currently at the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Program Unit and Vendale when they are displaced by the people you pick up on 1 July? I was at Vendale last week and it was completely full. I was at the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Program Unit three or four weeks ago and it was completely full. What will happen to the people going through voluntary rehabilitation in these places, which is why they are full, when you take the mandated drinkers there on 1 July?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have provided the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Program Unit facility additional funds this year to provide an additional 20 beds.

Mr GUNNER: They will be built on 1 July? On 1 July there will be 20 new beds there?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Possibly not from 1 July, but within the next couple of months those beds will be up and running. They have recently applied for Development Consent Authority approval to proceed with development of an extra 20 beds, a new section of their facility, and they will be well under way within the next couple of months.

Mr GUNNER: The landscape will not change on 1 July because those places are full, and we need to wait for the capital works money to roll out. On 1 July, at the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Program Unit and Vendale, if they take a mandated drinker is there displacement of a voluntary rehabilitation patient?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, there will be beds available. The eight beds at the Alice Springs secure care facility will be available from the first day. The thing you have to keep in mind, member for Fannie Bay, is from 1 July there will not be a demand for 200 beds immediately.

Mr GUNNER: You said the landscape will change immediately.

Mrs LAMBLEY: From 1 July.

Mr GUNNER: Dramatically.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Listen to what I am saying, member for Fannie Bay: from 1 July, it will take two or three months for demand for those beds to accumulate. Of course, it is all about the trigger - three protective custodies within two months is the trigger for people being referred to the mandatory alcohol treatment program.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is now 6:30 pm and time for dinner. We will resume at 7 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: On the committee we have Kon Vatskalis, member for Casuarina; Michael Gunner, member for Fannie Bay; me, Chair; Bess Price, member for Stuart; Francis Xavier Kurrupuwu, member for Arafura; and Gerry Wood, member for Nelson. We are recommencing with Output 3.1. Are there any questions?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Deputy Chair, could I introduce members of my team?

Madam CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have Penny Fielding, Executive Director of Strategy and Reform; Jeff Moffet, Chief Executive of the Department of Health; and Michael Kalimnios, Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Health.

Mr GUNNER: The national standard measure of recidivism is not re-entering the criminal justice system within two years of leaving gaol or a community-based order. Will you be measuring the success of your scheme through looking at the number of people who leave treatment and do not re-enter protective custody, a sobering up shelter, or a treatment centre within two years?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is interesting information pertaining to Corrections facilities. We are not setting up Corrections facilities, member for Fannie Bay.

Mr GUNNER: It is a measure of recidivism. Obviously, we do not want people to be repeat problem drunks. You are trying to stop people from being repeat problem drunks, and that is the definition of recidivism. Will you be using a something similar to measure the success of your scheme to stop people being repeat problem drunks?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Fannie Bay, with all due respect, you are showing your complete ignorance on the subject. When it comes to residential alcohol rehabilitation, you do not call people returning for a second or third round of rehabilitation recidivists. It is widely acknowledged people commonly go through rehabilitation programs many times over. I had an interesting experience last week. I visited the involuntary alcohol rehabilitation centre in Sydney, one of the few that exists in Australia, and they said some of their people go through rehab many times over. If you talk to the current residential alcohol rehabilitation providers in the Northern Territory, and there is quite a number - you mentioned you visited several within the last few weeks - you will find it is a common occurrence. They would be deeply offended to hear you draw a parallel between recidivism within the Corrections system and returning multiple times for rehabilitation.

Mr GUNNER: It is a definition about repeating.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Rehabilitation does not always work the first time; it may work the second or third time. It is a process of changing your life, giving up an addiction. We are providing a wonderful, strong health model in which we would embrace people returning if that meant changing their lives and enhancing the quality of their life in the future.

Mr GUNNER: You have to have a way to measure success of your scheme.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr GUNNER: At some stage you want people to stop going back. What is your definition of success? How will you define the success of this scheme?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are working on an evaluation methodology and on parameters of how we will measure success. Success, I am sure from the opposition's perspective, will mean only people who have abstained from alcohol permanently because that is the only dogma you could possibly think of. We will be developing a very comprehensive system of evaluating what we do.

For the interest of people within this estimates process, our alcohol mandatory treatment program is about giving people an opportunity to change their lives. People who are seriously affected by alcohol - the most seriously affected in our community - imagine being picked up once and taken into protective custody because you were so intoxicated the police thought you would be a danger to yourself and other people. Fix your mind to that and think of being taken into protective custody for that reason three times within two months. That tells me, and the community, that you have an extremely serious problem - an addiction, a health problem - and you need help.

For the first time in the history of the Northern Territory, we are extending the hand of care, a hand of treatment to these people, and taking them into a really good quality rehabilitation service which we are working out with a number of non-government providers, as well as providing it within the Department of Health. We will be providing these people, perhaps for the first time in their lives, a really good quality rehabilitation program and they will learn things about themselves, life and opportunity.

It is going to be deeply embraced, not only by people going through the system, but also people throughout the community. Despite what you hear, we have had endorsements from people saying how excited and positive they are about this program. All you hear from the opposition is criticism and negativity when, in fact ...

Mr GUNNER: It was not just us. Yesterday, the Chief Minister ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, do not interrupt the minister when she is speaking.

Mr GUNNER: Yesterday the Chief Minister said success was 5%, but you said you still do not know how you will evaluate this. At the moment he is saying 5%, but 5% of what?

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have probably taken that out of context, member for Fannie Bay.

Mr GUNNER: No, he said 5% as the measure of success, but 5% of what.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If he did say that, and I question whether he did ...

Mr GUNNER: He said it multiple times.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like to see a copy of *Hansard*. The Chief Minister does not have carriage of this portfolio area ...

Mr GUNNER: The Chief Minister said 5% was the measure of success. He said 5%, and he did not tell you he is holding you to account for 5%?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Fannie Bay, take a deep breath ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, cease ...

Mr GUNNER: The measure of success is 5% but he does not tell his minister.

Madam CHAIR: Minister for Fannie Bay, cease interrupting the minister when she is answering your question.

Mr GUNNER: Extraordinary!

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is about evidence, about us embarking on mandatory residential facilities for people affected by alcohol. The success rate of most rehabilitation programs is no more than 20%. I will not mislead you in any way, but 20% is what you can expect at the upper limit. It usually sits around 10%. If the Chief Minister said what you claim - the success rate is around 5% - he has made a mistake. I am happy to go on the public record, and I am sure the Chief Minister would like to be corrected if he said what you allege.

This mandatory rehabilitation program will have benefits and successes in a range of ways. One area I am keen to look at focuses on the impact alcohol has on things like domestic violence, child abuse, child neglect, suicide rates, and other symptoms of health directly, or indirectly, related to alcohol.

By taking the 800 worst alcohol-affected people in the Northern Territory off the street and putting them into rehabilitation, you are not only providing those people with health treatment and rehabilitation treatment, you are also providing the community and families respite from these deeply-affected people. When you take a deeply-affected problem drinker out of the family and a community, it will have an immediate effect on that family. All of a sudden, the pressure valve will be released. The pressure off that family, that system, that community, will be profound.

We will be measuring that, member for Fannie Bay. When we talk about evaluating this program, we will be looking at how families' lives are improved because these people are taken out of the equation for 12 weeks. We will, hopefully, be working with these families and communities so they can make changes in their lives, so the whole dominance of alcohol in their life can be changed forever.

Mr GUNNER: This is commencing on 1 July, will cost \$35m a year recurrent, and we still do not know how you will measure its success. People have said it is not legal. Some people have commented it will be challenged. The Chief Minister has described it as being 'legal' legislation, which is interesting phrasing. Can you provide a copy of your legal advice to support that?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I cannot provide a copy of legal advice now, but we have been advised it is a sound piece of legislation. We were under no illusion from the beginning this would be contested, would be disputed, and would be highly controversial. It is, has been, and, no doubt, when we debate this legislation in parliament next Thursday evening, 27 June 2013, there will be great interest in how the amendments are put forward and how this legislation is brought to parliament and debated. When you talk about evaluation, we do not even have the legislation up yet, so we have some time to get our evaluation process in order.

We will do it through consultation with stakeholders; people who are experts in the industry. The residential rehab providers are the experts in the industry and know what they are talking about. It is quite surprising when you talk to critics of this initiative how little they know about residential rehabilitation services. Last week I had a very interesting experience meeting with and talking in depth to the usual people who are outspoken about alcohol issues in the Northern Territory. I primarily met the Alice Springs based stakeholders who are very critical of our policy. When you teased it out, they had quite a limited understanding of residential rehabilitation, even without the mandatory component. I found to some extent was dispelling their concerns about the myths created around this mandatory alcohol policy.

We know this type of program is reasonably well-understood and highly regarded elsewhere throughout the world and, indeed, in New South Wales, where I visited last week. In New South Wales the involuntarily mandatory rehab program has been in existence for about 12 months and it met with very little public resistance. People accepted the fact there was a need for mandatory treatment of people affected by alcohol within the community, it had to be in a secure centre, and it had to be within a health setting, totally consistent with what we are rolling out on 1 July.

I hear what you say, member for Fannie Bay, and know your government lacked the courage to do anything like this. It put in place something that failed dismally, and to this day continues to whinge about how we, in such a brazen way, dropped it when it did not have time to roll out. We thought 12 months of disappointing results, 20 000 protective custodies within that 12 month period -and most of those people on the Banned Drinker Register - spoke volumes and the people of the Northern Territory agreed. They voted us in knowing the cornerstone to our election campaign in August 2012 was the rolling out of mandatory alcohol rehabilitation and getting rid of the BDR. It is undisputed, and we have the mandate of the people of the Northern Territory to do this.

Mr GUNNER: Your proposed amendments next Thursday do not remove the Banned Drinker Register. The minister for Licensing, in this estimates hearing, said you propose to use aspects of the Banned Drinker Register. How do you intend to use the Banned Drinker Register going forward? It remains part of the bill and is there for use. The minister for Licensing said aspects of it work and will be used.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The legislation we are rolling out ...

Mr GUNNER: Does not remove the Banned Drinker Register.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You need to read the legislation. It has nothing to do with the Banned Drinker Register.

Mr GUNNER: You are amending the *Liquor Act* ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Banned Drinker Register ...

Mr GUNNER: ... and you have the capacity to remove the Banned Drinker Register and are not.

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... is another ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, the minister is trying to answer your question. Please stop interrupting.

Mr GUNNER: I am correcting her misinformation.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Banned Drinker Register is in another piece of legislation. We are rolling out the Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Bill ...

Mr GUNNER: You are at odds with the minister for Licensing ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... which is about -I have full carriage of this bill ...

Mr GUNNER: ... who provided different advice.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, the minister is able to answer the question in the way she sees fit. Give her the opportunity or I will have to warn you.

Mr GUNNER: You can warn me. I am looking forward to the minister answering the question correctly.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are very confused, member for Fannie Bay. I have carriage of the rehabilitation program ...

Mr GUNNER: I am quoting the minister for Licensing ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, with respect, you are not properly referring to what the minister for Licensing said. He did not say ...

Mr GUNNER: It is in *Hansard*.

Madam CHAIR: He did not say what you said. You can afford the same latitude to the minister.

Mr GUNNER: He said it the night before ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: They are two different bills. You secretly know that and are trying to be a bit clever and catch me out on this subject. I am not going to talk about alcohol policy in general; I am the Minister for Alcohol Rehabilitation. The Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Bill repeals the requirement in section 31A(2)(a) and (ab) of the *Liquor Act* for the minister to establish an ID system to check whether a person is subject to a SMART Court order or notice under the alcohol act. This formally repeals the Banned Drinker Register; however, the bill leaves in place other provisions of section 31A of the *Liquor Act* which gives the minister the discretion to establish an ID system for other purposes. For example, checking prohibition is part of bail parole; for example, permit systems established through the alcohol management plans.

We are keeping the identification ...

Mr GUNNER: The ID system remains.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is worth keeping in mind that in Alice Springs, and perhaps other parts of the Northern Territory, we had an identification system in place prior to the Banned Drinker Register. It was called the ID system and it preceded the Banned Drinker Register in using an identification system to try to stop problem drinkers drinking. However, what we discovered, and the whole of the Northern Territory discovered apart from the former Labor government and its strong supporters, is it did not work. Alcoholics will drink regardless.

Mr GUNNER: How much money has been allocated, as part of the alcohol mandatory treatment program, to meet increased referral numbers to mental health services?

Mrs LAMBLEY: None.

Mr GUNNER: Zero? There will be no dual diagnosis? The only person to be picked up is an alcoholic?

Mrs LAMBLEY: They are two separate parts of the Health department. People who have a significant mental illness will not be coming into mandatory alcohol treatment. For example, if someone shows signs and symptoms of psychosis they will be treated within the mental health system.

Mr GUNNER: They will be referred?

Mrs LAMBLEY: As they would be if they were presenting for a diabetic check, a dentistry check, or any other health service. If a health provider, and in this case a clinician from the alcohol mandatory treatment centre, considers a person is showing signs and symptoms of mental illness they would be referred, as in any other health service, to the appropriate service.

Mr GUNNER: You are not budgeting for increased referral numbers?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a separate service.

Mr GUNNER: You are not expecting any increases in referrals.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You do not understand how health services in the Northern Territory are provided. If you are mentally ill you go to the mental health services, if you are profoundly intoxicated and require alcohol rehabilitation you go to the alcohol and other drugs services or, in some cases, mandatory alcohol rehabilitation. There is a referral system in place to ensure people are connected with the appropriate service.

Mr GUNNER: Through the alcohol mandatory treatment program there will be no increase in referral numbers to the mental health service?

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are asking a loaded question and the answer is none. As a part of this output group I will talk about mental health services if you like. There has been quite a significant increase in funding for mental health services in the Northern Territory, and there will be in the coming financial year. They are two separate things. Do your homework before you ask these questions because it shows your gap in knowledge.

Mr GUNNER: You say there will be no referrals. Someone who is picked up, assessed, goes into a mandatory facility for rehabilitation, and goes through alcohol withdrawal will not be referred. There will be no dual diagnosis. No one will be referred to the mental health system.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, no ...

Mr GUNNER: That was the question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You did not listen to my answer, member for Fannie Bay.

Mr GUNNER: I did and you said zero.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I said people who exhibit significant signs and symptoms of mental illness will be treated ...

Mr GUNNER: Were you wrong when you said none.

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... by the mental health services. If someone has an ongoing case, for example, of depression, which is deemed a type of mental illness - they may not be particularly disabled but it is something they deal with every day of their life - and they have a significant drinking problem, their mental illness is not the primary diagnosis at that point in time. It would be the problem of drinking alcohol.

We will have people in our mandatory treatment facilities who suffer from depression, anxiety, eating disorders. They might have a range of mental health disorders or illnesses under control and well-treated, and they will be able to fulfil the criteria to undergo alcohol rehabilitation. If, however, their signs and symptoms of mental illness are not treated, or are so acute they require specific mental health services and treatment, they would be referred there before undergoing alcohol rehabilitation. You cannot have someone who is floridly psychotic entering an alcohol rehabilitation program because it would achieve nothing.

Mr GUNNER: You previously said aftercare is a critical element of your alcohol mandatory treatment regime. How much funding has been allocated in this budget to post-release or aftercare services to support mandatory treatment?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am not clear on the figure, but we have listened carefully to the existing residential alcohol rehabilitation providers and we know the transition from rehabilitation to the community is just as important as the rehabilitation process.

We will ensure those transitioning and aftercare services are there for people and are adequate to meet the needs of people going through rehab. The existing rehabilitation services we are using, for example, Kalano and CAAAPU, have aftercare officers who work full-time to provide adequate aftercare services for their people.

We will be strengthening the existing services and building new ones. It is not ideal for people to walk out of rehab into the situation they came from. We know from talking to current providers that some people will choose that, regardless of what we put in place. We know some people will go straight back to the environment they came from and back onto alcohol. We will have given them a 12-week window of opportunity to change their lives, which has never been done before. We are so proud of this new initiative. We think it is courageous and are very excited about the possibilities it will bring to people who go through rehab, and the whole of the Northern Territory.

Mr GUNNER: How will those aftercare services be provided in the bush?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is an interesting question, and I have had some discussions around this. We believe that in the future we can set up houses or accommodation facilities in certain areas out bush so people can go back and still be part of a supported accommodation program while transitioning back into their community. They will not be thrown into the same situation they came from but will be allowed to spend more time ensuring they remain healthy and off the grog. Those facilities exist in some communities already. For example, in Tennant Creek a number of group homes perform that function. There are plenty of models to work with.

Of course, part of our rehabilitation program will be work. We want people to engage in some meaningful work. You would have heard the Attorney-General earlier talking about his Corrections program - getting people into work. We believe work is part of any rehabilitation program, and are excited to offer people some training and work opportunities which they can, hopefully, go back to their community with.

Mr GUNNER: That flagged my next question. How much additional funding has been allocated under your alcohol mandatory treatment regime for the life skills programs?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am not sure what that breakdown is but it is part of the program. Each facility will be slightly different. Obviously, the ones run by NGOs will have existing life skills and rehabilitation programs in place. For the newer one we are using the medi-hotel and will be starting from scratch. For Phase 1, we will be spending about \$250 000 on the life skills programs within the treatment facilities.

Mr GUNNER: After they have gone through three months of treatment and life skills, they will be job ready. Where will they be working?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would not say they will be job ready, member for Fannie Bay. We have been told by current residential alcohol rehabilitation providers sometimes these people have never worked in their life; alcohol has taken over from an early age. You are starting from scratch with many of these people.

I travelled to the Tiwi Islands with my colleague, Mr Francis Xavier Kurrupuwu, about a month ago, and they are very keen to start a mandatory alcohol treatment centre there. They have a tree plantation industry and are keen to get the people in rehab involved in a work program in conjunction with the plantation industry. Some people will be work ready after 12 weeks, depending on the impact alcohol has had on their mind and body; others will not.

Mr GUNNER: When did you or your colleagues first contact the Australian government to discuss the use of the planned medi-hotel as a mandatory treatment centre?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In May I first spoke with minister Plibersek, the federal minister for Health. I explained we were rolling out – sorry, it was 14 April. She was very open-minded about it. She is a very reasonable person. She had concerns about, more broadly, the alcohol policies within the Northern Territory. She also expressed concern about the original purpose of the medi-hotel and what she understood it should be used for. We discussed the fact the medi-hotel had never been used for the original purpose, and that existing services were managing the overflow of the hospital and the accommodation needs of people travelling in and out of Darwin for treatment in the hospital.

I followed that up with a letter. I have since spoken to her, and spoke to her again on Monday. We are talking through this; she still has not said no. She is keen for us to discuss use of the medi-hotel with the Health and Hospitals Fund Advisory Board, and I have agreed to do that.

Mr GUNNER: You spoke to Ms Plibersek on 14 April, but your media release was issued on 12 April. You did media saying you were using it before you spoke to the federal minister?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is right. I rang her the week before the announcement was made. There has been nothing underhanded in this area. I can see where you might be going with this. I have been very open, honest and transparent about my intention to use the medi-hotel for this purpose since becoming Health minister. As soon as I saw it, I knew it was the obvious option for a temporary alcohol treatment facility. I have been very open and honest about our intention to use it for no longer than 18 months to two years because we need it in two or three years for its original purpose. We must have it available in the next two or three years for its original purpose.

Mr GUNNER: It might be a question for another output, but I thought we needed it now.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are managing fine without it.

Mr GUNNER: What was the advice of the child protection unit or minister about the decision to use the facilities in Alice Springs for the mandatory treatment of adult problem drinkers instead of vulnerable children?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That question suggests you are not clear on the arrangement. There are two secure care facilities, one in Darwin and one in Alice Springs. They are identical in specifications, size - they look the same, are the same, but in two different locations. The original plan was to use half in each location for the Office of Children and Families.

Mr GUNNER: So children in Alice Springs could stay near their family?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, not at all. In fact, that is so wrong it is ridiculous! For the Office of Children and Families for a secure facility for children requiring secure care, and the other half was for adult patients requiring secure care.

Mr GUNNER: That is right.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Two cohorts of clients with very challenging needs. I visited the Alice Springs facility soon after becoming Minister for Health and it instantly became clear to me that it was totally undesirable to have those two cohorts located adjacent to each other in the one facility - children with very challenging behaviours, challenging problems next door to adults with extremely complex behavioural problems who may or may not have a history of aggression and violence.

Mr GUNNER: Distance will not be an issue?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will continue with the story. Separating those two parts of the facility was a mesh fence and an observation unit where you could see through, like a goldfish bowl. My immediate thought was one facility has to be for adults and one for children. I negotiated that with the current Minister for Children and Families, minister Anderson, and we quickly resolved the matter. She accepted it was highly undesirable to mix these two cohorts. The Office of Children and Families has taken over management of the Darwin facility, and Health has taken over management of the Alice Springs facility.

Mr GUNNER: Why is there no provision in the alcohol mandatory treatment regime to assess people who come to the attention of NT police due to other alcohol-related behaviour such as alcohol-fuelled domestic violence and nightclub brawls?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Someone who has perpetrated domestic violence while intoxicated, are you saying they should undergo mandatory alcohol treatment?

Mr GUNNER: I am asking why the narrow focus to your mandatory alcohol treatment regime? Why are you going down the path of only three times in two months and not looking at other alcohol-related offences or behaviour?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We do not want people who have committed an offence or a crime to come into alcohol rehabilitation programs. We want people who are overwhelmed and controlled by alcohol who come to our attention through three protective custodies in two months. We want people who do not have the complication of facing criminal charges to come into mandatory alcohol rehabilitation. It muddies the waters, it mixes people facing criminal charges with people who are not, and we feel we will have enough demand for people who fulfil those requirements.

Mr GUNNER: What work will be undertaken as part of your budget allocation to ensure the residential treatment centres are fully compliant with all appropriate guidelines, including deaths in custody legislation?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I might refer that to Penny Fielding. Penny has been doing an enormous amount of work in this area and has been driving the roll out of alcohol mandatory treatment programs.

Ms FIELDING: Penny Fielding, Executive Director, Strategy and Reform. One of the legislative amendments proposes reporting under the *Coroners Act*. As part of our quality assurance program, we will have a set of guidelines and senior assessment clinicians who are departmental officers will be supporting accreditation and improvement of standards. The Chief Executive will also be authorising a range of people working in the service system, whether they are NGO or departmental staff.

Mr GUNNER: What work will be undertaken at the medi-hotel to make it secure enough to prevent people from absconding?

Ms FIELDING: A number of staffing and environmental considerations have been taken to ensure the medi-hotel is safe, both for clients and people on the hospital campus. Those measures include fencing, sensor lighting, and environmental controls so we can see who is in there and what they are doing. A number of modifications have been made to the medi-hotel so it is safe for clients, and we are using a regime which will rely on staff being actively engaged with clients at all times. We will have active rather than passive staff 24/7.

Mr GUNNER: Once the available places are filled, what is the process for those who continue to present for assessment?

Ms FIELDING: If there is no assessment or treatment place available the draft bill provides for a mechanism whereby police will have to check prior to transferring the client across to the assessment and treatment facility. If there is no place available then the next time the person is brought into protective custody they will go through the same process.

Mr GUNNER: How will those assessment arrangements work in remote areas? For example, if someone is picked up in Galiwinku, where would that person be held until an assessment can take place?

Ms FIELDING: That process is being developed through guidelines with police and will be based on how police operate in remote areas and the risk profile of the individual. In the first instance, the process will rely on regional assessment centres.

Mr GUNNER: What arrangements or protocols have been put in place between police and the mandatory treatment providers regarding those who may abscond from assessment or mandatory treatment?

Ms FIELDING: Those processes are currently being developed with police. We have a number of guidelines we use in a range of other service settings which we will use as a foundation for those protocols.

Mr GUNNER: Will they be completed by 1 July?

Ms FIELDING: Yes, they will.

Mr GUNNER: How much of the budget will be used to train staff of government and non-government organisations to be search officers?

Ms FIELDING: We commenced staff training in Darwin last week in the Mabo technique of safe restraint. That included training for all staff who are currently recruited both for Darwin and some for Alice Springs. It is being done on a train-the-trainer model so will be replicated throughout the Territory, and about \$50 000 has been spent on that training to date.

Mr GUNNER: The legislation gives search officers the powers to seize weapons and drugs. What arrangements do you have in place for the storage and safe transport of those things?

Ms FIELDING: We are anticipating most of that will be done by police prior to transfer, but guidelines are being developed to manage the safe storage of those items, as is routinely undertaken in the treatment services currently.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Chair, I have offered the member for Fannie Bay, and any member of the opposition and the Independent member for Nelson, a full briefing on all the details leading up to the debate in parliament on 27 June. I do not mind you asking these questions in estimates because I believe in being open and transparent, but if this is going to lead into a full briefing please take up the offer I extended.

Mr GUNNER: There has been some back and forth trying to get a date for that briefing. I was supposed to have one several months ago when minister Tollner had carriage. That, unfortunately, fell through because of some Cabinet changes; there was a reshuffling of the decks. There has been some back and forth about having another one. We wanted it last Monday but, unfortunately, that could not happen so it is this Monday. At that briefing many things will be discussed. The member for Nelson also has a range of questions. You are correct, minister, there is a briefing coming which will go through things like search officers, their powers, and where things will be stored. I have a series of questions along those lines so I am looking forward to the briefing. The member for Nelson has had one but it was prior to the amendments.

I am happy to stop at this point and let the member for Nelson pick up.

Mr WOOD: Thank you for the briefing I received from Ms Fielding and Lex - I have forgotten his surname.

I support the philosophy behind what you are doing. I agree with what you said and the reasoning behind what you are doing. It is about helping somebody overcome an addiction, and giving the public some peace and quiet.

Several years ago people rang me about the state of their property in Darwin. I visited and some places had been strewn with rubbish, defecation, and all types of things. This was not just one night; it happened on many nights. I used to tend gardens in Geranium Street and exactly the same thing happened, so it is not something new. Part of the reason the vicar at the Uniting Church felt like leaving – he may have had others reasons - was he was sick of people vandalising around the church. There is a real issue. The public want a break from it, people are entitled to a break from antisocial behaviour, and there is a responsibility for government to do something. There must be some compassion. You are dealing with people who have lost the ability to make their own decisions.

I will not oppose the legislation unless I see something drastic in it. I am unsure if I will support it because I would have liked it to have gone to a select committee or maybe the place in Sydney you mentioned. What was the name of the facility in Sydney?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was the Royal North Shore Detoxification Unit, Herbert Street Clinic, Royal North Shore Hospital and we met with ...

Mr WOOD: Detox centre, was it?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Royal North Shore Detoxification Unit.

Mr WOOD: Those people are mandatory. How do they become mandatory in New South Wales?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Nelson, I can give you all this information separately ...

Mr WOOD: I would like that, yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is an involuntary drug and alcohol treatment program, a little different but, in principle, the same as we are rolling out.

Mr WOOD: This, to me, is serious legislation and very complex. Giving it 10 minutes of debate is probably not the best thing. The principle of what you are doing - correct me if I am wrong - is mandatory rehabilitation should be the last resort. I believe that is what you have in the legislation. Many of these people must come from the bush or from somewhere.

I have mentioned previously an option like healing centres. A healing centre - because my sisters-in-law, Sue and Bronwyn, are not qualified, but they give people with problems - not just alcohol, it could be other problems - an opportunity to go out bush. I believe the bush itself, for many people, is therapeutic.

You give them a mandatory sentence so they have to go through the process, and the option is to go somewhere where they could hunt or fish and rest. You go back to a more cultural option - not necessarily a family, because sometimes family is the reason for drinking. It would be good to test the waters of how many communities would be willing to - you would have to pay them to do it. I believe women are probably better to do it because they are stronger when it comes to retaining culture and understanding some of these things. I am not saying men cannot do it.

That is where we should put our main focus. If people do not stay in those areas you say to them, 'If you do not stay in this area you will be put in a more secure centre'.

I am not a great fan of saying, 'Let us put you in this place first'. Let us look at softer option. You have other options in your legislation - community treatment ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I am not looking at the Tennant Creek version you mentioned, but something a bit further away from that type of sophistication ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Nelson, Phase 1 is rolling out the beds we need to get this up and running. Phase 2 will look at more culturally appropriate options, for example, the Tiwi Island option. Other communities have expressed an interest in setting something up. Talking to Mr Francis Xavier Kurruwu's friends and colleagues on the Tiwi Islands, they were keen to incorporate cultural learning and education into their program. I hear what you are saying.

Mr WOOD: Nguiu has plenty of bush, plenty of island, plenty of fishing, plenty of places you could take people away, and I do not disagree with that. My main concern is if something goes wrong - that is why we need purpose built facilities - it will give the government a bad name.

If someone was to hang themselves or hurt themselves - there is a withdrawal period of a week or so - I would be concerned if I put my name to a process which was not good enough to ensure risk did not happen.

The other issue I have is I visited CAAAPU and Vendale - I was shown around the centre and I looked at the medi-hotel and the sobering-up shelter in Katherine. I spoke to the CAAAPU people and asked where the facility was going. They said, 'There', and showed the plans. That concerned me because they are just four demountables. If I was looking for a risk option, there is risk, not with voluntary people, but these people will be there against their will. You may have alleviated my concerns a little because you have an amendment to the security issue I raised with Mr Fielding in our briefing, which was if someone jumped over the fence straight into prison, which is defeating the purpose. I would be concerned if we build a facility that is relatively easy to escape from.

The CAAAPU people told me they did not want a great big fence around there, 'We just want one of these'. I could get over that with a chair and be out in no time. I have concerns that if it is not secure enough, even after three times they will still be in prison. There are 22 amendments and I need to look at them.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There are over 26, I believe.

Mr WOOD: I need to go through them.

I have given you my concerns because it is a fairly monumental piece of legislation. We deal with people with cognitive impairment, I understand that, but this is a fairly drastic approach. I am not against that approach, but there comes a time when you have to make some drastic decisions. I am concerned about the way we are doing it. I advised Ms Fielding that by taking over the medi-hotel I hoped, with a purpose built facility, there would be a veggie garden.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I have to stop you. Are you coming to a question? This is an extraordinarily long statement. You said you had briefings and the minister has offered more. We will be debating not only an Appropriation Bill, but also this bill on Thursday. If you could come to a question it would be appreciated.

Mr WOOD: The advantage of estimates is it is one of the few times ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, as much as I love hearing your advice on what estimates is for, I can quote Standing Order 112 which states questions should not contain statements. Do you have a question, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: If you want to read chapter and verse at me, fine. If you want to throw me out for not – I am on a warning ...

Madam CHAIR: I do not want to throw you out; I want you to ask a question.

Mr WOOD: It is a serious piece of legislation ...

Madam CHAIR: Yes, and it should be debated in the proper forum, which is the parliament.

Mr WOOD: This is the proper forum ...

Madam CHAIR: This is the Estimates Committee.

Mr WOOD: What do you think it is for?

Madam CHAIR: Budgets.

Mr WOOD: If I do not oppose the government and have some concerns - the Labor Party does not agree with it so will go back and forwards with questions. I have explained where I am coming from and am happy to leave it there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Nelson, I appreciate your perspective on this and would like to continue the conversation. We will be talking much more in parliament on 27 June.

Can I take up on your last point that the opposition does not support it? It is interesting looking back through their media releases over the last three years because they have supported it in the past. I am looking at a media release from the Minister for Alcohol Policy, Delia Lawrie, on 1 September 2010. She said the new proposed reforms include, 'Introducing mandatory rehabilitation treatment for problem drinkers'. That was less than three years ago. She talks about the government's plans to introduce new laws which allow NT police to issue alcohol banning notices preventing drinkers from consuming and purchasing takeaway alcohol. 'Under the new proposed laws, police may issue a banning notice of up to 12 months to a person who is placed in protective custody three times in three months'. It is very similar to what we are doing.

The former minister stated she intended to introduce mandatory rehabilitation treatment for problem drinkers. On 10 December 2010, she reiterates her intention to introduce mandatory rehabilitation treatment for problem drinkers. In February 2011, the then Chief Minister, Paul Henderson, in a media release says he will introduce new powers which will include mandatory rehabilitation treatment for problem drinkers.

The opposition has gone from a position of intending to implement this mandatory alcohol treatment throughout the Northern Territory to going cold on it. They have become fearful. They have lost the courage of their conviction to go through with it. Now, in June 2013, the opposition are against what we have committed to. I do not expect a response from the opposition; they are obviously conflicted and confused and in disarray.

I would like it noted on the public record that the former Labor government, now opposition, have stated many times they support mandatory alcohol rehabilitation.

Mr WOOD: May I ask the question now ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: I can table those if you like.

Madam CHAIR: You can ask a question, yes.

Mr WOOD: Minister, there is concern about how this process starts. If a person is picked up by police and put in the paddy wagon, is that regarded as custody?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, not under this new initiative. We have amended the *Police Administration Act* to implement much more strict and onerous identification procedures. At the moment, people are not identified when they are taken into protective custody particularly well. We had to ensure we knew conclusively who those people were when we ticked them off as a protective custody.

Mr WOOD: I raised this issue with the Police Commissioner yesterday, but part of it is your responsibility, someone is picked up by police, put in a paddy wagon, and generally they go to the sobering-up shelter. When I was in Katherine they said their opinion was if a person could walk from there to there police would say they are in the sobering-up shelter. That was their impression. If they were in a much worse state I thought they would go to the watch house, but some people told me they now go to hospital. I have two conflicting reports. Do they go to the watch house, do they go to the hospital, or does someone make a decision where that person needs to get treatment?

Mrs LAMBLEY: What you ask highlights the fact police play a critical role in determining what a protective custody order is, what it is not, and, what, effectively, is one mark against their name in the three strikes trigger. A person is taken to the emergency department of a hospital if police believe they require medical attention. That happens in the first instance. Obviously, welfare of people is paramount.

Mr WOOD: I am trying to get this in a practical order. If they go to hospital they are not in custody and there is no tick?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Police might remain with that person then take them into protective custody after they are deemed fit to leave hospital.

Mr WOOD: If they do not go to hospital, they go to the watch house and get a tick. If, as I mentioned to the Police Commissioner two years ago - remember there was much crime in Alice Springs around Christmas time and the sobering-up shelter was full so people were taken to the watch house.

Is it a requirement that a police officer must, if someone is taken to the watch house for being drunk because the sobering-up shelter is full - do they automatically give them a tick? It might be a bloke who got onto the booze that night, his first time, has come in from a cattle station, has been picked up and the sobering-up shelter is full so they place him in custody, does he get a tick?

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is probably a question for the police, but anyone taken to the watch house because they are intoxicated to the point they are deemed a danger to themselves or other people - that will be considered a protective custody order. Whether it is due to the sobering-up shelter being full so they have to be taken to the watch house - but if the sobering-up shelter is full and they are not a danger to themselves or someone else, they might not be taken anywhere beyond that. It is at the discretion of the police officer to decide where that line is.

Mr WOOD: If a police officer takes someone to the watch house, are they required to tick them off or do they make a decision? They have power to decide whether they put them on the road to mandatory rehabilitation or not?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, their job is to bring people into protective custody.

Mr WOOD: You have to be registered three times in two months. The police register them, correct?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: At that point ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: They have some power in this process, if that is what you are asking.

Mr WOOD: The assessable clinician does not have that power. Once in the assessable clinician's hands you have to wait for the tribunal.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: At this stage there is a much onus on police to decide whether they are in or out?

Mrs LAMBLEY: There always is. There is now; it is no different. The difference from 1 July is there will be a consequence of people coming into protective custody. We see that as a strength of the system. At the

moment, you can be taken into protective custody dozens of times in a 12-month period and nothing happens. There is no help, no consequence; there is nothing for these people. They will be referred to alcohol services, but the choice is theirs and, nine times out of 10, people do not take it up. They just wander back home and sleep it out.

Mr WOOD: One other issue the sobering-up shelter people gave me - and it is nice to go to the front line because those people are good folk ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, indeed.

Mr WOOD: ... and give you the word straight. They said one of the problems is the people they take to the watch house are not necessarily the people who should be in the system. The people who go to the sobering-up shelter, and keep going to the sobering-up shelter, will not be picked up. Perhaps the sobering-up shelter should be looked at as well. They said, 'We et people time and time again. We know they are the people, but they are too drunk to go to the watch house'.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are conducting a sobering-up shelter review and will look at those things. We will improve on this as time goes on. What we start with on 1 July will probably be much different to what the system will look like on 1 July 2014. It is a work in progress.

Mr WOOD: That is my biggest concern. I prefer to bring the legislation in. Like the secure care centres, where we built facilities - regardless of where people were - then introduced the legislation to put people in there. I know it was a government election promise, but I want to give it my best shot to get it right.

Mrs LAMBLEY: These people are not criminals. If they go to the sobering-up shelters when they should have gone to the police station, as long as they are getting help somewhere, they will be picked up eventually. If they are habitual drunks, it is inevitable. If, for some reason, after 1 July these people are sent to the sobering-up shelter the first four times, maybe someone will say, 'Hey, this guy is slipping through the cracks. Can you take him in and process him so he gets into rehabilitation?' That communication can be enhanced and the system can be tightened to ensure people have access to this service. I know some people are seeing it as punitive, but we see it as the opposite. If we can direct people into mandatory rehabilitation because they need it, it is a win-win.

Mr WOOD: The Attorney-General does not always listen to me, but I remember the debate about 18 months ago when he said he would put them in prison. I said, 'Look at the Mental Health Act'. I appreciate that the government has gone down this path rather than putting them through the justice system. That is a positive change. I will give it much thought.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Very good.

Mr WOOD: I have a questions on mental health if we have gone through this far enough.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Mental Health

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.2 - Mental Health. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: How will your new mandatory alcohol regime relate to mental health services, and how will you ensure people with mental health issues are properly assessed?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Casuarina, I have answered this adequately. The member for Fannie Bay asked me a number of questions around this, and I am confident I am on the record answering this ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You are confident there will not be a mix-up; nobody will run away?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, because we have professional clinicians, both within mental health and the mandatory alcohol treatment facilities, to discern where people go depending on their signs and symptoms of mental illness or the effects of alcohol.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, there are cases where people with mental health problems drink and the other way round ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: I discussed this earlier.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are a brave minister to say, 'I am confident it is going to happen' because I have seen things go wrong many times. You say you believe it will happen because that is the advice you receive. However, I urge you to tread carefully because I have seen people off tap for the wrong reasons, then when hell breaks loose it lands on the minister's desk. That is my only question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, it is a good question. We will have mental health in-reach services going into the treatment facilities. You are right. People with alcohol problems commonly have mental health problems also. I agree with what you are saying. However, I answered almost the same question from the member for Fannie Bay about 30 minutes ago.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am fine with that.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the mental health secure care centre at Holtze is now a children's secure care centre, is that correct?

Mrs LAMBLEY: And vice versa.

Mr WOOD: Are there any problems having those children - I am unsure what age those children are - a long way from family?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I cannot answer anything about the Office of Children and Families. You will have that opportunity next week with minister Anderson.

Mr WOOD: Who runs that centre?

Mrs LAMBLEY: OCF.

Mr WOOD: You do not run it?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No. I am responsible for the facility in Alice Springs, which is now a Department of Health facility for adults with complex behavioural problems and mental health problems.

Mr WOOD: By bringing children there, you have transferred responsibility of the facility?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: It is not the Department of Health any longer?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, it was 50:50, but now we are solely responsible. The Department of Health is responsible for the Alice Springs facility.

Ms FYLES: Do you mean everything is OCF now?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Have there been any escapes from the secure care centres?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, because they have barely been used.

Mr WOOD: I was coming to that question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There have been adults - I can only talk about Department of Health clients - we have had a couple of adult patients using the facility on a day program. We have not had people reside in the facilities yet, bar one in Central Australia.

The plan is, because of the complex nature of these people's problems, you cannot instantly put eight people in there at once; you have to stagger the integration of people. Obviously, it is a group environment; you have to get the mix right. We will increase the number of people residing in the facilities over time.

Mr WOOD: Am I right in thinking, after reading the article in the Alice Springs newspaper, that there will be people undergoing mandatory rehabilitation in the same centre?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes. We only have one person residing in the Alice Springs complex at the moment. It is a 16-bed complex. There are the two halves - originally children and adults - so there is separation. We will be using half of the facility in Alice Springs for mandatory alcohol treatment. It will be the assessment centre. People deemed as possibly appropriate for mandatory alcohol treatment in Alice Springs will be transported by the police to that assessment and treatment facility for alcohol rehab and will be assessed. It is a beautiful place, has amazing amenities, and is gloriously located. I could move there and live myself with the location and luxury.

Mr WOOD: Some of us might be happy retiring there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is perfect to use temporarily as the assessment and treatment facility.

Mr WOOD: Minister, perhaps you can understand where I came from. I visited the secure care centre at Holtze with the previous minister and thought it was a great facility.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a fantastic facility.

Mr WOOD: That is what we should have built first. That is why I might have problems supporting it at the moment. It does not mean I do not support it in principle, but from my perspective that should have been built first and then we applied it straight off instead of having temporary this, temporary that. Those are my thoughts, but it is a very good centre.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In a perfect world, that is what we would have done too. Fortuitously, we came to government and were presented with a 100-bed medi-hotel and secure facilities which were not used - empty and not a huge demand for any of it ...

Mr WOOD: I am happy you use it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... in the short to medium term.

Mr WOOD: That is all my questions. Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Community and Accommodation Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.3 - Community and Accommodation Services. Are there any questions?

Ms FYLES: Minister, early this year senior Territorians gasped in horror when Nine News first revealed your secret plans to scrap the concession scheme our senior Territorians so richly deserve. Nine News Darwin stood up for seniors against your intentions to rip away these concessions. After two weeks of refusing to support the scheme, you eventually backed down. Would you support Nine News Darwin receiving a community service award? Can you tell me how the new Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme will work for Territory seniors?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Could you repeat that, I found it a little confusing.

Ms FYLES: It is in relation to the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme - Output 3.3. Can you tell me how the new Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme will work? I have had many inquiries in my office, as have my colleagues.

Mr VATSKALIS: So have I.

Mr WOOD: Same for me.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We all did. There was a great deal of anxiety around what people thought would happen driven by the ...

Ms FYLES: The leaked Cabinet paper. Did you chase that down?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, and driven by some opposition members who were unfairly playing the anxiety of older Territorians rather than waiting for the outcome of a Cabinet decision. At the moment we still have the

most generous Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme in the country. We have an estimated 26 214 members in the Northern Territory Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme. This is an increase of 9.5% compared to the same time last year. An increasing number of people are getting on board to make the most of these generous entitlements.

The changes to the scheme were around eligibility for travel concessions. The \$500 travel concession is available every two years to eligible seniors. This can be also used to fund a friend or family to the Northern Territory. It is not available for intrastate use, only interstate. It does not accumulate so it cannot reach \$1000 in four years; it is available every two years. Pensioners can also access concessions for electricity, water, sewerage, council rates, garbage rates, spectacles, motor vehicle registration and driver's licence renewals in addition to the travel concessions.

Ms FYLES: What consultation did you have before you made the changes?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The consultation really was essential. We were put in a position where we had to make savings due to the former government's overspend - the fact you did not consider the impact of senseless overspending over many years despite the global financial crisis in 2008 when the GST revenue to the Northern Territory started to slide downwards. The former Treasurer, Delia Lawrie, kept spending like there was no tomorrow. Labor members of parliament do not understand you cannot keep spending money you do not have. If you do that you end up with an enormous debt and your money goes into paying that debt off, paying interest off, and not making an impact on the level of debt. Like the cuts to the non-government organisations, member for Nightcliff, we had to look everywhere to make savings. This was one relatively small area of savings that ...

Ms FYLES: ... Relatively small but such a big impact on our seniors.

Mrs LAMBLEY: At the end of the day it was not such a big impact. In fact, many senior Territorians do not access these travel concessions. It is not a huge number. In fact, as at 30 April 2013, only 2315 travel concessions were granted.

Ms FYLES: If it is not a huge area of savings, why penalise senior Territorians?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We had to make savings, member for Nightcliff. I do not believe you understand how the finances ...

Ms FYLES: How much in savings ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... of the Northern Territory work. I spent the first seven months in government pouring over how we could bring the financial commitments of the Northern Territory under control. We had to look under every rock and had to make savings across the board. We all had to tighten our belts, including pensioners and carers. It is still the most generous scheme for pensioners and carers in the country.

Despite your objection to the very difficult decision we had to make, it was in line with cuts across the whole of the Northern Territory government. We did it with a great deal of reluctance. It was met with fierce opposition, but once people realised it was not as enormous as the opposition were blowing it out to look like, they accepted it and have continued on with their lives. We continue to be committed to providing the range of concessions I described.

Ms FYLES: How much are you saving from the changes to the scheme?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Northern Territory government 2013-2014 budget includes an addition \$7.9m to support the scheme.

Ms FYLES: You said the scheme is growing, so you are taking away from individual seniors.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You can flesh it out that way if you want, but if more people are using it, it costs more. You cannot keep spending, spending, spending, member for Nightcliff. It is like a credit card out of control which brings misery and discomfort at the end of the day. That is where we were heading under Labor. Despite the reduction in the travel concession for pensioners and carers, we are still committed to an extra \$7.9m to support this scheme.

Member for Nightcliff, you were a former ministerial officer to the minister responsible for Child Protection. You were part of the sham whereby 90 child protection workers were employed without one single cent allocated ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Rubbish!

Ms FYLES: Minister, you said you could not answer questions on child protection.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I understand why you do not get this. You did not get the fact to employ 90 workers you need money to pay for it.

Ms FYLES: What I get, minister, is you no longer allow intra-Territory travel, which I am sure our bush colleagues would be upset about.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was never offered, member for Nightcliff.

Ms FYLES: Moving on, can the travel ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, I would like to respond to that. You made a mistake. Do some research! Intrastate travel was never offered as part of this package.

Ms FYLES: Can the travel component be used for luxury jet travel, or is that only for Country Liberal Party ministers?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is \$500 you can use to travel interstate.

Ms FYLES: You can use that for your private jet, fantastic. Was consultation ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: If that is what you choose to do, member for Nightcliff, that is what ...

Ms FYLES: I am not a CLP minister so I do not have access to a private jet. Are travel agents aware of the ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Your sarcasm is unbecoming.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, minister. Are travel agents aware of the changes? I have had numerous questions directed to me about that. They felt the scheme was changed overnight without any consultation.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Travel agents were the least of our worries because we had heard, anecdotally, from many sources, it was being abused by some travel agents - not many. Tightening it up was a good thing, making it so people could not book rather expensive open-ended trips then cancel them and be refunded in cash. That was the story there.

Ms FYLES: They are serious allegations. If that was a problem with the scheme, would you not investigate and put a stop to it rather than affect every senior Territorian?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, I am sure the minister does not appreciate you putting words in her mouth and interrupting her.

Ms FYLES: Regarding the power price rises that have hit senior Territorians hard, there are seniors in my electorate who are unable to run air conditioners or important machines in their homes. Have you lifted tariff rates they receive rebates on?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No.

Ms FYLES: Minister, you do not seem to think these questions are very important, but these are what ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: They are incredibly important, member for Nightcliff. I am trying to think what their rebates are equivalent to. They get a 50% rebate.

Ms FYLES: We have seen a 20% rise in power yet there has been no ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is 50%, and that is the answer to your question. No, the percentage of rebate has not changed.

Ms FYLES: Senior Territorians are paying an extra 20% for power and 30% for water and have seen no increase to their rebates?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am the Minister for Health ...

Ms FYLES: Minister, these outputs fall within your ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Would you mind not interrupting me. I am the Minister for Health; I am not responsible for power and water tariffs. I am responsible for the pensioner ...

Ms FYLES: You were in the Cabinet, minister, where these decisions were made.

Mr VATSKALIS interjecting.

Madam CHAIR: Members for Nightcliff and Casuarina, the minister is answering the question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Ask the portfolio minister.

Ms FYLES: Minister, these questions are relevant to you. In the budget papers you are the Minister for Senior Territorians.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You need to refer any questions about the Power and Water Corporation to the portfolio minister or the Shareholding minister.

Ms FYLES: I am not referring to questions about Power and Water, ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you homework and do not burden me with the ...

Ms FYLES: ... I am referring to the benefits senior Territorians rightly deserve: rebates on their power and water bills. That is the question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Ask me a question.

Ms FYLES: Power and water tariffs have increased. Has the rebate to senior Territorians?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I answered that three questions ago. Do you mind, member for Nightcliff. No, no and no; the tariff rebate has remained exactly the same.

Ms FYLES: That is very disappointing, but thank you for answering my question. Senior Territorians will be pleased to hear that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You need to listen more closely.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I have a letter from a constituent who is upset you have not replied to her letter. She wrote to you on 11 April 2013. She received an acknowledgement but nothing more. I might pass it on to one of your advisors, and you might smooth waters over if you can answer it. It is in relation to the pensioner travel concession change.

For the record, before the end of this financial year, if someone books a flight - they might not be sure - they say, 'We are hoping to go somewhere between January and February next year'. When they travel, as long as they tell the department, can they still receive the original rebate? This is the bit I have trouble explaining to people.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If travel is booked and paid for prior to 1 July 2013.

Mr WOOD: Booked and paid for. We had information, and have told people, if you make a rough booking - because people sometimes cannot work that far ahead - as long as there is paperwork to say that is what you have done when you pay for it you can say, 'I did it before the end of the financial year'.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It has to be booked and paid for.

Mr WOOD: That is the bit ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: They have to commit.

Madam CHAIR: There is a fact sheet on the website, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Madam Chair. We know that, but this is the information we were given and why there has been some mix-up. A reasonable number of people are asking about it and it needs to be clarified. If the person who has written to me books and pays for a ticket before the end of the month, they will receive the original rebate?

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is right.

Mr WOOD: If they do it afterwards, they get \$500? It is not just booking, you have to do it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have to commit and pay. You do not have to travel, just book and pay. Everyone affected by these changes was written a letter describing the changes. It is complicated and, because of the fear and scaremongering tactics, primarily by the opposition, people work themselves up into a state. People need to know, and I am happy to ...

Mr WOOD: I will e-mail this to your advisor to look at. Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 – Disability Services

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions regarding Output 3.4 - Disability Services. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: No questions.

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.4 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – SYSTEM MANAGER **Output 4.1 – Corporate and Clinical Governance**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0 - System Manager, Output 4.1 - Corporate and Clinical Governance. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have any questions.

Mr WOOD: I do not know much about this but much money is involved. There is \$45m under a system called 'System Manager'. In not too long a form, where is that \$45m spent? It does not look like it is a nuts-and-bolt type expenditure?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I might refer that to Jeffrey Moffet, Chief Executive of the Department of Health.

Mr MOFFET: Jeffery Moffet, Chief Executive. The System Manager function is the emergence of a central function not previously described as a result of the new service's framework. The key functions included under Corporate and Clinical Governance are the Chief Medical Officer function, which includes a substantial role with clinical governance systems, clinical safety and quality in the system, workforce reform and a range of other medical leadership matters, and the Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer, who has a role in nursing workforce reform, nursing workplace systems, and nursing leadership.

There is also a planning and development sub-output of the System Manager function which includes all the specialised services through the office of the chief executive including government relations, ministerial liaison, comms and media, legal services etcetera - specialised executive services. It also includes our strategy and reform areas around planning research and policy, and includes our purchasing and services development branches as well. It is a substantial central part of the system around the governance, planning, direction and performance monitoring of the system.

Mr WOOD: Is it the top of the pile when it comes to organisation of those important parts of running the health department?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, it represents the non-operational element of the system which informs the support operations and governs the system.

Mr WOOD: You have corporate and clinical governance as well, so not only does it have this, it has to meet standards and national guidelines for what it does?

Mr MOFFET: Yes, the whole system is required to meet standards. The role of the System Manager is to ensure those standards are well understood, that we articulate nationally with developing standards, for example in safety, quality and pricing, costing of products and purchasing contemporary policy. There is a substantial amount of standard-setting involved in the System Manager function.

Mr WOOD: Does a Commonwealth body conduct an audit every now and then to ensure you are running according to those guidelines, or you just do it yourself - self-assessing?

Mr MOFFET: There are, primarily, Northern Territory government audit functions from the Auditor-General and our own internal audit processes. We have reporting and compliance functions to the Commonwealth for Commonwealth funding received. There is no explicit audit function in general. The Auditor-General for the Commonwealth can and does order an audit on occasion around some of our primary care grants, but it is unusual.

Mr WOOD: I do not have any other questions.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Planning and Development

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 4.2 - Planning and Development. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have any questions until Output 5.0.

Mr WOOD: No questions until Output 5.0.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.2 and 4.3.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES

Output 5.1 - Top End Health and Hospital Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 5.0 - Health and Hospital Services, Output 5.1 - Top End Health and Hospital Services. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister we now have two boards, one in Central Australia and one in the Top End. Can you guarantee they will not be two bureaucracies with increased costs to your department? How will you manage it?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In effect there will be three entities, the Department of Health, the Top End Health and Hospital Services and the Central Australian Health and Hospital Services. They will be separate but obviously linked through common features and common systems.

Mr VATSKALIS: Extra costs?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In my opening statement I described there will be some savings and some extra cost but, overall, we are hoping it will be fairly cost neutral.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will take your word for it. With regard to the Top End Health and Hospital Services, you said you will not develop a hospital in Palmerston and have refused funding from the Commonwealth government. You say the work done by the previous government was not adequate, and you are prepared to spend \$5m to undertake a study about Palmerston Hospital, is that correct?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, in some respects that is not true. We have never said we will not build a hospital in Palmerston.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the Palmerston Hospital; the one funded by the Commonwealth government.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Your concept for Palmerston Hospital, we believe, was flawed. We are not satisfied it includes what is necessary to meet the needs of the greater Darwin area into the next 20 or 30 years. We are not convinced the site you identified is the best. We feel the project you undertook did not consider proper demographic data, population shifts, future health requirements or private sector capacity and funding options for the future delivery of health services. We have decided to undertake a scoping study at a cost of up to \$5m to ensure we get it right.

Mr VATSKALIS: Ministers of departments change, but the people stay the same. Are you aware of the Palmerston Hospital services planning ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Are you aware there was a master development plan report done too? Are you aware of the Aurora Palmerston Hospital brief? Are you aware of the Palmerston community hospital - done by experts? Are you telling us your government believes the work was not done, the concept was not right and nothing was taken into consideration? I will save you \$5m. I will give you this report so you can study it. Save \$5m instead of doing the same work we did.

Some of the people with you worked with me and the Palmerston community to ensure everything was done properly. I have absolute faith in those people and know they did an excellent job. What is written by experts is exactly what should happen now. However, you prefer to play politics with Palmerston Hospital and risk the health of people in Palmerston and the rural area because you do not want to pay the money.

You will build a hospital in the never never. We do not know where, how big, or what it will offer. When all the work is done - all the reports are here and if you ask your CEO, I am sure he will give the reports to you and the \$75m can be spent somewhere else in the department.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, before you answer, would you please introduce your witness?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like to introduce Christine Dennis, Executive Director of the Top End Hospital Network.

Mr VATSKALIS: What is the real reason the hospital in Palmerston is not being built?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Casuarina, this is not playing politics; this is about getting it right. I am not disputing the competence and credibility of the people who undertook that work. I am not disputing the quality of the work within those documents, which I have perused. I am questioning the overall specifications you gave to the consultants and the people who did that work in order to come up with what they did. We believe you got the original concept site wrong. We are not going to commit \$70m on the table from the Commonwealth and \$40m we have put on the table to something we feel is, essentially, wrong.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, why will you not at least admit this is a Labor Party vision, you have a different vision? Do you seriously believe the architects would not ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have summed it up, that is exactly right.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... say, 'Guys, you picked the wrong site'. These guys spent much time and effort designing a modern hospital that could be expanded in the future to cover the needs of the area. Aurora spent time and effort talking to professionals, talking to the people, and developing the briefs. Not once did these people say, 'You've got it wrong'. Instead, they worked because they knew the location was right, the consultation with the community was right, and they were designing a modern hospital which would not have snow cells like RDH, it would be functional, would be expanded in the future, and would cater for the greatest needs of the community.

I understand it is not your concept; it is a Labor Party project. Why not say, 'Guys, we don't like it. It is your project, throw it out, we will get a CLP project', but do not say it is not the right site or design. I have no idea about the right site. I read the reports and realised it was the right site because the expert said it was. I will

save you \$5m. I will forward these copies to you to read. Do not listen to your political advisors; listen to the experts and people who know about hospitals.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Casuarina, if it was the right concept at the right site I would be the first one to proceed. That would be, by far, the easiest and most efficient thing to do. I will quote what the Palmerston Mayor, Ian Abbott, said on Channel 9 on 16 May 2013 about your concept:

We believe that traffic was going to be major issue. It is also a major corridor for Defence to go out to Robertson Barracks along Temple Terrace. We believe the site had serious concerns.

I looked at this site, member for Casuarina. This is not a spectacular map, but you have an aged care facility right in the middle of it. There are many traffic flow concerns. It is hemmed in by major roads and built up areas - urban areas and commercial areas. I do not need to say any more than that. It is not down to politics why we made this decision. We believe your concept was short-sighted and poorly worked out. Future demography and demand for health services had not been taken into consideration. We want to get it right. We want to make it bigger and better. We are working with the federal opposition as we speak so it can put more money on the table and we can make it a much bigger, better concept.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, you and I are not medical experts and rely on the advice of experts. I strongly suggest you look at this document from page 14 onwards, analyse the element you raised about transport corridors, transport flow and everything else, and describe clearly if the location is right or wrong. With regard to the Mayor of Palmerston, the department consulted with Palmerston City Council and, at the time, under the previous mayor and previous council, not one issue was raised. They were very enthusiastic to have this hospital built there. Of course, the council has changed. New mayors come with different ideas. Mayors are elected as representatives like me and you. They are not experts. My strong suggestion is you save your \$5m and read the documentation which clearly describes all the elements of the design and the location of the hospital. Do not listen to political advisors; listen to the people sitting around you who know about health and hospitals.

If you do not want to believe it, fine. It is another way to campaign for the next election. That is fantastic, but every year that goes by is one year longer the people of Palmerston and the rural area have to wait for a hospital. This facility is located strategically because it is in the middle of a health precinct. Do you want to build a hospital in the middle of nowhere? What purpose will it serve? Here you have a super clinic which alleviates pressure on the hospital system and a nursing home. You have to have a hospital nearby because old people get sick; they die quickly if they do not have access to medical care. My strong suggestion - I am passionate about it because if we are going to leave a legacy - you and I - let us put something there so people can say, 'They built it'. We do not want to be remembered as the people who ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, do you have a question? I note Standing Order 112: questions should not contain arguments.

Mr VATSKALIS: Why not save \$5m, look at the reports already presented and stop playing politics - your government - with the health of Territorians. I am happy to provide this information to you. I can photocopy it and send it to your office tomorrow.

Madam CHAIR: The minister has the information, member for Casuarina. Are there any other questions?

Ms FYLES: Every other state has a dedicated children's hospital or wing. Why do you not believe Territory children deserve the same? Why did you cancel the RDH children's wing proposal?

Mrs LAMBLEY: You need to refer this question to the federal government counterpart. There has been no money forthcoming from the Commonwealth Labor government. It did eventually come up with funds to refurbish the existing paediatric unit at Royal Darwin Hospital, but we are still waiting on funds for the wing.

Ms FYLES: The federal government put significant funds on the table and you ignored that. Do you not believe Territory children deserve better?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have answered the question.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 5.1?

Ms FYLES: You have not answered the question. Significant Commonwealth funding was on the table. Do you not believe Territory children deserve better?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff!

Ms FYLES: Do you believe the current ward is suitable?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff. Member for Nightcliff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: If you further question your federal counterparts you will find there is no money ...

Ms FYLES: There was \$40m on the table. I heard Tanja Plibersek a few weeks ago ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Show me where the money is, member for Nightcliff, and I am happy to re-ignite those plans.

Ms FYLES: Minister, you are committed ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Your federal minister for Health ...

Ms FYLES: ... if the federal government comes on board. You spoke a minute ago about engaging with the federal opposition. We are in a federal election year. If you get the federal counterparts on board, are you willing to look at a children's wing for Royal Darwin Hospital? You went to say that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was on the table. The funds were not there, member for Nightcliff. If you want to talk to your Labor counterparts, put your money where your mouth is, talk to your federal Labor mates, try to get that money back and we will start negotiations again.

Ms FYLES: There were significant funds there ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: There were, indeed!

Ms FYLES: The federal Health minister has offered that. You mentioned your chats with the federal coalition ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Put it on the table.

Ms FYLES: It is your job; you are the Minister for Health. You need to lobby these people not just say, 'The money was there, it is too hard'.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, do you have a question for the minister?

Ms FYLES: Why are you not working hard for Territory children? Why do they not deserve a better paediatric ward? Why are you not working hard to get federal funds?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, the minister has indicated she has answered the question.

Are there any further questions on output 5.1?

Ms FYLES: The Minister for Health is not willing to lobby the federal government, or the federal opposition, to get more funds for Territory kids. That is what she is saying by not acknowledging the question. Appalling!

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, have you seen these plans?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will clarify, the election commitment was made by federal Labor during the election campaign. Nothing has come of it. I have spoken to the federal minister for Health, Tanja Plibersek, on numerous occasions now. It has never been on the table and they have no intention of putting it ...

Ms FYLES: Minister, take that back. The federal government committed significant money to the Territory. Have you written to the federal minister to ask her?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Nightcliff, where is it? You have all the answers, have you not, sweetheart?

Ms FYLES: Have you written to the federal minister and asked her? Have you at least done that? You have not ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have just received funding for the refurbishment of the paediatric wing ...

Ms FYLES: You are the Minister for Health and have been in government for 10 months. You have spoken to Tanja Plibersek on the phone, yet have not raised the question. It did not cross your mind to think, 'I might ask her about the children's wing?'

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff! I remind everyone of Standing Order 112: questions cannot contain arguments.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The member for Nightcliff is showing her ignorance around how these things work. It is all very well for her to make accusations about ringing and writing, but if the money was ever there in the first place it was negotiated by the former Northern Territory Labor government. It was never there. We inherited ...

Ms FYLES: Are you saying the federal government lied?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, do not interrupt the minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am saying you are possibly misleading this estimates hearing by saying it was there in the first place. It never appeared.

Ms FYLES: I am asking a question ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It never appeared. It has never appeared and, if you are so concerned and it is such a pressing issue for you, why not ring your counterpart and try to lobby. You have a part to play in this too; you are the opposition shadow minister for Children and Families. You, obviously, consider you have some pull if you are throwing around these accusations.

In all reality, if the money was never there in the first place under the former Northern Territory Labor government then, surely, the possibility and probability of them plucking money out for me, when they have only just honoured their commitment to refurbish the existing paediatric unit, is highly unlikely.

Ms FYLES: You are the Minister for Health. This was a significant funding commitment from the federal government and I find it amazing you have not chased it in 10 months of government.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, it was commitment by the federal government. I personally spoke to Tanja Plibersek. She put money on the table, and I committed our government to put money on the table. Yes, it was in our election commitment. However I have to - have you seen these plans? Has anybody shown you these plans?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I cannot quite see what you are showing.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to provide a copy. It is the concept master development plan which incorporates the new children's ward. It was designed after I came back from Sydney and discussions with Tanja Plibersek - after the commitment I had from her.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Did it appear in the budget paper?

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister ...

Ms FYLES: It was a costed commitment.

Mr VATSKALIS: It was a costed commitment from the Commonwealth.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The PEFO? The pre-election fiscal outlook - did it appear in there?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, because ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: No! There you go!

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it was not, because the books had been prepared before the commitment.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I rest my case.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, you knew ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a fantasy!

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, are you coming to question or are you making an argument?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, yes.

Madam CHAIR: It sounds like an argument to me.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am prepared to go to Tanya with you and argue about the money. Are you prepared to come with me and ask for the money? Your government can use the money to have a great, new children's ward at RDH. Are you prepared to do that?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am more than happy to make my own negotiations and discussions with ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You have not done it yet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have not done it because it was a fantasy. It was not there.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, stop interrupting the minister.

Ms FYLES: Minister, it is not a fantasy. We asked for a commitment.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can I have some space to speak?

Madam CHAIR: Certainly, minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Opposition members are fooling themselves. Even in the PEFO it did not even exist. The money was never there. It was a fantasy; a figment of your imagination. You were duped by the federal minister for Health and are now turning on me and making it out to be a reality. Let us have a reality check. It never existed, it is not there. It is not in our budget papers because it never existed. Member for Nightcliff, you are a junior politician; let us have a reality check: if it did not exist and still does not exist, it does not exist.

Ms FYLES: Minister, one more question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am happy to write to Tanya Plibersek tomorrow to ask for this fantasy amount of money to come forward.

Ms FYLES: Fantastic, that is what Territory families want to here.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will argue with Tanya to support it.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, do not point at the minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: The minister keeps pointing at us.

Madam CHAIR: You can point at me if you like.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I like you.

Ms FYLES: Fantastic! We have a commitment from the Minister for Health to write to the federal minister about the children's wing. Territory families will be pleased.

Madam CHAIR: Are there further questions for output 5.1?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can I ask the member for Nightcliff to tone down her level of sarcasm? It is really unbecoming and unnecessary in this estimates process.

Mr VATSKALIS: Come on, minister, you called her sweetheart.

Mrs LAMBLEY: People who use that level of sarcasm do not deserve much better.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, I take your word ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is so disrespectful.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... I would like a copy of your letter to the minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Certainly.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will support you. I would like to remind you I negotiated \$5m for the super clinic to stay in Darwin. Two ministers, and you admit the money is still in Darwin.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Perhaps you would like to demonstrate where the paper chain of this fictitious paediatric wing funding started and ended with your government. You are accusing me of not doing this, that and the other, but give us some evidence it existed.

Ms FYLES: The federal minister committed to it in August last year. There is much documentation on that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is there?

Ms FYLES: Anyway, you are going to write a letter tomorrow so we will have all the answers.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you provide that for me, member for Nightcliff?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will wait for the letter.

Ms FYLES: Yes, we have our letter so we will have all the answers.

Mr VATSKALIS: We managed to negotiate the remote mothers' accommodation from the Commonwealth. We managed to negotiate medi-hotels, which were not hotels for long-grassers as the Treasurer called them. They were facilities for people coming from outside to be accommodated here.

In the past few weeks we have heard about a bed blockage at RDH - about 35 beds blocked with people who could not go home because they were not well enough, or were not sick enough for the hospital but could not go to nursing homes. A few weeks ago I heard from nurses there were about 100 beds blocked. You have a perfectly good medi-hotel where you can place people but you have not commissioned it yet. Instead, you want to turn it into a lock up centre for your alcohol program. Minister ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: That you supported.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we do not support your alcohol program and will not because of the problems it has. You have a perfectly good medi-hotel you can run today, but if you want to put people with alcohol problems there you have to spend a significant amount of money to upgrade it because it is not suicide or injury proof.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We have had this discussion, member for Casuarina.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am sorry, minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You missed the output group.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is Top End. It is a perfectly good medi-hotel to support RDH but you are ignoring it; you have your own plans for it. At the same time you appear to have bed blockages at RDH. In the future, how are you going to address the issue of bed blockages at Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, there has been a push on beds at Royal Darwin Hospital of late. It is due to three aged care facilities, Tracy Aged Care Frontier Services, Terrace Gardens Frontier Services and Tiwi

Nursing Home all unable to accept new admissions. There has been a real squeeze on beds for that reason.

Ms FYLES: There are 100 beds here ...

Madam CHAIR: Do not interrupt, member for Nightcliff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Rudeness is very unbecoming. Yes, there has been a problem and you can track the failure of the federal Department of Health and Ageing to properly monitor these nursing homes and provide them with the advice and assistance they need to continue operating - for the squeeze on beds at the moment. As of last month, there were 21 patients in Royal Darwin Hospital awaiting accommodation in nursing homes, and two patients referred to the aged care assessment team. This places a heavy burden on the hospital and its staff, as well as the elderly patients. There is no way in the world those patients would be suitable to be transferred to the medi-hotel. Even though I can see where your logic is going, the squeeze on beds at Royal Darwin Hospital does not mean the medi-hotel provides the answer. In this particular ...

Ms FYLES: Staff tell us if the medi-hotel ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you mind! I will not put up with this.

Ms FYLES: Stop pointing, please.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, you are out of control this evening. I consider your conduct to be disorderly and warn you that if you persist in interrupting the minister I will order you to withdraw from the hearings under paragraph 31 of the Assembly's resolution establishing this committee. I have warned you on a number of occasions to stop interrupting. The minister has also warned you. It is unacceptable and unbecoming of a parliamentarian.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you. The medi-hotel would provide some relief for the pressures on Royal Darwin Hospital, but in many cases it would not. You can see - you nodded or blinked your eyes in agreement - in this scenario we are experiencing at the moment at Royal Darwin Hospital, it would not provide any relief whatsoever. Although I can understand your logic, it is not necessarily true at this point in time.

Would you like to make some comments on that, Christine, around the pressures on Royal Darwin Hospital at the moment?

Dr DENNIS: Thank you. Dr Christine Dennis, Executive Director of the Top End Hospital Network. As the minister stated, at the moment we have 23 patients who are considered aged care patients. Twenty-one are waiting for nursing home accommodation - Commonwealth funded nursing homes and appropriate aged care facilities - and we have two patients waiting for aged care assessment team assessments. To manage capacity at Royal Darwin Hospital - at the moment the hospital is running at about 89% capacity so we still have some capability within existing bed capacity. However we are doing much work around capacity management of the hospital with clinical redesign. We are looking at strategies which include good planned discharge planning criteria lead discharge, monitoring length of stay against national benchmarks, and looking at our surgical waiting list management. These are strategies clinicians, medical staff and nursing staff are all signed up to and the intent of these strategies is to manage capacity within our existing bed stock without necessarily using the step down facility.

If we do not get the flow right within Royal Darwin the concern is we will, potentially, take some of those existing processes to another facility and the risk is we could end up with bed lock in that facility as well. It is critically important for the hospital that we get discharge planning capacity management right. I can attest to the fact clinicians across Royal Darwin are signed up to these strategies and have been actively engaged.

Ms FYLES: Minister, the use of a medi-hotel would not assist in the step down and management of beds at Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Not at this point in time because, as you just heard Dr Dennis describe, these patients would be unsuitable for the medi-hotel.

Ms FYLES: There were 23 patients last week. On Thursday night it was 50 patients over.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is that true? Fifty patients over?

Dr DENNIS: I am not quite sure what you mean by 50 patients over.

Ms FYLES: We received information Royal Darwin Hospital was 50 beds short at some point last week.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Did I hear you say capacity at the moment is 89%?

Dr DENNIS: At the moment we are running at 89% occupancy. There are days where we have surge capacity and need to find beds. Even if we had another 200 beds, we would still have days, throughout a 365 day year, where we would have capacity problems. Every hospital across Australia, and internationally, has the same problems with surge.

Ms FYLES: Minister, in the unique circumstances of the Northern Territory - patients are well enough to return to urban Alice Springs and Darwin - the bush is a different story. You are saying 100 beds at the medi-hotel being available would not help with this problem?

Mrs LAMBLEY: They have never been available and RDH has coped quite adequately, with the support of various hostels and other services in the Darwin area.

Ms FYLES: Why was the medi-hotel built in the first place?

Mrs LAMBLEY: You could probably answer that. Your government built it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we did.

Madam CHAIR: The time is now 9 pm. We should stop for a 10-minute break. I take this opportunity to remind the Estimates Committee we are finishing at 11 pm and have one more minister to go after the Minister for Health. We will see everyone back at 9.10 pm.

Mr WOOD: I am confused, what time are we finishing? I thought we were finishing at 11 pm. When is the minister for Primary Industry coming in?

Madam CHAIR: I am just highlighting we will complete the Health portfolio and minister Westra van Holthe's portfolios before 11 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. It is 9.10 pm and we will continue with Output 5.1. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, how many people did you consult before you made the announcement about parking at Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Charging for parking would never be a popular decision. It is similar to increasing power and water tariffs. Our consultation around the implementation of car parking fees at Royal Darwin Hospital was confined to talking with the private hospital, which has a similar intention. Also, within the hospital a group was set up to develop the concept. I might refer that to Dr Christine Dennis for comment.

Dr DENNIS: As the minister stated, the consultation was basically in the form of a small working group looking at the strategy around managing access to the site and managing constant complaints over the last few years with regard to patients not being able to park close to the hospital, and concerns raised by Darwin Private Hospital that staff and visitors were parking in their space as well. The intent now is to consult with staff about the implementation. We have already set up numerous groups to answer frequently asked questions. One relates to night duty staff and their capacity to access the car parks closest to the facility. The strategy enables them to use car parks one and two, which are closest to Royal Darwin Hospital, between the hours of 7 pm and 8 am. From an overnight perspective, night duty staff and staff who move their cars into those spaces during the evening will be able to park safely and securely close to the hospital.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, you are right. Some of the things we have to do are not good and you had to announce an increase in power tariffs. Not popular, you said. Now you have the parking, which will not be

popular. If anyone suggests you announce an increase in the drinking age do not do it. That is not popular either.

I understand the issue with parking at Royal Darwin Hospital and know they have been struggling for a long time. However, one of the biggest issues at Royal Darwin Hospital is not nurses and staff; it is people get stuck there. They have appointments at clinics at 8 am. The flow is not managed so people go at 8 am and come out at noon. Have you considered changing the location of the clinics or introducing a new system of appointments so people know when to go, know they will be seen by the doctor, and know when they can go home?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The car parking strategy we are putting forward does not specifically take that into account. We are also conducting the Clinical Services Review. Perhaps Dr Dennis could talk about that because I understand it is looking at streamlining those processes.

Dr DENNIS: For patients currently attending Royal Darwin Hospital for outpatient appointments, we have put in place a better system of allocating appointments rather than just attending a clinic and being seen within one to four hours. Patients are given an appointment time. Clearly, with any appointment time there is always the possibility of clinics running over time. We will have an information brochure encouraging patients, if concerned about the time they are at the hospital going over the two hours which is currently provided free of charge, there are car parks not in car parks one and two, where the charge will be \$3 a day. That is still a reasonable, affordable fee.

With regard to the redesign of outpatients, we are doing much work to look at new to review ratios in outpatient services because we continue to see an increasing number of patients through our outpatient clinics. We are mindful of the fact that some patients, just by the nature of the way appointments are made, just keep coming back to the hospital when the preference is they are discharged to their primary care provider. Streamlining outpatient services improves accessibility of the clinics and turnaround times as well.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, undertaking a clinical review is really good. Why have you asked for a decision in regard to parking before finalising the review?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Casuarina, let us put in the broad context what we have inherited from your former government - a very tight fiscal situation.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have heard that before.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, do not interrupt the minister while she is answering the question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: At some point you have to look at revenue to pay for things you need. At Royal Darwin Hospital we need more car parks, better lighting, better security, a more organised approach to the whole thing, and that costs money. We are looking at \$500 000 for 150 extra bays coming online before the end of the year. You have to pay for that. We are not looking at a bottomless bucket of money.

Unlike the former Labor government, we have looked at increasing sources of revenue. I do not make any apology for that. It is good governance, good financial management, and means Royal Darwin Hospital will have more money to improve facilities as a result.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, you keep telling us about the fiscal situation, which is your word against mine. Why not ask a car parking company? You can allocate the land and they can build a car park and charge people. There will be less argument, people can park in a secure area, and that will help staff as well. I understand the difficulties and dangers there.

You are conducting a clinical review, which is great. Before you finish it and have something in your hands to justify your decision, you announce a parking fee – everybody pays and no consultation. People are complaining about it.

Also, people going to the hospital are sick or are poor people. They cannot go to a GP and pay \$85 every time. Pensioners have to be close to the hospital to attend the clinics, but now everybody is complaining. You made the announcement. You can say whatever you like about the clinical review, but nobody will take any notice. Everybody will say, 'Robyn Lambley makes me pay \$3 every time I go to hospital'. I have said before, Health is a poisoned chalice.

Madam CHAIR: Is there a question, member for Casuarina?

Mr VATSKALIS: Why did you ask for a decision about parking before you finish the clinical review and before you found other solutions to the problem? That is the easy solution; the easy way out. It is not the right solution, minister. Are you going to look at other options for car parking?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Member for Casuarina, we put an enormous of thought into imposing ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It does not look like it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... car parking fees at Royal Darwin Hospital. Your idea of getting a private provider to build a multistorey car park and allow them to charge - we are talking about minimal fees for car parking, probably the lowest for any capital city hospital in Australia. From \$3 a day is really not much to ask? It is an impost, I agree, and people do not like it. We thought long and hard. Part of being in government is making tough decisions, I do not baulk at that. This decision had to be made. It is about balancing the books, providing a better service, and a user pays society. None of us like it. I would prefer not to have made that decision, but I made it and am convinced it was the right decision at the right time.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output ...

Mr WOOD: Hang on, you asked if there are any more questions.

Madam CHAIR: On 5.1.

Mr WOOD: That is why I am saying yes. I have not had a chance in this ...

Madam CHAIR: Sorry, I thought you meant no.

Mr WOOD: It was, 'I'm here' in case you might have forgotten me ...

Madam CHAIR: Go for it.

Mr WOOD: ... although I doubt that.

Madam CHAIR: My note says the member for Nelson is on a warning. I will not forget.

Mr WOOD: Madam Chair, I thought you know it off by heart now.

I was under the impression the charge was not to make money, although that appears to be the case, but to alleviate the chock-a-block state of the car park. How will the charge achieve that? If people are there for legitimate reasons – there is nothing else there. Why would you park your car there if you were not going into the hospital, unless you want to go walking at the beach? There are no shops there. Will it really change the clogging up of car parks there?

Mrs LAMBLEY: We identified car parking at Royal Darwin Hospital as a problem. I said on radio just days ago that I have not spent much time at Royal Darwin Hospital - I live in Alice Springs. However, over the last few months I have been staggered at how chaotic it is. There are cars parked everywhere. The facilities for car parking are at the standard they should be.

Mr WOOD: I get ill by the time I get to hospital because it is so far away.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Raising revenue through imposing car parking fees is a way of making that better. The money will be put back into the hospital, first and foremost, to improve car parking.

Mr WOOD: That is the first time I have heard that. The impression I had was they want to fix up car parking, and charging people will mean some people will not go to the hospital. That did not make any sense. Today you say you need to raise revenue, and we can argue whether that is good or bad. You do not have to take my advice, but if you tell people the money raised will increase the number of car parks many will say it is not such a bad idea. At the moment, it looks like the government wants some money.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The media release was quite clear. Car parking for disabled people is free. There will be a better drop-off facility, where you can drop off your relative or friend and pick them up at no cost. We are not being nasty or ill-intended; it is about improving the facilities.

Mr WOOD: I know what the hospital is like. I have been to emergency and had to wait. I do not mind, but that is the reality of going to hospital. I have been there when relatives have been dying. Sometimes you stay longer for very proper reasons.

If you were to go over the free car parking time for legitimate reasons, will you get a \$ 50 ticket on your screen or could you say, 'This is not a shopping centre. There was a serious reason for me to be here'. I would not want people to be fined when they had been there because someone was dying.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Of course, member for Nelson, discretion will be used in cases where people are dying.

Mr WOOD: Who will book people?

Mrs LAMBLEY: People will be given an infringement notice ...

Mr WOOD: Who by?

Mrs LAMBLEY: ... by the security service.

Mr WOOD: Will they be able to pay that ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Dr Dennis will explain the detail.

Dr DENNIS: We currently have security staff who walk around the facility and provide infringement notices. The reason for that is we have many vehicles parking illegally on verges. In fact, we have had people parking in front of the helipad, which is limited to capacity for an emergency vehicle to pick up a patient from the helicopter and bring them to the ED. It is really important we manage people who are parking in incorrect spots on the RDH campus.

The biggest problem regarding complaints has been from patients and families who cannot get a car park close enough. The reason we are using car parks one and two and putting a scheduled fee there is because that will discourage staff who might be parking for eight to 12 hours to use the car parks closest.

There are still other car parks around the facility. We have 1400 car parks on the RDH campus at the moment. As the minister stated, we are going to be build another 150. We will have a significant number of car parks available. Our strategy is designed to ensure patients and visitors can access the car parks closest to the hospital.

Mr WOOD: I have two more questions. I have plenty more but, anyway, I would like to get two. These are the life and death - the more difficult issues. One I mentioned was the hospice. As I said before, the palliative care people are fantastic. I have never heard a bad word about those people. Are there any plans to expand that facility? In the case of Alice Springs, is it still only part of the hospital or are we looking to build a stand-alone facility in Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Dr Dennis can answer the question pertaining to the Top End Health Service.

Dr DENNIS: The palliative care service provided on the RDH campus consists of 12 beds. It was opened in 2005, so it is a relatively new facility. It currently has an occupancy rate of around 90%.

We are building some additional accommodation for staff and multi-D teams adjacent to that building as part of the Menzies build. The services provided through palliative care include end of life respite care and symptom management. It is a wonderful facility, as you said. In fact, I was there today for the launch of the End of Life Program. As I said, it is at 90% occupancy. I can only talk to the facility at Royal Darwin.

Mr WOOD: People in Darwin have that option, people out bush do not. Is there a palliative care mobile group, or does somebody visit some of the communities?

Mr MOFFET: Our palliative care specialists support a range of programs. The PEPA Program is a particularly culturally appropriate one which involves outreach workers providing support for families and carers. There is an outreach element to palliative care, but the specialised services reside in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Ms LEE: Can I say something on this? From my experience and being in the health system for over 10 years in palliative care in the bush, it has always been staff in the remote clinics who would do the

palliative care, in consultation with either Darwin or Katherine Hospital or the nearest regional hospital. That worked well because Indigenous people in communities prefer to stay at home with their family while in palliative care. That choice is theirs at the end of the day. There are so few who go to Katherine Hospital or come to Darwin to use the palliative care unit, so it works out in that manner. The majority of the health managers have been there for 10 years.

Mr WOOD: Yes. The other issue I raise every year - I ask about termination of pregnancies. I will put it in context. Where would I find the number of births? In the front of the annual report it has a highlight which tells you there were 272 births per month. Why are those figures not in the document? I can find all the diseases of the world and how many people suffer, but I cannot find how many people were born in the Northern Territory. How many people were born in Darwin hospital?

I ask - it is a sensitive question - about termination of pregnancies because I would like to see the figure reduced. I have no qualms in saying I put my hand up for human life, whether it is born or not born. I raise this, minister, not from a judgmental point of view, but to see if we can reduce the number.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are trying to see if the number of births is published. Is it in the *Mothers and Babies* report?

Mr WOOD: That sounds like Target.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a publication produced by the Department of Health. .

Mr WOOD: What is the book called?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is called *Mothers and Babies*.

Mr WOOD: I would never have gone looking. I would have said that is about booties.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Goodness me! You learn something new every day. Births, Deaths and Marriages perhaps?

Mr WOOD: How many pregnancy terminations were there and how does that compare with last year? I asked the question last year?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In relation to births, we should consider putting it in the annual report next year. It makes sense.

Mr WOOD: Is there any reason why terminations should not be? There is a section which tells you the department.

Ms FYLES: It is an output of the Department of Attorney-General and Justice.

Mr WOOD: Termination of pregnancy should not be.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, we keep those statistics. I am unsure where they are published. The statistics are kept by Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital.

Mr WOOD: I want to compare last year with this year. The intent is we should do our best – it is a sensitive issue and I am not being judgmental - we should try. I love babies, especially as a politician, but if we can encourage people to go through with pregnancies - we should try to reduce unwanted pregnancies. How can we reduce that figure?

Mrs LAMBLEY: In 2011-12, at Royal Darwin Hospital there were 631, and for 2012-13 there have been 417. There has been a reduction of just under 200. In Alice Springs, for 2011-12 there have been 137 terminations, and in 2012-13 there have been 112. There has been a reduction of 25. Sorry, the data for 2012 is from 1 July to 30 March, which explains the difference.

Mr WOOD: Do we have births for the same period?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No. Going back to the figure for Darwin in 2011-12 of 631, the projection is 556. It is sitting at 417 at the moment. With three months more data, it should get up to 556. For Alice Springs,

2011-12 should be 137. It is sitting at 112 to 30 March. The projection is it will reach 149. There is the possibility of more terminations at Alice Springs Hospital.

Ms LEE: Can I ask, minister? It is probably a question for Dr Dennis, but is the hospital audited annually so you can look at the KPI - the numbers he was referring to? Is anything like that done annually? In remote clinics it is done every year?

Dr DENNIS: No. In relation to hospital data, we provide data to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. In regard to an audit, I am not quite sure what you mean by being audited around that data, other than providing it to the Institute.

Mrs LEE: Basically audited. Every person in the hospital or registered under the clinic or something - the record has to be audited. This happens in remote clinics. We do it every year, and you go through each person. You dedicate a portfolio - chronic disease or - then for the whole six weeks the staff would probably be looking at the data and building everything together so you have like a financial report to hand over to the federal government by the end of the year. That is what happens - an audit. Are there similarities at Darwin hospital?

Mrs LAMBLEY: There are strict rules and legal requirements around the termination of pregnancy under the *Medical Services Act*. I imagine that is why the number of terminations is closely recorded. Would that be a fair analysis? It is a very strict process, and the numbers are recorded as ...

Mr WOOD: Who oversees it to ensure it is done according to the act?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Solicitor-General for the Northern Territory has advised any changes to the *Medical Services Act* to provide for changed locations for terminations should also clarify - etcetera. It sounds like it is the Solicitor-General, but he is just looking after the legal requirements of ...

Mr WOOD: Does someone check that? It is a fairly serious thing and the act says abortions can only occur under certain circumstances. Does anyone check to ensure that is the case?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Jeff Moffet can answer that.

Mr MOFFET: Jeff Moffet, Chief Executive. Obviously there is much scrutiny around terminations and there are clear legal requirements for practitioners performing terminations. Our directors of medical services keep a close watch on that and report annually in relation to termination activity. We obviously talk about it every year at estimates as well; it is that type of issue. There is a high level of scrutiny around it, and there is a clear responsibility for our directors of medical services to oversight it. Our Director of Legal Services provides advice from time to time as well.

Mr WOOD: Does anyone in the department put the case to help someone go through with their pregnancy? Again, I do not put that in a judgmental way because there are many reasons why someone asks for an abortion, but is there someone who can ensure, before the very serious decision ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Counselling is a requirement as part of determining the need for termination - a decision being taken by two medical practitioners, and the termination must only be performed in Territory hospitals with the hospital being designated under the act. These requirements are within the *Medical Services Act* section 11 pertaining to termination of pregnancies in the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: Is that the *Medical Services Act*?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, section 11. It outlines conditions under which terminations may be performed in the Northern Territory.

Madam CHAIR: There is not much scope; it is very narrow.

Mr WOOD: When you consider the population of the Northern Territory it is a fairly large number compared to births. We were told recently the figure for births is about 2500. Sometimes you have to ask the hard questions and talk about charging for car parks.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will be prepared next year Gerry, that is for sure.

Mr WOOD: I cannot just ask about car parks. Difficult questions sometimes have to be asked.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There is an average of 3500 births per annum in the Northern Territory, although that is not particularly specific.

Mr WOOD: I have many questions, but they were the two important ones for me and we have to get to Primary Industry.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.1.

Output 5.2 - Central Australian Health and Hospital Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 5.2 - Central Australian Health and Hospital Services. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, has the legal dispute between the government and John Holland about malpractice at Alice Springs Hospital been finalised yet?

Mrs LAMBLEY: There have been some developments in this area but it is outside my portfolio responsibilities at this stage. Justice and Infrastructure are involved so perhaps ask minister Styles.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, one thing that cannot be disputed with regard to renal dialysis is the Territory has been leading the nation with chairs, not only in big hospitals but also in remote communities. Can you update us on what happened to the renal dialysis bus? We struggled to improve conditions for Indigenous people with renal disease. We managed to increase life expectancy by 10 years so it matches the rest of Australia. What happened to the renal dialysis bus?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are you talking about a bus in Central Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Western Desert Dialysis operated a bus.

Mr VATSKALIS: To refresh your memory, Dave Tollner, when Minister for Health, could not find \$200 000 to have it run for a year. Can you find \$200 000 and save the lives of Indigenous people in Central Australia? Are you prepared to say you cannot find \$200 000 in a \$1.3bn budget?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am told the bus is currently in Central Australia and is being used.

Mr VATSKALIS: If that is the case, thank you very much. Many Indigenous Territorians will thank you. I find it unbelievable the minister could not find \$200 000. He was prepared to risk the lives of Indigenous Territorians by stopping the bus. Thank you for that.

Do you have enough nurses in Alice Springs Hospital? What is the nurse to patient ratio in Alice Springs Hospital?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will refer it to Sharon Sykes, Executive Director of the Central Australian Hospital Network. Sharon, would you like to answer that?

Ms SYKES: In regard to recruitment to nursing positions at Alice Springs Hospital, we have been very fortunate over the last six months to increase our recruitment to positions. With the opening of the new emergency department last week, we have been able to recruit to many of those positions as well, which is very pleasing. I believe that is also the case with Royal Darwin Hospital, so it is a good time for nursing recruitment.

In regard to the number of nurses - what did you ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Nurse to patient ratio.

Ms SYKES: Yes, we work on the nursing hours per patient day model. We have recently reviewed that and the ratio has been compliant with it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, you do not have any problems if, during my visit to Alice Springs next week, I visit the accident and emergency department now it is officially opened?

Mrs LAMBLEY: All going well. If the hospital is agreeable I do not have a problem with that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, if the hospital is okay I will visit it. Thank you, minister.

Madam CHAIR: Any further questions on 5.2?

Mr WOOD: Did we finish 5.2?

Madam CHAIR: No, if you have a question now is the time.

Mr WOOD: I did, but I will not ask it.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.2 and Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CORPORATE COSTS TO HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES

Output 6.1 – Corporate Costs to Health and Hospital Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to output group 6.0 - Corporate Costs to Health and Hospital Services, Output 6.1 - Corporate Costs to Health and Hospital Services. Are there any questions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Chair, for your information, I do not have any further questions at all for the minister.

Madam CHAIR: At all?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr WOOD: I have one at 7.1.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There is no 7.

Mr WOOD: I will go to 7.1 because that takes ...

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – TOP END HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES

Output 7.1 – Admitted

Madam CHAIR: In Top End Health and Hospital Services?

Mr WOOD: Patient Assisted Travel. The amount of money going into that is increasing, yet we built facilities at Royal Darwin Hospital so people would not have to go south. Is it still costing much money to go north instead of south, especially in relation to Alice Springs and more remote patients? More money has to be put into that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The use of the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme over the last 12 months, compared to the previous 12 months, has dropped by around 400, which is interesting. This is for interstate travel. Expenditure on PATS has also dropped by around \$0.5m. Intrastate travel has remained, basically, the same for the last two years and has slightly dropped in expenditure.

It is an interesting scenario. Expanding the services within RDH and the Alice Springs Hospital probably means less need for patient assistance travel. Telehealth also ...

Mr WOOD: Can I ensure I am looking at the same thing? I have table 5, number of patient travel requests is 2067 for 2011-12. I will give you 2010-11 and 2011-12: interstate 3515, 2011, 3604 - is your next figure lower?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Was that ...

Mr WOOD: Interstate.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes. I have usage for 2011. Sorry, this is not a full year. I have July to March.

Mr WOOD: I am using table 5 from the Department of Health Annual Report. It says, 'Activity has steadily increased from 2005-06 to 2011-12 with assistance provided to 3600 for interstate and 24 091 intrastate'. I

thought the whole idea of getting all these facilities here was to reduce those costs but, in fact, that may not be happening.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will ask Jeff Moffet for an overview of this.

Mr MOFFET: Thank you, minister. We have been focusing, for several years, on a number of things. One is building up services at hubs like Darwin and Alice Springs to ensure we minimise referrals out of the Territory.

Second, we have managed no-shows -people who are not arriving for PATS and not utilising the system in a more effective way. That has involved much education and engagement with clinics etcetera. That has been quite successful; we have a much-reduced no-show rate.

Third, we have developed many outreach clinics through telehealth that are saving travel, particularly from the remote sector into regional and urban settings.

Mr WOOD: Could I ask a question in relation to this. There is table 7, which is the number of patient travel escorts. I presume that, in many cases, is a spouse or partner. What concerns me is when I read the reasons for a medi-hotel, one was for carers. Surely this is what that facility would have also been used for. Someone comes up from Alice Springs and needs someone to help them. They go into hospital and the other person can stay at the medi-hotel and not be far away. My impression is the medi-hotel was to be used for that facility - not exclusively, but to be used for that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are right, member for Nelson. It was, in part, built to satisfy additional demand in that area.

Mr WOOD: Will they have to find other accommodation?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I was advised, before I made the decision to use the medi-hotel for the next 18 months for mandatory alcohol rehab, that the current services providing accommodation could meet the needs or demand of patients travelling ...

Mr WOOD: Does that include carer accommodation?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, but after 18 months, two years, definitely not. The pressure would be too much and the medi-hotel would have to come online. I am very mindful of that.

For your information, PATS was last reviewed in 2008 and this government is currently doing a full review of PATS. We have allocated an additional \$7.5m per annum for three years to fund any recommended changes to the scheme coming from the PATS review. Some positive changes will come about through the review. I have not read the review yet, but have been told of some of the recommendations coming forward. We hope that will come as good news to people throughout the Northern Territory who find they are travelling for specialist treatment, both intrastate and interstate.

Also, an electronic system for PATS will be brought online so people will not have to physically see the PATS officer and sort through onerous paperwork. It will all be quite streamlined and all approvals will happen before they travel, rather than the messy situation we have at the moment.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, did you have a question on 7.1? My understanding is we have no further questions for Top End Health and Hospital Services.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 8.0 - Central Australian Health and Hospital Services. There are no questions from the members for Casuarina or Nelson, including Non-Output Specific Budget Related.

That concludes consideration of all outputs relating to Health. I thank the minister and her staff and officials who attended across her portfolio this afternoon.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a, thank you Madam Chair. I also have an answer to a Question on Notice. I would like to thank my colleagues from the Department of Health, Jeffery Moffet, Chief Executive; Michael Kalimnios, Chief Financial Officer; Mike Melino; Penny Fielding; Dr Christine Dennis; Sharon Sykes, Dr

Christine Connors; Dinesh Arya, Karen Parish; Jan Currie and Jo Earl for their support and assistance throughout this process. Thank you very much.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.3

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have an answer to the question on Legionella.

Madam CHAIR: The minister has tabled her response question 5.3.

Madam CHAIR: We will take a three minute break while we wait for the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER WESTRA van HOLTHE'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND FISHERIES

Madam CHAIR: It is 9.45 pm. We have Lynne Walker, member for Nhulunbuy; Kon Vatskalis, member for Casuarina, myself, Larisa Lee, member for Arnhem; and Bess Price, member for Stuart. I am sure Gerry Wood, member for Nelson, is just moments away.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, Madam Chair. To my left is Alister Trier, Chief Executive of the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries. To my right is Ian Curnow, Executive Director of Fisheries, and also Ms Karen Simpson, Acting Chief Financial Officer of the department.

Madam CHAIR: We will invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes and then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions, before moving on to output-specific questions and, finally, non-output-specific budget-related questions.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first, followed by the independent member and then other committee members. Finally, other participating members may address electorate issues. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by the shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow questioning on the output.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the department of Primary Industry and Fisheries?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

The primary industries and fisheries sectors within the Northern Territory are expected to contribute over \$650m to our economy this financial year. That is well up on the past financial year, due largely to the better than expected mango crops. The Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries is responsible for supporting and facilitating development of the Territory's primary industries and fisheries sectors.

For 2012-13, the department forecasts a contribution of \$658.8m, exceeding the production value of \$641.5m for 2011-12. However, going forward, the department expects the Territory's production value to fall to \$621.7m in 2013-14 as the mango crop returns to a long-term average value.

Excellent market price conditions for most of the horticultural period in 2012 supports the provisional estimate of industry value at \$216.8m, up by more than 9.3% from the previous year. This estimate includes the \$69.4m mango crop, down 13.2%, and the \$67.7m melon crop, up 6.8% on 2011. For the 2013-14 season, the horticulture industry value is forecast to return to \$162.6m based on average yields and prices.

Mixed farming, including fodder crops, is estimated to have contributed \$14.6m in 2011-2012. However, the forecast for 2012-13 has been adjusted down to \$13m due to reduced live cattle exports and seed production. In order to demonstrate this government's commitment to food as a fundamental pillar of our three-hub economic plan, the Ord Development Project has been given major project status in order to facilitate the extension of the Ord River Irrigation Scheme into the Northern Territory. Once complete, this will open up new land and opportunities to grow our agricultural and horticultural sectors significantly.

In 2011-12, the cattle industry increased in value by 0.2% to \$325.8m, despite a 0.3% decrease in live cattle exports to all markets. The live export trade to the main Indonesian market has been, and continues to be, impacted by ongoing policy decisions in both Indonesia and Australia.

The department's pastoral market update data shows exports of Northern Territory live cattle were down 5.3% in 2011-12 to 266 120 head on the previous financial year. For the period 2012-13 - the year to date in April - cattle exports decreased by 15 278 head, down 7.6% when compared to the same period last year. The outlook for the Northern Territory cattle industry remains challenging with development of new markets, live exports, and the early phase construction of the local processing facility critical for return to growth.

In order to widen the opportunities for Northern Territory pastoralists, a live animal market development unit has been established in the department. This unit will work with industry to investigate and develop new live export markets in order to increase live export numbers and help establish the local processing facility that will process animals that do not meet live export specifications. The department projects the cattle industry will contribute \$347.6m in 2013-14.

In 2011-12, the estimated production value from commercial fishing in the Territory was \$51.3m, including an estimated value of aquaculture production of \$17.2m. In addition, the industry harvested a further \$28.9m worth of prawns in the Northern Territory zone of the northern prawn fishery, making a total sector contribution of \$80.2m in 2011-12. For 2012-13 the forecast is for a reduced economic contribution by the commercial industry of around \$72m as the prawn catch returns to average levels. Recreational fishing and fishing tours are estimated to return over \$80m to the Northern Territory's economy this financial year.

That is the end of my opening statement. With the indulgence of the committee, I will make a further statement.

It is my intention to end my period of estimates at 11 pm, as per the decision made by the Estimates Committee. It is unfortunate. I share the frustrations the member for Nelson is no doubt feeling at the short time we have to examine Primary Industry and Fisheries, Mines and Energy, and Land Resource Management. This is as a result of the indiscipline of the opposition. They wasted two days on two ministers, and even when they were given restrictions today still could not ...

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Madam Chair!

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, what is your point of order?

Ms WALKER: Members of the committee do not need a lecture from the minister. He obviously was not here when the Chief Minister and the Treasurer chewed through hours and hours of time because they were ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, the minister is making his statement.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. Even today when parameters were changed around the Estimates Committee the opposition was still not able to maintain discipline to keep the time frames, which has given us one hour to examine Primary Industry and Fisheries, Mines and Energy, and Land Resource Management. On the back of that, member for Nelson, I understand your frustrations. I was where you are last year and the four years before that ...

Ms WALKER: Only because your colleagues chewed up time.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I am willing to offer you a briefing on any matter we do not cover tonight.

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

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Chair, if the minister considers examining the Treasurer and the Chief Minister a waste of time, he had better talk to his colleagues.

Madam CHAIR: Is that a question, member for Casuarina?

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Chair, I am frustrated we cannot examine the minister, but it is beyond our control. I will take up your offer of briefings, minister, because there are already some outstanding briefings in your office. I received some briefings for certain areas and I want more briefings from you.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I am sure we will be able to find time to brief you, member for Casuarina. The offer was to the member for Nelson, seeing he was not necessarily complicit in the position we are in at the moment. The opposition continued its line of questioning for hours and hours on end.

Ms WALKER: No, the Leader of Government Business set up the ridiculous parameters nobody agreed to.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, please do not ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That brought us to this position. Nonetheless, I have always offer briefings to you, member for Casuarina, and the offer stands.

Mr VATSKALIS: It looks like you are way down the pecking order so you have to cop it.

Madam CHAIR: Are there questions or will we move on?

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, you mentioned the Ord project having major projects status. In my experience the Ord major project status would sit with the Chief Minister's department. Where does the Ord sit at the moment as a major status project?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Strictly speaking, major project status for any project in the Northern Territory is handled by the Department of the Chief Minister. However, there have been resources allocated to this through the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries. An amount of \$400 000 per annum has been allocated by this government because we are serious about developing agricultural industries across the Northern Territory. Staff applied through that funding are working under the umbrella of the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries. Notwithstanding that, major project status, per se, rests with the Department of the Chief Minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have you established a unit within the department to deal with the Ord scheme?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That is correct.

Mr VATSKALIS: How many people are in the unit?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: There are two people.

Mr VATSKALIS: Did these people work for the Ord scheme in the previous government?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I could not answer that question; I do not know the answer.

Mr VATSKALIS: Probably your CEO can answer the question.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, I am advised at least one staff member was working ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The unit you established has the same people working with the Ord scheme?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: ... on the Ord under a previous government.

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay, at least you have somebody and continuity there.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: You spoke about food security and how the Ord development will expand the agriculture sector. Bearing in mind the current proponent is only interested in growing sugar, how is this going to improve food security in Australia and the Territory?

Mr WOOD: Ord Stage 2 or Ord Stage 3?

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, Ord Stage 3. The one involving the Territory.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I did not use the term food security in my opening address, nonetheless I will address it. Food security is relative to all countries we have some form of trading relationship with. If sugar turns out to be the crop grown in Ord Stage 3 - the Northern Territory side of the border - and that contributes to an export market which helps to secure the food security of another country, we are contributing through that scheme to food security in general.

Mr VATSKALIS: In relation to the live cattle export, I agree with you, Indonesia is still our major market. How many new markets, since becoming minister, have you explored and developed?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We are in the process of re-establishing our markets in Indonesia. I count that as a new market in that the relationship between our two countries had been so badly damaged by the foolhardy and reckless decision of the federal minister for Agriculture, that the foray of the Northern Territory back into Indonesia was like establishing a new market, as it was 20 or 25 years ago by former Country Liberal ministers and people who worked with them.

We are working back into Vietnam. I know it was done by your government and I acknowledge the work done there. I have recently been in Vietnam securing relationships with our import partners there ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Good.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: ... and working very closely with Meat and Livestock Australia and other organisations there.

The intent of the live export market development unit we have established - and we have allocated \$300 000 per annum for that new market; that is new money into the Primary Industry budget - will be to examine new markets as well as old markets we are currently not trading with, with a view to re-establishing markets and relationship with those countries.

We will be looking at Malaysia, Philippines, Sabah, Sarawak - all those countries.

Mr VATSKALIS: This new unit ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: My Chief Executive just reminded me we are also working on China as a market.

Mr VATSKALIS: How many people work in this new unit?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Recruiting is under way for new personnel ...

Mr VATSKALIS: They are all new people?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: They are new people; recruiting is under way.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are not using some of the ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Recruiting is under way for personnel for that unit.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the only thing I wanted to ask about your opening statement.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: I can cover it in the main document.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you have responses to written questions?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I do and ...

Madam CHAIR: Are you tabling those tonight?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes. Unless the shadow minister of the committee would like me to read through them I am happy to table the answers to those questions.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions

Madam CHAIR: Great, thank you very much.

The Committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2013-14 as they relate to the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: May I make a comment, Madam Chair? The way the Primary Industry and Fisheries output groups are divided up is there are two output groups for each. I am happy to consider both output groups for Primary Industry together, and am equally happy to consider both output groups for Fisheries together.

Madam CHAIR: Great.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: It will make it simple.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, let us start with the Ord. When I refer to the Ord, I am talking about the part of the Northern Territory to be developed. Have you done any economic modelling to see the cost benefit analysis from development of the Ord on the Territory's side?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: What we are looking at in the Ord is an expansion of about 14 000 ha of land. A business case is currently being undertaken. Work to put that business case together is being done as we speak. Considering we have only been in government for 10 months, and the former Labor government was in power for 11 years, I believe we have made considerably more progress than the former government.

Mr VATSKALIS: Will that analysis provide information on how much it will cost for infrastructure, how much it will cost to negotiate with traditional owners, and how much it will cost the Northern Territory to develop the infrastructure?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I am sure the business case will cover all aspects of development across the Ord. We will also be looking at several scenarios of where the requisite funding will come from. That business case will cover costs directly to the Northern Territory, anticipated costs directly for the Commonwealth, and anticipated costs should we go down the path of a share arrangement with a private company which may be the proponent of production there.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have you had any negotiations with the Commonwealth about funding of the Northern Territory part of the Ord?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I have had discussions with a number of federal ministers over this. We are not at the formal stage of making decisions because of the early stage we are at, but the issues have been flagged with the Commonwealth government and some of the shadow ministers - the opposition coalition members responsible for areas relating to the Ord development.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have you had any indication, from either the government or the opposition, that they are prepared to put money into the Northern Territory part of the Ord?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, we have had an indication there will be money on the table. However, nothing definitive has been offered other than the \$300 000 minister Catherine King committed to last week when I met with her in Cairns.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have you have any negotiations with the Western Australia government about development of the Ord? We have the cards in our hands because the Ord, as it stands now, will develop but will not be as good as if you had the whole area.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We are fortunate we have a good relationship with the Western Australia government. When I was shadow minister I began relationship building with the Western Australia government when I visited Kununurra. We have signed a MOU between Western Australia, the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory. There is a set of guiding principles and parameters for us all to work around in developing the Ord as a whole and how that relates to the Northern Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: Considering Western Australia is now in recession with a significant debt of billions of dollars, are you confident they will honour their agreement with you?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Member for Casuarina, you are asking for an opinion, which is clearly out of order. I could not comment on how Western Australia would meet funding commitments under those or any other circumstances.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have any studies been undertaken about the need for transport corridors to be established for development of the Ord in the Territory?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Work is under way and is part of the business case to be looked at.

Mr VATSKALIS: Has any study been undertaken to ascertain the impact of development of the Wyndham port in Western Australia against Darwin port?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: There is a slight divergence of views between WA and the Northern Territory in that regard. I feel WA would like to see any produce from the Ord region go through Wyndham. Certainly, the Northern Territory would prefer to see any produce come back through Darwin port.

Mr VATSKALIS: What is the distance of the Northern Territory Ord part from Wyndham?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: About 220 km.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is 220 km from Wyndham port and 900 km from Darwin port. What would be the most economical solution for export? It is not an opinion; it is a reality.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I have visited Wyndham port; I am unsure if you have.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am an ex-Western Australian and know it well.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Clearly, the simple economics in relation to distance would stack up in favour of Wyndham. However, the capacity of Darwin port is significantly greater.

Mr VATSKALIS: Does the EPA have to approve a licence for the removal of wastewater from Western Australia to the Territory? Most of the water will come from the Territory to the Ord, but much of the water has to be discarded at the Territory site. Obviously it will need a licence from the EPA. Has the EPA done any work on that?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I do not believe the EPA has done any work on it yet, but I will take advice from my CE. The work is under way. The EPA and relevant agencies are working together across jurisdictions.

Mr VATSKALIS: In regard to the cattle we are exporting to Indonesia, our problem is we have all our eggs in one basket. If something goes wrong in Indonesia and we cannot sell our cattle, neither Coles nor Woolworths will touch it because it is not what they want. Will the department consider alternative breeds of cattle for the Top End of the Northern Territory?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: The ultimate decision around the breed of cattle farmed in the Northern Territory is up to pastoralists. The department can provide research and extension advice on the types of cattle suitable for the north, but it has been a very lengthy breeding program to get our cattle in the north suitable for the live export market into Southeast Asia. That is not to say suitability of our cattle is limited only to one market. Cattle going to Indonesia are suitable to go into other Southeast Asian countries. The focus at this stage would be on enlivening existing markets, or markets we used to have, while also developing new ones.

As you would understand, to change the breed in the Top End of the Territory would take a significant amount of time. To get to where we are at the moment with research on Brahman and Brahman cross breeds would suggest that might be a medium- to long-term strategy rather than a short-term fix.

Mr WOOD: One of your research projects is a comparison between the productivity of multi-breed composite and Brahman breeder herd. Is it the case you are doing some work on multi-breed animals already?

Mr VATSKALIS: And composites.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, there is some work being done on composite Droughtmasters.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, as you are probably aware, the Islamic religion relies on the lunar calendar and Ramadan is a moveable feast which is moving towards the wetter period of the year. The cattle industry will be asking you - it probably already has - to look at a long-term proposition, because if it happens in the Wet Season they will not be able to muster and export their product. What is your government doing to address that issue?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Ramadan moves forward by 12 days a year, or something like that, so you are quite right. When I was shadow minister I flagged with you a number of times what plans your government had for taking that action.

Mr VATSKALIS: Now you are the government.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That is right, indeed we are. Issues in the Northern Territory with Wet Season cattle relate to transport of those cattle out of properties during the wet and along the roads that are, at times, unsuitable, unusable, unpassable or weight restricted. Unfortunately, the federal Labor government has slashed \$1m-plus from the Territory's regional roads budget. The work that would have been done on regional roads has been limited by the way in which the federal government formulated its funding for the Northern Territory for this coming year. We are a little behind the eight ball on that, but it is something we are cognisant of and are working closely with the NT Cattlemen's Association.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, I want to move on because we do not have much time. Is the Finnis River going to open again?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Which part of the Finnis River are you talking about?

Mr VATSKALIS: The part traditional owners closed.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: You would be well aware of the Blue Mud Bay negotiations, how sensitive they are, and that they have been going for quite some time. This government is proud to have, in 10 months, pull together one of those agreements. Since 2008, when the decision was handed down by the High Court ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Is that the Murgarella/Minimini?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, that is the one.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a trial for three years.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Over that period the former government was only able to pull together three agreements on Blue Mud Bay. In addition to that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, that agreement ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Please do not interrupt me when I am talking.

Mr VATSKALIS: I want clarification, minister.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: In addition to that, we have done what the former government was not able to do: establish a very good relationship with the Tiwi Land Council. We are very close to reaching an agreement with the Tiwis as well.

In regard to the Finnis River, you would be aware of the power of veto traditional owners have over decisions around Blue Mud Bay. The traditional owners in the upper reaches of the Finnis extended their deadline for negotiations to the end of March this year, instead of what the Northern Land Council had

proposed, being the end of June. At the eleventh hour, just days before that 31 March deadline, the traditional owners made the decision not to allow permit access into the upper Finniss. We are still working with the traditional owners. I have a meeting with traditional owners coming up shortly, at which time I will be asking them to come back to the negotiating table.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, for 10 months the Finniss River has been closed. You have a three-year trial while we had three agreements for permanent access for recreational fishermen. That is not a very good record is it, minister?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I am very proud of the work done in the past 10 months ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am very pleased about that, because if you were not, we would be in real strife.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I remember popping across to the Tiwi Islands some time ago ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, with Adam Giles ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina, stop interrupting the minister.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I remember popping across to the Tiwi Islands a number of years ago when I was shadow minister for Fisheries and attending a meeting of the Tiwi Land Council.

Mr VATSKALIS: We know, we heard.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, you heard. You were not there, but a couple of people engaged in Blue Mud Bay negotiations were. The message from the Tiwi Land Council was they wanted to sit down with the minister. As a consequence of your government not reacting to that, relationships between the Northern Territory government and the Tiwi Land Council soured to the point they decided not to extend, for any period of time, Blue Mud Bay negotiations. They simply said, 'There will have to be a permit system of some kind'.

Mr VATSKALIS: So you threw it out?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We have re-established relations with the Tiwi Land Council. It was one of the very early things we did. I have had a number of meetings with the Tiwi Land Council or representatives thereof. We have moved forward with negotiations, so you can probably expect an announcement for a successful Blue Mud Bay negotiation shortly.

Mr VATSKALIS: Would that allow me to fish anywhere I wanted on the Tiwi Islands?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: The negotiations are still under way; we are finalising things. We have an agreement in principle. I am not going to discuss that tonight.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, before the election you promised money for the Dundee boat ramp. Are you going to do it?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: An amount \$4.5m has been allocated by the Northern Territory government for boat ramps across the Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: How much for the Dundee boat ramp?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Let us put this into context. Had we come into government with a nice, healthy surplus and not been staring down the barrel of a projected \$5.5bn worth of debt, we might have been in the position to offer more money for infrastructure works around fisheries. Unfortunately, we are not in that position. Therefore the commitment of \$4.5m is still on the table.

We have, however, formed a Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee. The RFAC will be given a number of tasks, one of which will be to prioritise the spending of infrastructure money on ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am familiar with that. We did the same in my day.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: ...on fishery-related matters around the Northern Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: But not Dundee?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: It will be up to the RFAC.

Mr VATSKALIS: But \$4.5m ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Casuarina!

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: If RFAC decides, and advises me as minister, that is where the money should be spent, that is where it will be spent. If they decide otherwise, that is a matter for them. I will take the advice as I receive it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister ...

Ms WALKER: Madam Chair, can I ask a local member question?

Madam CHAIR: Yes.

Ms WALKER: I wanted to ask, minister, about an update on the CLP election commitment of \$1.5m to complete the upgrade at the Melville Bay mud wharf.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: It is pretty much the answer I gave the former minister. The money on the table is \$4.5m for recreational fishing infrastructure. The RFAC will be tasked to provide me with recommendations as to how that is spent.

Ms WALKER: I understand that, minister, but that is different to an election commitment. People cast their vote on the strength of an election commitment. An election commitment has to be delivered upon, irrespective of any consultancy group. I will feed that back to my constituents who ask me about it regularly.

Mr WOOD: Can I put my two bobs worth in for the Howard River boat ramp?

Madam CHAIR: Is it a question?

Mr WOOD: A comment. If we have money going around, many people would like that done.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, one of my favourites when I was a minister, for many reasons, was the marine rangers, not only because they protect our sea life, but also at the time they played a significant role in detection of illegal fisherman. I praised them many times, both here and nationally. In the Regional Highlights Budget 2013-14, you said there is \$200 000 in support money for the marine ranger program Territory-wide. In the previous year's budget highlights we had \$460 000. Why only \$200 00 in your budget?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Bear with me and I will chase that up as I get the information. The budget highlights you are referring to on page 230 of Budget Paper No 3 - the top of that page says there is \$0.68m.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you give us a break down of the \$0.68m?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.1

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

Mr VATSKALIS: A breakdown of the \$680 000 provided to support marine ranger programs.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked by the member for Casuarina to the minister is number 6.1.

Mr VATSKALIS: Minister, a key deliverable in Budget 2012-13 was inspection programs to monitor aquatic pests. That has been scrapped and will be replaced with a risk assessment to guide management. How will this assessment be conducted and will it be publicly available?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I will hand that over to Mr Ian Curnow.

Mr CURNOW: Ian Curnow, Executive Director of Fisheries. The two inspection programs are still running - both the inspection of high-risk vessels and the site monitoring in Darwin and 12 other sites around the Northern Territory. The risk guidelines are there to provide some guidance around which vessels should be inspected. That is based on a history of which type of vessels coming from different ports were found to be infested with different marine pests. That is an efficiency measure to ensure we are inspecting the right vessels and not unnecessarily inspecting others.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you.

Mr WOOD: Minister, your annual report mentions aquaponics. Can you explain what aquaponics is? Is the object to be a commercial development and has it been successful?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I will ask Mr Ian Curnow to answer that.

Mr CURNOW: Ian Curnow, Executive Director of Fisheries. At the moment the aquaponics work occurring at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre is mostly small scale. They are looking at how it might be utilised in the regions, particularly Aboriginal communities throughout the Northern Territory. While it is in preliminary stages - they highlighted some of the work at the shows last year, and it will be on the show circuit this year. It is basically a mixture of growing both plants and fish in the same system using fish to provide the fertiliser to grow a range of plant species. It has been used in a number of artisanal communities through Asia and there are many programs in Africa and other places. We are looking for opportunities where we might get over issues with soil and other things and may have some small scale application initially in more remote parts of the Territory.

Mr WOOD: A niche operation rather than a big one?

Mr CURNOW: At this stage.

Mr WOOD: Minister, how many trips have you taken overseas specifically related to cattle, where you have visited, and what were the results of your discussions?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I have been to Indonesia three times since being elected. Those trips were specifically around the cattle sector. They are designed to re-engage with Indonesia. There is no doubt in my mind that since the live cattle suspension two years ago the relationship between Australia and Indonesia has been damaged. Although the Indonesian government will not say that to your face, that is the picture you build when you spend time there talking to officials and people working in the industry.

I have been to Vietnam once as well. That was piggy-backed on to an Indonesian trip. Again, that trip was designed to engage and build relationships with our trading partners there, particularly the governments of two of the provinces in Vietnam our cattle are going to. It also gave me an opportunity to inspect feedlots and another infrastructure taking Australian cattle, look at the slaughter facilities used in both countries, and also to engage ministers at quite high levels to work through some of the issues both Indonesia and Australia have - or the Northern Territory specifically - in re-establishing our live export trade.

The last trip to Indonesia was a joint delegation with me and the Queensland Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Hon Dr John McVeigh. We met with minister Suswono, who is the Minister of Agriculture in Indonesia. We met with the Deputy Minister of Trade and also the Minister for State-Owned Enterprises. Those high-level discussions enabled us to get a better picture of Indonesia's economy, where they are sitting, their priorities, and the problems with re-engaging the live export trade to the levels it was in previous years.

I was very fortunate on the last trip as the meeting with minister Suswono was fruitful. During that meeting, he agreed to bring forward by one month the third quarter quota of live cattle coming out of the Northern Territory. That meant the July/August/September quota was brought forward to June/July/August which, effectively, lobs an extra month into the trading year if he continues with that regime of bringing the cattle quotas forward by a month.

Mr WOOD: What is the quota today compared to last year, and what is the maximum wage? They all seem to be moveable feasts each year when it comes to ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, the Indonesians are maintaining the maximum weight at 350 kg, but they are insisting on cattle lighter than that. We are sending across pretty much around the 320 kg mark. That allows for a bit of weight gain on the boat to ensure they land well within the 350 kg range. The current quota is 268 000 or thereabouts.

Mr WOOD: Do you know what the figure was before the ban on live cattle?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I will have to take it on notice to give you an exact answer. The best overseas trade coming out of the Top End was 700 000. We were up around the 500 000 mark before the live cattle suspension.

Mr WOOD: Could that be blamed on the live cattle suspension, or Indonesia's philosophy of being self-sufficient in meat?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: There are a number of factors at play. There is, of course, the stated policy of the President of Indonesia around self-sufficiency. That is not just in cattle, it is in four other commodities as well: soy, rice, corn and one other which escapes me now.

At that point in time, the Indonesian government ministers were allowing the trade to bubble along because they realised they had to feed their masses. Indonesia has around 240 million people with a rapidly growing middle class. They also have a stated policy position of increasing their per capita beef consumption from 2 kg per person per year to 20 kg per person per year. They are trying to balance a number of stated policy positions and, of course, politics plays in around that depending on who you are talking to.

It is my view that the live cattle suspension imposed by the federal government two years ago was the catalyst for paring back the live cattle quotas on a semi-permanent basis to align with the stated intention of that country becoming more self-sufficient in beef.

Mr WOOD: You mentioned other areas where Indonesia is trying to be self-sufficient. Did I read somewhere they were looking at growing soya beans in the Northern Territory, or looking for possibilities?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes. Every now and then I hear rumblings about Indonesia looking towards Australia and the Northern Territory for a place to grow crops. I have not heard anything specific about Indonesia wishing to grow soy in the Northern Territory. That would be a matter for the Indonesians, for the FIRB, and everyone else who becomes involved in those types of international investments.

Mr WOOD: I am not supposed to ask for an opinion, but it is a needed opinion. Obviously, there is still a threat from animal welfare people wanting to close down the live cattle trade. There was an article on ABC *Country Hour* some time ago regarding Northern Territory livestock exporters having to fund animal welfare insurance costs. Do we have processes to ensure our welfare standards are at the highest level to try to mitigate some of these groups wishing to kill this industry?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: The department, supported by the government, is working feverishly in this area. On the trip to Vietnam - I will use Vietnam as an example because it is an area we will have to be mindful of in ensuring animal welfare standards remain high. People from the Primary Industry department have been there on a number of occasions. One of the earlier shipments of cattle sent to Vietnam was met by DPI officials so they could assist the Vietnamese in the way they handled them. They provided input into design of the feedlot, the supply chain in a physical sense - the transport of cattle from the shipyards to the feedlot, and the feedlot into the slaughter house, using our experience and expertise to help build the capacity of the Vietnamese. We have also spent time doing that in an auditing capacity to ensure the Vietnamese understood, and understand going forward, what the requirements are.

Also, in regard to SCAS, we have been working closely with Meat and Livestock Australia, which has been working in Vietnam as well, to ensure animal welfare standards are maintained. We are working quite heavily in that area. We take our responsibilities very seriously. We recognise that, in order to maintain a healthy live export market into any and all countries, we have to take some degree of responsibility for animal welfare and ensure we work very closely with the governments and the people involved in that export and import industry to ensure animal welfare standards are kept high

Mr WOOD: I get back to Ord Stage 3. I was out there several ago and must admit - perhaps I am getting a bit old - it filled me with delight to see seed crops grown in straight lines and looking healthy. I am not so sure about sandalwood. I am not convinced such good country should be used for tree crops, but that is another matter. Chia seems to be expanding.

I understand Ord River Stage 3 had an issue in relation to what crop would be grown – cotton. AACo asked me last year. I think they were sussing out what the previous government felt about GM cotton being grown. I do not believe you can grow anything else but GM cotton in the north because of the insect pests. If they asked to grow cotton in the Northern Territory would the government agree, subject to normal environmental impact statements and that type of thing?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We would give consideration to any proposal. Even though Kimberley Agricultural Investments, the chosen proponent for the Western Australia side of the Ord, has indicated it will be growing sugar it does not mean we will take them on as the proponent for the Northern Territory. We would allow an open expression of interest process to be undertaken. If another proponent wished to grow a crop other than sugar on the Northern Territory side of the border, we would look at all proposals before us.

Mr WOOD: How far have we gone with bananas in relation to Panama disease? I am referring to either new varieties by conventional selection, or the move to genetically modified banana varieties.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We are working through the introduction and evaluation of new clonal material from overseas, particularly Taiwan. Other work has come out of Queensland. A number of departmental officers have been hot on the trail of this and recently spent time working with authorities in Taiwan. We continue to work on that.

Queensland University of Technology has been granted approval for a gene technology regulated field trial of genetically modified banana with disease resistance on a property at Lambells Lagoon. We are working with that because we recognise the banana industry in the Northern Territory used to be quite lucrative and worth about \$13m. Since Tropical Race 4 was found, it has significantly damaged the capacity for us to grow banana crops.

Mr WOOD: Minister, believe it or not I received a letter from a grower in Humpty Doo today. I do not know whether you can help with this question. He could be fined for using a spray within the withholding period. Is that your area?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, it is. The department of Primary Industry is responsible for monitoring the use of agricultural and other chemicals on food crops. I have been given a very quick brief on this situation. I might paraphrase what I have in front of me.

A particular herbicide can be sprayed directly on chilli plants to control weeds, but any food on the treated plants cannot be harvested for 11 weeks after application to avoid residue of the herbicide on the harvested chillies.

A joint investigation has been conducted with department of Health and Families staff involving property visits, interviews with the grower, the complainant, collection and analysis of samples including frozen chillies and chilli paste obtained from a retail outlet. Chemical analysis found four of the eight field samples tested positive for Fusilade, with two results above the maximum residue level. A chilli paste sample also tested positive and above that maximum residue level.

Mr WOOD: What is the withholding period on Fusilade?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Eleven weeks.

Mr WOOD: Is it a herbicide?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Fusilade.

Mr VATSKALIS: Is it a pesticide?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: It is a herbicide.

Mr WOOD: I will deal with this person, but I wanted to clarify who I see about it. Obviously, this person is concerned.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Yes, the department of Primary Industry.

Mr WOOD: Minister, do you want to move to mining?

Madam CHAIR: That concludes outputs on Primary Industry and Fisheries. I thank Primary Industry and Fisheries officials and staff here today.

DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND ENERGY

Madam CHAIR: Minister, as there is only 10 minutes left we will go straight into questions. Are you happy with that?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Yes, look ...

Madam CHAIR: Do you have a statement?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Yes. I am here to answer questions from the opposition. I could spend the next 10 minutes on an opening statement but will put that aside and take questions.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. Do you have answers to questions to table in this portfolio?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: I have answers to questions I am able to table.

Madam CHAIR: Okay, great.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Are you happy with that, member for Casuarina?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. Minister, following the budget we saw a media release by AMEC and the Darwin mining council furious with the government for imposing a new mining tax and levy without consultation. Did you consult with the industry before the budget? Did the CEO of the Department of Mines and Energy know about this proposed tax?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Yes, they were spoken to, certainly.

Mr VATSKALIS: Did you speak to your CEO about it? Did he know about it?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Sorry?

Mr VATSKALIS: Did he know about two new taxes?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Yes, the CEO knew about the mining levy being considered for introduction.

Mr VATSKALIS: How did you consult with the industry?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Discussions were held between the department and AMEC, as well as the Minerals Council of the Northern Territory, NT Division.

Mr VATSKALIS: How come, in their media release, the Minerals Council of the Northern Territory accused the government of secrecy not consultation? In addition, the documentation was sent to the Minerals Council after the announcement in the budget.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: I cannot explain a media release issued by a third party organisation. It is, ultimately, up to them what they write in media releases. However, I can assure you that before this was announced, both AMEC and the Minerals Council had been told about it. Clearly, being a new levy on mining, industry representative organisations such as AMEC and the Minerals Council, representing the interests and the views of their members, would have been lobbied by those members to object and to lodge complaints with the Northern Territory government with respect to this, in whatever form.

I am not surprised the industry representative bodies made an issue out of this. They are clearly not happy with it. As has been said in estimates before by other ministers in the last two or three days, sometimes

governments have to make tough decisions which will upset some people, because you cannot please all the people all the time.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, and I am familiar with that. You said you are not surprised they reacted, but they were very surprised when they found out. The rehabilitation levy applies because there were many legacy mines. It applies to new and existing mines in the Territory.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: New mines will not leave a legacy because they pay an environmental bond.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the levy. Every new or existing mine in the Territory has to pay.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Every mine will pay the levy.

Mr VATSKALIS: Will exploration companies have to pay when they apply for an exploration licence?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, they will.

Mr VATSKALIS: What is the justification for that? They do exploration not mining, and do not leave a legacy behind. Also, most exploration companies now put a significant bond in place. Where is the justification for hitting the exploration industry with a levy for legacy mines?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: As the former minister for Mines, you would understand every time an exploration company digs or drills a hole or does something, there is disturbance to the soil. That requires an environmental bond to be paid to the Northern Territory. That bond is held in the form of cash or an unconditional bank guarantee. The decision by the Northern Territory government to impose a levy will, for the vast majority of companies operating in the Northern Territory, reduce the amount of money they have to pay overall. In order to explain that I will delve into the way environmental bonds are calculated. As a former mines minister I am surprised the member for Casuarina did not know environmental bonds are not 100% of the assessed remediation costs but 115%.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, hold on, minister, let us speak clearly. The environment bond is 100% for the remediation cost and you add 15% for costs.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That is correct, you pay 15% continuance. You did not know that and is why you were jumping up and down saying it would be less than 100%.

Ms LEE: A point of Order, Madam Chair! Standing Order 51: no interruption while the member is talking.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, member for Arnhem.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I will explain how environmental bonds work. Any time a mine management plan is lodged with the department it is assessed and a discussion is held between departmental officers and the mining company as to what level the environmental bond should be. In many cases the bond assessed by departmental officers is accepted by the mining company, and in cases of very large disturbance the bond is assessed by the Mines and Energy Security Assessment Board. The bond is calculated as being 100% of the remediation costs of the land and, on top of that, is a 15% contingency. That becomes, in effect, the 100% amount of the bond held.

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on, you cannot have 100% on both sides. Do not say something that is not accurate. A company wants to mine and there is an assessment. All assessments were undertaken by a board, not departmental officials. They assess the 100% rehabilitation possibility. The company goes bust, walks away - that is the environmental bond. The contingency cost is not the environmental bond; it is a fee for the department to administer the bond and everything else that goes with it. This has always been the case. The contingency is separate from the bond. The bond is the money to cover ...

Ms LEE: Madam Chair, Standing Order 112: questions cannot be debated.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not a question, Madam Chair.

Ms LEE: Yes, it is.

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Madam Chair! Estimates, historically, is conversational in nature. I know the member for Arnhem ...

Madam CHAIR: Let me cancel this conversation and move to the question. Minister, are you ready to answer?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I could not glean a question from the former minister's statement. The bottom line is we do not charge the 15% as an administration fee; it is a contingency amount added to the 100% bond.

Mr VATSKALIS: So you charge 115%?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We are holding 115% of the assessed amount of bond required to remediate disturbance of the ground created by mining or exploration.

I will continue to explain how the mining levy, in the vast majority of cases, will mean a reduction in cost for mining and exploration companies. In imposing the 1% levy on the environmental bond, which is how the mining levy is calculated, we decided to reduce the contingency by 10% of the total amount. That is minus 10% of 115%. Take 11.5 off 115 and that is the total bond remaining. In fact, if you want to break that down, it is a 100% bond plus a 3.5% contingency.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, minister.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: We are still holding more than 100% of the assessed required bond to remediate that particular mine site. In most cases, for mining and exploration companies who put their bonds up as cash, instead of putting up 115% of the assessed bond amount they are only putting up 103.5% of the assessed bond amount, which is a reduction of 10% of what they would have paid. On top of the 103.5% they pay a mining levy of 1%, which amounts to 105%.

Mr VATSKALIS: My question, minister ...

Madam CHAIR: I am sorry, minister, it is now 11.01 pm. I am in your hands. We are finished. Have you finished with that question?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I have finished with that question, yes.

Madam CHAIR: In that case, I thank the Department of Mines and Energy, Total Land Resource Management, and Primary Industry and Fisheries. That completes the outputs for those portfolio areas. Goodnight everyone.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I thank the departmental people for being here tonight – the Primary Industry department, Mines and Energy, who did not get a word in, and, of course, the Department of Land Resource Management who, unfortunately, did not have an opportunity ...

Mr WOOD: I had some questions for them!

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I am sure you would, Gerry. Thanks everyone.

The committee suspended.
