

**In committee in continuation:**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Good morning, everyone. I understand that we now have *Hansard* on line with us. I will commence by introducing the members of the committee panel this morning: the members for Braiting; Arnhem; Sanderson; myself, member for Brennan as Chair; the member for Blain; the member for Araluen; and member for Greatorex.

Before inviting the minister to introduce those people with him and making his introductory statement, I remind witnesses that evidence given to this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, however the giving of false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute a contempt of the Legislative Assembly pursuant to powers and privileges legislation.

Officers should be aware that when they are requested by their minister to provide answers to questions, they are not required to comment on matters of policy. As you may have guessed, the proceedings are being recorded permission has been given to media outlets to use the recordings as part of their broadcast.

With those formalities out of the way, I welcome the Minister for Employment, Education and Training. I invite you to introduce officials accompanying you, and invite you to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Employment, Education and Training if you so wish.

**MINISTER HENDERSON'S PORTFOLIOS**

**Mr HENDERSON:** Mr Chairman, good morning everybody. At the table with me is Margaret Banks, Chief Executive of the department; Sharron Noske, Deputy Chief Executive of Training and Resources; Mr John Hasted, Deputy Chief Executive of Employment and Training; and Mr John Glasby, who has broken his leave, so thank you, John, for coming back to assist at estimates, who is the Executive Director of Schools North. Obviously, for such a large agency with very wide responsibilities, we have other senior officers of the department present to assist the committee with any questions that cannot be answered at the front table.

I will not make any opening comments. This is obviously a very complex department, and rather than make opening comments, we would like to get straight to the committee's questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** In that case, there being no opening statement, there is not really an opportunity to ask questions around the opening statement, so I will move straight questions relating to Output Group 1.0 - Employment, and Output 1.1 - Employment Initiatives.

**DEPARTMENT of EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION and TRAINING**

**OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Blain.

**Mr MILLS:** Mr Chairman, with the other portfolios for which I have shadow responsibility, we have looked at some of the overarching things that pertain to the department itself to get those out of the way, some of the housekeeping matters such as staffing levels and so on, just get an idea of the structure of the organisation. Would you object to those matters being attended to first, and then moving to more specific matters?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I suppose if they are just questions in that regard that do not go to specific policy areas, yes, I am happy. I have listened to other questions, so that is fine. If they go to policy, I would rather keep them in terms of ...

**Mr MILLS:** No, that is fine. It is just to get this matter out of the way and then we can start to be more specific with inquiries. In opposition, we sit outside often and just get a faint idea of what is going on in the department, but one thing I am aware of is the amount of work that has been undertaken by members of the department in preparing for estimates. I can only hope that level of preparation does not distract in any way from education delivery to kids. I acknowledge all the work that has gone on. I just hope that I can, as shadow for education, provide some assistance in bringing attention to bear on matters that are important in education.

First up is the issue of the appropriation. It is a very large appropriation for education. Minister, what proportion of it goes towards Corporate and Executive Services?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Obviously, we will get to that in a moment. In looking at the appropriation across the agency and mindful that each and every one of us from me, as minister, through the chief executive on the education side, the real focus is supporting much better teaching and learning outcomes in the classrooms and attendance. The department does work very hard to ensure that the corporate areas are resourced appropriately, not extravagantly. Given the huge amount of policy detail, obviously it is important to have a strong executive arm.

In regard to the numbers we will provide, they are appropriate and there is a focus from Margaret as chief executive on this area. The estimate for corporate services, given that we have not quite closed the financial year yet, is \$79.2m, which is about 12% of the agency's budget.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, minister. Cleaning arrangements for department.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am interested in this series of questions about cleaning.

**Mr MILLS:** Small things can help illustrate larger principles. Is it contracted out or is it part of the arrangement for the leasing of the buildings managed by another agency? How does that work?

**Mr HENDERSON:** There are a number of elements to this. Obviously you would be aware, as a local member attending many school council meetings, as I am sure that you do along with all of us, that the cleaning arrangements of schools is devolved down to school councils. It would not be feasible to gather that amount of information. Obviously, the agency leases property across the Northern Territory, and the advice is that the cost of cleaning of leased buildings are covered by DCIS. So DCIS, through their Properties Division, enter into contracts for leasing. Part of those commercial agreements includes cleaning.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay, thank you. The maintenance allocation within the appropriation?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Are you talking about repairs and maintenance budget?

**Mr MILLS:** No, this is just for the department; it is not for schools.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I do not know if we can break it down to that level. I might pass that over to Sharron. Do you have a cost on that? We have a repairs and maintenance budget for the department and obviously a large part of would go to schools. I imagine that our property leases would include maintenance. Sharron?

**Ms NOSKE:** Our property maintenance and property management for the period 1 July 2006 to 31 May 2007 is the sum of \$411 613, which includes pest control, waste paper disposal and shredding, cleaning of our properties, ground maintenance, cleaning sanitary bins, security patrols, minor repairs and maintenance exclusive of schools.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you very much. Should a question about office rental be addressed to another agency?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, Property Services, or whatever the division in DCIS is called, enters into all of those commercial lease arrangements, not the agency.

**Mr MILLS:** The size of the CEO's office?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am very interested in this series of questions. I have sat in your position in opposition. I am very intrigued. I am sure you will not tell me, member for Blain, as to who is jealous about people's offices. Obviously you are asking a series of questions on behalf of someone who has a bit of bee in their bonnet about office space. I think that my chief executive does not have a salacious and salubrious ...

**Mr MILLS:** All that aside, what is the size of the room?

**Mr HENDERSON:** ... accommodation. It is 36 m<sup>2</sup>. I hope that that very important piece of information in regards to education and learning outcomes for our children satisfies someone somewhere.

**Mr MILLS:** Just stay on board, minister. We will get to the destination!

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am intrigued!

**Mr MILLS:** The total appropriation that goes towards the cost of advertising, including the design and production costs of radio, television, newspapers, magazines and any other media?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We will just get some documentation on that.

**Mr MILLS:** Happy to have the document tabled.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Okay. I'll have a look. On this particular question, I am pretty confident that the overall media and marketing spend is less than it was last year. Obviously there was a large amount of consultation and communication around community debate about the introduction of middle schools, but the total expenditure on communications, media and marketing was \$1.385m and that was down from \$2.1m the previous year, so it has reduced.

**Mr MILLS:** Is this document being tabled, just the break down?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, tabled.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will have copies distributed. Do you need to refer to one in the interim?

**Mr MILLS:** No. Good information comes across and I am fearful of losing it, so I need to go back through *Hansard* and make sure that I have that number.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** It will be stamped on the document.

**Mr MILLS:** I know I went through this yesterday.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Initially they weren't, but we have made sure they are now.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. The cost of advertising which included the minister's image?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am not sure whether we have that level of detail. Of \$1.3m worth, very little of that would have contained a photograph. The advice I have is that it is going to be pretty difficult to trawl through that. What we do have is the NT Board of Studies presentation ceremony program; the DEET show display; the careers expo display; the Jobs Plans 3 mail-out brochure and report; Safe Schools NT brochure that was released recently; middle years for which there have been two mail-outs; an Education Week newspaper feature; World Teachers Day newspaper feature. It is really important for the minister to acknowledge our teachers on World Teachers Day; the Annual Report 2005-06; and the Safe Start NT WorkSafe brochure. So, 10 publications out of probably hundreds that go out every year.

**Mr MILLS:** The question was the cost, though.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We do not have the costs.

**Mr MILLS:** Right, so 10 publications. Just in case you are really puzzled as to this ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** Oh, no. We used to ask the same questions.

**Mr MILLS:** I know, and you know, of course, that it is just to ensure that there is no tendency given to shameless self-promotion. If we did not have an opposition to ask such questions, perhaps things could get out of control.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Absolutely. No, no, I acknowledge we used to ask those questions.

**Mr MILLS:** Minister, what is the cost of postage associated with mass communication to Territorians and the cost of letterbox drops?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Again, I will seek advice as to whether we have answers to that. Obviously, postage also includes mailing exam results and all of those things. As of last year, \$85 000 for Executive Services; Media and Marketing, \$15 000; People and Learning, which includes the Records Management Unit \$52 000; Other \$18 000; total \$85 000.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, minister. Has there been electorate or policy research or message development conducted within the department? This includes focus groups, research of issues and what the community is feeling about certain matters.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Obviously, in terms of the consultation around the middle years development, there would have been a lot of community consultation, but I will take advice. I will just pass over to Sharron Noske who is our Deputy CE and who can answer that question.

**Ms NOSKE:** The only focus groups we have run this financial year were with parents, teachers and students around a survey instrument that we use as a part of our accountability framework for schools to shape up the sorts of questions, and we are still working on those at this stage. They have not been finalised, so there will be some more focus groups over the coming months just to finalise the questionnaire.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay and would those focus groups have been conducted in Darwin and Palmerston?

**Ms NOSKE:** I think there was one in Alice Springs, but the rest of them were in Darwin and they were around things such as: do you feel safe at your school?, are you happy communicating with your teacher? and those sorts of questions. It is just getting those questions right to get the right sort of responses so schools can respond to them.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If I could just interrupt. Sorry, member for Blain, if I could remind officers to state their name, even if you have been introduced by the minister, or more particularly, if it is a series of sort of question and answer, even though it is very artificial, *Hansard* needs it so that they can be sure they are recording the right pieces against the right people. Thank you.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Is there a cost that can be identified to the conducting of this research?

**Ms NOSKE:** It is a part of developing the questionnaires. We can have a look for you, but I am not sure that we can break it down specifically. It is within a contract which I think is around the \$30 000 mark. Would you like more specific information?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, thank you. What is the total appropriation that goes towards media liaison and monitoring?

**Mr HENDERSON:** The agency does not do any media monitoring. Media monitoring is done centrally through Chief Minister's.

**Mr MILLS:** What do you call the unit within DEET responsible for public relations?

**Mr HENDERSON:** The name of the unit is Internal Communications, Media and Marketing.

**Mr MILLS:** How many in that unit?

**Mr HENDERSON:** There are 11 staff. Given the size of the agency, and the importance of communicating to 150-odd schools across the Northern Territory, it has reduced in the last financial year from 13 to 11; it is actually 10.5 full-time equivalents.

**Mr MILLS:** Is there an appropriation for that section?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, there is. It would be just over \$1.3m; employee expenses \$1.045m; and operational expenses \$0.34m.

**Mr MILLS:** Sorry. The operation expenses \$0.34, and the staff?

**Mr HENDERSON:** \$1.045, or just over \$1 m for the 10.5 FTEs.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. Are you able to identify for us the reviews that are being conducted currently in education?

**Mr HENDERSON:** The advice I have is that we do not have any current reviews.

**Mr MILLS:** What about the review into curriculum you have referred to?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Oh, sorry. I was thinking you were talking about externally contracted reviews. You are talking about everything we might be reviewing internally as well?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, I should be more specific: reviews that will be publicly reported.

**Ms BANKS:** We could take it on notice.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I do not really want to take it on notice. We can pull it together. We have the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework review going on at the moment. I am sure we will have some discussions about that when we get to the Education output group. There is, obviously, the SABS/SACE/NTCE review that is ongoing at the moment for the introduction of a new NTCE from 2009. They are the two major ones. We also have the review of the *Work Health Act* that is being undertaken at the moment. I am just checking with officials. Yes, that is it in major bodies of work.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. Can we have details of consultants that were employed, what they were employed to do and how much they cost?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I have good news on that. I can table this document. The department spent \$1.92m on consultancies between July 2006 and May 2007. \$2.126m was spent in the previous year, so there has been a significant reduction. I am happy to table a list of those consultancies for you.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, minister. The total appropriation that goes towards the cost of staffing within the department itself: the number of full-time equivalents, the number of employees and the levels?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Just while we are tabling that, to provide full information on reviews, another one has come to notice: Teachers of Exemplary Practice is, obviously, a body of work that is being done in reviewing that scheme. That is for completeness for the record. So the question was staff numbers?

**Mr MILLS:** Correct; the number of full-time equivalents and the number of employees at each level within the department.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes. Obviously, DEET is a little different from a lot of other agencies, given particular teacher numbers are formula driven so they do bounce around during the year. The rolling quarterly average is approximately 3750. There is a paper here I am happy to table.

**Mr MILLS:** Minister, does that separate those who work in schools from those who work in the department?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, it does, at a high level.

**Mr MILLS:** What do you mean 'at a high level'?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Maybe if we table the paper and you have a look at it.

**Mr MILLS:** Right.

**Mr HENDERSON:** The top line is administrative, and it goes to executive teachers, principals, those sorts of numbers.

**Mr MILLS:** You are saying that ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** If you look at the table, you see the top line is administrative.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes.

**Mr HENDERSON:** So that would cover positions across the department. Then it breaks down into ..

**Mr MILLS:** Oh, yes, thank you. Airfare costs, specifically looking at the cost of airfares between Alice Springs and Darwin?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I do not think we have a breakdown in Darwin to Alice Springs. What we have is intra-state official duty fares. In commercial fares, that would be flights to Alice Springs and Gove and excludes charters. Really, it is the main RPT route, which would be Gove and Alice Springs. That figure is \$902 000 for the year. Obviously, in an agency like DEET, there are a lot of charters getting teachers and admin staff around the Territory. That is \$141 000. That is the level that we have broken it down to. Most of that would be to Alice Springs, I would imagine.

**Mr MILLS:** Sure. Thank you, minister. I need to ask questions, and you will probably guess why, regarding greenhouse gas policies. Are you able to provide the total appropriation that goes towards these strategies?

**Mr HENDERSON:** There is no separate appropriation. What I can say is that there is a big body of work being done between DPI and DEET in regard to getting information out to schools on how they can reduce their emissions and make savings regarding energy consumption. I have asked for a specific information or fact sheet to go out to all schools and school councils to assist them in what they can do around the schools to reduce the amount of energy consumed in schools. That is a body of work that is nearly complete, member for Blain. There is specific work occurring that we cannot put a budget allocation to, but which provides information for schools so they can reduce energy consumption and make savings. That will be specific information that I have requested go to schools very soon. So, no specific budget allocation, but work is being done, particularly in and around our schools.

Obviously, through DCIS and their guidelines for property leasing, I am aware that there has been significant improvement in contractual requirements for people who provide properties to Northern Territory government agencies to specify in tender documents what they are doing in reducing energy consumption and making buildings more energy efficient.

**Mr MILLS:** In the department itself, in looking at the figures you have just provided, administrative, I assume, is about 900 people working in the department who are not working in schools. Is the Mitchell Centre where most offices are housed?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Well, no. Our administrative staff, obviously, would be in all of the major centres. It is not all in Mitchell Street.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. For those who are administrative, and let us just pick on the Mitchell Centre, do you have a plan to which you can work to set some targets for reducing energy consumption and so on within the department?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Sharron Noske.

**Ms NOSKE:** Yes, we do. Fortunately, the Mitchell Centre, being a very new building, affords us some good opportunities to make savings in that area.

**Mr MILLS:** You do have a plan, though? I am talking about things such as turning out the lights after hours and that type of thing. Is the organisation aware of specifics and how you are tracking against targets, or is it just everyone for themselves and try the best you can?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Obviously, the government is committed to targets across all agencies. I believe it is 1.5% ‘

**Mr MILLS:** I know that you have. I just want to see what plan you have in place that you can work against so you have objectives set that you are able to achieve.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I really think, regarding the department, as I have said before, if you were to add up cumulatively the amount of structural space that the department occupies across the Northern Territory, the vast majority of that structural space will be in our schools.

**Mr MILLS:** Sure.

**Mr HENDERSON:** As I said before, there is specific information going to go to schools very shortly to assist them with their plans. However, I have been provided with a strategy, I suppose, regarding energy management. I will ask my Chief Executive to explain.

**Ms BANKS:** This work is in progress. We have a high level of commitment to energy management improvement, and that includes the creation of a specific energy policy, appointment of a senior staff member as the Energy Manager responsible for the overall coordination of the program to be assisted by a coordinator who would report directly to senior executive, appointment of individual school facility and divisional managers, establishment of an energy management committee with agreed terms of reference which we are hoping to have in place by next term, provision of regular feedback to staff and, as the minister has indicated that work is in progress, implementation of staff awareness and training programs and we are putting together a communication plan which is being developed. There are certain minor strategies in place such as liaising with DIPE, preparation of an action plan based on audit findings and DEET's energy management committee will have that as its key terms of reference, ongoing entry of energy consumption details to DIPE, the national environmental data gathering and reporting database to enable DIPE to report on the whole-of-government energy management, and a school energy blitz.

**Mr MILLS:** Good. Just checking. Government can made statements. We all think it has happened and it is good to see that there is a plan so described. We are all fired up with interest on its progress. That is it for my general questions, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Having allowed some general questions, I will open it for any further questions.

**Mr MILLS:** The member for Brainting has some. Don't get crotchety now.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, I take it when I look at your staffing levels, and I notice there has been a reduction in staff, that the majority of staff reductions have occurred in teaching or school positions, am I correct?

**Mr HENDERSON:** My advice is that it has not been in the teaching positions; it has been in the corporate areas.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I was looking at the paper you tabled, which is monthly staffing to March 2007, and the variation seems to be very much in assistant teachers, executive teachers, physical teachers ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, but the chart that you are looking at is a rolling average through the year driven by formulae and attendance.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** So you are saying that no, the staff reduction in DEET is mainly administrative, not in school positions?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes. The numbers, as I said, do fluctuate and, obviously, we will get to a significant discussion, I imagine, later about school attendance. Obviously, those teacher numbers are very much influenced by attendance. In terms of the staffing reductions that have occurred over the last year or so, the significant majority of that has been in the corporate and administrative areas. I am just getting some additional information. I will hand over to Sharron Noske, our Deputy CE Planning and Resources, who might be able to shed a bit more light on this.

**Ms NOSKE:** The figures fluctuate with teaching staff quite significantly. As you would be aware, at the end of term and particularly in January when contracts finish and before the new contracts start, so you really need to look at the average over the period. The reductions have been in the corporate area and in efficiencies that we have been able to drive.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It is my understanding, minister, that there were extra positions put in the regional office in Alice Springs?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Could you perhaps indicate what positions they are and how many they have now?

**Mr HENDERSON:** One of the initiatives that we put in place in the last 12 months is Regional Directors across our regions. Sharron, do you have further information in particular about Central Australia?

**Ms NOSKE:** Regional Directors have been appointed in Tennant Creek, Katherine and Nhulunbuy and office staff to assist those, which were additional staff. Other staff are being reallocated from areas that are placed in the regions to work under those regional teams and, of course, in Central Australia as well.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Thank you. Minister, are you providing new premises for regional office staff in Alice Springs?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Obviously, they need somewhere to, so I assume ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** No, I am talking about the whole department. There was a story that you were going to move them out of the building into another one.

**Mr HENDERSON:** In terms of office space and what have you, that is all managed through DCIS. Now as we put additional staff on, obviously we have to accommodate those staff. In terms of what leases may or may not be expiring and when they are expiring and what happens with the tender process in relation to expiring leases, they will be an issue for DCIS.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, do we still do criminal checks on teachers, teaching assistants, the indigenous liaison officers, all people who are associated with schools?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I believe they are, but I will defer for definitive advice to Sharon Noske.

**Ms NOSKE:** Yes, they are.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** So everyone who works with a child in a school, be it even parents? Minister, you are frowning. I am well aware that there are many parents who go into schools to assist with children, who work with disabled children.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will pass that question to our CE. We are having a pretty intense debate about these issues at the moment, but in terms of requiring all parents who may or may not assist in the classroom to undergo criminal checks, I do not think we are going down that path, but I will hand over to our CE.

**Mrs BANKS:** The position is that all paid staff are required to go through the screening process. With respect to the role of parents, the duty of care of children still lies with the staff of the department, in particular with teachers and principal, so their responsibility of ensuring the welfare of children and they are not left alone without the appropriate supervision should be in place. Obviously, that is something of which we are very cognisant.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I guess I just wanted some reassurance that criminal checks are still occurring because there is a fairly high turnover of people in schools who help on a part-time basis with different children.

**Mr HENDERSON:** In terms of all paid positions, the answer is yes.



**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, do schools in the bush have school councils similar to those in town schools?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We are moving to a group schools model in the bush, and we have school councils in and around the group schools, but I might pass to Mr Glasby who can answer that specifically.

**Mr GLASBY:** The answer is yes.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Are they centrally based, these councils, or on the communities themselves?

**Mr GLASBY:** No, they are based on communities. Some of the smaller group schools, which are very small, have parent reps, have small school councils albeit not perhaps not in the same form as you might expect in a school, but, yes, they have parent representatives.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Do devolutions, minister through you, occur in bush schools also? The devolution of funds, maintenance, relief staff or whatever?

**Mr GLASBY:** Those funds are devolved to school councils. They receive an annual grant four times a year currently. The group schools receive those grants on behalf of their smaller schools, and monies budgeted for those small schools go through the group school. The larger schools, like Gunbalanya or Milingimbi and so on, would have their own school council and their own funds.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** And the group schools funding, is that acquitted each year by the department or by a qualified accountant?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Again, Mr Glasby, but we are certainly tightening up financial management across all our schools, but for the specifics, Mr Glasby.

**Mr GLASBY:** As the minister said, all school councils have to provide an annual report and in the annual report is an annual audit which has to be conducted by a qualified person.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Does the department fund events other than those that they organise and run themselves?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Are you talking about a CrocFest?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Yes.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We will cut to the chase about CrocFest. I certainly take the view, as minister for Education, that our primary focus is improving educational outcomes, teaching and learning outcomes in our schools. We all know, particularly around indigenous education and remote schools, we have a long way to go. Certainly, since I have had the portfolio, in terms of the funding that we do have available for indigenous education, we are really trying to focus that funding on evidence-based initiatives that lead to better education outcomes. I am not saying we have got there by any means.

In regards to the CrocFest, what I can say is that the federal Education minister issued a media release a few weeks ago, I do not have it with me now, but I certainly have it in my office, announcing that the Commonwealth government had allocated \$3.05m to run seven CrocFests across Australia. I am also advised that the people who organise CrocFest made a specific application to the Commonwealth government for \$635 000 to run a CrocFest in Alice Springs for which they have been funded. No information in that application contingent on Territory government funding.

I am also aware that CrocFest organisation has seen funding increased to that organisation to run seven CrocFests across Australia from \$2.04m in 2004 to \$3.05m in 2007, so an increase of over \$1m in their budget to run these CrocFests. In terms of being responsible and accountable to ensure that Education department dollars go to evidence-based, as much as possible, improved outcomes in education, I made the call to decline the funding request, not that the CrocFest people approached my department directly. It would mean that, if I was to have to find \$140 000 from the budget, it would have to come from programs like the Clontarf Football Academy, which is proving very real results, and in terms of evidence from Western Australia has led to very significant

increases in attendance, very significant increases in Year 12 outcomes, very significant increases in terms of employment. I am not going to cut programs like Clontarf to fund CrocFest, that has been adequately funded by the Commonwealth government, and if the CrocFest people cannot run a festival in Alice Springs for \$635 000, I would respectfully suggest that they cut their program a little bit so they can provide a festival. It is a very significant amount of money, and I am disappointed that they have let down the students of Central Australia in terms of renegeing on their obligation to provide that festival based on the funding they have received from the Commonwealth government.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, can I just correct some of your figures? I believe that the department was sent a letter requesting \$100 000 and the minister for Arts was sent a letter requesting \$30 000. The letter from the minister's office came back signed by, I think, a departmental person. In your case, I am not sure where the minister for Education's came from. I am disappointed that you will not fund it. Why do you think 53 schools put up their hands to be involved if they did not think it a worthwhile program for their schools?

The CrocFest is darn hard work. Ask the teachers, parents and staff who go with the kids into Alice Springs. It is not a joy ride; it is not just a fun thing. There are many activities, and I will just mention one: the optometrist tests the children's eyes and provide glasses free of charge if they need them. That is an opportunity that many remote schools do not have. The children very rarely get a chance to have their eyes tested. Their hearing, we concentrate on, but we sometimes forget about their eyes. There are also some very significant programs to get students involved. They have been working on it for many months because the CrocFest provides many activities and materials to the school as a leader. It is not just coming to town and having a good time; it is an educational program. I suggest that your educational outcomes are dismal at the moment so anything you can do to improve them for remote schools, you should be doing.

I am disappointed, too, and so will be those 53 schools, minister. By now, they have been notified, but I had hoped that you would have been big enough to say: 'Okay, I will work with the Alice Springs Town Council and I will assist with funding'.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I can say that we have not refused to assist because we do provide significant in-kind support in teacher time and travelling costs. I will be writing to the 53 schools to put the record straight on this. It is not the Territory government that is stopping this event going ahead; it is the CrocFest people who are renegeing on their commitment to provide a festival in Alice Springs as a result of their applications to the Commonwealth government and very generous funding that they have received. My advice, through my department, is that there is no evidence base of improved sustained educational outcomes as a result of this. I agree it is a fantastic event. The kids thoroughly enjoy it, but in terms of the responsibility for improving education outcomes, I would probably put it in the category of a 'nice to do' event.

We are approached as government for funding for any number of events and, with requests for funding throughout the year, as you would remember from your time in government. Governments have to make decisions about what we can and cannot fund. With regard to my responsibility as minister, I would have had to find \$100 000 or \$140 000 from the budget to fulfil this request when the CrocFest people had been funded over \$600 000.

Like any organisation, if \$600 000 or \$635 000 does not get you there for the full gamut of things you want to do, you trim your sails a bit and provide something that you can. For example, the Territory government funds \$350 000 in total to support *BassintheGrass* and *BassintheDust* concerts. Out of that funding, we get two very significant community events that many thousands of people attend. These people are saying they cannot run a festival for \$600 000 in Alice Springs.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It is not that, minister. It is all of the infrastructure and all the materials that are with that.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Julie Bishop announced \$3.05m to run seven CrocFests. She did not say \$3.05m and contingent on state and Territory governments contributing; \$3.05m.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** But every other state supports the CrocFest, including Queensland, South Australia, and have a look at New South Wales ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** They have significantly bigger budgets than we do. I am not going to pull funding from programs like Clontarf, which are delivering real education outcomes, to fund a festival for which the CrocFest people have been very significantly funded to provide. I am disappointed that they are walking away from the people of Alice Springs and Central Australia.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I think we have gone on ...

**Mr MILLS:** A point of order; Mr Chairman. I am just inquiring you as to whether the member for Brainting has received the answer to her question.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I think I have received it clearly, yes.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay, thank you.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Just one other cross-departmental one. Does the department have a policy on nutrition programs in schools?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Whilst we are getting the appropriate policy response, individual schools do run significant nutrition programs in schools, urban, regionally and in the bush. I think all of us as local members know our individual schools run breakfast programs and lunch programs.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Does the department fund these programs?

**Mr HENDERSON:** My understanding, and I will hand over to Ken Davies, our Deputy CE of Education Services at the moment, that some of them require a gold coin donation, other schools have Centrelink payments voluntarily forwarded to them to fund these programs. I will pass over to Ken Davies, Deputy CE, Education.

**Mr DAVIES:** Thanks, minister. DEET has a branch called the Health Promoting Schools NT Unit, and that branch has a personnel budget of about \$1.2m of which \$1m is Northern Territory government funds and about \$190 000 are Australian government funds. It provides support for schools, teachers and parents to manage programs such as health, sexuality, nutrition, physical and drug education programs. Part of that process is around working with school canteens on the school canteen guideline policies that are available. So yes, there are nutrition programs that are run centrally and there are people in there supporting schools to run those nutrition programs.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** This is across the board?

**Mr DAVIES:** It is across the board, across the Northern Territory. The specific responsibility falls to the Health Promoting Schools section, and that section is based in the Student Services area.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Thank you, minister. Finally, your policy on assaults on teachers: could you indicate what measures you have taken to ensure the safety of teachers, and when something does occur and we get the headline, what policy measures are in place?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am not trying to be pedantic, Mr Chair, and I said we would take some general questions. I have probably been a bit lax in that, but, through the Chair, I do not know how you want to handle this. I am happy to answer the question, but whether it is now or when we get to the appropriate output group ...

**M CHAIRMAN:** I do not want there to be double dipping. I will bow to your better knowledge of the department area, minister, but I would have thought that question comes under regulation of occupational health and safety, which is 1.2.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** All right, we can bring it up then.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes the general questions.

### **Output 1.1 - Employment Initiatives**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We can now move to Output 1.1 - Employment Initiatives.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I am very interested in commencements for apprenticeships. I understand that apprenticeships as you describe them are apprenticeships and traineeships.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes.

**Mr MILLS:** The estimates as have been set have not been matched each year, and bit by bit over the last four years, you are coming back closer to now nominating what you see to be an appropriate estimate. That is an observation. What I am particularly interested in is the gap between your estimate and your result, particularly from 2002 to 2004.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Just a point of clarification, obviously I am happy to deal with policy questions, but we are dealing with the 2007-08 Budget. I do not have budget papers going back to 2002 here.

**Mr MILLS:** All right, I will do this in another way at another time. We will go to the next phase of this. I just make the observation that there has been a disparity between the estimate of the number of traineeships and apprenticeships and how many you have had lodged. Let us go to the next stage of that, the number of commencements. Are you able to advise the commencements as compared with completions for the last two years?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Before getting to the specifics, in terms of the policy that is driving this, we made a commitment to 10 000 new commencements in terms of apprenticeships and trainees across the Northern Territory in this four year term. I can advise the committee that we are slightly ahead of that target, and I am confident that we will reach the 10 000 commencements. In regards to specific overall numbers, I can also say that during this period, we are training double the numbers of apprentices and trainees that we were five or six years ago.

The specific numbers here are apprenticeship and traineeship commencement figures reflect 27% growth from 2025 at 31 December 2001 to 2583 at 31 December 2006.

**Mr MILLS:** Minister, can you just go back to 2001?

**Mr HENDERSON:** In 2001, the commencement figures were 2025. These are annual figures. It was 2583 at 31 December 2006. That reflects a 27% growth on the numbers of new commencements.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. Minister, if you are able to provide those figures, can you now provide the corresponding figures that relate to completions?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, I will pass that over to Mr John Hassed who is the Deputy CE, Employment and Training.

**Mr HASSED:** Our completion rate sits at around 50%. So 50% of those apprentices and trainees that start an apprenticeship or traineeship complete their apprenticeship or traineeship. That is on a par with other jurisdictions. We have put in place a number of strategies to try to improve that. We have had a slight improvement of about 2% in the last couple of years.

Some of those strategies include new programs that we have introduced, the Work Ready program, which is to give young students a particular taste for the trades that they would like to go into. Workwear/Workgear is an incentive for new apprentices and trainees who get through their three month probation period.

Some work that I have done previously identifies that you lose about 13% to 15% of apprentices or trainees in the first three months during that probation period, so we felt if we provided an incentive for them to get through that initial period, it would move to an increase in completion rates. Particularly for apprentices, it will take some time for us to be able to identify any completion because predominantly, they take three to four years to get through an apprenticeship. It will take a bit of time before we expect to see some further increase in the completion rates.

**Mr MILLS:** I appreciate that, through the Chair, for those commencing in 2006, we cannot see their completion until perhaps up to three years from now, but that is for apprenticeships. For

trainees, can you give me an idea of the trainee programs? Would there be traineeships that are included in this that are six month programs?

**Mr HASSED:** That would be an exception, a six-month traineeship. A person coming in would have to go through a recognition of prior learning exercise, which is a mandatory requirement now. If they have substantial experience in the area that they are working in, it is quite possible they would. Most trainees coming in are generally younger people with limited exposure to work practices or the environment that they are undertaking a traineeship in, and I would say in the Northern Territory, nominally it would be a 12 month, if not plus, period of time before they complete a Level II traineeship.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. Minister, I have had provided, through you, the specific figures for completion starting in 2001. Whilst I accept, and I have seen it in the Budget Papers, about 50% completion, I would like to have figures of the completions as far as you can go, notwithstanding what we have just discussed about 2006, it would be very difficult to provide those, but they can be provided by 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 so that we can assess the strength of the program and how it is improving.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am advised that to go back over those years and pull that information out specifically is going to be a large body of work. In terms of the completion rate, we have the starts, and the completion apprentices/trainees rate is 50.13%. I will describe how that number is arrived at. The completion rate each year is the commencements for the collection period, 1 July 2000 to 31 December 2006, so we have the commencement data over that period and it is from the period 1 July 2000 to 31 December 2006, divided by completions over the same period. So we have a total number of completions, and that is how that figure, 50.13% is arrived at. To go and break that down year on year, my advice is it would be a very significant body of work. We have a number. We know the number in a public policy sense is 50.13%. I am correct that we have to report these details to the Australian government, which signs off on these figures, so it is not that there is any doubt about the veracity of the figures. They are provided to the Australian government under the VET funding that they provide us.

I want to try to be helpful here, but I am a bit loath to send the department out to collate a whole body of work. I do not understand why you would require that level of detail on a year-by-year basis when we can provide an overall number, which is consistent with national averages, which is reported to the Commonwealth government, which accepts those numbers. I am pretty reluctant to put the department to a huge amount of work without understanding the reason why you would want to see them. I am trying to be helpful.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. I appreciate that. I am surprised that you find it difficult to understand. If you are in government, it is easy to talk about how many you can get commenced. In opposition, we would be more interested not so much in the headline act, but what you achieve in result. Being a significant amount of work, it is important work.

**Mr HENDERSON:** What I can do is give you the raw numbers of commencement and completion. I am prepared to take on notice the number of commencements and completions over that period regarding the raw numbers. I will take that on notice, but breaking it down year-by-year, the advice I have is that that is a huge amount of work and, quite frankly, whilst trying to be helpful, I would rather have departmental officers focused on rolling out programs. However, I can take on notice getting you the raw commencements and completions from the period 1 July 2000 to 31 December 2006.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, I will accept it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice 4.1

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Blain, would you restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard* please?

**Mr MILLS:** I am not exactly sure what I am being provided with, but the question is ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** Maybe I can say.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, say what it is you are providing me and I will give you the nod.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am prepared to take a question on notice which is the raw numbers for the number of apprentice and trainee commencements for the collection period 1 July 2000 to 31 December 2006, and the number of completions over that period.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That accurately represents your question?

**Mr MILLS:** Perfect, thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Excellent, member for Blain. I will take it as read that you accept the questions, minister, and I will allocate that question number 4.1.

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**Mr MILLS:** Minister, I am not in the business of inquiring after these things so that I can just have another piece of paper on my desk, but I have to say that this data is really important.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, I understand.

**Mr MILLS:** I would like a report from you as to how the assessment of completion rates compared with commencement rates is processed within the department to inform and advise on the delivery of training programs.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am sorry, member for Blain; I was being a bit rude and seeking a point of clarification. Can you repeat the question, please?

**Mr MILLS:** I will give it my best shot. I am interested in what is done with this data because it advises the quality of program delivery so that we can improve our completion rates. Whilst it is interesting for government to be able to tout how many they have started, what is really more important is the amount of bang we get for our buck, and how many, in fact, complete their program. What advice is received by way of this data to feed into program delivery?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Before I hand over to Mr Hassed, this issue of how we improve completion rates is a very significant policy issue and question. A lot of work is done, both in the Territory and nationally through various forums and industry advisory groups and associations. It is certainly an issue on which the Northern Territory is not Robinson Crusoe in improving those retention rates. There are a number of structures through the Vocational Education and Training policy space where industry groups, unions and governments all look at this issue of how we end apprenticeships and traineeships, but also get better completion rates.

One of the things we are doing across our schools is introducing a school to work transition plan and trying to get industry better engaged with our schools across the Northern Territory to provide work experience places in the workplace so students, before they actually take that big decision about what they want to do, might get access to a range of different experiences to help guide them in their decision-making. However, it is a significant issue and, for more detail on it, I will pass it over to Mr Hassed who is our Deputy CE, Employment and Training.

**Mr HASSED:** We are talking about one specific program here, being the Apprenticeship/Traineeship Training Program, which is funded out of a bucket of monies that they tag nationally as 'user choice' which effectively means that the employer has a choice of training provider from those that are registered for delivering a particular qualification for which they wish to take on a young person or a more mature person.

In terms of a cancellation which, effectively, is a non-completion, the responsibility for processing that has been outsourced under a contract to the Australian Apprenticeship Centre here in the Northern Territory. There is a requirement that the apprentice or the employer, or both if they seek a mutual cancellation, provide a reason as to why the training contract has been cancelled. There is a wide range of reasons, as you would imagine, but we are able to look at that type of data and determine across a year the major reasons why training contracts have been cancelled.

From that, we have, as I said, implemented a number of strategies. One that I did not mention earlier is that under the new contract we signed earlier this year with the Australian

Apprenticeships Centre and the Australian government, was to adopt a more rigorous process in cancellations of training contracts. You normally have two forms of cancellation: one is a mutual cancellation where both parties basically say: 'Enough is enough'. For a variety of reasons, this training contract will not go on. Generally in those cases, we can attempt to try and bring the parties together but, regularly, we are unsuccessful. No form of mediation generally works where both parties decide to walk away from the training contract. It is the same as any other employment contract, effectively; where there is a fall-out in the workplace, people walk away from it.

Where there is no mutual cancellation and where one party decides they want to cancel, we have asked the Australian Apprenticeships Centre to intervene in these cases and attempt to mediate to bring the parties to the table and try to work their way through so that we can continue that training contract. This is successful in some cases but not, again, overly successful at the end of the day. By adopting that process, even if we can bring together 10% of those arrangements, we believe that we have been successful in ensuring that someone does complete their training contract.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. Now we are getting closer to it. Can you describe for me the capacity within the division to be able to negotiate, mediate and to assist in those times of emerging dispute? What capacity is there within the division to go to that point of need?

**Mr HASSED:** As I said earlier, we have contracted or outsourced the initial service for the apprentices, trainees and their employers. That includes, during the life of the contract, the apprenticeship centre field officers have to visit the work places on a reasonably regular basis to check that everything is going okay with the training, the supervision of the apprentice and such. They also have a responsibility to intervene where there is a dispute in the work place. The dispute may not necessarily result in a move to cancel a contract. If it does, then they do have the role to intervene and attempt to bring the parties together where there is no mutual cancellation.

**Mr MILLS:** Perhaps to make it more clear: how many people work to address that point of need?

**Mr HASSED:** I could not give you a ready answer as to how many field officers are in the Australian Apprenticeships Centre. I can go further by advising that in a number of instances we do have field staff in Darwin and in our regional centres in Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Katherine and Jabiru. They are also involved in bringing the parties together. Generally, where a matter has been referred to us where there has not being any ability to resolve a dispute and it is brought to our attention, we will then send in our field officers to take further action on those cases.

**Mr MILLS:** How many field officers do you have?

**Mr HASSED:** We have field officers, as I said, in Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Jabiru, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

**Mr MILLS:** So there is one in each?

**Mr HASSED:** There is one in each, yes, and we have two or three officers who are involved in field work in Darwin. We also have more senior officers who would intervene, depending on the case before us.

**Mr MILLS:** How many disputes have been formally recorded in 2006-07?

**Mr HASSED:** In terms of disputes over the cancellation of a training contract, very few have come to our notice in all honesty. I could not give you an accurate ....

**Mr MILLS:** You can not give me an accurate figure?

**Mr HASSED:** I cannot give you an accurate figure. We do have a Complaints Register. I would say that in the last nine months there have probably been six cases brought to our attention where we have intervened.

**Mr MILLS:** Is this Complaints Register a document that opposition can access?

**Mr HASSED:** We could not give you the names of those who have registered complaints because it is not just complaints from apprentices and trainees. There is a wide range of issues that are brought to the attention and put on that Complaints Register about quality of training, not necessarily for apprentices and trainees.

**Mr MILLS:** How many would there be on the Complaints Register now that reflect 2006-07?

**Mr HASSED:** I can get that number for you.

**Mr MILLS:** While you are looking, would you be able to get me the comparison with the year before and the year before that so that I can have a sense of the trend and whether we are getting on top of this?

**Mr HASSED:** The Complaints Register has been in place for about a year and a half. It was a national initiative that all jurisdictions have endorsed and put in place. Prior to that, I do not believe we would have details that we could ...

**Mr MILLS:** All right; as much as can be provided. It goes without saying that as I celebrate those who commence and complete, which is an outstanding achievement that should be recognised, particularly in light of our resources boom and opportunities in the Territory, I am, conversely, very concerned about those who commence and do not complete. There is often a very sad story behind them and the future does not auger well for many of them.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That is why we need the union reps to help them. Excuse me, Mr Hased, can I just ask are you confident you can get that information quickly, or should we take that on notice?

**Mr HASSED:** I believe we can get that information for you.

**Mr MILLS:** I appreciate that. I am very happy with that, thank you. You say that the completion rates are equivalent to Western Australia and Queensland.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Again, before I hand over to John Hased, my advice is that our completion rate is equivalent to the national average. How that compares state by state, I do not know if we have that specific information, but I will ask Mr Hased.

**Mr HASSED:** Some states and territories are not open about providing their completion rates and they do adopt different methodologies for their figures. The advice that I am providing is based on a conversation I had with a senior officer from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research in last few weeks. We asked the question: what would be the average completion rate across the nation for apprenticeships and traineeships? They said around the 50%. It may be that some jurisdictions have a slightly higher one, but what you do see is that generally, we have a slightly higher completion rate for apprenticeships over traineeships. Again, being a shorter nominal period of training, people at a lower level qualification probably do not have as great a commitment as many apprentices to get through.

I also raise one issue in that respect: there has been research undertaken in respect of this and one of the findings that has been around for a couple of years now and again, I can only advise on information provided by NCVET who believe it hasn't changed, is that around 70% of those people who do not complete a structured program, which is an apprenticeship or traineeship ...

**Mr MILLS:** Sorry, what percentage?

**Mr HASSED:** It is actually 74.4%; I think. Around 74.4% of people who do not complete an apprenticeship or traineeship are actually in full-time employment three months after the cancellation of their training contract. One of the reasons here is that, particularly with traineeships, people come in at what is called the 'discounted wage rate' and quite often they actually perform to the level that they are offered a full-time job outside of the traineeship.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, I appreciate that. The focus here, though, is the capacity to add value to their interest in their profession by way of a formal qualification. The NCVET annual report in 2005



shows that, from what I recall reading, the completion rate in the Territory does not match those of Queensland and Western Australia, the other two resource states. Is that correct? Does that equate with your recollection of the NCVER, which you just quoted?

**Mr HASSED:** I cannot readily recall that particular report, but it is quite possible that would be the case because, as I referred to earlier, completion rates are generally higher for apprentices than trainees. Both Queensland and Western Australia have a higher proportion of trade apprentices than any other jurisdiction in Australia, particularly Western Australia.

**Mr MILLS:** So do Queensland and Western Australia include traineeships in their global number?

**Mr HASSED:** Having come out of the Queensland system and having been responsible for apprenticeships and traineeships for some time back there, we did include both apprenticeships and traineeships in the information that we fed into NCVER.

**Mr MILLS:** So would it be disaggregated in the NCVER annual report?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will allow Mr Hased to answer that, but these are questions about our budget estimates, not about the NCVER annual reports and how they may or may not aggregate their numbers, but I am happy to ...

**Mr MILLS:** Minister, I will respond to that. We are saying that we are tracking as well as the other states. The reports from the other states vary, from what I have just heard, and I want to know whether we are comparing apples with apples or not. NCVER has been cited as a reference. I know a bit about that report and I am making further enquiries so I know whether what we are being presented with is able to stand up to scrutiny.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Well, I believe it is. Mr Hased.

**Mr HASSED:** Again, I can only provide advice on the information that was relayed to me because, at one stage, I have to be honest, we were advised by NCVER that the completion rate for apprenticeships in the Northern Territory, and there is a publication, I believe, on the NCVER website, was around 80%. Now, I found that to be totally unrealistic. Really, I do not know of any jurisdiction that has a completion rate at 80% for apprenticeships. That is the reason I went back to NCVER to actually identify what they believe is around the national completion rate, and that is when they advised me it was around the 50% mark.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, sir. Related, a slightly different tack, though: if completion rates are sitting around the 50% mark and the question arises as a result of the data that is being collected that program delivery does not match the training requirement, can you tell me about any skills audits that are conducted, say, in remote communities so that training provision matches what that community has use for? Rather than just completing a training program and saying we have done one, but it does not match what their community can use.

**Mr HENDERSON:** That is a good question, member for Blain. It is certainly one that has been exercising mind as we have developed the Jobs Plan 3 initiative that is part of this budget. It is fair to say that in the past and for quite some time now, there has not been a very specific focus, particularly in remote areas, of actually linking the training that is being provided to the jobs that may be available either regionally or within a community.

So one of the focuses that we are putting on Jobs Plan 3, discussions that we are having, particularly with the Batchelor Institute, and I met with the board from Batchelor a few weeks ago, is to actually work at a whole of department level through where the Territory government is rolling out secondary education across seven communities now, and up to 13 or 15 communities over the next few years, getting students into school, getting them to complete either their NTCE or at Year 10, go into specific training programs, to work with individual communities, with either Batchelor or CDU to do a jobs audit in that community or region, doing a skills audit within that community of what skills people have, and in terms of the complexity nationally of how registered training organisations work with job placement providers that people are registered with, actually having a targeted and focused effort in terms of training people for jobs that are available and place those people into jobs.

The first community we are going to have this real focus and structured approach around this year is Yirrkala. There has not been that level of linkage before specifically. I have asked all parties to come to the table, through Mr Hassed, to have formal memoranda of understanding or agreement with DEST and DEWR so that we are working together. They fund the job placement providers and work systemically, community by community, in the way that you are talking about, but it does need all parties to come together. It needs the schools, communities, the training providers, predominantly in the bush, Batchelor, the job placement providers funded through the Commonwealth to come together and have a very real focus.

Another initiative that is part of Jobs Plan 3 this year is to hold an initial conference, maybe in the first instance annually but then biannually, where the major employers in the region outside of government employers, predominantly DEET and Health, but where we have industry which includes the mining industry, the timber industry on the Tiwi Islands, the pastoral industry, the horticulture industry in and around the Katherine region and tourism providers throughout our region, where we get those major players in and workshop what we do to improve training and employment in those industries across the Northern Territory. That has not been done before. That is part of Jobs Plan 3, and we are hoping to have the first significant seminar towards the end of this year pulling those major players together.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, minister. I trust you are referring to the community engagement plans that were described by the former minister where there were going to be contracts signed with the communities. That was announced nearly two years ago. We are still waiting for Yirrkala to have its signed. From your last correspondence to me, there will be sign-off in July. Is that still on track?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We are on track. Member for Blain, it is an extension to that, a natural progression. The community engagement plans were around improving secondary education outcomes. When I took carriage of the portfolio I asked our chief executive, of the 26-odd people who actually graduated with an NTCE 12 months ago from our remote communities, where those students were and what they were doing. Were they in employment; were they in further training; were they at university? Through the agency, those people had not been tracked.

We now have someone engaged in the agency to do that work and link up, because I have a very significant commitment that, whilst we are expanding the provision of secondary education in our remote communities and getting some success, we cannot let those people down.

**Mr MILLS:** No, I agree with you.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We have to work with them to transition them into a job.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, and we have the same objective, perhaps coming at it from different sides. If it has taken two years to get close to signing one agreement, how many people within the department are working on this project?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Again, structurally, and I am not trying to dodge the question, we are in the employment output group, and what I am talking about is an extension to those community partnerships. I suppose there is a link. Obviously it is complex, getting out onto communities, sitting down and negotiating. It is taking longer than I would have hoped. We are very close with Yirrkala. I will pass over to Ken Davies for the specific answer of how many people.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, that is all I am after: what sort of resourcing is behind this?

**Mr DAVIES:** There are two people allocated full-time within the Remote Services Policy area of DEET who are coordinating it. We have a consultant engaged on the ground in each of the communities that the community has chosen.

**Mr MILLS:** Sorry, stop there so I get it clear. In Yirrkala, Yuendumu, Borroloola, Ramingining and Maningrida, there is a consultant in each of those places?

**Mr DAVIES:** The community are in the process. They choose their own local consultant to work up their plan and the sorts of things they want to put on the table. We have an overarching independent consultant we are working with, who provides a brokering role between DEET and the communities. Then internally within DEET, we have two people working full-time on the

coordination of the project. Currently, we are in Yirrkala. We are in Borroloola, Ramingining, Maningrida and Yuendumu doing the preparatory work to start to gear up to do the formal negotiations.

**Mr MILLS:** Right, thank you for that. Minister, the linkage here is very direct; that being with the completion rates in traineeships and apprenticeships, if we want to make gains in remote communities, we must have real training that matches real economic opportunities. This process is interlinked, is that correct?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Absolutely.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay.

**Mr HENDERSON:** It is as per Jobs Plan 3 and the focus that I have put on it.

**Mr MILLS:** So if it has taken two years to get close to signing one, and with the Prime Minister's actions in the last few days, would I expect that there would be additional resourcing coming into this important area as a result?

**Mr HENDERSON:** In terms of the federal government's recent initiatives in the Northern Territory, that is still unfolding. I have not had, as minister for Education, any direct contact yet with the federal Education minister. I did write to her last Friday on a range of matters so I would anticipate and expect from the federal government's point of view that there would be significant efforts in this area. This is essentially policy that is unfolding at the moment. I offered to be available to the federal Education minister over the weekend to discuss these matters. For whatever reason, that offer has not been taken up so it is a work in progress.

We are all after the same outcomes here. We all want to see education, training linked to real work.

**Mr MILLS:** Sure. Thank you, minister.

**Mr HENDERSON:** In terms of the commitments I have made in wanting to enter into formal memoranda of agreement with Commonwealth agencies, that is work that is being progressed at the moment.

**Mr MILLS:** So you will agree with me that strategically this activity that we are speaking about now with its connection to training, with its connecting to community engagement, with its connection to the decisions of the Prime Minister is a very important plank in the move forward in the area that has been identified. Do you agree with me on that: that this particular activity is very important to the issues that have concerned us in the last little while?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I suppose it is really is a focus that we are putting on the very real outcomes that we are looking for here, which is improved attendance and education outcomes from our remote schools. They cannot be done in isolation of a job or further training or a university place at the end of it. One of the very real issues that we have, if you talk to any of the employers across our regional and remote areas, is that people from communities cannot be engaged because of very poor education outcomes. I know where you are going with this. The focus has been in terms of trying to improve the education outcomes, and the training and employment outcomes will follow as a result of that. The focussed effort has been in and around the education outcomes.

**Mr MILLS:** I appreciate that. Minister, I am mindful of our time and the use thereof. I asked do you agree that this is a strategic initiative of the department that commenced nearly two years ago and in the light of recent events has greater importance?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Very much so, and that is why under Jobs Plan 3 an additional \$2m worth of Territory government and Commonwealth government funding will address those specific training needs, so there is additional resourcing going in as a result of this budget.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. So if we have two people working in this area who have not quite achieved one - and I understand the complexity; it is not a criticism so we do not need to get defensive

there, but how important this is - agreement, do I anticipate that there is going to be additional resourcing that will result in more people being able to fast track this very important process?

**Mr HENDERSON:** When you say there are only two people ...

**Mr MILLS:** From your department.

**Mr HENDERSON:** ... there is very specific effort being put into these areas, particularly around improving attendance and education outcomes. Without the education outcomes, there will be no job outcomes.

**Mr MILLS:** We have been down that path.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will hand over to Ken Davies.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Blain, there are substantial resources going in and around, so the two people that I advised you are in place are actually coordinating a whole-of-department effort. The negotiating teams are made up of people like myself, the General Manager of Employment and Training, the General Manager of Remote School Services. We have been out to Yirrkala *in situ* three times. We are meeting with them later on today ...

**Mr MILLS:** When you say three times, over what period?

**Mr DAVIES:** Over about a two to three months period. We took a while to gear up around getting all the processes in place, getting the independent consultants engaged and setting up the parameters, but we anticipate we are going to move very quickly from Yirrkala to Ramingining to Borroloola. We have the negotiating teams appointed for both Ramingining and for Borroloola. The Regional Directors are playing an integral role, as are the school principals, and we are moving as quickly as we can, now that we have all things in place, to start the firm up the agreements.

**Mr MILLS:** In our agreement, I hope that with the impetus that has been gained by recent events that the work that has already occurred will result in significant gains in the next matter of weeks because it has taken two years. It is very important work, so thank you for that. I will leave it at that because there are so many other areas to cover and I appreciate that line of inquiry. Thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions? Member for Braitling.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I will be brief, being mindful of the time also. Minister, I am pleased to see that your policy is to match traineeships and apprenticeships with real jobs in the bush. That is something that the focus has not been on in the past, and I am pleased to see it. Your Workwear/Workgear subsidy, I take it apprentices cannot get that until they finish their probation period. Could we also have some indication of the take up rate from last year?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Before I get the specific details, you are correct. Apprentices have to complete the probation. It has been a successful initiative and recognises that in the first year of an apprenticeship, wages are not crash hot. Apprentices undertaking a skills shortage trade are eligible for a \$1000 bonus after three months of employment. Other apprentices and trainees are eligible for \$300 after three months and, from 4 April 2005, when the initiative commenced, to 20 April 2007, there have been 969 skills shortage bonuses of \$1000 each rolled out and 1755 other bonuses at \$300 each rolled out. That initiative continues in this budget.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Because we do have that high drop out rate, is there any recovery?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I do not think so. I think the money is gone.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Once it's gone, it's gone.

**Mr HENDERSON:** It really is, member for Braitling, recognition that the first year of an apprenticeship is pretty tough. I am aware of a lot of employers do the right thing and work with the apprentices and provide discount tools and what have you. They have capacity to buy equipment at discounted rates and make that available to the apprentices to use this money, so it

is certainly very welcome by those apprentices and trainees, but, no, we cannot recover the money if they fail to complete.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** We talked about the number of apprentices who have started, which is great. Can you give us figures on how the apprentices have started out in the remote areas?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We do have some of those numbers, more regionally based than remotely by community. I will just get them. Apprentice/Trainee commencements, if we look at the 2006 numbers: Alice Springs 453; Barkly 73; Darwin 1614; East Arnhem 131; Katherine 249; West Arnhem 63. That is a total of 2583 starts.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Could I ask if that could be tabled?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Well, I have given you the numbers.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I will wait for Hansard.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes. They are the numbers. I do not have their broken down to specific communities, but they are the regions.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, I am very pleased to have received your letter yesterday saying that you increased ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, that was a good outcome, so thank you for bringing that to our attention.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Perhaps we can inform the member for Blain because I am sure he will be interested.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes. In terms of the costs and allowances for apprentices who actually have to travel interstate to undertake units of training, that has increased, from my memory, it is ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** \$143 to \$220 and it applies also to those going intrastate.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I believe that affects around 160 people a year so, member for Braitling, thank you for bringing that to our attention.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It is significant for someone who is on \$5 an hour or something like that.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Absolutely.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Mr Chairman, that is all for now.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. Unless there are further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

### **Output 1.2 – Regulation of Occupational Health and Safety**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will now proceed to Output 1.2 - Regulation of Occupational Health and Safety. Member for Blain.

**Mr MILLS:** Mr Chairman, does the move of the Mining and Petroleum Compliance section of the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries into DEET fall into this output group?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, it does.

**Mr MILLS:** Flowing from this move, has service to industry improved?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Mr Chairman, we are currently working through, as you would be aware, a consultative process with industry as to how the amalgamation and integration of the mine safety officers into NT WorkSafe will take place. We have engaged consultants that have been working with various industry groups and unions at a pretty hectic pace, looking at contemporary practice around Australia for mine safety management. There have been a number of workshops held. We have a draft report of the outcomes with the people and groups who have been participating in

that consultation. Services have not improved yet because we have not formally integrated those people into WorkSafe NT, and we have not completed the consultancy and the report in terms of what are contemporary practices across Australia and what legislative requirements may be required to move towards that integration.

**Mr MILLS:** The decision to move the compliance section from DPIFM to DEET, was that driven by issues of non-compliance and problems within the target industry?

**Mr HENDERSON:** It was a policy decision that was taken by Cabinet to integrate electrical safety and mine management safety into WorkSafe NT so there would be a whole-of-government approach and a single agency responsible for occupational health and safety across all industries in the Northern Territory. That was a policy decision that was taken and one that I, as minister, am implementing.

**Mr MILLS:** When you describe it as a policy decision, you are therefore saying it is not in response to a problem on the ground as much as it satisfies ideological positioning? I do not understand what you mean by it is a policy decision. Could you unpack that for me so I understand what drives this if it is not safety outcomes?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Well, obviously, safety outcomes do drive it and having a single agency primarily focussed on improving occupational health and safety outcomes across the Northern Territory amongst all industries and work groups, having a single agency with a primary focus on lifting the bar on occupational health and safety has to be a much better strategic focus of government than having a fragmented approach across a number of departmental agencies.

**Mr MILLS:** But, minister, you have just advised us that it was not driven by problems in the host industry group. That does not make sense then. You say you want to raise the bar and there were not any problems in place, so why make the change?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Look, I would appreciate that you do not put words in to my mouth, member for Blain. In terms of are there any problems in any industry sector, one fatality is one fatality too many. One injury is one injury too many.

**Mr MILLS:** I agree. We are talking about the mining and petroleum ...

**Mr KIELY:** Terry, would you stop interrupting?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Absolutely. In regard to lifting the bar, having a very specific and accountable focus within government for improving occupational health and safety regimes across all industries in the Northern Territory and having accountability with one place in government and one minister in government, it was determined that a specific and discrete focus is best practice in achieving the outcomes, which is improving occupational health and safety in all industries across the Northern Territory, not just in the mining sector.

**Mr MILLS:** I appreciate that explanation. It still does not help me understand. You described it as a policy decision. If we are talking about this shift occurring in response to problems in the host industry, the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries had a compliance section looking after the mining industry. I understand that there had not been any electrical fatality within that industry for 36 years or thereabouts. It will now be administered by WorkSafe; programs administered by WorkSafe. What is the record there?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Member for Blain, there have been fatalities in the mining industry.

**Mr MILLS:** Electrical?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Well, there have been fatalities in the mining industry. We had electrical safety as part of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, we had mining safety in the Department of Mines, and then we had NT WorkSafe that covered all other industries. I do not understand what you do not understand about the policy imperative that was determined by Cabinet of bringing accountability for improving occupational health and safety across all industries in the Northern Territory under one government agency under one minister as occurs in most other states in Australia.

The policy objective to improve outcomes is improving focus and accountability. I don't see how that policy decision can be questioned because it is logical and sustainable. It certainly provides clarity, focus and accountability for the very real responsibility that we have as legislators, that industry has in its duty of care for its employees and employees have as a responsibility of working safely in any work place. It is logical that all of those accountabilities come under one agency and under one minister. To imply that the mining industry has not had its share of injuries and fatalities is wrong.

**Mr MILLS:** It is or it is not a response to problems under the pre-existing arrangement that was supervised by the *Mining Management Act*? Is this change occurring because there are problems?

**Mr HENDERSON:** When we make public the consultant's review of what is contemporary practice - not best practice because in our jurisdiction with our capacity and resourcing, what is contemporary practice across Australia in mine management safety, with the structure of the legislation that we have to support improved occupational health and safety outcomes in mine sites – you will see that we have significant deficiencies in the way our legislation is structured to support the outcomes that we all want.

It is not nirvana as it is. We do not have injury- and fatality-free work places in mines. The policy objective driving the government's decision to amalgamate is to provide accountability and a core area of focus across government for improving occupational health and safety. I am sure that when you read the consultant's report that has been very much workshopped and worked through with not only peak industry associations, but individual mining companies, you will see that we have deficits in our current legislation.

**Mr MILLS:** Minister, the title of this report?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I do not know that we have given it a specific title. John Hassed.

**Mr HASSED:** The consultants who undertook the review are Shaw Idea, and it is a review of the mine safety/work health legislation.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. When do I expect to do as the minister has suggested, have a read of it and then understand? When will I have that opportunity?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We will just get the timeframe. We are currently working on it. As I said, the draft copy of the report is with the people who have been working on it. I am not going to provide a specific date because the report will have to go to Cabinet. Cabinet is going to make decisions as a result of recommendations that I will be taking in around July/August I hope. I am not going to be definitive because Cabinet may have significant issues and questions that require the report to bounce backwards and forwards for a while.

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

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Just raising the question I flagged earlier about the number of assaults upon teachers and the policy of the department to assist. How many have we had? I suppose you can't ensure they don't happen, but when they do happen, what protection is given to the teachers?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will defer to the Chairman. It is specifically a school issues rather than a Work Health issue, but I can see the link. We will deal with it now. Member for Braitling, in taking on the portfolio, one of the first things I did, as you would expect, was to quickly meet with all the major associations and groups in and around education, including the Teachers Union, the Principals Association, school councils, the non-government sector, the Catholic Education Office, Independent Schools Associations and other peak bodies.

One of the issues that came through as a significant issue was violence in schools and how the department, at a policy level as opposed to an individual school level, dealt with the issue. A significant body of work has been done, and I will table this document that I released just a few weeks ago. *Safe Schools NT* is the official code of behaviour for students, parents and for teachers in our schools. It is very explicit. I will table it. I said at the time of the launch, and it is

explicit in the document, that every teacher and every student is entitled to a safe school and no violence in the schools.

I was very concerned as a minister about assaults on teachers by adults. We all understand and expect that things are going to go off the rails with students from time to time. Although student assaults on teachers are unacceptable, there is a different level of culpability when you are talking about parents, guardians, adults who come onto school grounds and assault a teacher. Now explicitly in this policy, in all instances now, complaints will go to police. No ifs no buts; complaints will go to police. The police will obviously determine whether charges are going to be laid.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Is that with students as well?

**Mr HENDERSON:** With students, where appropriate, and it depends on the scale of the assault, but specifically for students, any assaults on teachers are unacceptable. Within the code, it is a requirement now for the principal to not only work with the student, but to bring the parents or guardians in. If suspension is required, it is required. If the assault is significant, there will be a suspension period applied. Then there will be a specific negotiated and documented re-introduction into the school for that student. I have requested from the department that not only the principal sign off on that, but the teacher who has been assaulted also signs off on it.

The intimidation of teachers in the classroom and the anxiety that teachers may have in terms of students re-entering the classrooms are issues that have to be resolved in the best interests of the teacher and the rest of the class. So it is ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Is there an increase in the number of instances or is it only because we get a bit more media attention?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I do not know whether there is an increase. I might hand over to Mr Glasby, but some of the examples that came to me, and I am not being critical of people here, indicated that we do need to make a very clear statement that it is unacceptable. If parents enter school grounds with the intent of assaulting a teacher, police will be called - no ifs, no buts. I have asked for the department, as a result of this code of behaviour, to provide a flow chart for every principal that outlines very clearly that if the assault is from a parent or a student, who to contact and what to do, and what level of support those principals and teachers can expect from the department, from legal services and what have you in supporting them in dealing with that assault.

Whether there has been an increase in the number of assaults, I am not aware that there has, but I hand over to Mr John Glasby, who is the Executive Director of Schools North.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** If we could get some indication.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Just before you say anything, Mr Glasby, are you tabling that report, minister?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, I table it.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Sorry, Mr Glasby, please continue.

**Mr GLASBY:** Member for Braitling, this issue was raised by the member of Blain last year and some data was tabled that showed an increase in the incidence of violence in schools rose from 12 incidents to 51 incidents in 2005-06. That data was collected from DCIS figures provided through compensation claims, although not all of these incidents resulted in compensation claims.

The incidents, we believe, were part of a strategy for us to focus on, safety in schools and particularly on the safety of our staff. The number of incidents dropped from in 51 in 2005-06 to 32, which is our latest data, for 2006-07. So there has been a decrease, but there are a number of different ways of looking at this, too.

For example, we also collect data around critical incidents in schools, which does not just relate to violence in schools, but it might relate to reporting of break-ins in communities or motor vehicle incidents and the like. So there is a range of data we have, but I think the figure that you want probably is 32, and that shows a decrease.



**Mrs BRAHAM:** Do you think there is a lack of reporting or your new policy is such that they must be reported? Is it mandatory to report it?

**Mr GLASBY:** I think the increase from 28 to 51 in 2004-05 demonstrates that there is increasingly a very strong focus on the security and safety of staff in our schools, and we have been encouraging the reporting of that data, and so I think those numbers that show an increase in 2005-06 show that, but I also think that increased focus on staff security and staff safety possibly also led to the decrease in numbers.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, the concern is that staff will not report, it is kept internally within the school, whereas you are saying it should be mandatory to report it to police?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Certainly where an adult assaults a teacher, and I give another specific ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** And what about a teenager?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Well, depending on the severity of the assault. There has got to be some flexibility depending on the category, but what I am saying very strongly is that if it is a significant and serious assault in terms of a student, the police should be called. It is the definition around those. We have school based police as well, of course. Where an adult is involved, and you see news flashes from the department, it does not happen very regularly, but where it does, it is unacceptable and we need to get the message out, and we are doing it through the *Safe Schools* policy, that if you walk on to a school with the intention of assaulting a teacher, and an assault occurs, police will be called and charges will be laid if appropriate, and you will face the courts.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Mr Chairman, that is good news, and we are looking forward next year to getting an update on what has happened.

**Mr MILLS:** Mr Chairman, that issue has been raised and I intended raising these matters later. Would it be useful to deal with it now, talking about the Code of Conduct and the like?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Having let the cat out of the bag so to speak, I am happy to take those now, but I will defer to the Chair.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If everyone is agreeable, I am happy to let that happen. Do you have many questions, member for Blain?

**Mr MILLS:** No, my questions will be short and sharp, but the answers might not be.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** My reason for asking is that I was going to call a short recess, but we can do that after your questions.

**Mr MILLS:** All right. Our reward will be a break shortly.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will try to provide short, sharp answers.

**Mr MILLS:** Now the Code of Conduct, no one will disagree with that. It came across my desk a week ago. It reminded me of a very similar document of some years back, and that was raised by a former Education minister. I remember it being referred to by minister Lugg, and received a scathing comment from a very cynical shadow minister for Education, accusing it of being fine, but where is the resourcing, what is going to substantiate the desires to have people adhere to a Code of Conduct? What is it behind it?

**Mr KIELY:** Are you asking the minister to comment on minister Lugg's Code of Conduct or his own?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Sanderson, please. If the minister objects to the question, then I will deal with that.

**Mr MILLS:** Just follow along, member for Sanderson, and it will all be clear.

**Mr KIELY:** That will be a change.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Blain, member for Sanderson, can we just let the minister answer, thank you, and stop the cross-chatter. Thanks very much, minister.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Certainly, I can say, in regards to resourcing, and I am sure if we were to look back to minister Lugg's time, we will see in the answers I am about to provide a significant increase in resources to assist schools in terms of managing behaviour and violence in schools. We have Behaviour Advisory Services employing eight behaviour advisory teachers in the Northern Territory, at a budget figure of \$778 800. We have 11 Wellbeing Officers Northern Territory-wide, who were introduced as part of our government's reforms at a cost of just over \$1m. We have Alternative Education Provision employing five staff in Darwin, Palmerston and Katherine, at a cost of nearly \$480 000.

As a government, we introduced school counsellors to all senior schools across the Northern Territory to assist and work through difficulties that students may have. We have 19 school counsellors across the Northern Territory now that would not have been there in Mr Lugg's day at a cost of \$1.834m.

The policy is backed up by the significant investment that this government has made in terms of supporting teachers and schools in dealing with students who do have behaviour management problems. I am not saying that there are not problems in schools, there are, but there are specific people and programs allocated. In terms of assaults by adults on teachers, there is a very clear commitment from government that in each and every case, police will be called.

**Mr MILLS:** Are these positions that you described new positions?

**Mr HENDERSON:** They have been in place for some years now. I know the school counsellor positions they were about three years ago, the behavioural advisory teachers, part of the extra 100. A lot of these are new positions. The 19 school counsellors are new positions as of three years ago.

**Mr MILLS:** How many people in total in what you have described there?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Let me add them up. I would say 43, reading here.

**Mr MILLS:** Nearly half of those are new positions, is that correct?

**Mr HENDERSON:** They are new positions since we came to government, yes.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. This initiative to describe a code of conduct is new, though?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Very much so. In terms of having very explicit codes of conducts and very explicit requirements in regard to how we deal with assaults against teachers from students and adults, it is a lot more comprehensive and specific.

**Mr MILLS:** How many adults have been charged with assault on a teacher?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Like I say, the code was only endorsed and established as policy three weeks ago. We are requiring, by the end of this year, all schools to put in place specific plans at a school level about how they are going to implement this policy in the schools. School councils and principals will obviously have to come up with a specific school plan. In terms of how many assaults on teachers have been referred to the police, I do not know we have that number here. Just bear with me for a minute.

In the last 12 to 18 months, the advice is that there have been two formal reports to police regarding adult assaults on teachers.

**Mr MILLS:** I might investigate that later. How many ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** These have resulted in court cases, so there may have been others that have been reported to police, school-based constables and after investigation, charges have not been laid that have led to a court appearance, but these two specifically led to court appearances.

**Mr MILLS:** You just told me that others have occurred. Does that information exist within the department?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will let Mr Glasby answer that specific question.

**Mr GLASBY:** Member for Blain, it would be the case that in consultation with the general managers and principals, on receiving information of suspensions or critical incidents in schools, there would be some discussion about the process. At the end of the day, police may or may not decide to charge a person; the person who has been assaulted may or may not decide to go ahead with a complaint to police. In that sense, the data is difficult for us to collect.

**Mr MILLS:** A dispute register was mentioned in a previous question. Does a dispute register exist within the department in this regard?

**Mr GLASBY:** No.

**Mr MILLS:** Why not?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Because it is a critical incident. Mr Glasby.

**Mr GLASBY:** When you talk about a dispute register, you mean?

**Mr MILLS:** Well, if this is an area of concern that needs to be assessed in the interests of teachers and students, surely the collection of this data in one place would assist in policy development so that we can ensure we have the improvements that we desire.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Before handing over to Mr Glasby, I advise that assaults and critical incidents are required to be reported. The department obviously collects those figures. However, a dispute is somewhat different from a critical incident, which is an assault. I defer to Mr Glasby.

**Mr MILLS:** All right. Critical incident register then.

**Mr GLASBY:** My apologies; I misunderstood the question. It is mandatory for principals to report critical incidents to us. This year, until May, we had 50 incidents recorded, but not all of those would be violence in schools. They would be a range of critical incidents from a motor vehicle accident to assault by a student, assault arising from a teacher intervening in a fight or whatever. So there are 50 incidents reported to us in that sense.

**Mr MILLS:** Fifty. Okay.

**Mr GLASBY:** And that is a decrease of one.

**Mr MILLS:** Good to hear. How many students have assaulted a teacher in the last year?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Again, before I hand over to Mr Glasby, there is a difference in terminology between suspensions and expulsions. Under the *Education Act*, it is only the minister who can expel a student from the school system in the Northern Territory, but suspensions occur at the school levels.

**Mr MILLS:** So that we are working with clear definitions, the minister can expel a student from a school so they must register at another school. There is a difference. You can have expulsion from the system, but you can demand their removal from that school and they have to lodge a registration at another school.

**Mr HENDERSON:** No. Under the act, my understanding is the minister ultimately, from the system, and that has only occurred once in the Northern Territory under the *Education Act*. In terms of suspensions of students and transfers of students possibly between schools, they do not come to my desk; they are handled internally.

**Mr GLASBY:** Principals suspend and under the act, they are the only people who can readmit a student. The minister is the only person who can expel a student. Once a student is expelled, they can re-enrol through NTOEC and through the private system, non-government schools.

**Mr MILLS:** If expelled, can that student come back into the system?

**Mr GLASBY:** We can take that question on notice and provide an answer shortly.

**Mr HENDERSON:** My understanding, member for Blain, because I have asked this question, is that expulsion under the act has only occurred once since the act was in place. That was many years ago.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Blain, do you want to put it on notice?

**Mr MILLS:** Certainly, I will put that on notice.

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#### **Question on Notice 4.2**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Can I ask you to restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard*?

**Mr MILLS:** If a student is expelled from the system, as the minister refers to it, can the same student apply for re-entry into the system?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, we will have to get Legal Services to look at the act.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate that question number 4.2.

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**Mr MILLS:** I will not go any further with that, thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No further questions? That concludes consideration of the Output Group, Regulations of Occupational Health and Safety. In the interests of health and safety, we will have a five minute recess.

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The committee suspended

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We are about to head into Output Group 2.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Before we do, I have some additional information to provide.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay, perhaps we can do that now and that will also give people time to wander in. Minister, thank you.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Mr Chairman, I am not sure whether this was formally taken on notice, but we said we would get back with the number of formal complaints registered in DEET regarding apprentices and trainees. In terms of formal complaints registered with DEET, in 2004, there was one formal complaint lodged by an apprentice. In 2005, there was one formal complaint lodged by an employer. In 2006, there was one formal complaint lodged by a trainee. In 2007 to date, there have been no formal complaints lodged through the formal complaints process in DEET.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 2 – GOVERNMENT EDUCATION Output 2.1 – Preschool Education**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. We will proceed to consider Output Group 2, commencing with Output 2.1 - Preschool Education.

**Mr MILLS:** We do not do government education as a whole and then ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, it is broken down output by output within the group.

**Mr MILLS:** All right. I have questions regarding preschool, but in the interests of time, I will let that go. Some of them may be touched on further along.

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

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Just quickly if I could, Mr Chairman. Early entry across the Territory has caused a drop in preschool numbers and there have been a lot of staffing reductions in preschools because of that. I am asking if early entry is implemented right across the Territory now, or is it still being trialled in certain schools? To cater for the reduction in preschool and the fact that preschools are losing staff, what age can children now enter preschool? Is there any proposal to change that?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We have been working very hard in expanding the early age of entry trial. It is still a trial that is being expanded to, I think, 60-odd schools across the Northern Territory.

**Mr DAVIES:** Sixty schools.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Sixty schools across the Northern Territory, so it is not mandatory in every school, but we are expanding that trial. A lot of the evidence to date is that it has been very successful where it has been trialled and was well supported by the schools that have been part of that trial to date. I can speak, as well as minister, as the member for Wanguri. I think Wanguri was one of the first schools involved in the trial and there was a fair amount of apprehension amongst the teachers initially. It certainly has been embraced. When you talk to the Transition and Year 1 teachers, they say that it has been very beneficial in terms of those very young children's readiness to participate in a classroom setting. To support that early age of entry trial, I formally launched earlier this year, a couple of months ago, a resource kit for teachers at that level to enable them to structure programs around the early age of entry trial.

Whether it has led to a real decrease in preschool numbers across the Northern Territory is not an issue that has been raised with me. I might hand over to Ken Davies to provide further information on that.

**Mr DAVIES:** Thank you, minister. To answer your question, member for Braitling, students are able to access the preschool program at three-and-a-half years of age. As the minister has already said, there is resounding support for the program in the Transition year, with all the students starting together who are turning five by 30 June. Given that means students are coming out of preschool who would normally be staying there for longer periods, we have allowed the preschool enrolments to move from four years of age in the urban context to three-and-a-half years of age.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** At the beginning of the year?

**Mr DAVIES:** At the beginning of the year, so three-and-a-half years of age as long as long as they are turning four by 30 June. That is the way that the program is working.

In Alice Springs, I am aware that there have been a couple of schools that have had some issues around all their students who are turning five by 30 June moving up into preschool programs at the start of the school year and leaving less in the preschool. What we have been encouraging those schools to do is to make sure they are engaging with parents to get kids in on their wait list, and to start to engage them so that they can sustain the staffing numbers that they have in their preschools.

Braitling, for instance, has negotiated some additional funding so that they can manage during this transition period. It certainly has not been a general response across the board where preschools are turning around saying we are losing staff. The enrolments have been managed at the local level and they're ramping up their wait lists. In fact, at the school that the minister just mentioned, the preschool numbers have grown from a one teacher unit to a two and a half teacher unit just by take up.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** We have the examples where it has done the reverse because of this, but perhaps there will be catch up eventually. Minister, how many identified preschools do we have in remote communities?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Whilst officials are looking to see if we have that information at hand, obviously through the Rex Wild-Pat Anderson report that is one of the key recommendations in

expanding that to all remote communities, that from the age of three, getting those students into preschools. We will have to take that question on notice.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Yes, that is fine. Can we have that on notice, Mr Chairman?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Braitling, can you restate the question?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** My question was how many designated preschools are there in remote communities?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will be handing it over to Mr Davies who might have some more information.

**Mr DAVIES:** I can provide a partial answer. All of our larger remote schools, all of our CECs, the Yuendumu, the Ramingining, the Shepherds all have properly designated preschool programs. We have mobile preschool programs in the Katherine region and on the eastern side of the highway in Alice Springs. What we can do is build a picture for you of what we have. There are some gaps.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Yes, thanks very much, that will be good.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No need for that on notice then? Do you have further questions?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** They are going to provide that information for us.

**Mr MILLS:** Just in response, some of the answers have given rise to the need to ask this question. Do I understand that the estimate for attendance of preschool is likely to be more or less in 2006-07?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will hand over to Mr Davies to answer that.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Blain, the estimate certainly is for more and as we are ramping up the mobile preschool projects as well, we anticipate, particularly in our remotes, that we are engaging more and more young indigenous children in preschool programs. I need to emphasise that in remote communities, preschool students have always been able to access the education programs, where there is a preschool, at three years of age providing they are accompanied by a parent or a guardian.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. Has the allocation for the preschool component increased or decreased in this budget?

**Mr DAVIES:** The average cost per student has decreased, member for Blain. Looking at the projections, the *per capita* cost has decreased but that will be because there are increasing numbers of students accessing the program, which means that when you divide the total cost of the program by the increasing numbers, the *per capita* cost comes down.

**Mr MILLS:** That is a concern when you factor in inflation rates alongside of that. It is a significant figure to say you are going to have more students and the cost per student in preschool is going to decrease when you have already referred to the increasing demands of having younger children in the system. Minister, would you not be concerned that the allocation per student with increasingly younger students is going to place additional demand and there is reduced resourcing? Is that concerning to you?

**Mr HENDERSON:** There is some more information. At the top level the allocation for preschool education as opposed to the average cost per student, but obviously within any system there is an overall cost that has to be absorbed in terms of running out the program, and the more children you have in the program, you obviously spread those costs further. Mr Davies has further information on the overall budget allocated to preschool education.

**Mr DAVIES:** The 2006-07 estimate was \$20.998m. The 2007-08 Budget is in fact \$21.258m, which is a plus of \$260 000. That is the variation in the budget total. As I said, when you have an

increase in student numbers and that is divided into the total allocation in a *per capita*, the *per capita* allocation can come down because you have more students in the cohort.

**Mr MILLS:** I appreciate that, but the students that are being referred to here are increasingly younger. They are babies, in a sense, three-and-a-half year olds, coming into the system. Surely they are going to require additional resources, not less.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We have taken a significant policy initiative and committed significant funding in terms of this early age of entry trial. The Commonwealth government only provides funding under the Grants Commission to the states in terms of education from compulsory school age. Introducing and expanding this program is all being funded through Territory government funding. One of the issues that is going to have to be addressed, and certainly in discussions with the non-government sector that run schools out in remote areas, is a requirement to go back to the Commonwealth, particularly in light of the Pat Anderson and Rex Wild report that recommends this programme be rolled out to all remote schools, we are going to need significant investment from the Commonwealth government to support that recommendation because it is not funded through the current Grants Commission formulae.

**Mr MILLS:** I will leave that there.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any further questions on Output 2.1? That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

## Output 2.2 – Primary Education

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output 2.2 - Primary Education.

**Mr MILLS:** I would like to focus attention for a time on financial accountability within primary schools in particular. The reports that I am receiving, and you can tell me whether this is the case, that the allocation for relief teachers has some very tight parameters and that is putting additional pressure in schools across the Territory. Can you describe the changes in the area of the allocation relief teachers in primary schools?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Just before I hand over to Mr Glasby for very explicit advice, the issue here is really requiring not only our primary schools, but also middle and senior schools to be much more accountable for the budgets that are allocated to those schools on an annual basis. It is all part of an accountability and performance improvement across all our schools.

Schools have to be more accountable. Schools are funded to the tune of 6.5 relief days per year per teacher. That budget has been devolved to schools and schools have been asked to manage their relief allocation within the budget. What the department has said is that if there are exceptional circumstances as to why that cannot be accommodated within the budget, of course through DEET and the financial services area, those requests will be considered. DEET is not doing anything other than asking the schools to manage within their budget allocation, however exceptional circumstances will be considered.

**Mr MILLS:** Perhaps in the answer, then, in terms of efficiency, you could describe the exceptional circumstances whereby a school may make the request.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will defer to Mr Glasby, but if there was a 'flu epidemic at school that knocked half the teachers, those sorts of issues will obviously be considered. As I said, schools are funded at 6.5 days per year per teacher, which, when you look at the average amount of sick leave that is taken in the work place, is a pretty fair allocation. Mr Glasby will have further details.

**Mr GLASBY:** Member for Blain, the changes, as the minister described, are all about improving accountability in schools of public money. Under the previous arrangements, principals and school leaders could use a number of different strategies for paying for relief teachers. What that did mean there was no accountability for managing that budget at all because they could simply come back to the department when they had run out of dollars. So in approving leave of any shape or form, and bearing in mind the sick leave, there is no doubt that if a person is sick they take sick leave, but there are other forms of leave that school principals could approve and there was no built-in accountability to our system around that so when they ran out of their dollars, they would come back to the department and we would top them up.

What we have been asking principals to do is to manage that money far more carefully, to be much more accountable for those dollars, and, as the minister described, in that management, if there is a case where schools have managed their funds appropriately but there has been some major 'flu epidemic or a particular set of circumstances around an age demographic perhaps, if they were to come back to the department through their general manager and put a case that they simply need to be topped up, then that safety net is there and in place and schools are guaranteed that the money will be topped up.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. Do I presume, therefore, that as a result of this measure, some schools have been wasteful and that money has gone astray?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Again, before handing over to Mr Glasby, this was a department decision, but in terms of understanding that, there was certainly information to like schools of significant discrepancies in regard to relief teacher funding. Mr Glasby.

**Mr GLASBY:** The principals work within the appropriate guidelines, but there is always room to be more careful. That is simply what we are asking principals to do, perhaps to be a bit more thoughtful about how they allocate leave around long service leave and those sorts of things, around short-term leave, applying the guidelines that do exist a bit more critically, working with their staff around this much more and being far more accountable for those dollars with their staff than has been the case in the past.

**Mr MILLS:** When you say that principals have worked within the previous framework, does that mean that some of them have tested the limits and that has raised some alarm bells and you need to tighten it up because there has been waste?

**Mr GLASBY:** Principals have worked within those guidelines. There are perhaps instances where they could have been more careful, but by being far more explicit around what is acceptable and what is not, it makes it much clearer. All we have simply done around that is that we have asked our principals to be far more accountable for these dollars, to work with their staff around this, to develop far more accountable measures for the allocation of relief teachers.

**Mr MILLS:** The 6.5 days per teacher, is that just for sick leave or is it for professional development?

**Mr GLASBY:** There are some notional figures within the 6.5 days, which include some amount for professional learning as well as for sick leave. Under the new guidelines, it is possible for schools to consider those professional learning days as part of their total budget and if there is a particular need that might arise during the course of the year where there is a particular strategy that they wish to implement, then they may use part of their budget to supplement those 6.5 days. In addition to that, schools receive four days a year for professional learning, whole school days. Also, whilst it is not something that we utilise formally, during the 12 weeks there is the stand down period. There are already a number of teachers and principals who access that time for professional learning purposes.

**Mr MILLS:** Can you describe for me the means whereby a school can make a request of the CEO of the department for additional funding, not the circumstances that would give rise to it, but how that would take place? What is the process whereby that request can be made?

**Mr GLASBY:** There would be an initial discussion with the General Manager Schools or their regional director.

**Mr MILLS:** Who would have that discussion? The principal and the general manager?

**Mr GLASBY:** The principal would have that discussion. As is currently the case for a range of financial discussions around these sorts of matters, they would have a discussion with their schools manager. If the school's manager was of the view, in discussion with the school principal, that there was a case, or if they required some supporting evidence, we would use our Financial Services area to perhaps audit the books or have a look at the accounts so that we could be comfortable with the fact that additional sources were being sought appropriately. We would work with our Financial Services area and there would be discussion around that.



**Mr MILLS:** We have spent a fair time on that. If we now move to a related area, there are schools that through one means or another, whether its fundraising endeavours or they, as a community, decide on a particular objective, the school council can make savings in a year. Can they transfer or carry over those savings into the next year?

**Mr GLASBY:** Under the current guidelines, they can carry those savings forward. Under the guidelines, we provide four grants a year. There is a 40% and then 10% in semester one, and 40% and 10% in semester two. Schools receive those dollars. They formulate a budget in consultation with their school council. Some school councils, for example, have finance subcommittees, depending on the location and the size of the school and so forth. In developing that budget, there may be scope for schools to look to save some dollars for particular projects. For those projects, there need to be, once again, discussion with the schools manager because the view that we have formed is that those dollars are provided to schools for that financial year and for the teaching and learning of students in that financial year.

There is the view that schools may wish to save a portion of that money for the purposes of a particular teaching and learning project or some particular piece of equipment that might support their school. Having received the reassurance that the money has been properly accounted for, schools can then roll that money over into the following year. There is no requirement for them, as is the case in the public sector to hand that money back. It is retained by the school council.

**Mr MILLS:** If it is retained by the school council, is there any impact upon the grant systems that affect the next year? If they have carried over savings which they lodge in the next year, is there some adverse impact upon the amount of money that then flows to that school?

**Mr GLASBY:** No.

**Mr MILLS:** None at all? That is different from what I have heard, advice has come to me, so I will investigate that further.

When you gave the numbers, minister, of how many are in the department, as opposed to in the schools - teachers, executive teachers and the like – how many of those who work in your department have teaching qualifications?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I would have thought there would be a fair number of people in the admin area who would have teaching qualifications as well. I will pass that over to Sharron Noske, Deputy CE, Planning and Resources.

**Ms NOSKE:** There are 197 staff who would primarily be working in Teaching, Learning and Standards and Student Services, and then other various members of staff who also hold teaching qualifications apart from that.

**Mr MILLS:** So out of the total number, I do not think I have it here.

**Mr HENDERSON:** 3700 or whatever it is.

**Mr MILLS:** You have 926 administrative, and I was led to believe that they are those who work in administration roles within the department itself. You are saying that a couple hundred of those have teaching qualifications?

**Ms NOSKE:** Sorry, could you say that again?

**Mr MILLS:** Earlier on I got the staff numbers, and I was told that the top line, administrative, is 926. In those 926 there are a couple hundred of those who have teaching qualifications?

**Ms NOSKE:** No. I will just have to get some exact information.

**Mr HENDERSON:** As a point of clarification, there would be, I would imagine, a number of people who would have teaching qualifications like our Chief Executive, but not necessarily currently have teacher registration.

**Mr MILLS:** Oh yes, qualifications is what I am asking for, not a license to teach.

**Mr HENDERSON:** How we would track that across the agency, I will take some advice.

**Ms NOSKE:** The 926 includes school-based administrative staff as well.

**Mr MILLS:** Oh, I thought it might.

**Ms NOSKE:** Not PET teachers; they would be in a line of executive teachers.

**Mr MILLS:** So what I thought I had before is not the case. I have got an idea of the front line, which is quite clear in education, but how many in the back line? How many in the department itself who are providing support to those on the front line?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will just get some advice on that.

**Ms NOSKE:** Teachers and executive teachers in school, approximate full-time equivalents is 2164; other staff in school, 1110; in Student Services there are 88; in Teaching, Learning and Standards there are around 95. The two last categories, the Teaching, Learning and Standards and Student Services, a fairly large proportion of those will be executive teachers who hold teacher qualifications. We would also have people in various administrative roles who have teaching qualifications as well. I do not have that broken down.

**Mr MILLS:** No, I did not expect you to pull it out. I was interested to know what numbers there were. The reason is if we are encouraging those who have, say, in deputy principal positions or in school leadership positions on the front line, it has been reported to me, and I have observed this, that someone from the department comes out to fill a leadership position in a school, from out of the department into the school system, to top up the administrative problem of having a missing leadership role. I would have thought it would be a better strategic decision in longer term interests of encouraging leadership within our schools to bring up deputies rather than parachute someone in from the department. That is really the point of it. I am trying to get a sharp and shiny question around that, but I am wondering ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** Struggling on the question. There are a few comments that can be made.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay, I will paint the scenario. Out there on the front line where it really happens in terms of interface with kids in education, there are those we are encouraging to come up through the leadership ranks. Then there is an administrative problem, a couple of principals become crook for one reason or another and out of circulation. The problem can be solved creatively by having some of those who are aspiring leaders to move up to those positions and solve it that way in the interests of strengthening leadership capacity or you can make a nice tidy decision and parachute someone from the department straight in, which makes it nice and easy to organise but you do not strengthen your leadership capacity.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will just pass over to our CE. She can make some comments about leadership development in our schools.

**Ms BANKS:** What we are wanting within the department is to build capacity and to maximise what we can achieve from each of our employees. There is no doubt that a range of experience adds to people's background experience and develops understanding of various contexts, which I think enriches their capacity to lead.

There are opportunities. I believe the merit capacity of all of our people, no matter where they are working in the organisation, needs to be looked at in terms of their skills set, not just their basic background experience. Our positions are all based on merit, although according to public sector standards, we are able to appoint for short-term positions by expression of interest or I have the capacity to tap someone on the shoulder in the short term.

Our policy is that generally it is an expression of interest, or in the short term if there is an emergency, and I understand you are probably referring to several scenarios during the last semester where, owing to somebody's emergency health issues, we were forced to make some pretty quick decisions, and providing people with different opportunities to demonstrate whether they are able to perform in certain roles is an opportunity that can come forward. I strongly support that and I support it as a two-way process. We have people who have been in school leadership positions who are now in the central office and *vice versa*. I think it is healthy for the organisation.

**Mr MILLS:** With respect, I felt there was an opportunity missed, that being you had a secondary deputy become the acting principal of a primary school, a primary principal becomes the acting principal of a high school and there are deputies behind all of those moves who had the opportunity to set up and it becomes administratively easy to take someone from the system and put them in it. It is tidy for the department, but I think an opportunity was missed to strengthen those who were in the second rank. How do you respond to that?

**Mr HENDERSON:** With all due respect, we are on dangerous ground here. We are obviously talking about specific schools and specific issues. I do not think Estimates is the appropriate place to be referring to specific schools and specific allocation of staff. I just do not think this is appropriate. Generally, our CE has explained her philosophies in terms of leadership development, but we know what you are talking about, member for Blain, and I do not think canvassing those specific examples in public is appropriate.

**Mr MILLS:** I only canvassed those because I tried to ...

**Mr HENDERSON:** To explain the point, I understand that.

**Mr MILLS:** The point is valuing those who are in leadership roles within the current system over and above satisfying administrative and organisational requirements. We can use the same language, but I still think there was an opportunity missed. I will let that pass, but I hope it is not indicative of a centralised approach that has more of an interest in organisational needs rather than developmental needs on the front line. I now go to stress leave. How many teachers in the past school year took stress leave?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I have to seek advice about whether we have those numbers. We do have some numbers. Just bear with us. It will take a few minutes to get that specific information.

**Mr MILLS:** Perhaps whilst the information is being sought, I will be going then to comparative figures, too, so the supplementary question relates to stress leave for this school year compared with the preceding school year and how we are trending.

**Ms NOSKE:** My apologies, I just misplaced this page. Our stress claims in 2004 were – was that the question?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, 2004 is good.

**Ms NOSKE:** In 2004 were 19; in 2005-06 were 32. For this year, which is not yet completed, there have been nine claims. So we have had a reducing number of claims.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay, thank you very much for that. Minister, have you changed your view on the challenge to take a coordinating and leadership role in addressing childhood obesity, particularly in the primary schools?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Mr Davies provided some information earlier. There is advice provided through Student Services in regard to schools around health issues in schools. There is a budget allocation, there are people tasked to actually work with schools around improving the health of students. In regard to explicitly at a policy level, have I changed my mind in terms of requiring all schools to have coloured stickers on foods in the canteen ...

**Mr MILLS:** No, do not be cheeky.

**Mr HENDERSON:** ... I have not changed my mind on that. I am not prepared to mandate coloured stickers on food at the canteen.

**Mr MILLS:** You deliberately misunderstand my position.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I have seen the policy on the Internet. It has been very explicit.

**Mr MILLS:** Deliberately misunderstand it.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We Googled it. We Googled the policy.

**Mr MILLS:** All right, all right. I will not waste any time on this.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We found the policy on the Internet and we will not go down that path. Google is a wonderful tool, member for Blain, you know. You can get all sorts of information through Google.

**Mr MILLS:** You are quite free, minister, to come up with your own approach, and I only offer a suggestion. Criticise it if you wish, but on the serious issue of childhood obesity, other states and other ministers have provided a whole-of-government approach, coordinated through the schools, to make some inroads on this. I am asking whether you will be taking leadership on this issue.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We have, and I suppose there are two levels of debate. There was one which was that the policy initiative that you announced in regard to requiring school councils to adopt a traffic light approach to identifying the nutrition content of various types of food available through the school canteen, and that is where the debate started. If we are looking at what are we doing at a policy level to improve the health outcomes of students as opposed to specific initiatives, we do have seven physical education coordinator positions that were established in 2006 to implement physical activity and school sport programs in schools. These coordinators support a range of schools and their clusters, and one coordinator has been placed in each of the following clusters: Darwin City, Northern Suburbs, Palmerston and Rural, Arnhem, Rivers, Katherine, Central Australia and Group Schools serving the small schools managed under the group schools banner.

We do have an educational officer for health, providing professional learning for teachers to enhance nutrition and teaching and learning programs in schools. We established a school canteen guideline in 2006. So in regard to an overarching policy to improve the health and fitness of students in our schools, yes, there is a focus, yes, there have been additional resources committed to that. As I go around schools in the Northern Territory, individual schools are running fantastic programs. I know in Alice Springs, I forget specifically whether it was Brainting or Gillen, they have a program which gets the kids out prior to school starting, doing physical activities and exercise, and that has led to students entering the classroom awake, alive, synapses open, ready to go. Other schools are doing that. I think Larrakeyah Primary is one I have been to recently.

**Mr MILLS:** Sure. There is a lot happening in the areas.

**Mr HENDERSON:** So, yes, there are additional resources, but traffic lights for food, no.

**Mr MILLS:** There is a lot happening in the area, as there should be. What has been referred to is setting some objectives. In all that activity that you have described, are you making progress with this issue? Are you able to measure it, and are you making progress?

**Mr HENDERSON:** If you are asking whether we weigh all the kids at the start of term and then weigh them again at the end of term to determine whether there has been a reduction in weight, no we do not, but it is an overall recognition that, in supporting better learning outcomes in the classroom, there has to be a focus on improving the health of students to enable their capacity to learn to be maximised. Do we have specific targets for weight loss programs in schools?

**Mr MILLS:** No, no. Do you have a means of measuring your objectives? That is all. Do not get smart; I am not asking if you are going to weigh the kids.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Blain ...

**Mr MILLS:** You have objectives. Are you able to measure whether you are achieving your objectives or are you just doing programs?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Blain, I ask you to stick to questions. I have allowed some latitude. I understand when you get on a train of thought, you begin to ask the next question, but you have cut the minister off on a couple of occasions. I ask you to allow the minister to finish the answer and refrain from what I might describe as inflammatory comments. Thank you, minister.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I have pointed out that there is a policy focus recognising the contribution to improved health outcomes and the specific links to improved educational outcomes. What I would

like to see is specific improvements in attendance and education outcomes that would be supported by healthier kids, particularly out in remote areas. I will hand over to Ken Davies who can speak more specifically about curriculum and measuring of policy objectives.

**Mr DAVIES:** Thank you, minister. Member for Blain, there is a requirement for schools to undertake two hours of physical activity in their curriculum each week. We have school nurses ...

**Mr MILLS:** Okay, now this is where we are getting ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Blain, can you let the officer answer the question before you start in please? Thank you.

**Mr DAVIES:** We have school nurses in our high schools who also work with our primary schools.

There is an Australian government program that is working very broadly and widely across the Northern Territory with our schools. It is the Active After School Communities program, which engages students after school hours in physical activity programs. In addition, we have a program which is a partnership between DHCS and DEET, called the Healthy School Aged Kids program. That program works in our remote communities where students are assessed by the health clinic staff on-site, and schools are given specific feedback as to the student's wellbeing, their general health status, whether or not they need additional nutrition and that sort of thing. One example is Ramingining, where there was an assessment made and the school diet at the canteen was changed to compensate for a lack of iron in some of the students' diet.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. That was an excellent answer. That is the sort of stuff I was after. In terms of the requirement for two hours of PE, are all schools complying? Are they checked? Are they all complying, and how do you know?

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Blain, we have signed off under the Australian government *Schools Assistance (Learning Together--Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act*, which is a national requirement for all schools to sign off on two hours of physical education. As part of the compliance requirements to meet that act, we check schools to ensure that there is two hours of physical activity being conducted. That is part of the audit process that we have to work with.

**Mr MILLS:** And there has been full compliance?

**Mr DAVIES:** I would need to check exactly whether there has been full compliance, but part of the requirement of running with that act is that we do check and where there are deficiencies, we go back and work with schools to ensure that the right time allocation is made.

**Mr MILLS:** Literacy Awards: are all primary schools involved in this literacy initiative?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Are you referring to the Chief Minister's Literacy Awards?

**Mr MILLS:** Yes.

**Mr HENDERSON:** My understanding is that all schools are involved.

**Mr DAVIES:** Absolutely.

**Mr MILLS:** Every school is?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes.

**Mr MILLS:** Quite an initiative, too, minister.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, fabulous.

**Mr MILLS:** Gifted and Talented funding: it has been reported to me, as I know it has been reported to the minister, there are some problems with support flowing to schools from the gifted and talented allocations. Has this area been addressed?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I did meet with the association, I suppose, who are the advocates for gifted and talented students in schools and certainly, for the first time, my predecessor launched a specific gifted and talented policy that requires all schools to support those students. I might hand over to someone to talk about how it has been rolled out.

**Mr DAVIES:** We have two full-time executive teachers, Executive Teachers 2, located in the Student Services Division who are responsible for working with schools in putting in place programs to address gifted and talented students. We have Gifted and Talented Units located at Moil, Alawa and at Parap. There is an operational allocation which is used for grants money of around \$35 000 that is allocated to these schools to assist them with their gifted and talented programs. On top of that, we have a leading edge project which we are running with at the moment using some Australian government money and some NTG funds as well within Students Services which is a project out in our remotes around identifying, using specific criteria, gifted remote students who might have low literacy and numeracy levels but in fact are gifted, to start to ramp up the support around those to give them the best possible chance.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you very much for that answer. Through the Chair to the minister, the complaint, as the minister will be aware, was that there was an allocation that was to flow to schools where there are recognised gifted and talented children that had not been accounted for in the schools system. I do not want to go into specifics here, but has that issue being addressed?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will have defer to Mr Davies for the specifics. When I met with the parent group involved, which is some time ago now, there was recognition that for the first time there is specific policy and there is requirement for school to comply with that policy. In regards to specific resourcing of the policy, I hand over to Mr Davies.

**Mr DAVIES:** The funding for those students who are identified as gifted students has now been paid. It actually adds up to \$126 per student. So it is a top up on top of the normal allocation and that has now being paid.

**Mr MILLS:** What caused the hold up?

**Mr DAVIES:** The hold up was caused because we were trying to ascertain just how many students we were actually funding in our schools. What we needed to do was to make sure that all the students that were funded had been formally identified as gifted students so that they had an assessment done of them. We had some instances where claims were being made against gifted students who either were not in a unit or the proper assessments had not been made. So it was a point in time stop to just get the data right and to make sure that we were funding the right students.

**Mr MILLS:** The assessment regime, is that under control now? You are able to ensure that all those who register a child as gifted or talented has been assessed?

**Mr DAVIES:** The guidance officers in Student Services can do the formal assessment. Some parents choose to get an external assessment done with a private provider. We look at the assessments that are done and then we record those students on our data list. Any parent who goes into a school and makes a formal request to have their student assessed will be assessed. It may take some time, depending on the resources that we have available, but anyone who makes a formal request, either a school or a parent, to have their student assessed for giftedness, it will be undertaken.

**Mr MILLS:** Broadening this area, what is the waiting list for those waiting for assessment in any area of Student Services?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Again, I will have to seek advice.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Blain, we have undertaken around our servicing requirements to try to make an assessment within a four-week timeframe, so that is what we are trying to do.

**Mr MILLS:** Are there any areas that are receiving greater pressure than others?

**Mr DAVIES:** One area that requires a very, very comprehensive assessment is the area of autism. We can go so far with some assessments; others require inputs from paediatricians and

from health professionals. So whilst we may work on four-week cycle, in fact by the time we aggregate the inputs from other health professionals, it can take a while to build the picture.

**Mr MILLS:** Do you have enough speech pathologists?

**Mr DAVIES:** Speech pathologists are provided through the Health Department, so that would be a question better directed to the health area. Speech pathologists are part of the schools support program and partnership arrangements we have. Audiologists are another group that fit in that range where we actually source in DHCS personnel to work with our schools. Occupational health therapists are another group that we work with the Health Department on.

**Mr MILLS:** When you speak of the four week turn around, through the minister, is that once assessed or is that from the time of recognition, that assessment?

**Mr DAVIES:** From the formal referral, is the answer, to assessment. That does not mean that the assessment can be immediately provided to the parents. It may take a while to aggregate the data from there.

**Mr MILLS:** Right. How are disputes regarding whether the outcome or the result of an assessment managed?

**Mr DAVIES:** The dispute process is normally through the school principal, so the school principal comes back to the General Manager of Student Services, and it is worked through in that regard. Sometimes I come in and work with both the general manager and the principal around it, but in terms of numbers, they are usually very much sorted out at the local level. In terms of direct disputes, where we have had a parent coming in and really questioning what has been provided on an evidence base, we do not have any at the moment.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you for those answers. I now move to the teaching of Asian languages. Rather than go into a discussion about this area, I seek provision of the number of students within the government system who are learning Bahasa Indonesia, Mandarin and any other language of Asia.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Can I just clarify whether you are talking specifically about primary education?

**Mr MILLS:** In primary education.

**Mr HENDERSON:** In speaking generally to the question, and I think we will have to take it on notice for the specifics, in regards to Bahasa Indonesia, the very significant issue and problem that we have in terms of continuing to support that program to the full extent that it should be in terms of school and teacher exchanges that really went to the heart of being able to provide full exposure to learning Bahasa Indonesia, that has been compromised, unfortunately, by Commonwealth travel warnings on travel to Indonesia. It is an issue, when I became minister, in which I had a specific interest. I met with teachers who teach that program. There are concerns around not being able to maintain those language skills to the level they would like as a result of the travel warnings.

I asked for a review of our current policy in terms of not approving exchanges where our teachers go to Indonesia to immerse themselves in the language and culture, and a review was undertaken, but in terms of an employer with a duty of care for our employees, the legal advice was that we could not support teachers travelling to Indonesia as part of those exchange programs whilst the travel warnings are in place. That has been very unfortunate.

We obviously still continue to see Indonesian teachers come to the Northern Territory, students come to the Northern Territory, but we cannot approve travel for students or teachers to Indonesia, so that is a disappointment. However, we have worked, and I have approved further support with the Indonesian Consulate for a cultural program which the Indonesian Consulate in Darwin is working with their education department to bring people to the Northern Territory to run cultural programs in our schools. It was run for the first time last year very successfully and we are going to continue to support it this year. I know you have an abiding interest in Indonesia. I do as well, but with the travel warnings in place, it is compromising our capacity under that program.

Specific numbers of students studying specific languages, we will have to take that on notice. Mr Glasby may have some information to support.

**Mr GLASBY:** All we can add to that is if you want specific numbers by school, that is something we need to get, but in terms of language provision, with the restructuring of the Northern Territory School of Languages, we now have Dripstone working with their local feeder schools to deliver Indonesian. Taminmin, likewise, will be focusing on Indonesian. The other point of interest to you might be that all after-school classes that were provided last year are currently being provided this year as well. So there has been no diminution of service around the delivery of languages. In fact, there seems to be a move towards working far more closely between our primary schools, middle schools and senior colleges to ensure that there is a pathway delivered right through the spectrum.

**Mr MILLS:** I would still appreciate something being tabled school by school. It is time for an assessment, as far as I am concerned, of where are we going with this. It will assist me in policy formation as well as perhaps understanding what is currently at play, and the focus of this government and department specifically in Asian Relations and Trade through language teaching, notwithstanding the lack of ability to travel.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Just following up on that, in regards to China, you would probably be aware that, as minister, I have to approve all overseas travel for departmental officers and students. I am seeing quite a significant number of students travelling to China on school exchanges, which is very pleasing to see. We are seeing numbers of students come and stay in the Northern Territory. Developing our relationships with China is certainly being supported, particularly through our senior colleges, and there is a significant increase in the number of students travelling to China. I believe there is a group of students from Casuarina Senior College going to Meizhou in August.

**Mr MILLS:** So something will be tabled?

**Mr GLASBY:** We are required to provide data in August this year to the federal government. We are one of the few jurisdictions that can do that across all three sectors, and do it quite well, so it might be prudent to wait until August, or we can provide you, because there will be a full Census done across ...

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. I am happy to wait for that, thank you. I have many other questions and I am aware of the time. The last one in this area is bullying. There is a lot of talk about problems with bullying within our schools. Can you tell me the programs that you have in place to address this problem?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Again, minister, sorry to interrupt before you answer. In relation to languages, this output is primary and we did stray into secondary education of languages. I was happy to let that continue. I am just recognising the fact that that may also occur in relation to bullying. If, minister, you are happy for that blurring to happen, I will not pull it up, but what I will do is restrict questions when we come to secondary education in relation to the bullying. I just flag that up-front.

**Mr MILLS:** Certainly. For your sake, Mr Chairman, I will not be asking any questions on Asian languages in the secondary section.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We have agreed that the department has to provide figures to the Commonwealth as part of that Census in August. Once that work has been done, I will correspond with you and provide you with that information.

In regard to bullying, again, the Safe Schools NT Framework that I tabled earlier sets the framework for schools for dealing with bullying and the code of behaviour. Again, there is a requirement for all schools to have their own school plans and policies in place by the end of this year to support that framework. With regard to specific programs that teachers can use in addressing bullying, as I get around schools in the Northern Territory, I think I have been to over 60, it is front and centre in every school that bullying is not tolerated although it would be absolutely naïve to not understand that it does go on.

Programs include the National Safe Schools Framework, which, again, is a national framework that we support: key strategies of the annual National Safe Schools Weeks project and grant



money. As members will probably be aware, quite a number of schools have adopted the Real Justice program in their schools. This is an evidence-based approach to conferencing and mediation. I am aware of schools in my electorate, in this particular break, where teachers are undergoing training in Real Justice. *Bullying - No Way* is a national website developed by Education Queensland involving all states and territories. Just recently, I was in a school where students were accessing that particular site. The *Lets Start* program is a program to develop children's social skills in students aged four to six. The *Friendly Schools and Families* program is a whole-of-school wellbeing program that, again, schools can choose to partake in. *You Can Do It* is another approach for schooling for children. *Rock and Water* was very interesting. I was at Nightcliff Middle School and actually sat in on one of their *Rock and Water* sessions that I found very interesting, particularly for boys.

The government has established and funded 11 Wellbeing Officers across the Northern Territory and 19 School Councillors. So there is a lot of support provided to schools and there is recognition that bullying should not occur in our schools.

**Mr MILLS:** Good. Thank you, minister. I appreciate the efforts that are made to combat this problem. In my reading of this in the last little while, it struck me that we talk about symptoms of bullying so a parent can tell whether their child has been a victim of bullying or not. We have all the programs with lots of dollars behind them that describe means to combat bullying. However, there is very little reference given to the bully. How many bullies are there in our system? It is like they do not exist, but everyone is bullied. Can we talk about bullies? Where are they and how do we deal with them?

**Mr HENDERSON:** The Safe Schools Framework requires our principals to have plans in place to deal with kids that have challenging behaviours, and there is a big focus around that. I will give an anecdote. We are not going to provide information on the number of bullies, but my son last year moved from one school to another in the northern suburbs. I asked whether he was happy with that, and his articulation was he was very happy because it was a smaller school and there would be fewer bullies.

It is an issue that confronts and concerns students and parents. We have done the policy work. There are programs available for schools to utilise. There is a behaviour management sector and policy. I might ask Ken to speak to how we actually manage the kids who are actually ...

**Mr MILLS:** Bullies.

**Mr HENDERSON:** ... bullies, yes.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Blain, we have eight Behaviour Advisory Teachers located regionally to work with schools to address the high end behaviour issues. Bullying is not always overt. Sometimes the best bullies are pretty good at hiding the behaviours that impact on other students. This why it is really important that the work is done with teachers and principals so that they can identify cases, that parents are informed and engaged early when bullying behaviour is identified, particularly for the student who is doing the bullying.

In terms of the processes we use in schools, such as suspensions and internal suspensions, schools are keeping databases around behaviour of students. There is not a register of bullies in the Northern Territory, member for Blain, but it is understood that this can be extremely insidious. For anyone who has been on the end of it as a young school student ...

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, I still remember it.

**Mr DAVIES:** ... it is particularly demoralising. So that is the answer at the moment.

**Mr MILLS:** I appreciate that. It is just telling, I think, that you do not have *Women's Weekly* or *A Current Affair* or whatever it is with parents standing there and saying: 'My kid is a bully'. Everyone's child is bullied and our system is so protective of that notion of protecting us against this threat.

**Mrs BRAITLING:** Protect the victim.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes.

**Mrs BRAITLING:** So we should.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes; deal with the offenders, though. Minister, the Harley Unit at Moulden was a very effective unit. It was defective in that it had no scaffolding built into the high school where there was a need to carry the behaviour management regimes into the high school. As a result of it not being there, some of the problems that were managed in the primary system then flowed straight into the high school. Are you aware of that issue? Now, with the further dismantling of the Harley Unit, would you accept that the problem is only going to deteriorate?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I will hand over to Ken for explicit examination of that issue. I do not believe that the problems will deteriorate. However, Student Services are currently developing models for the establishment of a positive learning centre to replace the Harley Unit. What form and context that will take is still being worked through. The fundamental principle is: do we need to have an environment where, at the end of the day, we try to manage behaviours in schools to the best of our abilities and provide additional support to assist schools to manage students with very high levels of challenging behaviour? I accept that we do need to have the capacity in very difficult circumstances to take children out of that particular school into another environment. That is under consideration at the moment as to what form that environment will take. It is certainly something that is very much on my agenda. I will hand over to Ken Davies for further information.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Blain, we are in the process of negotiating to establish two positive learning centres, one in the Darwin area and one in the Palmerston area specifically. It is envisaged, and in terms of putting these units in place, that the centre will be staffed by a team of teachers with specialist knowledge dealing with challenging behaviours. They will deal with students who are being withdrawn from other schools and put into these positive learning centres. One of the difficulties with the old Harley Unit was that once the student was withdrawn, part of the approach was always about reintegrating, so it was about modifying behaviour and then returning the student to the home school. Unfortunately, the Harley Unit, for some of these students, became a life-long possession.

What we want to do is to make sure that in taking students out of school, we have some capacity to renegotiate their entry once their behaviour has improved. It is about ramping up the service, and we are in a transition period at the moment, but the intention is to develop one in Darwin and one in Palmerston and, clearly, we are going to need to negotiate that with the particular school communities that are involved.

It is not that we will not have that option; it is just that we are still waiting to put it in place, and it will be done soon.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you, Mr Davies. Was there an equivalent to the Harley Unit in the northern suburbs or in Darwin?

**Mr DAVIES:** The answer is no. There was an old Withdrawal Unit at the Wulagi campus, but that had been reintegrated quite a while ago. There is also, if I can just say this, one specific school out in the northern suburbs, Malak, where there is an Autism Spectrum Disorder Unit particularly dealing with young students there. The idea with the autism issue is that the earlier you can get in and do some modification work, the better so that reintegration can take place. If it is left too long, then you have problems.

**Mr MILLS:** Certainly, thank you. So, when you describe this, through the minister, Mr Davies, you describe this as a model in transit?

**Mr DAVIES:** Yes.

**Mr MILLS:** Transit from what to what? There is no operation *per se* in the northern suburbs or in Darwin and the Harley Unit is not functioning now, I understand. So it is a transit from what? At the moment, we are talking about students at risk, students with behavioural difficulties. Challenged learning outcomes are not being attended to while we develop another model. Is that the case?

**Mr HENDERSON:** No, but over to Ken.

**Mr DAVIES:** What has happened is that the resources that were apportioned to deal with the students who were in the Harley Unit are now specifically allocated with those students in their home schools or in the school that they are currently in. So the resources that accompany them, including the teaching staff and the AO3 Special Assistant, have been allocated to the students to house them in their home school whilst this transition phase takes place.

**Mr MILLS:** Okay. I will leave it there. I have a number of other questions, but my main ones have been dealt with. I have touched on some of the issues in secondary education, so I am happy to give you some time now, member for Braitling.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Yes, I would like to address a couple in primary.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Just, through the Chair, before we do, I have information in regard to the question about student expulsion, which we took on notice.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The number, is that 4.2?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I do not have a number.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I have the answer, though.

**Mr MILLS:** Number three, I think.

**Ms CARNEY:** The answer to the right question.

**Mr HENDERSON:** So, yes, Leader of the Opposition, I do not know if this is the answer to the right question, but in regard to student expulsion, the minister can expel a student from a government school if he or she considers it necessary in the interests of other children attending the school. Refer to section 28(1) of the *Education Act*. This is in contrast to a suspension, maximum period of four weeks, which can be effected by a head teacher or principal if they form the view that the student's continued attendance would be injurious to the health or moral welfare of other persons enrolled at the school by reason of the student's insolence, repeated disobedience, immoral conduct or serious breach of discipline. Refer section 27(1) of the act.

An expulsion can be reviewed at any time by the minister and may terminate the expulsion if he or she forms the view the student should no longer be expelled. Refer section 28(2) of the act. When a student is expelled, they cannot be enrolled at another government school without permission of the minister. In effect, if the minister gave such permission, it would arguably amount to a review and termination of the expulsion. However, when a student is expelled, he or she may be enrolled at the NTOEC or School of the Air without having to obtain the minister's permission. Refer section 29(a) of the act. Expulsion by the minister: the minister may at any time review an expulsion made under subsection (1) and where he is of the opinion that the child should be no longer expelled from the school referred to in that subsection, he or she may terminate the expulsion.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. Very good advice. Rather than have to wait for *Hansard*, I wonder whether you can table that. It is a good little document.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I can table it.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Braitling.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I asked this of the Treasurer but he said I should ask it of you.

**Mr HENDERSON:** That was helpful of him. He loves his footy, you know.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** The hand ball, yes. It is about the \$50 subsidy to parents, the Back to School payment.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** You have allocated \$1.9m. Does that go to all primary students from T to six? Basically, how is it administered? Is it given to schools up front, or do they do it on a recovery basis? What form is that subsidy; is it in kind or cash to the parent?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, the Back to School payment of \$50 is for every student at the start of the school year. It is paid as a voucher to parents or guardians of students from Years 1 to 12 in term one of each year. Transition students may be issued with a voucher in semester one or two of each year.

Essentially, the vouchers go to the schools, not directly to the parents. The parents or guardians of those children redeem the vouchers to the value of \$50 in regards to whatever the school council or the school may determine can be redeemed against those vouchers. Most often, in the vast majority of cases, it is to be redeemed against school uniforms in schools, however I am aware that some schools have a Back to School pack, which is administrative resources for students and, essentially, it has been very successful.

It is available to all of those students, as I mentioned. A total of 41 471 vouchers have been issued to schools at a cost of \$1.9m as of 31 May 2007. That is \$1.9m worth of assistance to schools and parents for supporting school uniforms and better equipment, I suppose, for want of a better word, for students in the classrooms.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** How is it redeemed? Do the schools have to recover it from the department, or is it a one-off grant given to schools?

**Mr HENDERSON:** For the specifics of how the schools redeem that funding, I will take advice.

**Ms NOSKE:** We provide them with funding for the number of students they have, and then they need to acquit it at the end of the financial year. In some cases where student numbers change, etcetera, it is topped up or adjusted.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It sounds to me as though it is a lot of administrative work for the schools. Why do you not just give every student uniforms and books?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Member for Braitling, I have not had one complaint about this scheme. I have not had complaints from schools; I have not had complaints from parents. It really is to acknowledge the reality that at the beginning of Term one every year in terms of sending children to school, particularly as we now have a compulsory school uniform policy for primary and middle schools, it is an expensive time of year. Parents have just come off Christmas and school holidays. Certainly, there is going to be some administration around the acquittal of \$1.9m worth of public money, but I have received absolutely no complaints and lots of accolades, so I do not think it is a big headache for schools.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I notice in the budget papers that the number of schools have decreased, primary schools only by one, one last year and one this year. Can you tell me which schools closed?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Certainly. Recently, the Chief Executive decided to close Warrego School.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** That is a shame.

**Mr HENDERSON:** The closure of any school is a shame. Can I say, member for Braitling, that I did visit the school. Certainly the issue was around. I met with the teacher. I met with the students and some of the families. It was in the best educational interests of the very few students who were still enrolled at the school to support them in terms of entry into Tennant Creek Primary School.

Support has been provided around those students, and I have certainly made it very clear to the agency that where student numbers reduce to the point where schools are no longer viable in terms of providing full access to education that students require, we have to put in place specific plans around each enrolled student at that school before we close it. That is a requirement that I have asked the department to adopt. In terms of the parameters around those decisions to close

the schools, that is done by our Chief Executive. I will ask Margaret to speak to the particular issue of decisions to close small schools.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Before you give that answer, may I ask are those two teachers still in the system?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Certainly the teacher at Warrego is, but I am not sure of the other school you are referring to. It has not closed under my watch that I am aware of.

**Ms BANKS:** I can only talk about Warrego. I am not sure what other change ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I can quote. Last year's budget dropped from 139 to 138, and this year to 137.

**Mr GLASBY:** We can answer the Transition one.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Oh, well, it is not ...

**Ms BANKS:** I will continue with the response about Warrego and then we will deal with the second one. The teachers are still involved, and we are involved in the transition process at this point, and monitoring very carefully the impact on the students and the staff.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, my final question is about truancy. As you are aware, I have had this concern for some time. You have an act that gives you powers to fine parents, take them to court, which I do not think you do; you tend to use a bit of a softly, softly approach. However, we still have not made great inroads in truancy. I believe there is also a suggestion that there be a database to track students across remote schools who move so we can know where they are, which would be beneficial for people when they find them in town. How you are going to address truancy, particularly in light of recent events?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Thank you, member for Braitling. It is an important question, and one that is receiving not only a lot of attention now, but has been receiving a lot of attention for some time. Starting with the capacity to fine parents, the initial financial penalty for not sending children to school would be through the Social Security system, and somehow to tie school attendance to Family Assistance payments.

I wrote to the Minister for Education on this issue on 12 June this year very much in light of doing this as part of Territory and Commonwealth governments working together through Centrelink and other programs to support better school attendance, particularly where children were not attending. I also made it very clear to the federal minister that as well as the penalties being applied, there are other Commonwealth programs like Abstudy that have not been taken up to the extent that they should be in the Northern Territory to support parents sending children to school.

The advice that I have is that Abstudy payments can be made to parents of students aged 14 years or more who are attending school at least 85% of the time. Currently, and don't quote me specifically, there are around 1900 enrolled students who may be eligible for Abstudy payments in the Northern Territory for which only 350 or 360 payments are being made. Most of those payments would be made to parents whose students are attending Kormilda, St John's and other boarding-type facilities.

In terms of working with the Commonwealth government, and I hope we can continue to do this, we work with communities with a range of strategies to improve access to Abstudy payments for parents who do send their kids as we are rolling out secondary education to remote schools. The current administrative burdens are quite extensive. I certainly, in the correspondence to the federal minister, said that as part of a community agreement, we need to improve attendance around agreed partnerships where the Commonwealth and the Territory governments come to the table in terms of improving access to Commonwealth programs such as Abstudy, and where the community also wants to impose some sort of sanction regime through Centrelink payments.

That is where we were getting to until the events of last week where the Commonwealth has announced its intention that it is going to mandate Social Security payments against all students, as we understand it, in the 60-odd communities they are talking about. It is a step further than I was seeking to take.

However, in terms of attendance policy, that is much broader. We are implementing a schools accountability framework across all of our schools. One of the key requirements for all of our schools will be, starting from next year, to report against targets for attendance; what they are doing to improve school attendance in our urban, regional and very remote schools and, through the Regional Directors, making sure there is a very clear focus on that.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, are you aware that they did a trial at Halls Creek?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** They were challenged in court over it. My understanding is that it has not continued.

**Mr HENDERSON:** That is correct. I do not believe that this is going to be a silver bullet, quite honestly. It is part of the tool kit that could be put in place, if we are talking about very remote communities, as part of a range of strategies in getting children to school. I hope, and we have not seen any detail yet, that the Commonwealth government does not see this as a single measure that is going to be a silver bullet to deal with this problem. I do not think it will be. What we have to do is really get a genuine commitment from parents, guardians, and communities to understand and commit to sending the children to school because they want them to, not because they are going to be punished.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Part of the problems that we see on the streets in out town are students who are still of compulsory school age but obviously do not attend any school or are not linked to any school. I know you have a program where schools are supposed to liaise with the parents of the students who are linked to their school. I am talking also of those children who should be in school somewhere but are not. What measures can you take to address that? You do not have Truancy Officers as such any more. Is that so?

**Mr HENDERSON:** There are no specific Truancy Officers, but we are reviewing our attendance policy. I might hand over to Ken Davies who can talk about this issue, particularly about Alice Springs.

**Mr DAVIES:** The attendance program has now being built into it - we have about 105 people that we think we can target around attendance. That is the school-based Counsellors, the Wellbeing Officers, the Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers and the Home Liaison Officers we have in our schools.

What we are doing at the moment is building a framework, and we are going to start doing some specific work with these people around working with families to get students who are under-attending at school re-engaged with the school system. That is part of the broader work we are undertaking.

We had five Attendance Officers who we placed into regions, and they kind of ran a lone show. Right now, what we are saying is that schools need to be engaged in working with their school communities, that we have a range of resources in our schools that need to see this as a focus, so the specific officers who were out there are being clawed back in, and we are ramping it up in a much more strategic way and, at the same time, concurrently putting in place the local programs like the IPPU Unit in Alice Springs, which is working specifically with families on re-engaging students.

There is also a program that has been put in place in Tennant Creek that is currently engaging 10 people to work in the town camps to assist students to get into the schools at Tennant Creek Primary and Tennant Creek High School.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, I think you've done far too little too late. I think you'd be aware that truancy has been an issue that we have been trying to deal with in Alice for a long time now, and it has caused many social problems. Let's hope you can come back with a good news story about getting those kids back to school and the attendance better. I won't go into outcomes for indigenous groups and benchmarks. Did you want to go down that road?

**Mr MILLS:** No, I am going to leave it.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Okay, we'll leave it and we can do that in another session. I am happy to leave it at this stage.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 2.2 - Primary Education.

### **Output 2.3 - Secondary Education**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will proceed to Output 2.3 - Secondary Education.

**Mr MILLS:** I covered my main issues.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Braitling?

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### **Answer to Question**

**Mr HENDERSON:** Excuse me, member for Braitling. I have question 4.1, completion rates for trainees and apprentices that we took on notice. Within the period, which was 2000-2006, the raw numbers are there were 13 249 commencements, 6726 completions yielding a 50.7% completion rate. The percentage completion rate does not take into account apprentices and trainees who have commenced training within this time period and are still in training.

**Mr MILLS:** Sure. Thank you.

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**Mrs BRAHAM:** Just quickly, Mr Chairman, this is from the member for Nelson: what is the government contribution towards the new Lutheran School at Howard Springs?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That will be covered under Output 3.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It is a secondary school.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** It is non-government education. This is government education.

**Mr MILLS:** Mr Chairman, just before moving on and just for reference, does secondary include middle schooling?

**Mr HENDERSON:** In terms of the Budget Papers, it comes under secondary.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If there are no further questions on Output 2.3, we will conclude consideration.

### **Output 2.4 – International Education**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will move to Output 2.4. Are there any questions?

**Mr MILLS:** There are, but I will put them on notice. I will write to the minister.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** No questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no questions on Output 2.4, that concludes consideration of that.

### **Output 2.5 - Tertiary Education**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will now proceed to Output 2.5 - Tertiary Education.

**Mr MILLS:** My main issues have been attended to, but I will write to the minister with my remaining points.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** The only question I would like to ask the minister, if I may, is: you contribute to CDU and to Batchelor Institute a fair number of dollars. How do you account for those dollars? What accountability measures are there for those two organisations to get back to government to acquit?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Thank you, member for Braitling, it is a good question. The government, as you are probably aware, has entered into a formal partnership agreement with Charles Darwin University, which is a formal documented agreement. The Chief Minister has just signed a formal partnership agreement with Batchelor Institute. There are schedules to the CDU partnership agreement. There are schedules being developed with the Batchelor agreement that do provide accountabilities for funding provided.

On the VET side, maybe Mr Hassed can speak on how that money is acquitted. We are working much closer and, in discussions that we talked about earlier in terms of much better aligning the training dollars and the training that is being provided with real jobs in the Northern Territory, that is a significant body of work that is being commenced.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Do you target the money you actually give them to specific areas?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Mr Hassed can probably be a bit more eloquent, I suppose, on specifically how this done.

**Mr HASSED:** In terms of the allocation for Vocational Education and Training to CDU and Batchelor Institute, both of those sit within resource agreements we have with both organisations. Those resource agreements are negotiated each year and monitored in the course of three further grant meetings with representatives from those organisations. In the initial negotiations, we sit down with them and identify the areas that they have the capacity to deliver in and those areas that we believe are needed in terms of training generally to meet employment outcomes. So they specify the industry sectors, there are 16 industry sectors. They identify those on which they are going to have engagement with communities, where communities have expressed an interest in delivery. We check that against our labour market material that we develop through Workforce NT. Targets are set across each sector and money is allocated per AHC hours, which is our Annual Hours Curriculum.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Annual Hours Curriculum?

**Mr HASSED:** 'Ash' they call it; it is a national acronym, one of many in the VET world.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Okay, that will be fine for now.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 2.5 and Output Group 2.0. We will move on to Output Group 3.0 - Non-government Education, Output 3.1 - Primary Education.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION**

#### **Output 3.1 – Primary Education**

**Mr MILLS:** I will leave that. On any issues, I will write to the minister.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** This primary education not secondary.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** No, we wait until you ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

#### **Output 3.2 – Secondary Education**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will now move to consider Output 3.2 - Secondary Education.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** This is a question from the member for Nelson. What is the government contribution towards the new Lutheran School at Howard Springs?



**Mr HENDERSON:** Thank you for the question on behalf of the member for Nelson. I am hopeful of an announcement in regard to support for the establishment of a Lutheran School in Howard Springs very soon, within a matter of days. Discussions are on foot at the moment, but I cannot announce that until we have actually reached an agreement. What I can say is that the government provided a grant of land for the Lutheran School in Howard Springs. We are discussing, as we speak, conclusion of an agreement on additional support that government might provide, however it is within a matter a days to make that announcement, hopefully, if we can achieve a concluded agreement.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Are there any proposals to build any more new non-government schools that you know of?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Not that I am specifically aware of in terms of new non-government schools, that I am specifically aware of in terms of a specific proposal that has come forward.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It was the Howard Springs one in particular. That is all, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 - TRAINING** **Output 4.1 - Vocational Education and Training Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will now move to Output Group 4.0 - Training, Output 4.1 - Vocational Education and Training Services.

**Mr MILLS:** I will leave it there.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Braitling, do you have any questions on that output group?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Not at the moment, no.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0.

#### **Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Non-output Specific Budget Related Questions, thank you, member for Blain.

**Mr MILLS:** You may bat this away, but it relates to Rosebery school. I note there is no mention in the budget of any allocation to Rosebery school. However, a guest writer for the Palmerston Regional Business Association, and I cannot guess who that might be, told readers that money has been set aside for the headworks. Can you illuminate me on this? I cannot find it anywhere in the budget. That reference has occurred before, I think, in 2001. No school is there now, and no money allocated now.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Specifically, in relation to Rosebery school, there is very extensive work being done. Obviously, government acknowledges the implicit need and requirement for a new school. Work is being done. There is no specific reference in this budget because the work has not been concluded yet in terms of what the configuration of that school may look like. It is on the design list at the moment, and government will be considering the issue during the course of this year. Hopefully, an announcement will be made in the course of this year as to what the plan is for Rosebery. But there is no specific allocation within the DEET budget in this budget. Obviously government has the budget capacity overall to make decisions during the financial year to allocate funding.

**Mr MILLS:** Thank you. That is all my questions. I have to say to the minister and those accompanying you, I value their input today.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of all output groups within Employment, Education and Training. On behalf of all the committee, I thank the minister for attending, and also the officers who have provided advice throughout the course of these hearings.

[**Editor's Note:** The Committee proceeded to examine Tourism's budget allocation.]

## TOURISM NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now move on to the next portfolio of the Northern Territory Tourist Commission. I will just let you know that we will be going until 1.05 pm in light of the break that was had during this session. I invite the minister to now introduce the officials accompanying him and, minister, if you would like to make an opening statement on behalf of Tourism NT, please do so.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to introduce Maree Tetlow, Chief Executive of Tourism NT; and Ms Tracey Scott, Chief Financial Officer for Tourism NT. Other officials are here if required. I have no opening statement, but I do have a great announcement, Leader of the Opposition, and I am sure committee members will be very pleased to hear that Tiger Airways have just announced, this last half hour, that as of 1 December this year, they will be flying a daily service from Melbourne to Darwin. They will also establish a daily service from Singapore to Darwin, which is an extra 130 000 seats a year in to Darwin, and the first domestic schedule has been announced.

That is absolutely fantastic news. It really shows that the work that this government and Tourism NT have done with Tiger Airways is starting to pay dividends. There are some very exciting opening fares that have been announced by Tiger Airways today. So a lot of work has been done. Congratulations, Tiger! An extra 130 000 seats a year in and out of the Northern Territory is a magnificent way to start the Tourism Estimates.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Excellent news.

**Ms CARNEY:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Direct to Melbourne to Darwin?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, direct Melbourne to Darwin. I might be able to get down to see St Kilda on a regular basis now.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We have allowed some flexibility where there has not been an opening statement to still allow the general questions that I have noticed is customary to open with, so Leader of the Opposition, your questions, please.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Thanks, minister, and thank you staff from Tourism NT. I am here because my colleague, Fay Miller, who is shadow minister for Tourism, is ill. Indications are that she will be joining us tomorrow. I do have an insight, as my colleagues do, as to the amount of preparation you have put into Estimates. I am sorry it does not get the time it properly deserves. If it makes you feel any better, in light of Mrs Miller's condition, I have had to do some pretty quick preparation into the wee hours. So with those comments, welcome and it is sort of an apology on behalf of Mrs Miller, but an apology in a general sense because Tourism is generally a good news portfolio. I was Tourism shadow once and all Tourism ministers really enjoy the portfolio. All of us appreciate its importance to the Territory.

As the Chairman said, I will be asking a number of general questions. In light of the time, it is unlikely that I will be able to get to some of the questions that I and Mrs Miller previously prepared. In any event, we will give it our best shot.

Minister, thanks for taking these questions, they will not come as a surprise. How much of the total appropriation for this output group goes to corporate and executive services?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Our Chief Financial Officer can answer that question.

**Ms SCOTT:** That was a percentage you asked for, was that right?

**Ms CARNEY:** It can be dollars or percentage.

**Ms SCOTT:** For 2006-07, \$5.389m, which is equivalent to 14% of the budget.

**Ms CARNEY:** So \$5.38m.

**Ms SCOTT:** Our forecast for ...

**Ms CARNEY:** You actually had the percentage figure.

**Ms SCOTT:** 14%.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. That will save my fingers on a calculator.

**Ms SCOTT:** For 2007-08.

**Ms CARNEY:** It is expected to be ...

**Ms SCOTT:** \$5.382m, which is, again, 14% of the budget.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. What is the cost per square metre of cleaning offices, and is it undertaken by contract or internal cleaners? Minister, some of your colleagues have said that buildings fall within the DCIS division. If you guys do it, can you give us the answer?

**Mr HENDERSON:** My understanding is that NT Properties do that as part of its contractual arrangements.

**Ms CARNEY:** No problem, thank you. What is the size of the CEO's office in square metres? We have been asking everyone; we are not singling anyone out.

**Mr HENDERSON:** This is fascinating. We are going to a table on who has the biggest ...

**Ms CARNEY:** I know we're driving you mad; you're all wondering why we are asking.

**Mr HENDERSON:** It is! I am really looking forward to the answer.

**Ms CARNEY:** You wait for it. When you see the results, you'll be thinking: 'That's why they asked'.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am sure it is going to rock the Territory to its foundations.

**Ms CARNEY:** It probably won't do that.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Currently 38m<sup>2</sup>, which was inherited from previous incumbents and the previous government.

**Ms CARNEY:** It matters not whether it was inherited. We just want the size. Thank you.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Every single square metre is well utilised by a hard working chief executive on behalf of the Territory.

**Ms CARNEY:** Absolutely. It was just a question. You are so defensive, Hendo.

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am not defensive; I am fascinated by it. Fascinated!

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, I know. It is slow water torture. As you're going to bed night after night, we want you in bed thinking: 'Why are they asking those questions?'. Next question: how much of the total appropriation goes towards the cost of advertising, and what are the design and production costs of radio, television, newspaper, magazine and other media?

**Mr HENDERSON:** The vast part of the tourism budget is spent on marketing the Northern Territory. We can give you the headline figures because that's what Tourism NT, to a large part, does.

**Ms CARNEY:** If you have it in tabled form, that would be good, thanks.

**Mr HENDERSON:** In the Budget Papers, the budget for marketing in the 2007-08 financial year is \$28.317m.

**Ms CARNEY:** Is that the answer, or is there more?

**Mr HENDERSON:** There is a lot of information we could provide in terms of the break up of the \$28.3m that we spend on marketing every year. It is just a case of how you may want it broken up.

**Ms CARNEY:** If you have that in table form, that would be great. People usually ask this question.

**Ms TETLOW:** Depending on the question, we have the exact advertising costs that I can give you. Obviously, there is a lot more to the marketing than just advertising.

**Ms CARNEY:** Sure.

**Ms TETLOW:** It is a figure we have estimated for 2006-07 as being \$4.273m. That is for domestic and does not include our international.

**Ms CARNEY:** Does that money come from the 28 allocated for marketing?

**Ms TETLOW:** That is right.

**Ms CARNEY:** Can you give us a breakdown?

**Ms TETLOW:** Yes. Television ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry to interrupt, but in the interests of time, it is on Hansard, it is recorded, but if you can table it, I would be grateful.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, we can table that.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you.

**Ms TETLOW:** For the second part of the question in relation to production costs, we have some details on TV production, \$200 000; printed inserts of \$295 000; outdoors \$25 000 ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry, unless you table it, I need to write it down.

**Ms TETLOW:** Yes, sorry. I have it as a written scrawl.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, so is mine. Inserts, how much?

**Ms TETLOW:** Print and inserts, \$295 000; outdoor \$25 000.

**Ms CARNEY:** What is 'outdoor'?

**Ms TETLOW:** The big billboards.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, okay.

**Ms TETLOW:** Film shoots \$110 000; web production in regard to campaigns \$115 000; other costs, which relate to exhibition production costs, signage, style guides, \$200 000 adding up to a total of \$945 000.

**Ms CARNEY:** Is that all domestic?

**Ms TETLOW:** Yes, it is, other than online, which is a global audience.

**Ms CARNEY:** Sure. So that 945 falls within the figure of 4.2, which in turn falls under the figure of 28?

**Ms TETLOW:** I beg your pardon. It does include international, so the other component, which was the \$200 000 online component and the film includes international use as well.

**Ms CARNEY:** I am sorry to sound a little confused. I think you have given me, in addition to the tabled document, all of the information I was after, but can we check? We are after how much of the appropriation goes towards the cost of advertising? We want to know the design and production costs of radio, TV, newspaper, magazine and other media. We have got it, haven't we? Yes, thank you. What has been the cost in 2006-07 of all advertising media which included the minister's image?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We have that here somewhere. Five documents during 2006-07: the 2006 Brolga Awards program \$2300; Brolga information and call for entries booklet 2007, \$5500; and the 2007 Muster Trade Manual, \$7500 for a total of \$15 300.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. What was the cost of postage associated with communication of advertising material to Territorians, and that includes letterbox drops and inserts?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Tourism NT did not produce any material that was distributed through residential letterbox drops. It produced two pieces of collateral that were inserted into Northern Territory newspapers at a total cost of \$53 000, which includes costs for production and insertion. The first one was a *Resident* magazine Top End feature, \$25 000, inserted into *Resident* magazine and the *Sunday Territorian*. I think that was to support the shoulder campaign for Darwin, wasn't it? Then there was the *Resident* magazine Central Australia feature, obviously to support Central Australia's specific shoulder products at \$28 000 inserted into *Resident* magazine and the *Central Advocate*.

**Ms CARNEY:** What is the cost of research or message development? We have been asking this as a standard question, but for Tourism it is probably a bit more interesting. You know what I am talking about, I think.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Whilst officials are looking for that particular information, so much of the impact of marketing is obviously in terms of visitor numbers, actually understanding where the market is at in terms of how it makes decisions as to where people want to travel and how we position our marketing as a result. It is a significant part of what Tourism NT does. Maybe Maree can talk to this because it is pretty significant.

**Ms TETLOW:** Certainly. The amount for 2006-07, we spend \$1.904m on research projects. To the minister's point, that is basically a broad range of research that we do, from actually collecting and monitoring how many visitors we receive, by contributing towards Tourism Research Australia, through to actual data relating to the NT brand and advertising awareness, and what domestic and some international consumers think about what sort of products we have and the relativity of what we can offer them for the future. That is what the total is. I can go through each one. There are quite a few research projects here that I can ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Can I ask you a couple of questions in relation to it before answering yours? The list adds up to \$1.904m?

**Ms TETLOW:** The \$1.904m does include personnel.

**Ms CARNEY:** Do you have that in tabled form, in the interests of time?

**Ms TETLOW:** No, it is not in a table form.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. All right.

**Ms TETLOW:** It is, basically, the amount and then the specific projects with ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. It is not essential and, in the interest of time, I have that figure, so that is fine, thank you. I would like to ask a question, possibly in relation to media liaison and monitoring. How much of the total appropriation goes towards the cost of media liaison and monitoring?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Tourism NT pays for media monitoring services through Media Monitors Australia. The arrangement is for the Media and PR Unit within the Marketing and Communications Division. This involves access to their online database of media articles, an e-mail alert system based on key words and delivery of media articles. Payments are estimated at around \$20 000 per annum. Actual payments to 31 May 2007 is \$6971.86.

I suppose the requirement there is we are in a very competitive market in terms of tourists, and it is important for the agency to understand what the market is doing so we can be quick in responding and developing long-term strategies.

**Ms CARNEY:** Sure. I just wanted to know how much and whether you do it. Of course, that is why you do it. Why else would you do it?

**Mr HENDERSON:** I am just advising you ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Can I clarify something that you said? Did you refer to the Policy Advice and Coordination Unit that pays for media monitoring or a separate organisation?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Maree.

**Ms CARNEY:** Within DCM, they have their own media monitoring. Do you use that or do you outsource?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We have a commercial arrangement.

**Ms TETLOW:** We have a separate arrangement.

**Mr HENDERSON:** We gave a separate commercial arrangement.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay, thank you. Does the media monitoring service that you receive include transcription of interviews and stories and so on?

**Ms TETLOW:** We can ask for specific transcripts that we think we need to consider.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay, but it probably gets to about \$20 000 a year? Okay. How much of the total appropriation in 2006-07 went towards the cost of reviews, and how much do you expect it to be in 2007-08? Could you list the reviews? If you have it in tabled form, I would be grateful if you would table them.

**Ms TETLOW:** There are no specific reviews. We do have the Tourism Strategy that is under way. That is to the value of \$99 000, as I recall. However, there are no specific reviews.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay, thank you. How much of the total appropriation in 2006-07 went towards engaging consultants? This is a regular one in Estimates: how they were appointed? How many, where did they go, who were they, and what did they cost?

**Mr HENDERSON:** For the sake of completeness, I table a document totalling nine consultancies to a value of \$1.594m.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. How much of the total appropriation goes towards staffing? Can you include the number of full-time equivalents and the number of employees at each level? This is a regular one, too. If you are prepared to table it, that would be good.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Okay. My wonderful, efficient Tourism staff are doing very well here. I am prepared to table a document which shows FTEs at 129 by classification.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. How much of the total appropriation in 2006-07 went towards (a) the cost of airfares and (b) the cost of airfares between Darwin and Alice Springs?

**Mr HENDERSON:** We will get those figures. Obviously, there is a fair amount of travel. Intra-Territory for the year 2006-07, and we do not have this broken down specifically to Alice Springs, but I assume the vast majority of it would be to Alice Springs, was \$109 203. Of the total intra-Territory travel, which includes accommodation and TA, it is \$172 783.

**Ms CARNEY:** So \$172 000 is the total?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes, including accommodation and travelling allowance. Fares are \$109 203.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes. Sorry, I missed the first one, other airfares.

**Mr HENDERSON:** So intra-Territory ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Intra is \$109 000.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Yes. So that is the number it is broken down to. I imagine most of that would be to and from Alice Springs.

**Ms CARNEY:** What about overseas?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Sorry, that was Alice Springs. Interstate, total fares were \$265 399. I quite often sign approvals for overseas travel. It was \$118 223.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. I missed it before because I said to the Chairman give me a knock when I have 30 seconds to go and we had 30 seconds to go, so, thank you. I am sorry we did not get through it.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much. We are out of time on this section, unfortunately. On behalf of the committee, minister, and those members of the Tourism NT you have with you, thank you very much for your attendance today. We will reconvene at 1.30pm.

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The committee suspended.

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## MINISTER BURNS' PORTFOLIOS

### HEALTH

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** I welcome the minister and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Health and Community Services, invite him to do so.

**Dr BURNS:** Thanks, Madam Chair. First, I introduce Dr David Ashbridge, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Health and Community Services. This is David's first time as CEO during Estimates, although he has been part of Estimates previously.

The Department of Health and Community Services output budget increased during the 2006-07 financial year from \$788.6m to \$799.6m, an increase of \$11m or 1.4%. Additionally, in 2006-07 the department has increased capital investment by approximately \$11m. This will ensure that the department has the infrastructure in place to deliver the required new and expanded services in 2007-08.

The department is expected to meet its budget targets for the 2006-07 financial year. This government has increased the department's budget for 2007-08 by \$38m to \$837.7m; that is an increase of 4.8%. The Northern Territory government's funding to the department has increased by 7.3% to \$580.3m. The Northern Territory government funding is offset by a drop of 3.8% in Australian government funding. Many of the Australian government grants to the department finished in 2006-07, and have not yet been renewed or replaced with other grants. Although many are likely to continue, since they have not been formalised yet we were unable to count them in the budget. This has impacted on the Public Health Output Group that currently shows a reduction, mainly due to reduced Australian government funding.

Before I highlight some of the key areas of the budget for 2007-08, I would like to reflect on our achievements in 2006-07. The Royal Darwin Hospital's Rapid Admission and Planning Unit has commenced; six additional beds are in place at Royal Darwin Hospital; eight additional renal chairs in Alice Springs and two additional chairs in Katherine; and a workplace agreement for nurses was negotiated with an increase of 4.5% in 2006-07 and a further 3% in 2007-08. This ensures that our nurses' wages and conditions are competitive with the rest of Australia.

Some of the budgeted initiatives to enable the continuing implementation of *Building Healthier Communities* are: in 2007-08, in the Acute Services Output Group include: \$5.3m to provide 12 new beds at Royal Darwin Hospital and 12 new beds at Alice Springs Hospital; \$4.74m for a further extension of the Rapid Admission and Planning Unit; \$0.7m to increase renal dialysis capacity at Alice Springs Hospital; \$0.2m for palliative care; \$0.4m for rehabilitation services; \$0.25m for Aeromedical Services; \$0.5m for social workers in hospitals; and \$0.13m for a blood transfusion nurse.

The increase in Community Health Services Output of \$3.25m is made up of funding for a CPI and wages adjustment, plus \$0.75m to establish a primary health care program managing chronic and early kidney disease to reduce the flow of people entering end stage renal disease.

Northern Territory government funding increased in the Environmental Health Services Output by \$0.13m in CPI and wages adjustments. The apparent decrease of \$0.324m is due to reductions in Australian government funding and the cessation of one-off projects in 2006-07.

The Northern Territory government funding also increased in the Disease Control Services Output by \$0.374m. The level of Australian government funding also heavily influences this output and it shows in apparent variations in the negative \$3.17m. Two examples of these are the \$1.5m funding to screen illegal fishers and \$2m for an Australian government vaccination program.

The Health Research Output Group variation of \$0.097m covers indexation of grants to research organisations such as the Menzies School of Health Research and the Cooperative Research Centre.

Finally, I often run out of time before the end of a particular output area, but I would like to thank the staff of the Health department for their considerable work in putting together the budget briefs in relation to this Estimates Committee.



I am happy to take questions from the committee relating to my responsibilities under the budget.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, minister, and welcome to Dr Ashbridge. When referring questions to Dr Ashbridge, if you could state your full name for the purpose of *Hansard*. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** I will not address the minister's statement. We can proceed to Acute Services. If the minister would bear with me, I might ask some global questions first before I come down directly to Output Groups 1.1 and 1.2.

**Dr BURNS:** Output Groups 1.1 and 1.2?

**Dr LIM:** Just global on the health department, if that is all right with you.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – ACUTE SERVICES** **Output 1.1 – Admitted Patient Services**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2007-08 as they relate to the Department of Health and Community Services. I now call for questions on Output Group 1.0 - Acute Services.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, how much of the total appropriation for the output group goes to its Corporate and Executive Services? Are you able to provide that?

**Dr BURNS:** Towards Corporate Services?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, Corporate and Executive Services.

**Dr BURNS:** That is probably a theme that runs right through the output groups. I defer to the CEO on that particular question. Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Dr David Ashbridge, Chief Executive Officer. The corporate overheads for the department are made up of a number of different areas and, going from top to bottom, the actuals up to May 2007 include: fringe benefits tax, \$147; payroll tax, \$1298; salary and related expenses, \$2649; superannuation, \$1807; workers compensation, \$49. In other expenses in the operational area is \$12 000; purchases of goods and services, \$23 149. In corporate overheads, DCIS services are \$21 384; property management, \$991; depreciation and amortisation, \$13 159; repairs and maintenance, \$4826. The grand total of corporate expenditure up to May 2007 is \$87 471 and, in 2006, that equivalent number was \$94 423. I point out that that is for the Department of Health and Community Services, not just the Health output.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, would you be prepared to table the document? It makes it easier for me to try to ...

**Dr BURNS:** Of course.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. I will look forward to looking at that. Minister, my colleagues and I are keen to know, and the word clean comes into it. What does it cost per metre for cleaning of offices undertaken by contract or internal cleaners?

**Dr BURNS:** Per square metre or per cubic metre?

**Dr LIM:** No, unless you clean the roof and the ceiling and the walls and all that as well, per square metre will be fine, thank you.

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to the CEO on that question.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** We are unable to provide you with the cost per square metre. The total cost to the department is \$787 812.

**Dr LIM:** Sorry?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** \$787 812. I repeat: that is for the Department of Health and Community Services.

**Dr LIM:** That is \$7.812m?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I repeat that this is for the whole department, for the Department of Health and Community Services. Up until May 2007, the total expenditure is \$787 812.

**Dr BURNS:** Dr Ashbridge, that would include remote health centres, every facility under the Health department and also Family and Community Services?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** That is correct.

**Dr LIM:** Is there a cost incurred by the department for providing meals per person per day, provided by contract or internally?

**Dr BURNS:** I defer, once again, Dr Lim, to the CEO for that important question.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I ask you to repeat the question, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** Is there a cost incurred, and if there is, what is the cost for providing meals per person per day per meal, and are these meals provided internally or by contract?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Are you referring to the hospitals in the Northern Territory?

**Dr LIM:** To the hospitals, yes. The department obviously provides meals to patients, etcetera, and also to staff. I am interested to find out. What does it cost per meal?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** We will have to take that question on notice.

**Dr BURNS:** We should endeavour to get these answers, where we can, to the committee before the end of these proceedings, but ...

**Dr LIM:** That would be good. Thank you, minister, for making that undertaking to provide the information quickly. Obviously, the better we know what it costs per meal helps us to design a budget that would fit the Territory's needs.

Is there an allocation put aside for the maintenance of offices?

**Dr BURNS:** The maintenance?

**Dr LIM:** Maintenance of offices.

**Dr BURNS:** There is a departmental budget for Minor New Works, etcetera, so within the parameters of that budget works may be carried out, not only in offices but in remote health clinics within the hospital. I might defer to the CEO to further elaborate.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Just to affirm that what the minister said is correct. We have an overall allocation for repairs and maintenance and we make decisions across the whole department, both offices, clinical areas, etcetera, so it is not identified as a separate line item.

**Dr LIM:** After the end of each financial year do you have a bottom line to say this is what it cost us to maintain offices for the last 12 months? Do you have that? If you do, what is it?

**Dr BURNS:** I would be certain that level of detail exists, member for Greatorex, but it seems we are travelling along a path where you are asking for levels of detail from departmental officers that I am not really sure the point of it all.

**Dr LIM:** If I can put it this way, minister. I am keen to find out whether the department does know to such detail and, if it does, whether it records it anywhere, so that if there is ever a day that you might decide to ask how much you spend on cleaning, how much is spent on repairs and

maintenance, so I know how much is actually spent on the patient. That is something the Health minister would want to know, I would assume.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Greatorex, there are allocations through the budget, as I said, for Minor New Works. There would be a budget allocation for cleaning not only the establishments like Royal Darwin Hospital but our remote health clinics and I suppose our offices as well. I am very sure that the amounts of money set aside for acute services are more than adequate. We have growth in our budget and I am assured the department sticks to the budgets that has been allocated. As I said in my opening remarks, the department is on target to come in on budget this year and that is very important. I certainly commend the department and the officers within the department for showing financial discipline. Possibly Dr Ashbridge has more to comment on this issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** As I mentioned earlier, the department placed attention to the quality and necessity of repairs and maintenance of assets. The expenditure in 2006-07 was \$8.575m on repairs and maintenance across the system, and in 2007-08 that number was \$9.64m.

**Dr LIM:** I will come back to your comment, minister, about the department is on target to meet its budget in a little while. What is the cost of office rental? Can you tell me the square meterage of ...

**Dr BURNS:** That would be more a question that I would be directing to the minister for DCIS. Office space certainly comes under his purview as Minister for Corporate and Information Services. As a former minister for DCIS I know that is the responsibility of the minister for DCIS.

**Dr LIM:** Good. I accept that answer with the exception, though, that your department must know what rent it is paying for those premises that you occupy. Do you know that, and if you do, what is it?

**Dr BURNS:** As I say, that is more an answer for the minister for DCIS. Let me say, as a former minister for DCIS, I was very keen when I became minister for DCIS to have a structure for government office space in the way in which departments move from office space to office space, and the sorts of costs associated and the levels of accommodation. I can assure you that through that process, which now involves a high level committee within government, that all these aspects are screened and that government is getting the best possible value for its money in terms of the office space that it takes up and the level of accommodation that exists there for the public servants who take that up. I would advise you to talk to or direct those questions to the minister for DCIS.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. What I was keen to find out really is not so much what the minister for DCIS knows, but what the ministry for Health knows about its costs of rental. Obviously you are not able to provide that. So you might be able to provide ...

**Dr BURNS:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair. I have already answered this question. We have the member for Greatorex trying to verbal me here and I just do not think it is correct. I have given an answer. This is something that it is in the purview of another minister. The member for Greatorex has been in this place for long enough to know that that is the proper direction for his questions. For him to come out and say I do not know when it is not my ministerial responsibility, I find offensive.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex ...

**Dr LIM:** I am not going to talk to the point of order. I am going to say to the minister that what I asked was: 'Does the minister or his department know what rental the department pays for all the offices that are being used by the department across the Territory?' Now, you do not know that, well, that is fine. Let us move on. It is fine, but I am asking the question that should be in your responsibility.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, the minister has answered your question. Did you want to answer that question further, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** No, I think I have given the answer.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Member for Grestorex, please move on.

**Dr BURNS:** It is a question that is more appropriate for the minister for DCIS.

**Dr LIM:** I said that I was happy to move on. So, having not obtained the last answer, let me ask you this one, maybe you can tell me: how much of the total appropriation for the output group goes towards the cost of advertising? What are the design and production costs for radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and any other media?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, that is a valid question. I defer to the CEO for the answer.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The total departmental expenditure, and I remind you that this is for the Department of Health and Community Services, for marketing and telecommunications in 2006-07 was \$874 961 as at May 2007. This was made up of advertising, \$314 100; consultants, \$166 000; displays, \$34 000; exhibitions, \$30 000; document production, \$17 000; giving a total of \$874 961. It is also supported by the unit that coordinates marketing, printing production, web-based services and media liaison across the agency.

The staffing based in media and corporate communications is 10 positions. The total personnel cost is \$756 599. There are two positions in this unit which undertake media-related tasks. There two positions that undertake design and desktop for advertisements and document production; and there are 1.5 media liaison positions located at the two major hospitals. It is important to note in marketing media is that the total marketing communications expenditure included \$187 396 on nursing recruitment on a specific campaign. This included national newspapers, magazines and on-line advertising. So it is \$874 961.

**Dr LIM:** There is obviously a lot of detail in that. Would you be happy to table that information?

**Dr BURNS:** Of course I am happy, but just to clarify, this document covers both Health and Community Services.

**Dr LIM:** I understand that.

**Dr BURNS:** So there you go.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. What is the cost for all advertising media, which includes images of you and your colleagues?

**Dr BURNS:** Having been part of this Estimates process before, I understand that basically this is handled by the Department of the Chief Minister and in previous years that question has been directed to the Chief Minister. That is probably appropriately where it should be directed, if it has not.

**Dr LIM:** I understand that you sign many letters that you send to Territorians and I trust that if you sign them, you know that they have been posted out. What is the cost of postage associated with mass communication with Territorians and what is the cost for letterbox drops?

**Dr BURNS:** Once again, that is a question that is usually directed through the Chief Minister because it is handled by the Chief Minister's Department, so I assume that you ask the Chief Minister because that is in her output area.

**Dr LIM:** I will ask the question in another way. How many letters do you authorise in your name to be sent out to Territorians as a means of mass communication, and how many letterbox drops do you authorise in your name to Territorians?

**Dr BURNS:** I can think of very few instances in the Health portfolio where we have had letterbox drops, with images or bearing my name, but I will take ...

**Dr LIM:** I am not asking about images now. I am just asking about letters that you have authorised in your name, and letterbox drops that you have authorised in your name, into the Territory?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, very few, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** Very few! Surprise, surprise. It was done without your knowledge.

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised, member for Greatorex, there was material relating to numbers of doctors and nurses within the Territory health system that went out in a letterbox drop.

**Dr LIM:** And the radiation and oncology service. Do you want me to keep naming them for you, or do you know any number of them?

**Dr BURNS:** What are you trying to say, member for Greatorex? Are you trying to say that I should not be communicating with Territorians?

**Dr LIM:** No, do you remember what they are?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, please allow the minister to answer the question.

**Dr BURNS:** I think the radiation and oncology unit is a great cooperative venture between the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, member for Solomon, but keep going. How much does it cost?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, please allow the minister to answer the question.

**Dr BURNS:** As I said before, those costs are borne through Chief Minister's and you should have asked those questions there. I certainly defend the fact that, where appropriate, I communicate with Territorians, just as your leader does through her letterbox drops.

**Dr LIM:** I am sure she knows what it costs her. Do you know what it costs you?

**Dr BURNS:** I am saying those costs are borne through Chief Minister's. I do not believe they are wasteful exercises because they communicate important information – information, like, this is a government that put on 100 extra doctors since we came to power in 2001. This is a government ...

**Dr Lim** interjecting.

**Dr BURNS:** No, let me finish, member for Greatorex. This is a government that put on over 300 nursing FTE positions since we have come to government. This is a government that has invested heavily within our health system since we came to power in 2001. These are important things that the public of the Northern Territory has to know about. After the CLP stripped 200 nursing positions out in the years before it lost power, we are setting about to rectify that. Those are important things that the public needs to know about.

**Dr LIM:** Good to hear that, minister, because, when the CLP was doing it, it used to be labelled by your side as propaganda. When you are doing it, it is called information.

**Mr Warren:** Is that a question?

**Dr LIM:** How much of the total appropriation for that output group goes towards the cost of media liaison and monitoring?

**Dr BURNS:** I believe the CEO, Dr Ashbridge, has tabled the document that details that. He said there was a lot of detail in there. He no longer has that copy, but that is with you.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, that copy does not tell me about media monitoring. It talks about marketing and promotion.

**Dr BURNS:** I think it is on the other side of the page, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** On the other side it is about director, marketing and communications manager, senior communications officer, communications officer, media officer, media officer, web manager, multimedia assistant, designer, publishing and advertising officer, and administrative support. It does not talk about media monitoring.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I refer you to the page that you have in front of you, on page 1, the bottom number of media networks - \$1775.

**Dr LIM:** Media monitoring, \$1775. Thank you.

How many reviews has your department or your ministry undertaken this current financial year?

**Dr BURNS:** I will take advice on that, member for Greatorex. Reviews?

**Dr LIM:** Both internal and external, contractors, or internal reviews?

**Dr BURNS:** We are probably jumping to a more general output, but I am more than prepared to take the question. Are you talking about consultancies here?

**Dr LIM:** The lot - consultancies, reviews, internal reviews.

**Dr BURNS:** I have a list here of consultancies over \$10 000 - reviews of services. So ...

**Dr LIM:** Minister, before Dr Ashbridge embarks on the response, if it is a fairly detailed response, would you prefer to just table it and we can move on?

**Dr BURNS:** We will let Dr Ashbridge respond and see how it goes when he does.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** There is a range of reviews which occur under the audit aspect of the department, both internal and external audit function, as well as a number of reviews to services. I will not canvass both those areas in the response.

Obviously, the functions undertaken by the Audit Committee are on behalf of me, and a strategic approach has been taken to looking at the audit. There has recently been a significant internal audit around occupational health and safety within the agency, and has resulted in a major reorganisation of the department's occupational health and safety approach. There has also been a review of our server capacity and our server function performed by Stanton International, and that is in Building 6 at Royal Darwin Hospital. There has also been a review in the audit capacity by Deloitte to look at medical equipment and adequacy of strategies employed to monitor and maintain and replace essential medical equipment.

During 2006-07, the Audit Committee monitored the department's implementation of the recommendations of 12 audits and reviews to ensure the greatest benefit gained, and the committee concluded its watching brief for six of these audits following satisfactory implementation of the recommendation.

The audits that are currently in progress or have been completed in 2006-07 include: review of financial management practice from Health Service Division; Central Australian remote development financial review; a review of DHS' capacity to monitor NGO financial risk and developing a risk exposure tool; management of NGOs and delivery of health services; and a review of the experience of continuity of middle managers and supervisors within the organisation. There has also been business continuity risk assessment development of a business continuity plan, and a financial and performance management of the aerial retrieval contract. Total expenditure was \$139 338.

In addition to those, there have also been some reviews of services. These are both in the corporate, as well as in the service delivery areas.

**Dr LIM:** Are you done?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** No. Reviews are used by the Department of Health and Community Services to promote a culture of improvement and to ensure that its services contribute optimally to the health and wellbeing of Territorians. These reviews are usually undertaken by the relevant

divisions. A number of audits of the department's activity are undertaken as part, as I have already mentioned, a strategic audit plan.

However, other recent reviews undertaken this year were: a disability services review, which was completed in 2006-07, of which the government has made a number of substantial announcements in the 2007-08 budget; a review of individual community support package in mental health; a review of the provision of health services in Darwin metropolitan Aboriginal population commenced in 2006-07; and in 2007-08 the department will be conducting a review around the maternity services assessment.

In the service delivery areas, additional reviews include: Charles Darwin University doing a review of Safe Families Project under the Safe Families Bilateral – total \$45 000; the Endeavour Medical Pty Ltd, Dr Elizabeth Chalmers, in the investigation of Kalkarindji; Cornish and Associates are doing the review of aeromedical services; Health Consult Pty Ltd of Victoria doing a review of the hospital management board; a review of the hospital committee structures including nurse and medical and admin; as part of the quality improvement process, the QIC review accreditation; and, as I mentioned earlier, the disability review by KPMG. The total of those reviews comes to \$366 588.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, will you now table the document?

**Dr BURNS:** There is a series of documents there. I think the CEO is being very explicit there. That is probably all there is to add.

**Dr LIM:** The answer is no. Okay, let's move on. How much of the total appropriation for this output group goes to the engagement of external consultants? How are they appointed and what do they do? What companies are they or individuals? What did it cost?

**Dr BURNS:** I have a list here of consultancies over \$10 000. I would also say, and I am prepared to table this document, that in the 2005-06 year the expenditure on these consultancies was \$638 000 or thereabouts. In the 2006-07 year, it is \$330 000 or thereabouts. Some of those consultancies have been mentioned by the CEO, but I am more than happy to table, or have a copy tabled if you want. If you have more questions it is probably better if I hang on to mine so if someone could give me a copy of that to table.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** For the purposes of *Hansard* I would like to acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition.

**Dr BURNS:** There was an element of your question which really needs to be answered and that is how are these consultants engaged. There are procurement guidelines for each level of consultancy and these procurement guidelines are adhered to.

**Dr LIM:** How many consultancies would have received a Certificate of Exemption?

**Dr BURNS:** I have that information. It is probably on the list that I gave you. There are three that have a certificate of exemption: one, was Endeavour Medical in terms of the Kalkarindji investigation, that was \$11 545; John Kirwan Consulting, \$27 000, to develop a workforce strategy to address the Productivity Commission's Health Workforce study; and Stephen Yates, Exercise Cumpston 06, which was a consultancy on the pandemic influenza planning. That is the year to date.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, how much of the total appropriation for the output group goes to the costs of staffing, that includes the full time equivalents, the number of employees at each level if you are able to provide that?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** I anticipate that this will be a very detailed response because of the question. Would you be prepared to just table it and move on to other questions?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I do have a lot of information about FTEs. I will have to go to the information about the proportion of the output that FTEs account for. I will ask Dr Ashbridge to respond in the first instance.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** There are a few key points to be made that I will express some detail around that. At the end of the period 30 May, pay 24, the department recorded a total of 4710 FTEs. This is an increase of 231.7 over the period last year. The majority of this increase was found in nursing with 63 FTEs or 27.28%; medical, 18.1 FTEs or 7.18%; physicals, 19.32 FTEs or 8.34%; professional, 38.46 FTE or 16.6%; service delivery support, 58.8 or 25.38%; administration, 21.3 at 9.21%; and executive contracts which include medical contracts specialists have increased by 1.7 over that time period.

In the context of the increases in FTE from the Budget Paper No 3 2006-07 to Budget Paper No 3 2007-08, Budget Paper No 3 2006-07 shows an estimated FTE of 4544 for the financial year. The department's target for 2006-07 based on the increased Northern Territory and Australian government funding was 4587, an increase of 43 on Budget Paper No 3. This included 29 staff at the commencement of Stage 1 of the Rapid Admission Planning Unit. Budget Paper No 3 2007-08 shows an estimated FTE of 4787, an increase of 200 over the department's FTE number. The increased FTE requirement will enable the department to deliver new and expanded services.

The increase of 200 FTE in 2007-08 is made up of the following additional staff: 55 nurses from conversion of agency nurse and overtime expenditure; 14 renal nurses and allied health workers; 54 clinical staff for the full commissioning of the Rapid Admission Planning Unit; 27 for the Alice Springs Hospital new beds; 27 for Royal Darwin Hospital new beds; seven from the Disability Review implementation; 10 for Health Connect; and 18 in the Family and Children Services area, less an efficiency dividend of 12 FTE in the administrative and executive ranks; giving a total of 200 increase in 2007-08.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, unfortunately, I do not have the mind of Einstein and those figures that were quoted by Dr Ashbridge will be meant to confound. I would have to have it tabled before I could make any reasonable judgement of those figures. Would you, again I ask, table those figures?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes. I will table this document, which shows the increase in FTEs. I think there was also a question by the member for Greatorex in that about the extent to which staffing accounts for the overall appropriation of the department. Can we endeavour to give Dr Lim an answer on that in a broad percentage term?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** In this current financial year, up to 30 May, the personnel costs of the department were \$361 584 000.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, how about airfares? Out of the total appropriation for the group, how much goes to travel, that includes airfares between Darwin and Alice Springs, and training as a separate item?

**Dr BURNS:** The first thing to say is that this particular category of costs has remained consistent between 2005-06 and 2006-07. In terms of staff travel: intra-Territory - year to date to 18 May, it is \$1 882 685. The figure for 2006 was \$2 084 141. Interstate - 2006 was \$941 496 and year to date as of the same date I mentioned before, \$797 197. Overseas - 2006-07, \$40 341, and year to date, this financial year, is \$54 193.

In terms of travelling allowance, intra-Territory travelling allowance in 2006 was \$1 582 823 and in 2007 year to date as of 18 May, \$1 431 588; interstate 2006-07, \$183 144, and year to date ...

**Dr LIM:** Why don't you just table the paper, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** I am answering your question, member for Greatorex. Please let me answer it. You wanted a detailed answer. \$183 144 for 2006-07, and as of 18 May in this financial year \$159 849; and overseas, \$18 752 in travelling allowance in 2006-07, and as of 18 May in this financial year, \$19 849. I am more than happy to table it, but I just want you to afford me the courtesy of finishing reading it.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you very much, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** Do you want me to table it, member for Greatorex?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, please. I appreciate your tabling of the document.



Minister, your government committed itself to a 1.5% reduction of emissions ...

**Dr BURNS:** In?

**Dr LIM:** reductions in emissions.

**Dr BURNS:** Admissions?

**Dr LIM:** Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions.

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, I thought you were talking 'admissions' to hospitals.

**Dr LIM:** Emissions.

**Dr BURNS:** I see, okay.

**Dr LIM:** That is what your government committed, 1.5% reduction.

**Dr BURNS:** We also committed to sign the Kyoto Protocol, unlike your mob.

**Dr LIM:** That is good, and I applaud you for going along ...

**Dr BURNS:** We have been aware of the issue of global warming for some time, not in denial like the Coalition.

**Dr LIM:** Let me ask the question, minister, rather than interrupt me. The Chairman will pull me up but will not pull you up. I understand that you want to sign the Kyoto Protocol and you have committed to a 1.5% reduction in emissions from Northern Territory government commercial buildings. How much does the department generate, and ...

**Dr BURNS:** How much greenhouse gas?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, how much greenhouse gas does the department generate, and what specifically are your measures to reduce them to reach this target?

**Dr BURNS:** I cannot quantify the amount of greenhouse gases ...

**Dr LIM:** You cannot.

**Dr BURNS:** But we do have a power bill.

**Dr LIM:** You have a power bill?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, and there has been quite a lot of work, member for Greatorex, that has gone on through the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, and I am proud to say, when I was Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, that there was a program fostered in there about energy savings within government departments. Government adopted that particular policy, and there have been investments made in that regard. As a government, we are keen on saving energy. I am advised that the department has been doing a lot in this regard. In 2007-08, the department has incorporated \$228 000 of works projects to improve energy management in departmental facilities. I might ask the CEO to elaborate on that.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Returning to the first question - the carbon emissions, member for Greatorex, I can advise you that, in 2005-06, the department produced 46 091 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. In terms of the efforts that we are putting in place to address that, all capital works and minor new works are scheduled under a whole-of-government program managed through DPI, and they are obviously taking into account energy efficiency. The details of the projects which we are involved in, which are contributing to that total of \$228 000 is, specifically, the Jabiru Health Clinic - \$30 000 to install energy saving devices; 87 Mitchell St, the building; Palmerston and Harbour View Plaza, to install energy saving devices - \$72 000; Flynn Drive Community Health Centre, to install energy saving devices at \$72 000; Eurilpa House, install energy saving devices - \$12 000; Katherine Government Centre, installing energy saving devices -

\$30 000; and Batchelor Health Clinic, installing energy saving devices - \$12 000, totalling \$228 000 projected for 2007-08. In 2006-07, the department spent \$138 000 on improved energy efficiency projects, primarily in Alice Springs Hospital.

**Dr LIM:** Good to see that you are attempting to do something positive, but my understanding is that, in fact, through the Health Department you have gone up with greenhouse gas emissions rather than going down, even though you have saved some money.

Can you just tell me how many hybrid or LPG cars [inaudible]?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Greatorex, that is a question that is more appropriately directed to the minister who has responsibility for NT Fleet. You should ask him because I know he has some plans, overall plans, for the public service as a whole. It is more appropriate that you direct your questions about fleet to the minister responsible.

**Ms CARNEY:** Why do not you just say you do not know?

**Dr LIM:** It is a pity. Minister, again, I understand NT Fleet is in charge of all the vehicles, but your department puts out a lease with NT Fleet. If your department does not know, then you are really not across the management of the department, are you?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Greatorex, it is you who does not understand the way in which government, ministerial responsibility, and this estimates process works. I advise your leader to give you some counsel.

**Dr LIM:** I have been here a lot longer than you have, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** You have, and you should know ...

**Ms CARNEY:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! The Minister for Health is going out of his way to be difficult. He is attempting to be humorous, but he just being almost excruciating. I ask, in the interests of scrutinising this budget, that you direct or at least request the minister to do the decent thing and get on with the job at hand.

**Dr BURNS:** Speaking to the point of order, Madam Deputy Chair, every year in this estimates process we have the opposition bleating that they had all these important questions that they ran out of time asking ...

**Ms CARNEY:** He is not speaking to the point of order, Madam Deputy Chair.

**Dr BURNS:** I have told them that they should be directing specific questions to specific ministers. If they stop trying to grandstand we would get into the business of health, which is why we are here.

**Ms CARNEY:** There is not a point of order, Madam Deputy Chair, with respect. What the Health Minister ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, there is no point of order. I ask, for the flow of estimates, that questions and answers are relevant and as detailed as possible.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, in your opening statement you mentioned that you are going to meet your budget targets for this year and for next year. If you were to compare your whole-of-department's output across the years, each year your actuals or your estimates are well above your budget as published in the budget books 11 to 11½ months earlier. How can you say you are on target when, in fact, you are well above your budget figures each time and you need to then bolster your budget with extra money from Treasury?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Greatorex, you have been around here a long time; you were a Cabinet minister for a brief period. However, to explain it to you again, the way it works is that Cabinet adds items into departmental budgets - not just the Health department but various departments - throughout the year. The budget is just not set in stone when it is handed down in parliament; there are additions and budget items. That is why you have a Treasurer's Advance.

I can assure you, at no stage since I have been a Cabinet minister and since I have been Minister for Health, has there been discussion in Cabinet: 'Oh, the Health department is going to run over budget this year; we need to whack in \$Xm to cover it'. No. There is discipline within this Health department and I commend the Health department for having budgetary discipline.

It is quite normal for Cabinet to add expenditure items to departmental budget through the year as necessary. I will also ask the CEO to speak to this issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I believe the question was that there had been a departmental increase in what the original budget was to expenditure of \$788m to \$799m in the current financial year, and that is absolutely correct. This change was largely due to variations in the Australian government-funded programs that were not known at the time of the 2006-07 budget being published - and that applies for this situation as well.

Specifically, the Department of Health and Community Services has successfully secured increased Australian government funding of approximately \$14m for both capital and operational programs during the course of 2006-07, subsequent to the budget being published. This resulted in an increased service delivery across outputs. The major areas - and by no means complete - or major programming increases were: \$3.7m for Health Connect; \$1.4m for family violence; \$1.5m for HPV immunisation for school-aged girls; \$1.3m under the Public Health Outcomes Access Program; \$1.2m under the National Public Health Program; \$0.9m under the Australian Health Care Agreement; and \$0.5m under the Home and Community Care Agreement.

In essence, the increase in the department's budget arose almost totally upon increased Australian government allocation and not from allocations internally.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, let us move to Output 1.1. It might be easier to focus on that.

#### **Output 1.1 - Admitted Patient Services**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** I now call for questions on Output 1.1 - Admitted Patient Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, I do. It is interesting, minister, that when your budget blows out, it is a deliberate and considered way to increase your finances and it is good management. When the former Minister for Health under the CLP adjusted his budget, you guys labelled it ...

**Dr BURNS:** 'For presentation purposes', quite dishonestly.

**Dr LIM:** Are you going to let me finish what I have to say, or are you going to allow the minister to keep interrupting.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, your question is?

**Dr LIM:** It is interesting that the former Minister for Health under the CLP adjusted his budget, he was classified as corrupt.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, he did it retrospectively!

**Dr LIM:** Well if that is corrupt then you must be corrupt. Now my question ...

**Mr BONSON:** Point of Order, Madam Deputy Chair, the member for Greatorex has accused the minister of being corrupt. I would ask him to withdraw that.

**Dr LIM:** I did not. Did I say that? If I called the minister corrupt, then obviously, I should by all means withdraw unreservedly. What I am saying is that when the Labor government labels the CLP corrupt, it gets away with it, but when the CLP uses the same definition, that is labelling the minister corrupt, funny about that. Minister ...

**Dr BURNS:** You are rewriting history again!

**Mr BONSON:** Through the Chair, Madam Deputy Chairman, I am not sure if the member for Greatorex did actually withdraw his allegation that the Health minister was corrupt.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, please withdraw that comment.

**Dr LIM:** I did ages ago, and I said 'unreservedly'. Madam Deputy Chair, may I proceed or may I not proceed?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Do you have a question, member for Greatorex?

**Dr LIM:** Lots of questions. Minister, remember when I wrote to you in March last year seeking information about nurse numbers, hospital bed numbers, elective surgery waiting time numbers, and all that? That was in March last year. You finally came through a couple of weeks ago with nursing positions allocations and administrative jobs, etcetera. Within three or four days you sent me another response to the very same questions and saying: 'Oh dear, the last one we gave you was wrong and this current one is right'. Fifteen months it took you to get me the answers and you still got it wrong. So minister, can you explain to me: what are your nurse numbers, what is the rate of turn-over? Could you do that?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, very glad to. Since June 2001 to May 2007, there has been an additional 351 nursing FTEs added into our system. We have been increasing nursing numbers significantly since we came to power. As I have said before, in contrast with the former CLP government that stripped out 200 nursing FTE positions out of the system, and I say 'Shame' to the former government. Now there are two ways of measuring. As you said you got a snapshot in time about the question that you asked for 2006. But there are two ways in which you can view - I assume we are talking about retention of nurses with time. Is that the sort of answer you are looking for?

**Dr LIM:** No. I did not ask that question. What I said was what are your nurse numbers and you gave me figures ...

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I have answered it.

**Dr LIM:** Let me finish what I have to say so that you can respond accordingly. You gave me figures relating to the financial year 2005-06, and fair enough because there was the question. My question related to that period, but it took you 15 months to provide me with the information. Could you give me current figures now please?

**Dr BURNS:** I just did.

**Dr LIM:** You did?

**Dr BURNS:** An additional 351 in that period, as at the pay period of 30 May 2007, pay 24, there were 1672.97 FTE nurses employed in the department. This is an increase of 63.33 FTE for the same period last year.

**Dr LIM:** So these are new positions, new nurses on the job, in the hospitals and in our community health centres?

**Dr BURNS:** I have said that they are FTE, full time equivalents.

**Dr LIM:** Yes, and I understand that. But are those FTE filled, or are they just positions that you included in the 55 you created last week?

**Dr BURNS:** As the CEO points out, if they are being paid, they are on the job. That is the information that I have.

**Dr LIM:** What is your retention policy?

**Dr BURNS:** Retention policy? Well, there has been an EBA, as you are aware. We came to an agreement with the Australian Nursing Federation. Apart from the increase of 4.5%, there are a lot of incentives in there, I believe, for the retention of nurses.

In a media release recently, you mentioned a lot of the things that you believe should be done to retain nurses. As I said in the media, member for Greatorex, the government and the department are already doing quite a number of those things.

I think we are going to the question of turnover and retention of nurses, and I would just like to give you some figures. There are two ways of measuring this. The first is turnover, which is calculated by the number of separations in a 12 month period divided by the average FTE for that period. Between May 2006 and May 2007, there was an average workforce of, as I said, 1641.37 FTE and 573 FTE and separations representing a turnover of 35%. The other measure of retention is, of course, stability and that is calculated by comparing the current employees who were employed at the same time last year. It is a very simple test. The department advises me that almost three quarters or 74% of the departmental workforce remained stable over the last year.

I have some graphs here, member for Greatorex, which I am more than happy to table for you. This goes from May 2006 to May 2007 basically showing a decrease in turnover in this period from 41% in May 2006 to 35% in May 2007. Nursing stability over the last 12 months which is fairly stable, but there has been an increase from about 70% – 71% up to about 74%. I am more than happy to table this for you.

What these graphs illustrate is that departmental policies are working. It is a very difficult environment; it is very competitive environment to recruit and retain nurses. We are not only competing against other states and territories, we are also competing internationally. There is the issue of pay, there is the issue of support for professional development and that was certainly a great feature of the EBA that was negotiated with the nurses.

Violence against nurses is a very important issue. This is a government that has instituted more security in our hospitals and adopted a policy of zero tolerance of aggression against nurses. One of the very positive things, and I point to my predecessor, Peter Toyne, who gradually has been doing away, through his policy, with single nurse posts, which is a risky situation for nurses. This is a government that is moving on policies to recruit and retain nurses.

**Dr LIM:** Good. How many are on stress leave or sick leave at the moment?

**Dr BURNS:** That is a fairly operational matter, and I will defer to the CEO on that one.

**Dr LIM:** If we have the figures on the same graph or chart or page, can you tell me how many are on worker's compensation leave as well?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I will go straight to worker's compensation. As of 30 April 2007, the department had paid a total of \$3.5m in workers compensation costs. At 31 May 2007, 96 new claims were received costing \$547 000, which compares with 130 claims costing \$1.087m in 2005-06. The average cost per new claim in 2006-07 as of 31 May is \$5704 and 2005-06 it was \$8648, a significant reduction. In 2005-06, the department paid a total of \$4.6m in workers compensation which equated to 1.2% of the department's personnel budget. I should point out at this time that the departmental average around Australia in this area is approximately 1.5%, not 1.2% of the personnel budget.

In terms of the break up of the major costs and settlements by injury groups, slips, trips and falls have cost \$27 877 with settlement payments of \$140; body stressing, which is muscular stress, 6351 with settlement payments of \$500 000. Environmental factors, for example, airconditioning or mould \$18 121, and biological factors, contact with human body fluid, etcetera, no cost but a settlement of \$249, and the area that you directly mentioned about trauma, etcetera, in the workplace, in 2005 it was \$290 450.

**Dr BURNS:** There is still the issue of stress leave. I am not sure whether other departmental officials are looking for that figure. In answer to an earlier question of your's, member for Greatorex, the costs incurred for meals per person per day, I am advised by the department that the average cost of a patient meal across the hospital network is \$11.80. This means that the average cost per person per day is \$35.40. All meals are produced in-house and therefore no meals are bought from outside providers. I will table that advice for your benefit.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. I thank Dr Ashbridge for the response regarding workers comp, stress leave, sick leave and all that. Can you tell me how many nurses were assaulted, how many people were arrested and charged, and if you got any convictions out of that?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** While I am waiting for the exact figures to come forward, I should point out that the department has an aggressive zero tolerance policy towards staff, and will always support staff in the pursuit of criminal charges, and that is a given for the organisation. In terms of the specifics that you requested, they are just coming forward now. If you can just bear with us, we will provide it shortly.

**Dr LIM:** All right. Minister, I hope the CEO will give me the information shortly too, because I would have thought that this is something that you would have at the tips of your fingers. If you were paying attention to the zero tolerance of violence against nurses, you would be just there making sure that everybody who tries to do that gets punished immediately and they would be arrested and taken to court.

**Mr WARREN:** Dr Lim, is that a question?

**Dr LIM:** I am waiting for the minister or his CEO to respond.

**Mr WARREN:** Ask another question.

**Dr BURNS:** We are still awaiting those figures.

**Dr LIM:** Well, to move on then, minister. Bed numbers in the Northern Territory, could you tell me the number of beds we have in the Northern Territory and how does that factor into per thousand population?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I will do that. This is a government that has put in extra beds during our time since 2001. We are committed to fund a total of 83 new beds within the Territory. This is a very important initiative to relieve some of the problems that are faced by our hospitals in terms of increased demand. There were 59 additional prior to 2007-08, and 24 additional beds to be provided during 2007-08. These additional beds are in the Northern Territory's two largest hospitals, Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital. This is equal to an increase in capacity of 15% since 2000-01. The total beds in 2006-07 was 626 across the Territory and, in 2007-08, 650, and the variance between 2006-07 and 2007-08 is 24 beds. Royal Darwin Hospital received provisions for a further 24 beds in 2007-08, and Alice Springs Hospital received provision for a further 12 beds in 2007-08. The distribution by ward of these new beds is still to be confirmed. In short, this is a government that has increased capacity of beds, 83 beds since we came to power in 2001. We are very interested and committed to properly resourcing our hospital system.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I asked per 1000 population.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Would you like to take that question on notice, minister?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** No, we can take that question. The question is weighted beds per thousand population?

**Dr LIM:** Yes.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The Australian average for weighted beds per population is 2.6. Going to the various states in Australia, they range from the Australian Capital Territory at 2.2 per 1000; New South Wales, the majority hovering around between 2.5 and 3; with the Northern Territory having 3.7 beds per 1000 population, being the largest number of beds of any jurisdiction in Australia.

**Dr LIM:** Where do you compare those results? Where do you get those figures from?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I can refer you to the public document, *The State of Our Public Hospitals June 2006*.

**Dr LIM:** Good. Thank you very much for that. With length of stays, mostly that relates to, eventually, to waiting lists as well. Can you give me some indication of the length of stays of patients in the hospitals?

**Dr BURNS:** Sorry, member for Greatorex?

**Dr LIM:** I said, about length of stays of patients in hospitals, eventually relating to waiting times for surgery as well. Can you give me an indication of the average length of stay of a patient in our hospitals?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes. However, to point out, member for Grotorex, that for the first time the department has, I think it is, a median stay or an average stay of people who stay in the hospital system more than one night. I believe this will be very helpful for comparison.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The question relates to length of stay. I am going to exclude from that discussion the overnight stays, member for Grotorex. The average length of stay at year to date in Royal Darwin Hospital is 3.83; the average length of stay in Alice Springs Hospital is 3.11; the average length of stay in Katherine District Hospital is 2.63; the Tennant Creek Hospital, 1.78; and the Gove District Hospital, 2.64.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Can you confirm for me that waiting lists for elective surgery in the Northern Territory have been increasing until recently, and the recent reduction in waiting lists has been as the result of your department ringing up patients on the waiting list to inquire of them whether they need surgery, plus increasing some elective surgery - in particular, ophthalmological surgery?

**Dr BURNS:** That is partly a contributing factor. However, there has been considerable effort, resources and planning going into reducing our elective surgery waiting lists, particularly waiting times, especially for those patients who have been waiting the longest. As I said in parliament - and you were there for the answer that I gave, I think - basically, this has been a priority of mine since I took on this ministry late last year.

On 31 March 2007, 1612 of 3143 patients on the elective surgery wait list were identified as having waited longer than the recommended time and were identified as the target group. As a direct result of this project, 801 or 50% of these target patients have been removed from the wait list as at 31 May 2007. Member for Grotorex, 348 have received surgical procedures, and 453 were removed from the wait list through the validation process. The validation process consisted of the appropriate person in the department ringing the person on the waiting list and offering them surgery. For whatever reason, 453 people were removed from the list.

As of 31 May 2007, the total number of patients on the wait list has reduced from 6%, from 3143 to 2960, with the number of those overdue reduced from 1612 to 1393, or 14% over the same period. As I said in parliament, waiting lists are not static. They fluctuate - as people come off the list, more come on. However, this measure that I have talked about has been welcomed by surgeons. Dr David Reed, a well-known surgeon at Royal Darwin Hospital, joined me for the public announcement in relation to this. He basically said that, through the measures, people were moving through the waiting lists a lot better. He also commended the partnership between Royal Darwin Hospital and Darwin Private Hospital in that there are beds at Darwin Private Hospital offered during both the weekdays and weekends and that enables the capacity for those patients who have had elective surgery.

It is important. We have targeted those who have waited the longest and it is being successful. We have a target of 20% over the life of the initiative, and at this stage, as I said before, the figure is at about 14%. I am not sure whether Dr Ashbridge wants to comment further.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** There are just a couple of additional points. The elective surgery program is not only in Darwin. It is also in Alice Springs, Katherine and Gove, so regional patients, if appropriate, are being operated on regionally. I would make another point that the program will be continuing into the first few months of 2007-08 and we expect for that throughput to be continued with the extra beds going into Royal Darwin Hospital. We expect to be able to maintain the effort around elective surgery throughput in a seamless way into 2007-08.

**Dr LIM:** I commend your efforts in reducing elective surgery waiting lists. I am glad you picked up many of the suggestions that the opposition put forward. To reduce your waiting list by 50%, and almost 23% of them were from people who had already decided not to worry about having their elective surgery in the Northern Territory for one reason or another, and in your own words you said some 348 people who accepted the offer have now had their surgery, and that is good. But for a variety of reasons, another 453 people in the target group no longer required surgery.

Minister, did you find out why they decided that they no longer needed it? If you have a surgical problem, unless it is surgically corrected, it is not going to fix itself? Did the patients die? Did the patients' legs, hips suddenly get better and they did not need total hip replacement, or their cataracts improved suddenly by magic and they can see now when they could not see before? Why did they choose not to have surgery?

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to the CEO on this question in a minute. It is disappointing to see you so negative about this initiative. I would have thought that as a doctor you would have been all for managing waiting lists, for keeping them up to date, for making sure that they are appropriate, and this is exactly what is happening.

**Dr LIM:** You are not a doctor. Do not talk like a doctor. You do not make it. Give me a response.

**Dr BURNS:** I am about to defer to the CEO. Just to go back a little bit, I just wanted to clarify one issue that you talked about before. That is about beds per thousand population. So in parliament on 19 April, you asserted, and I quote: 'The Northern Territory has 2.8 beds per thousand population, and the closest is New South Wales with 3.8 per thousand, and the highest being Western Australia with 4.9 beds per thousand people'. You were completely wrong on that particular assertion, like many others that you have made in parliament and in the media. The fact is, the *State of Our Hospitals* report, which is a federal government report, in June 2006, shows that the Northern Territory has 3.7 beds per thousand population, far outweighing the national average of 2.6.

So, if we are going to talk about figures, which we are going to be today, you need to get your figures right. I do not know where you got your figures for that assertion that you made in parliament, or the assertion that you are making now. I would just advise you to get your figures right.

I will ask the CEO to answer your question about wait lists.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I think the question relates to the process of validation, and just to reiterate the minister's point, we rang up and were in the process of offering people surgery, not in the process of trying to validate whether they needed it. It was actually backed up by a commitment to actually undertake that surgery. It was not an exercise in culling the waiting list by any other process ...

**Dr LIM:** What is the difference?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, please allow the CEO to ...

**Dr LIM:** I am asking: what is the difference?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** In terms of the specifics to the question of the underlying reasons for not progressing with the surgery, I would like to introduce Peter Campos, the Assistant Secretary for Acute Care.

**Mr CAMPOS:** Thank you very much. If I could just provide an update, we are getting data almost constantly on update on where we are with this particular initiative. As at the end of last week, the data was only made available this morning, it was actually 952 cases that have been deleted from the long waits in the waiting lists; 447 of those were actual procedures and 505 were through the validation process.

We have been particularly careful to make sure that people who required surgery were still able to access that and those who were removed were for valid reasons. We have a break down of what makes up those reasons. We have 87 patients who were removed from the waiting list at their request. We have 113 who were removed from the waiting list at the request of the Medical Officer. We have 73 patients who we have made repeated attempts to contact and can no longer contact. We have 21 where there were found to be errors. We have 14 that are deceased. We have found 69 who had already received their treatment elsewhere. We had 71 who have moved outside of the Territory. We have 33 who no longer require the procedure and then we had 24 who were non-compliant also in terms of contact and coming to theatres despite repeated



bookings for them to come forward. Nevertheless, they remain active with us. If they do come forward and require the procedure, they will be put back on to the list.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I am sure you have seen this article in *The Australian* entitled *Hundreds die in health queues* reporting on a report published in the *Medical Journal Australia* saying that patients die while waiting for surgery. Obviously in the list that Mr Campos quoted from, there are cases of people who have died during the waiting time for the surgery and obviously people have also left town for all sorts of reasons. If you asked, you would probably find that they had been elsewhere for surgery. There are 14 people who died in that waiting period. I would not suggest that they died of the illness they had that required the surgery. I do not know the case, but I would like the department, if it is at all possible, to do an audit on those 14 cases and find out. You should ask that question, minister. Why did they die? Fourteen people died while they were on a waiting list. Did they die as a result of the disease they had? You should ask that. Now, minister ...

**Mr WARREN:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair. Could you ask the member for Greatorex to ask a question, not make statements, accusations?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, are you aware of the case of a Dorothy Lloyd who, as late as yesterday, had been admitted to hospital and had been fasting all morning from 7 o'clock to 1 o'clock waiting for her surgery, then at 1 o'clock was told: 'Sorry, go home'. She lives on her own. She is 74 years of age. She has a pacemaker that needs to be fixed. She was admitted to hospital on 30 May this year for the same procedure. On the morning of her surgery, she was told: 'Sorry, we cannot put you in'. Then yesterday, in hospital, perhaps ready to go to theatre, she was told: 'No, sorry. Go home' after having fasted all morning. This 74-year old woman got herself out of hospital, went down to the hospital canteen, got her lunch and ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, could you please get to the point of your question.

**Dr LIM:** ... then got herself home. Minister, this 74-year old lady needs your total support to get her done this week. She has a pacemaker that needs to be fixed.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, please ask your question.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Greatorex, you know full well that, as minister, I do not direct any department, least of all the Health department, in an operational sense. I am very sympathetic to the case of Mrs Lloyd, but I point out once again that this is a government that has made significant investments to move our elective surgery waiting lists along.

We know in hospitals that people do come in on elective surgery, that there are other priorities that come along, both in terms of the operating theatre and the work that the surgeons have to do, and it is very regrettable that this has happened for Mrs Lloyd as an individual. I can only point to the fact that the waiting list is being reduced, there is significant investment by government, and surgeons are working as much as they can. There have been extra operating theatres opened in Alice Springs. There have been beds sequestered at Darwin Private Hospital. We are putting a lot of effort into this. However, as I said before, operationally, I cannot say what happened to Mrs Lloyd on these two occasions. It is regrettable, but these things, unfortunately, do occur within hospitals. I will ask the CEO to comment on this.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I will make a couple of comments. I echo the concern, and I understand for people who go through that process why that would be not the best course of action I would like to see. I would like to re-emphasise though that we are talking about elective surgery. We are not talking about surgery which is time critical in that sense, and I ...

**Dr LIM:** She has a pacemaker and that is not time critical ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex!

**Dr BURNS:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I would ask the member for Greatorex to show some respect to the public servants who are here, and be less aggressive towards them and accusatory. It does not befit him, both as a doctor and as a member of parliament, to be abusing public servants here in an Estimates process.

**Mr BONSON:** Speaking to the point of order, the member for Greatorex has been through the Estimates process a number of times. He knows that he should be addressing questions through you as the chair, and then directing it through to the minister. He should know by now that he cannot cross-examine public servants without consent of the minister.

**Dr LIM:** Speaking to the point of order Madam Deputy Chair, I explain, with absolute incredulous belief, that a medical practitioner, whether he was a CEO of the department or not, would say that a pacemaker problem is not time critical ...

**Dr BURNS:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! The member for Greatorex is super sensitive on the floor of parliament about any imputations, ethical or otherwise, about his ability as a medical practitioner and about his history as a medical practitioner. Here he is, on the floor of these Estimates, making accusations against the CEO of the department, which goes to the heart of ethics. Madam Deputy Chair, I would ask the member for Greatorex to conduct himself a bit better than what he has and not be abusive.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Madam Deputy Chair, may I make a point of order and say that it is not usual to discuss individual cases in parliament or in the Estimates. I just ask if we can get back to the general questions that should be asked?

**Mr WARREN:** Speaking to that point of order as well, we seem to be drifting from Output 1.0 to a generalised questioning ...

**Dr LIM:** We are at 1.1. Do you not know we are on Output 1.1?

**Mr WARREN:** The member for Greatorex directed himself to Acute Services, Output 1.0.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, member for Goyder. Member for Greatorex, please direct your questions through the minister. Please do not direct your questions directly to our public servants.

**Dr BURNS:** Madam Deputy Chair, I think the member for Greatorex interrupted the CEO, and I would ask the CEO to continue in what he was saying.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Further to continuing my answer, I make the point, which I almost got to, which was that the decisions around elective surgery are not made by management. They are made by clinicians, and they are clinical decisions made by practising doctors, clinicians and their clinical decisions around what is the safety and the clinical decisions that need to be made around the priorities that people are given. I understand that it is disappointing that that might happen, but I want to re-emphasise that decisions made in my department of that nature are made by clinicians and not by management.

**Dr LIM:** Further to your point, minister, may I ask you, is it not your responsibility as minister to manage the department in a way that elective surgery of this nature, as labelled by the CEO, a person with a pacemaker that needs to be sorted out. My question to you is, should not the government managing the department ensure that these sorts of surgery do not get put off, not once, but twice on the very day that the person is booked in a hospital for the surgery?

**Mr WARREN:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I agree with what the member for Brailling said before: it is a precedence in parliament and in committees that you do not discuss individual cases. He was just told by a previous eminent speaker that was the case, and he continues to talk about the individual case. We all have empathy for that case. We all understand it, but it is not the right place. This is a budget estimates. I ask that the member for Greatorex contain himself to the output questions as they exist here, and relevance to budget.

**Dr BURNS:** Madam Deputy Chair, I will answer that question in a more general sense. I come back to the point that government has invested \$1.5m into this initiative. We have opened up extra theatres in Alice Springs. We have increased specialist outreach into the regional hospitals in Ophthalmology and also Ear, Nose and Throat. We have an arrangement with Darwin Private Hospital where we have access to beds, both during weekdays and weekends. We are working very hard to reduce our overdue list in elective surgery. At the beginning of the program, I said I wanted the reduction of 20%. I reported in parliament and here today that, currently, it stands at

14%. We will continue the effort. I want to hit that target. When we reach the end of this initiative, member for Greatorex, we will review where we are, and we will look forward to what needs to be done in the future.

The program has been extended until August, which extends its date by at least a month, possibly two months. That coincides with the opening of the Rapid Admission Planning Unit at the Royal Darwin Hospital. I believe there are nine beds there currently and there are 15 planned to open up. As I said before, we are looking at an extra 12 beds to be opened in Royal Darwin Hospital which will further alleviate bed block and patient flow and other issues. We will look at things again there.

However, let me give you this assurance, member for Greatorex and everyone here: I am very focused on reducing our elective surgery wait list. It is important, and I know how important it is for individuals and their families. I am focused on that as minister. I cannot say much more than that to you, member for Greatorex.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, do you have any further questions on Output 1.1?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, I do Madam Deputy Chair, and ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** We have been examining this point for a considerable amount of time.

**Dr LIM:** Yes, that is right; there are lots of issues in our hospitals.

Minister, without this thing turning to the member for Greatorex criticising our very hard-working, dedicated medical and nursing staff, I ask you: does the department conduct quality assurance or audits, especially ...

**Dr BURNS:** In terms of the hospitals?

**Dr LIM:** Yes. Let me finish my question. Are medical and nursing clinical audits done? If they have been done, what are the results? Are there any indicators of any problems or any problem areas? Are any individual staff members – I do not want names – identified as likely to be, or are current problems? If they are, what steps are in place to ensure that there is no situation about to arise from clinical incompetence?

**Dr BURNS:** I thank the member for his question. In an overall sense, as you would be aware, for the first time ever, all our hospitals have been accredited through a national independent accreditation process. That has occurred under this government. It is very important that we are getting national accreditation for our hospital. Underneath that accreditation, as you would be aware, there are processes, as you say, about auditing performance of the hospitals, and also auditing the performance, I suppose, of individuals or divisions within that hospital.

I do not think it is appropriate for me or anyone here today to talk about individuals - Joe Bloggs, or Dr X is not performing. However, I know those auditing processes do take place. I ask the CEO to talk more about that. We are very active in this area as well.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Okay, just a couple of points I would like to make, and then I am going to ask Dr Len Notaras to respond from the hospital's Medical Administration Network.

First of all I would like to point out that issues of the ilk that you are raising, member for Greatorex, are primarily an issue for professional boards to investigate for any practitioner matters that they can identify. I would also point out that we run a sentinel event policy where we look at critical events which have occurred across our hospital network. I am pleased to point out that, under the national criteria that characterise sentinel events, there were no such events in the Northern Territory in 2006-07. I would like to point out, however, that there were nine events which we chose to investigate to improve our practice. In addition to that, you would be aware that we have a credentialing process across the organisation Territory-wide. I would like to invite Dr Len Notaras, the Medical Administrator for the hospitals network, to flesh that out a bit more.

**Dr NOTARAS:** Thank you. Len Notaras, Medical Superintendent, Royal Darwin Hospital and the chair of the Medical Administration Network. In answer to the member for Greatorex's question, and as the minister has explained, we are accredited with ACHS. I have to declare an interest as a board member of ACHS as well nationally. We have done extremely well, and ACHS in particular has complimented the credentialing process that exists across the hospital network. As well as that, we have accreditation with a number of the colleges including the College of Emergency Medicine, the College of Surgeons, the Obstetric and Gynaecological College, and the College of Internal Medicine or the College of Physicians.

That all said, we do run morbidity and mortality audits. As well as those particular audits, there are audits within divisions which maintain the privacy and discretion of the various medical officers and other clinicians, nursing, allied health.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. The response has been in fairly generic form. I do not want clinical staff to be named, but what I asked was: are they indicated as problem areas and if there are, what steps are in place to ensure that there is no situation about to arise from clinical incompetence?

**Dr BURNS:** Dr Notaras has, in a large part, and also Dr Ashbridge, answered your question, but I will ask Dr Ashbridge and Dr Notaras to respond further.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I do not wish to repeat what I have said already but if there is anything additional Dr Notaras would like to add, I would welcome him.

**Dr NOTARAS:** If I could add, Madam Deputy Chair, the credentialing and scope of practice surveys particularly of senior clinicians, of specialists, but also of the medical officers in Gove, Katherine and those working at Tennant Creek, does keep a very tight and precise survey of their practice, and their level of practice, their competency to practice. At this stage, there are no significant issues that have been raised that I can actually put my mind to. That said, if a significant issue was raised it would be handled within the network and those people would be appropriately dealt with and counselled.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. I was hoping that you would say 'no', and that would be a fairly definitive comment, and I would be satisfied. But you sort of half said 'no', and that is also okay. All right, I will accept that.

**Dr BURNS:** Point of order, Madam Deputy Chair. Dr Notaras says he was not aware of any significant issues. I think that was emphatic enough. We know that within any health system there are issues that arise, very unfortunately. Dr Notaras said he was not aware of any significant issues, and that should suffice.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, would you not agree that to say that you are not aware means that it could have happened a little while ago and that you are just not aware. It does not mean that it has not happened; you are just not aware of it. Clinical incompetence - there is a concern, it is not something that happens overnight. It is a pattern of behaviour by people providing health care. It is a pattern that establishes itself over a period. If you do audits over a period, one would expect, would you not agree, minister, that you identify patterns. You are a researcher yourself, and I am sure you would understand that patterns and trends are what you would look for. Would you not agree with that, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** If you have some evidence or wish to pass on some advice confidentially on this matter, I am sure that Dr Notaras and the department would be pleased to accept it. They would follow it up.

**Dr LIM:** My question to you was: are there areas, have you done audits, have you identified any areas of concern? If you do not have any, that is fine. I would like to hear you say: 'No, you do not', and that would give me satisfaction.

**Dr BURNS:** Dr Notaras has quite plainly said that there is an audit process across divisions, and he has said that he is not aware of any significant problems. That answers the question. I will ask Dr Ashbridge to respond further.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I will be specific. There are no patterns.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. I am finished with this output.

**Dr BURNS:** Thank you, Dr Notaras.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, I do not have a lot of questions, and I am not even sure if whether this particular question is in right area, but I think it has to do with acute admissions. If young people under the age of 16 present to the hospital with STDs or pregnancies, that is a reportable offence. Why are they not being reported to the police?

**Dr BURNS:** It is not in this output area and I am not sure whether the member for ...

**Dr Lim** interjecting.

**Dr BURNS:** What's that?

**Dr LIM:** It should be in public health, environment health, disease control services.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, it is Public Health and Disease Control, which is Output 6.2.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Pregnancy is not a disease.

**Dr BURNS:** But you mentioned STIs.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Well, I will just stick to under-aged pregnancies. That means they have had sex when they are under-age. What I am asking is: why are they not being reported?

**Dr BURNS:** I am happy to answer your question about pregnancy. I imagine the member for Greatorex wants to ask this question specifically about STIs, and it is a very important question within Public Health and Disease Control.

**Dr LIM:** And the appropriate group is 6.0.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Braitling, could I ask you to direct your question ...

**Dr BURNS:** I am prepared to take a ruling of the Chair and the committee on this. I do not want to get involved ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** All right. Could I just say, minister, then for the under-age pregnancies, are they being reported or not? I will word it that way.

**Dr BURNS:** There is a policy and I am more than happy to table it. These are the departmental guidelines, the *Guidelines for Suspected Sexual Assault, Abuse or Maltreatment in any Persons Under 18*. Basically, it gives the 24-hour hotline, which is the FACS/Police/Central Intake Team, which is really associated with the Child Abuse Task Force. Which age group are you talking about here?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Under 16. I guess I am talking about the 12, 13 or 14-year girls who present and are pregnant. Is that covered in your policy?

**Dr BURNS:** Obviously the reporting of sexual abuse is mandatory under Northern Territory law, but what departmental officers and clinicians are asked to consider here, if they are between 14 and 15 years, is whether sexual activity is consensual. If not, or if they are unsure, they call the expert number that I have spoken about, investigate and manage the young person for STIs, and liaise with Obstetric Unit about support in managing pregnancy. In other words, in consultation with the Child Abuse Task Force, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre and the Central Intake Team to try to establish whether this sexual activity has been consensual. I am more than happy to table this.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Thank you. Could you give me some indication of how many cases would have been reported, say, in the last two years?

**Dr BURNS:** I will have to defer to the CEO and others in relation to that.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I can make a couple of points. The other points will fit into the later output groups, member for Braitling, but we have done a snapshot audit of that and found that all the cases that needed to be referred were referred.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Can you give me an indication of numbers?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I can do that later on. I do not have it at the moment, but we can check those numbers for you.

**Dr BURNS:** So this is pregnancies specifically, member for Braitling?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** You did not want me to get on the other area, so I did not because it ...

**Dr BURNS:** I think we will probably come to it later, so we should endeavour to have those figures when we come to the other output area.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** So just let me clear my mind, you are saying, basically, if a 14-year-old presents and is pregnant, and if the clinician thinks that it is consensual sex, then normally it is not reported, is that right?

**Dr BURNS:** It would not be mandatorily reported, because if it is considered to be consensual sex, then it is not an instance of sexual abuse.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** But we have a law that says that you cannot have sex with a minor.

**Dr LIM:** Funny about that, last year I raised this question, you said I should be realistic, and you are doing the opposite.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex, please allow the member for Braitling to ask her question.

**Dr BURNS:** Anyway to comment, member for Braitling, these guidelines that I have tabled here today are consistent across the nation and this is the approach that is taken.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Okay, and you are going to give us some figures on that, so that is good. Remember we had a wing that was meant to be for private health providers in Alice Springs?

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, we are going back in time now.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** We are going back in time. Did we ever look at getting a provider?

**Dr BURNS:** To when you were a Cabinet minister.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Ever look at negotiating any further on a private provider in Alice Springs?

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to others on this sort of history.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It is not that far back, minister.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The specific response to that is best provided by Peter Campos, Assistant Secretary, Acute Care.

**Mr CAMPOS:** The private wing is part of the general hospital complex. There are no negotiations on foot with a private provider. That capacity is actually being used as part of the remediation works, so that we are able to decant wards into that space whilst we fix up the fire safety arrangements.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** How many other wards do you have to go through this process?

**Dr BURNS:** We are talking about the rectification works now?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Yes. I know that wing is there and it is used to move wards in while you are fixing up the other ward, that is what you are saying. I am just asking how much more has to be done?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** There is a combination of questions here. Many of these questions need to go to the DPI. If you want the clinical issues around the remediation works in Alice Springs Hospital, we can answer those for you, but DPI has the responsibility for the remediation timetable and the works.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, I am sure your CEO knows the frustration of some of the staff working in the Alice Springs Hospital while all this is going on and the disturbances it causes to patients and staff. Do you have a timeline on when all these works may be finished?

**Dr BURNS:** If I could preface the answer that the CEO will give, just to give some of the history of this problem. Basically, we discovered this problem. It is currently in litigation. There are significant works to be undertaken to rectify the mess that was left to us in terms of this work by the previous CLP government. I commend the hospital staff. I know it has been difficult for the hospital staff, they have been working under difficult circumstances, but they have been doing a sterling job in minimising the impact on patients. I know it has been a strain. I would like it to be over and done with, but we have considerable time to go yet. That is a question for DPI in terms of the timeline, but we might just defer to Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** In terms of the current position of Alice Springs Hospital, the capital works for the clinical management wing and the day procedure and Ward 4 are complete. Tenders for upgrading of the Alice Springs Hospital closed on 6 June 2007 and work will commence in August 2007. The tender for work on operating theatres has been deferred for a period when the demand for the facility is lower. The total program is expected to continue and finalise in 2010.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Who has been allocated the job just mentioned, the contract?

**Dr BURNS:** It is in infrastructure. Where are we? Capital works too. I did see it here somewhere. Are we talking of upgrade of Ward 4 here? What is that?

**A witness:** That was finished.

**Dr BURNS:** That is finished. That was Probill.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, you can get back to me later, if I can go on?

**Dr BURNS:** Okay. Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The tender has been awarded but we are not able to publicly announce it yet.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Okay. Minister, you have a Rapid Admission Planning Unit at RDH. What plans do have to alleviate the problems of the new A&E in Alice Springs?

**Dr BURNS:** As you are probably aware, member for Braitling, there is a significant investment in the 2007-08 financial year in upgrading the Alice Springs Emergency Department. From memory, I think it is around \$5m. Is that correct?

**A witness:** \$6m.

**Dr BURNS:** \$6m. I think there have been discussions with the clinicians of Alice Springs Hospital about having something similar to the Rapid Admission Planning Unit in Alice Springs Hospital. I defer to the CEO, Dr Ashbridge, on this particular issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Thank you very much, minister. Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department is a busy department and \$6m has been budgeted for 2007-08 to redevelop the Emergency Department. That needs to be considered in the context of not only the growth of medical and nursing numbers, but also the fact that 2007-08 will see a growth of 12 additional beds in Alice Springs Hospital, and in 2008-09 a further 12 beds. There has been substantial investment in the infrastructure of the Emergency Department, staffing growth in Alice Springs

Hospital, and also in the bed capacity of Alice Springs Hospital, with 12 in 2007-08 and a further 12 in 2008-09.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Are the private practitioners are going to continue to operate in that area?

**Dr BURNS:** Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr LIM:** Are we now on non-admitted patients area? We are ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex!

**Dr LIM:** Madam Deputy Chair, we are wandering all over. I deliberately curtailed my questions, Madam Deputy Chair ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Greatorex!

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I will withdraw it ...

**Dr LIM:** Madam Deputy Chair, I am addressing you. I ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I will withdraw it, member for Greatorex, just to please you. If I could just have one more.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, the Renal Dialysis is budgeted for \$0.7m extra for Alice Springs. Could you tell me now the total capacity for the Renal Dialysis in the Alice Springs Hospital with that additional \$0.7m?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, member for Braitling, but I will preface the response by the CEO by saying that this is a government that has invested heavily in renal services right across the Territory. Renal disease is a great challenge, both in the care of those with renal disease, but also that it is a very expensive process. However, we have bitten the bullet and, in successive years, we have invested heavily in renal disease, particularly in Alice Springs. The situation was getting very tight in Alice Springs when there were more patients than there were units to treat them. It is a significant investment. We have refurbished Flynn Drive, and we are also increasing capacity in Alice Springs Hospital. I defer to the CEO for the details.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Thank you, minister. End-stage renal disease is an important thing for us to look at. It is expensive and a high support activity. We have the highest prevalence of renal disease in Australia, nearly four times the national average, and with substantial growth in renal disease of approximately 12% a year. There has been significant capacity around renal disease introduced into the system since 2003, and there was further enhancements announced in the budget from 2007-08 onwards. Specifically, regarding 2007-08, there was a combination of investment in the primary health care area to try to prevent people going on to renal disease. Your specific question of what the capacity in Alice Springs Hospital is, there will be eight chairs in Alice Springs Hospital.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Thank you. Finally, minister, let me just say elective surgery is not all bad news. I had one of my constituents, who was waiting for a hip operation, rang me up to say: 'Yahoo, they are not going to do one, they are going to do two, and they are sending me to Adelaide'. Thank you to ...

**Dr BURNS:** Fantastic.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** ... whoever organised that because that has been a long, ongoing problem.

**Dr BURNS:** Thank you for that positive feedback, member for Braitling.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.



## Output 1.2 - Non-Admitted Patient Services

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to Output 1.2 - Non-Admitted Patient Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. I will just be mindful of the time. I wanted to address the Patients Assistance Travel Scheme and the level of monetary assistance that has been provided for patients. Can you outline any plans that you may have to review the PATS reimbursement schemes, or PATS assistance scheme, in terms of not only airfares but also accommodation and other sundry expenses that patients might incur when they have to travel intra- or interstate?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Greatorex, it is my understanding that PATS is actually under Output 1.1 but I am more than happy to take the question. Obviously there is a lot of pressure on our PATS scheme here in the Territory because of the very nature of the services we provide our dispersed population, the fact that because of our demographics we do not have a number of specialist services here in our major centres and we have to send people south. It is a point of tension because when people get sick and if they have to go interstate, naturally they will want to take their families. It would have been an issue when you were in government also. It is a perennial issue for us and we do the best we can with the resources we have. I am not sure about a review of PATS but I will defer to the CEO on this issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I will just make a couple of introductory comments. Obviously the patient travel scheme covers inter- and intrastate accommodation, and so any comments we make are a combination of both travel within the state and interstate. Yes, there is some growth in the area. In terms of interstate travel trips, in 2005-06 it was 1951 increasing to 2100; interstate, 517 to 610; intrastate, 12 956 to 15 400; and interstate into hospital transfers, 6308 to 6400. So it is an area of growth. It is an area which we have committed to continue to allocate resources to.

In terms of the comparison of the patient travel scheme as it applies in the Northern Territory as it applies to other jurisdictions, there are a number of areas that you can consider: distance from specialists; retrospectivity or approval process; ages of escort; private vehicle per kilometre allowance; accommodation; and patient contribution. It would be fair to say, looking across at all those aspects, that the Northern Territory Patient Assistant Travel Scheme is the most generous in Australia. We are effectively the only jurisdiction that does not have patient contribution, apart from the Australian Capital Territory, and I think that is enough said. The accommodation allowance is \$30, which is consistent with all the other jurisdictions. The vehicle allowance per kilometre is 15¢/km, which is the second highest across Australia. The escort ages range from 16 to 18 - that is nationally consistent. The approvals for travel in the Northern Territory are basically prospective. In a number of other jurisdictions, they are retrospective. In terms of distance from visiting specialists, we are at 200 km and the other jurisdictions given, apart from NSW, are running at around 100 km. The obvious exception for that is offshore islands where the 200 km rule does not apply.

The patient travel scheme is well used and, nationally, we have the most generous patient travel scheme.

**Dr BURNS:** Part of your question, member for Greatorex, related to reviews of the scheme. I am advised that the Medical Administration Network reviewed the PATS guidelines regarding the criteria for an escort in September 2006. It was agreed by the network that these criteria are relevant and appropriate to the needs of the patient travel service. Furthermore, the department's Acute Care Division has engaged a project officer to revise the patient travel manual and to provide education to both clinical staff and patient travel clerks to ensure compliance. There is a bit going on in terms of patient travel.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. Madam Deputy Chair, relating to this issue I have raised many times before and government has not ever been firm with the answer: cancer patients in Alice Springs have repeatedly asked of government to provide them with a surety that they can receive government assistance, PATS, to Adelaide, for instance, where we can seek cancer treatment. The government has been reluctant to give that assurance that they can travel down there.

Minister, I assume you have had time to rethink this matter. The question has been raised by me several times, and in fact the member for Braitling decided that it was a stupid question and then later on asked the question herself. I hope you have had time to reconsider. Will you now

consider that Alice Springs patients deserve to have PATS support so that they can seek treatment in Adelaide where they have strong connections with the oncologist?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I understand the sensitivity around this issue. If you recall during the Alice Springs sitting, I was very direct in saying that patients in Alice Springs, when the radiation oncology unit is set up here in Darwin, would be travelling to Darwin and not to Adelaide unless it is treatment for a cancer that cannot be treated in Darwin.

I have undertaken both to the member for Braitingling and to various groups in Alice Springs that I would be making a trip to Adelaide to look at the patient support services for patients who do travel there and will be looking to replicate those in Darwin. I do understand the disappointment of Alice Springs residents, but for the radiation oncology to work and to be viable, this is the advice I have had, I am sure it is the advice that the Commonwealth has had: that the catchment needs to include Alice Springs. That is the way that the Commonwealth is going forward on the tender in relation to this and those will be the guidelines. I have been direct with you, member for Greatorex, and I was direct in the Alice Springs sitting.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, is it not the case though that PATS costs to Adelaide or to Darwin will almost be identical and therefore not be a significant factor in this? I also understand, and correct me if I am wrong, is it not the case that the Frommer Report also recognised that Alice Springs cancer patients be given the option of choice to either come to Darwin or go to Adelaide? That is a report your government commissioned and the cost is not much different.

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to the CEO of the department, Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The member for Greatorex is right in reflecting the costs of the airfares, however what we need to add to this discussion is the fact that when patients go interstate, they are charged back to the Northern Territory through a cross-border arrangement and the quantum associated with cross-border charges is quite substantial to the agency. In terms of developing services inside the Northern Territory, it is fundamentally a lot more than just the cost of patient travel. You need to include the cost of treatment, the cost of care in other jurisdictions, and if we are able to provide those services to the benefit of all Territorians, there is a substantial benefit for the jurisdiction.

**Dr LIM:** I will not argue this any further; we are running out of time. In regards to the question that the member for Braitingling asked earlier and she then withdrew, the after hours service that the health practitioners in Alice Springs currently provide, and supported by both the Northern Territory government and the federal government, where do you propose to relocate that when you proceed with the new emergency facility in Alice Springs?

**Dr BURNS:** That is an important service. I will defer to the CEO for a specific answer.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I would like to pass that question on to Peter Campos.

**Mr CAMPOS:** The location of that current after hours service is part of the planning that we are doing on the campus. One of the areas that would be available for it would be the old emergency department when that gets relocated. We will need to look at what is the most feasible location to have it on site. It is a very valuable service and it is one that we would like to continue to support.

**Dr LIM:** Listening to Mr Campos' response, can I have your undertaking that the government will ensure that the after hours practice is still going to co-located with the Alice Springs Hospital campus? Rather than just looking at it, that you will give a commitment that it will be located at the Alice Springs Hospital?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Campos has given a fairly firm commitment there. I have acknowledged it is an important service and I agree on the desirability of its co-location.

**Dr LIM:** Agreeing to the desirability and a commitment to explore co-location is not a commitment by the government to co-locate the after hours practice with the Alice Springs Hospital.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Campos has already answered the question; that they are looking for the most appropriate location on the campus of Alice Springs Hospital. I believe that is a fairly firm commitment.

**Mr CAMPOS:** The other point I would like to stress is the importance of the after hours to take pressure off the emergency department. That in itself means that we have a very strong commitment for it to continue. It is not something that we would like to see move off-site. It is very much a service that we would like to see continue on the campus.

**Dr LIM:** Why cannot you just say yes? It would be so much easier.

**Dr BURNS:** I think we have given a commitment here. We are still working through the awful problems of the legacy of the CLP government in terms of the remediation works at Alice Springs Hospital. That is our top priority. We are investing in a new ED, \$6m, a significant investment. What we have to do is look for the most appropriate location for the after hours GP service.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. I will not bother to debate this because we are running out of time. Regarding St John Ambulance Service's cost to the Territory, have you completed the contract with St John to continue the provision of ambulance services across the Northern Territory?

**Dr BURNS:** The advice I have here is the agreement around resourcing levels, frameworks and consideration of performance measures that form building blocks for the development of the new agreement, negotiations of which will be completed by 30 June 2007. Talking with senior people in St John, they are very happy with the progress of these negotiations. They believe that we are very close to sealing that particular agreement, but I will defer to others about that if they have more detail.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I had discussions yesterday and, yes, I am fully optimistic that this will be signed off this financial year.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. Minister, can you confirm for me, or perhaps provide me with some indication as to how many ambulances there will be available in the greater Darwin region, the Katherine region, Tennant Creek region, Nhulunbuy region and the Alice Springs region?

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to the CEO for that.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I have a couple of points to make around the ambulance services. In terms of what is guaranteed - in Casuarina there is guaranteed one 24/7 crewing, plus one eight hour crew for five days a week. Parap - one crew 24/7. Palmerston one crew at 24/7. The emergency services centre is guaranteed 24/7 crewing. At Humpty Doo, there is volunteer vehicle placed there by St John which will be manned by a roster of volunteers and available to ambulance services as a first response in the area should other resources be tied up. In Batchelor, there is voluntary crew. In Nhulunbuy, there is a guaranteed one by eight-hour shift Monday to Friday and after hours subject to crew availability. In Katherine, it is two by eight-hour shifts Monday to Sunday and after hours. In Tennant Creek, it is guaranteed two by eight-hour shifts Monday to Friday with after hours after that. In Alice Springs, guaranteed two crews 24/7; and Alice Springs Communications Centre, one 24/7.

Regarding the contractual arrangements for the growth in ambulance services in the Northern Territory, there is an escalation policy which forms part of the new contractual arrangements and, should the usage figures of St John reach that escalation point, then that triggers a review of the resources that St John are able to apply for.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Could we have that tabled, please, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I will table it.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Thank you.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister, that is good. Quickly adding up what Dr Ashbridge was describing for the Top End, is it five ambulances 24 hours a day for greater Darwin including Batchelor?

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to Dr Ashbridge on this. These have been protracted negotiations. To repeat what I said, I have spoken with senior St John people, namely Michael Mooney in the recent past, who told me he was very happy with the way that the negotiations have been. Basically, the extra money, from memory I think was approximately \$1.3m, has been invested in St John by the government in recent time.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The question was how many ambulances are available in the greater Darwin area? Is that correct?

**Dr LIM:** That is correct.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** That number ranges from five to six, given that there is an additional crew being put into Casuarina for eight hours a day, five days a week. That is the sixth crew.

**Dr LIM:** So, you have five crews definitely, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and six crews Monday to Fridays?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** No, I am sorry, that is not what I said. Earlier on, I read out what the availability of crews were for Humpty Doo and Batchelor, and I was including those in the crewing figures. There is a guaranteed four in Darwin and there are services available in Humpty Doo and Batchelor on top of that. I flagged that there was an escalation policy which is related to a 60% usage rate of ambulance services. Currently, we are operating below that 60%, which is a national benchmark figure, and that forms part of the basis of any future negotiations. I repeat: we are under the 60% at this point in time.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, I have to be guided by the St John Ambulance service to decide whether it has enough vehicles and staff available to provide ambulance services. I am curious. How did you manage – not just St John but, I suppose, the department of Health included – the accident at Daly when there were 15 casualties in the two-vehicle accident and, I think, two fatalities at the same time?

**Dr BURNS:** Two fatalities?

**Dr LIM:** Was it one or two? I cannot recall exactly, but there were fatalities involved in that accident.

**Dr BURNS:** Obviously, it was very difficult. It was in an isolated area. Crews had to travel there. I have been briefed on this issue. Doctors had to be sent from Darwin. I believe, given the circumstances, the logistics around that meant that people – particularly those who were more seriously injured – were treated and evacuated as soon as possible. Those who were ambulatory just had to wait a little. I defer to the CEO on that issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Thank you very much, minister. Just a couple of initial comments before I hand over to Dr Len Notaras. He will be able to brief you and provide you with information as the emergency plan was activated by Royal Darwin Hospital. I remind you that some of the ambulances that occur in services in remote areas are in fact not included in this. The vehicles out of Daly River were not included in the St John Ambulance vehicles, because they are in fact Department of Health and Community Services vehicles. I just introduce Dr Notaras to take us through the activation around that particular incident.

**Dr NOTARAS:** In this capacity I was acting as Region One Counter Disaster Controller. We activated with the good assistance of Didier Palmer, Director of Emergency Medicine, Royal Darwin Hospital. The disaster plan involved using the vehicles available close to the site and also vehicles from Darwin, including also the aero-retrieval wing that was activated at the same time. One fatality and 16 injured. Of the 16 injured, three were quite critically injured. There were others with varying degrees of injury including walking wounded. An ambulance bus was sent from Darwin to the accident scene and complemented the work with the two road crews that went down along with the fixed wing aircraft. So, in all, quite a substantial response.

**Dr LIM:** The ambus, as described by Dr Notaras is that part of St John fleet, or is it part of the Northern Territory vehicle fleet?

**Dr BURNS:** I think it is part of our fleet but I will defer to Dr Notaras.

**Dr NOTARAS:** The ambulance bus that was used on the occasion was one of St John Ambulance's buses, but there is an ambulance bus also available in the community. It is part of the NT Department of Health and Community Services' assets.

**Dr LIM:** Moving on, we come from St John to the Emergency Department. Can you give me a break down on the patient numbers that have been going through the department over the last five years, so we have an indication of how the figures, how the numbers are going?

**Dr BURNS:** I do not have the last five years. I can tell you that the numbers of presentations to the Emergency Department have been growing year on year by somewhere between 8% and 10% per annum. For example, the year to date in May 2007, 46 883 presentations excluding the 'did not wait' compared to 43 534 at the same time last year. So there is growth. What we have to remember in terms of Royal Darwin Hospital is there is no real back-up unlike other capital cities that might have several hospitals. We have Royal Darwin Hospital and that is it, and the same in Alice Springs.

The other things is because we lack GPs here in the Territory, and that includes the major centres of Alice Springs, Darwin and Palmerston, and up and down the track, the pressure comes on to our hospital system. Our hospital system here in the Territory is acknowledged by the federal government in its report on hospitals as probably amongst the busiest in Australia. So we do have a problem that the pressure comes on to our hospital. Also, given the fact that our population, particularly the indigenous population, is sicker than people elsewhere, we tend to get problems there. There is no doubt about it: the excessive consumption of alcohol also leads to excess presentations within our hospital. That is why it is so important that we address the alcohol issues within the Northern Territory.

We have taken some steps. We are talking about Royal Darwin Hospital, our Emergency Department. I mentioned the Rapid Admission Planning Unit which will be extended by 15 beds in August. That represents a \$7.8m investment recurrent by this government. I think there is something like 80 new staff who will be associated - this is around the clock of course - with that particular unit. It met with very favourable reception by clinicians and those working at Royal Darwin Hospital. It certainly reduced waiting time for people who have been put into this Rapid Admission Planning Unit, and with the expansion of an extra 15 beds, that would be very good.

I will also mention the implementation of 12 beds in the 2007-08 financial year within the hospital. I can assure you and this committee, and the people of the Northern Territory, that I am very serious about addressing issues around Royal Darwin Hospital. To that end, I have been drawing up some strategies along with the senior executives in that regard.

It is an important issue. Our emergency departments are important. They are very busy. I commend the staff in them. They are very busy and they do suffer at times from being overburdened but I will defer to Dr Ashbridge. I do not know whether he has the five-year figures.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Yes, I do. Specifically, we are looking at trends over the last five years in EDs across the Northern Territory. I can give you all five hospitals for the last five years Emergency Department figures.

**Dr LIM:** How about we table that, minister, to save time? It is pointless reading it out then tabling it. Just give it out and move on.

**Dr BURNS:** I think it might be the only copy that Dr Ashbridge has, so let him speak to the table he has, and then of course we will table it, member for Greatorex.

**Mr WARREN:** I would like to hear the answer, anyway.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** The important thing here is that the numbers verify absolutely the sorts of trends that the minister has identified. In the interests of speeding the process up, I might just give the aggregate figures over the last five years, and if you want more details, hospital by hospital, I can provide those as well.

The total in 2001-02 was 101 055. In 2002-03, 100 586. In 2003-04, 102 330. In 2004-05, 112 268. In 2005-06, 119 992. As of 31 May 2007, the number has increased to 113 296 with obviously with a month to go. Overall we will have seen an increase of approximately 20% into our EDs over the last five years.

**Dr BURNS:** We will table that document now, Dr Ashbridge?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I am happy for this to be tabled.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, you have, according to Dr Ashbridge, have ED figures hospital by hospital and region by region that you might like to table.

**Dr BURNS:** They are on that table.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, are you able to now dissect the figures a bit more and tell us what your response times are like for patients coming into an ED?

**Dr BURNS:** Obviously, these patients are triaged according to need. There are some figures in relation to that. I will defer to Dr Ashbridge and Mr Campos.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I refer the member for Greatorex to the *State of Our Public Hospitals 2006 Report*, the latest public national figures. We are a busy department, as I have just highlighted, in terms of emergencies. The median waiting time in the Northern Territory in our emergency department was 29 minutes, which is sixth in Australia. It is 35 in Queensland; 42 in the ACT. The Australian average was 25 minutes.

**Dr LIM:** I will move on to the next category if there are no further questions.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I realise it is getting late, so just two quick questions. Minister, have you considered establishing an agreement with Congress in Alice Springs to offload some of those patients after-hours if they would increase their service?

**Dr BURNS:** That is a good suggestion, member for Braitling. I am not sure whether it has been raised with Congress but I will defer.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I might just seek verification of this but my understanding is that Congress is open to 10 pm at the moment and they are obviously providing a service to mirror what is available in the public sector. I can seek verification of that, but that is my understanding.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It was my understanding that many patients were being referred to the Alice Springs Hospital.

**Dr BURNS:** From Congress of an evening?

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I am unable to comment, obviously, on your discussions, member for Braitling, but I am aware that Mr Peter Campos has been having some discussions with Congress so maybe he can enlighten us on those.

**Mr CAMPOS:** I have had discussions with both the Alice Springs Hospital and Congress about this matter. Congress is reluctant to have hospital-type rostering systems because that affects their recruitment process for doctors. Doctors go to work with them for different rostering arrangements, so it does seem to be an obligation that the hospital needs to respond to in terms of its 24/7 service.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** It just seems a shame there cannot be more cooperation between the groups, but I understand that.

**Mr CAMPOS:** There is a very positive and good relationship between Alice Springs Hospital and Congress in many ways. This is not affecting that relationship.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Okay, that is good. My other quick question was, you made an election promise, minister, of Hospital in the Home for Alice Springs Hospital. What has happened? I have not heard anything.

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised, member for Braitling, and I suppose, given the situation in Alice Springs and Alice Springs Hospital itself, that the extra beds for Alice Springs Hospital have been prioritised at this stage. We will follow through on that election commitment on Hospital in the Home. I understand Mr Campos may have more information in this regard, or Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** Specifically, there was \$190 000 allocated to Hospital in the Home in Alice Springs. The commitment to implement the Hospital in the Home certainly will occur. However, the most appropriate response for services in Alice Springs was deemed to be to introduce the additional beds into Alice Springs and that was the priority that has been placed. The Hospital in the Home commitment will be met. It is just that the beds have come on as a greater priority.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I will not forget, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** You will not forget, member for Braitling.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** That is all for now, Madam Deputy Chair.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Are there any further questions?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Are we having a break? Do you need a break, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** I do not mind keeping on going.

**Dr LIM:** Let us keep going.

**Dr BURNS:** We still have Police and Racing, Gaming and Licensing to go, so I think we should continue.

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

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – Community Health Services Output 2.1 – Community Health Services**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0 - Community Health Services; and Output 2.1 - Community Health Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr BURNS:** Before we go to that, Madam Deputy Chair, I have been advised that, in terms of the cars that the member for Greatorex asked about, there are two hybrid Prius cars: one in Alice, one in Darwin. There are no LPG vehicles. As I said to the member for Greatorex, I am sure the Minister for Corporate and Information Services will elaborate more on hybrid cars, etcetera, when he takes the stand in Estimates. So, sorry to interrupt there.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Output Group 2.0, Output 2.1 - Community Health Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, in your budget books there were some numbers about the number of Community Health Centres. Can you elaborate how many Community Health Centres there are, where they are located, and what staffing they have?

**Dr BURNS:** I think you are referring - there was a revised estimate of 51 to 52, and that is due, I am advised, by the Department of Health and Community Services being asked to provide Imanpa Health Centre services funded by the Australian government. So there was an increase in funded government managed rural community health centres. In terms of funded non-government managed rural community health centres, there was a revised estimate of 34 in the 2006-07 book. The revised estimate for 2006-07 was 32. Once again, that was associated with the takeover of Imanpa Health Centre and also the admission of Mt Gillen Safe House hostel in Alice Springs, which had been inappropriately counted on previous occasions as a rural community health centre.

I am advised that the operation of Mt Gillen Safe House has now been transferred over to my colleague, the Minister for Family and Community Services. I hope that answers your question.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I did ask whether you could provide me with a list of where community health centres and funded non-government managed rural health centres are located. Do you have a list of that?

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised they are in the annual report.

**Dr LIM:** Which we do not have until later this year.

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to the CEO, Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I introduce Ms Jenny Cleary, the Assistant Secretary for Health Services who has responsibility for this area.

**Ms CLEARY:** Rather than rifle through the annual report, it might be more appropriate if we prepare a list and table it in a short while.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, that might be the way, if the member for Greatorex finds that that is acceptable.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. While I am waiting for the list, minister, what sort of staff is in each of those centres?

**Dr BURNS:** Each of the centres? I defer to the CEO on that issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I will pass that question on to Ms Cleary.

**Ms CLEARY:** The Adelaide River Health Centre has two nurses and one other driver ...

**Dr LIM:** May I interrupt for a second, Ms Cleary. Minister, obviously this is a long list of numbers as well. By the time Ms Cleary is halfway through the list, I would have forgotten what she said in the first place anyway. Would you be happy to table that document?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I believe so.

**Dr LIM:** That is all I need.

**Dr BURNS:** We will look at it, but we will make sure you get the information as soon as possible.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you very much, minister. I asked those questions, I suppose, in the lead-up to this. What assistance and/or contribution would the Northern Territory government give to the community health centres, and any other means that you have, towards the Commonwealth response to the *Little Children are Sacred* Report?

**Dr BURNS:** Can you repeat that question?

**Dr LIM:** I asked what assistance and/or contribution will the Northern Territory government give through the community health centres, and any other means that you have, towards the Commonwealth response to the *Little Children are Sacred* Report?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Greatorex, it is a very important question. I inform you that, recently, I had a video conference with minister Brough, together with my colleagues, the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Minister for Local Government and Housing. In that teleconference, minister Brough outlined the process by which they would be rolling out their program. A big part of that was in the identified communities. They will be putting people on the ground, auditing each community, seeing what is required, what deficits there are, and moving forward - as Minister Brough said in his own way - to look at what is required in the longer term. He made it very plain that this was not a short-term fix for the federal government; that there was a longer-term plan here in resourcing, identifying what was working in a community, and also including what deficits might be in the community.

It is a bit premature to be answering that question until we have further discussions with minister Brough. I also have not had the opportunity yet to speak to minister Abbott. I did write to



him last Friday. He is in a remote part of the country in South Australia. He did ring my office earlier today. I tried to ring him back, but he was obviously out of range. However, I am very keen to also talk with minister Abbott about the way in which we can cooperatively work together to address this very important issue of child sexual abuse on indigenous communities. That is the answer to your question.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. I listened to your response. I am encouraged that you will be working collaboratively with the Commonwealth government. Will the Northern Territory government be prepared to provide assistance in the form of medical practitioners, nurses, Aboriginal health workers and Aboriginal interpreters for the roll-out of the program?

**Dr BURNS:** The first thing to say is you are well aware that we are suffering from a profound shortage of medical practitioners here in the Territory. There have been a lot of discussions between myself and minister Abbott in our meeting that we really need more GPs in the Territory to support our health services.

In terms of the health checks that are being proposed by the federal government, as I say I have not had a chance to speak with minister Abbott about this, but from the media that I have seen they are certainly looking to recruit medical practitioners to help them with these health checks. Indeed, during the teleconference we had with minister Brough he outlined that the federal government will be, I suppose, approaching the AMA for the support of the AMA to provide these doctors and medical practitioners to support this effort by the Commonwealth.

The other thing that minister Brough outlined in our video conference was that the logistics of this, the way he sees it working, is that the team will go to a set of five communities in one week supported by the military and then they will be moving on to the next five communities. He also said that at this stage and using his words, member for Greatorex, until these communities are stabilised that they would not be considering having the health checks until that occurs. So the health checks, from what minister Brough said to us in the meeting the other day, were not the immediate concern of the federal government. They were working on the logistics of these health checks. As I say, I am still keen to speak with minister Abbott about this.

I should also say that the department and this government has put increased funding in maternal and child health, I think \$2.2m recurrent from memory, for child health nurses across the Territory. We have what is called a universal health check which is a voluntary health check. What I would like to see, and what I would like to talk to minister Abbott about, is really further support from the federal government for what the Northern Territory government is already doing in terms of these universal health checks and the investment that we made.

I hope that answers your question but that is where things are at present. As you are aware, the federal government is making announcements as the week progresses and really giving some detail to their intentions. Also to let you know, as you are aware, that the Chief Minister and minister McAdam are meeting with the Prime Minister and minister Brough tomorrow in Brisbane, I understand. I imagine there will be further discussions around some of these issues there.

**Dr LIM:** In the meantime, minister, are the staff members in the community health centres engaging with the community to reassure them that there is no danger? What sort of messages are the health centres sending to the people to allay their unfounded fears?

**Dr BURNS:** That was also an issue that was raised with minister Brough in our video conference the other day. We have said that there was some alarm in some of the communities. Obviously, from what was said yesterday with the Chief Minister and our bush members, so to speak, they will be going out and trying to communicate with their communities, and that is a positive thing.

In relation to community health centres, I suppose the *Little Children are Sacred* report has outlined some of the things that the Health department, the Police department can be doing. There are some recommendations around that in terms of training, protocol, better cooperation between police and health centre staff. That work has already begun, I believe, within the department and also within Police. I am not sure on an individual basis how health centres are engaging with the community on this issue. But it is really difficult, member for Greatorex. The Prime Minister and minister Brough came out with their big announcement last Friday with little detail. There has only been communication this week. We have not really had the information to

be able to communicate back to our departments. I will defer to the CEO on this issue. Maybe he can give you more detail on that.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** You will appreciate, while we do not have in depth estimates briefs on this, given that it was released on Friday, but I am pleased to report that at an officer level, the department is being very cooperative with the Commonwealth agencies. We have established within the agency a formal structure to deal with the response to the urgent situation. That response has been headed up by Dr Tarun Weeramanthri, the Chief Health Officer, with senior officials working with him from both Community Services and the Community Health portfolios as well as administrative support.

A key component, which perhaps differentiates our response from the Commonwealth response, is our preparedness to talk to communities. We will have primarily Aboriginal staff going to talk to Aboriginal communities about the importance of what is going on, and we will be doing that as early as next week. We have had discussions with our federal colleagues around the nature of what these checks will look like. I can reassure the member for Grotorex that they will be, wherever possible, going through an orientation program on the Northern Territory, understanding the circumstances of the Northern Territory, and using the referral patterns and the procedures which are consistent with practice in the Northern Territory. We have had some concerns that there needs to be proper management and clinical governance over that. I can reassure you that we will ensure that the visiting professionals conform to good practice and ethical practice.

The information is unfolding. We do not have the complete information. However, as recently as a couple of hours ago, the suggestion is that at least some if not all of the professionals coming from interstate may well in fact work in mainstream services so that the teams of people who are undertaking the work out bush are, in fact, the departmental staff as opposed to visiting staff. That is not a commitment which has yet been agreed to. I merely wanted reflect that our engagement with our federal colleagues on that is a cooperative arrangement. We will be communicating with all our staff directly, primarily through Dr Shane Houston, and a consultation process at a community by community level. We will be ensuring that the practice that is undertaken in those communities is both evidence-based and ethical.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, it appears to me that there is significant fear out bush as reported by the media. Has your head of department instructed in a broad-brush way to all staff out bush to speak in reassuring terms to the people to reassure them that there should not be any fear, that it is unfounded fear? We cannot wait until next week. It should be happening as we speak because the staff are there interacting with patients every day.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** As you will be aware, it was only yesterday that we were alerted to which communities the federal government was going to do first. To suggest that we can preempt which communities they were going to, and inform our staff ahead of that, is a difficult thing to achieve.

However, now that we know which communities they are likely to go to, we will be active in talking to our staff there and there will be a communication coming out from myself to all staff across the agency around the importance of this, and the importance of not only achieving the short-term objectives but also ensuring that the Australian government works with us in partnership into the future to ensure we have a sustainable approach to the issues.

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose as the Australian government makes its intentions and logistics particularly around these health checks plain, then we will have more to communicate with people. That is why I am very keen to speak with minister Abbott at the earliest possible convenience. I understand that he is in a remote part of Australia, and I certainly appreciate the fact that he attempted to call me earlier today. It is important that he and I sit down and discuss these issues.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** One further point, member for Grotorex, just to reassure you that once we were aware of what the communities were, I can reassure you that three of those communities were contacted and had a teleconference last night. So we heard about it yesterday, we talked to them last night.

**Dr LIM:** No further questions here.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I have a couple of comments. My first comment, minister, would be to say to the message is simple: if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear. I think that applies to many of the communities to get the message out there.

This seems almost fickle when I think of the serious nature of the last question. When I visited one community, there was a Health house standing empty although the teachers were saying we desperately need it. My first point is, is there an understanding that houses can be shared, you know, if it is an empty one, give it to the place it is needed. The other thing is, you are going to need accommodation for people who go out in the communities. We have lots of dongas in Alice Springs. We would be more than willing to let you have them.

**Dr BURNS:** I understand, member for Braitling. In our discussion with minister Brough the other day, he did emphasise that the initial roll out of the Commonwealth strategy would be supported by the military. So, what he is saying is that they will do five communities a week. Basically, the tents will arrive; they will set up cooking. The accommodation will be in the tents. Then, once they have done those five communities, they will move on. I did not really find out what the communications strategy was about, which five they are doing this week and which five they are doing next week. I imagine that will be discussed in more detail with the Chief Minister, and Prime Minister and minister Brough tomorrow.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Perhaps you should ask minister Brough to camp in one of those tents when it is minus 4 degrees.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, he has been in the Army, as I understand it, member for Braitling.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Could I have an answer to my other question about accommodation in the bush generally.

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, well, you have been a minister; I think you were a minister for Housing. You know how agencies jealously guard their housing because they all have needs. It is one of the problems that we ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** ... many years ago.

**Dr BURNS:** It is not that long ago.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Ten years ago.

**Dr BURNS:** Ten years!

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Yes, yes. I think your CEO had a comment to make.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I think the suggestion behind the question is around flexibility of housing. Be reassured that when that is a feasible and a logical thing to do, the department engages in that. The background to your question is that we have something like 95% plus, if not 100% of our nursing positions are actually pooled in Central Australia at the moment. There will be occasions when there will be gaps between people coming. Clearly, as an agency, we are committed to the health service provision. We have gone to extreme lengths and done incredibly well in recruitment to nursing staff in Central Australia. The idea that there is a house being left idle does not gel, in any ongoing way, with our recruitment figures and our staffing figures in Central Australia.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Perhaps I can discuss that with you later, privately – which house I was referring to.

**Dr BURNS:** I will enjoy that, member for Braitling.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I am happy to move on.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

I note that questions on Output Groups 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0 will be addressed by the Minister for Family and Community Services on Thursday, 28 June 2007.

**OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES**  
**Output 6.1 – Environmental Health Services**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 6.0 - Public Health Services; Output 6.1 - Environmental Health Services.

**Dr LIM:** Madam Deputy Chair, I have questions, but I will forego with them because it is more important that we get down to Disease Control Services.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I am happy to agree to that.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Okay. That concludes rather quickly ...

**Dr BURNS:** So, where do you want to go? 6.2 - Disease Control?

**Output 6.2 – Disease Control Services**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 6.2 - Disease Control Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, are you able to provide for me a breakdown on STI numbers? Obviously, looking at Budget Paper No 3 over several years, STI numbers are increasing. Could you provide me with a breakdown in age groups of STIs in children; and the incidence and rate of infection breaking them down by pathogen and by region?

**Dr BURNS:** I am not sure by region, member for Greatorex. I will preface the reply by saying that, as you are aware, trichomoniasis was not a notifiable disease up until 1999. I have some figures here that track, with time, STIs – I believe they are in children. What you find when you exclude trichomoniasis is, basically, if you are looking from 1995 the numbers are very similar to what we have now.

I refute any assertions that there has been a massive increase of STIs in children in recent years. That is important to point out. There was a spike in 2002 and I believe that had to do with changes in the test regime that was used and a more sensitive test that was used. I have to place that on the record. I know there have been some reports in the media that suddenly, from 2004 onwards, there has been this outbreak of STIs in children across the Territory. I place on the record here, and I am more than happy to table this document that I have here, which clearly shows that this has been an ongoing problem in the Territory for some time.

I also place on the record that this is a government that has invested an extra \$2.5m recurrent into disease control, specifically for STIs. That, of course, includes STIs in children. STIs in children is a very serious issue. I have some numbers here broken down by age group. I do not know whether to table that or get Dr Vicki Krause to speak to this issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I introduce Dr Vicki Krause, Director of the department's Centre for Disease Control.

**Dr KRAUSE:** Would you like the numbers read out, or would you like these tabled?

**Dr LIM:** I would prefer the figures be tabled; it makes it a bit easier for us to follow ...

**Dr BURNS:** Of course, table it.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister, for tabling it. Looking at this in Budget Paper No 3, for ...

**Dr BURNS:** I will table this. This is what I was speaking to, the notification of STIs in the Under 14 age group in the NT. For the benefit of the record, it is an important issue. In 1995 – this is excluding trichomoniasis – 41; and in successive years, 1996, 52; 1997, 30; 1998, 26; 1999, 31; 2000, 17; 2001, 41; 2002, 65; 2003, 47; and 2004, 44. There are fluctuations and spikes. However, to assert that it is only a recent problem is erroneous. I am more than happy to table this document. I believe that Dr Krause has other documents there. Do you have copies if you table those, Dr Krause?

**Dr KRAUSE:** These can be tabled.

**Dr BURNS:** We will table these as well.

**Dr LIM:** The copies are coming back eventually. May I ask whether you are able to disaggregate those figures into indigenous and non-indigenous children as well?

**Dr BURNS:** I believe so.

**Dr LIM:** It is on the sheets? Good, I will have a look when they come back. I assume that, based on the figures, you said they have not been on the increase, irrespective of that ...

**Dr BURNS:** I said they were volatile.

**Dr LIM:** I accept that. Over the years, we are all increasingly aware that there is an issue. I raised it in fairly strong terms last year, and also the Chief Minister commissioned a review which ended up as a report, *Little Children are Sacred*. In that period of time, at least in the last 12 months, if not earlier, has the department been in preparation, in anticipation of the need to scale up services in the bush?

**Dr BURNS:** Certainly. As I have said before, this government has made a significant extra investment into disease control, specifically STIs, of \$2.5m. It is not just STIs we are talking about; it is Hepatitis C and HIV. A lot of the work, obviously, revolves around STIs such as gonorrhoea, syphilis and chlamydia. The department has been focused on this area, and that is part of the reason why the figures have improved in some areas, because the department has been looking more and has had the resources to look more in this area. However, I will defer to Dr Ashbridge and Dr Krause on this issue.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I believe the question related to what we were doing as a department before and during the inquiry. I refer the member for Greatorex to the document that was tabled earlier. Health and Community Services is a single department. We have developed protocols for working together between Health Services and the Family and Children's Services Division. There has been substantial work done about promoting the cross-program, not only within the department but also, obviously, within the police department as well. For examples of what that work is, I will hand over to Jenny Cleary.

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#### Answer to Question

**Dr BURNS:** While Dr Ashbridge is conferring with Jenny Cleary, in answer to an earlier question by the member for Greatorex, where he asked about workers' compensation for nurses, I am advised that the new claims in 2006-07 are 40. Of those, four were stress and three were physical assault. The incidents of assaults against nurses were: 2004-05, 110; 2005-06, 152; and 2006-07, 93. I should also add in relation to those figures that the department has been encouraging nurses to come forward in relation to assaults and other aggression towards nurses. Certainly, we do not want to tolerate it, and I believe the spike in there coincides with the program and initiative by the department of zero tolerance in relation to violence and aggression against nurses. Back to your question, member for Greatorex.

Oh, I should mention, on the issue of the member for Braitling who asked about pregnancies and protocols that flow on from there, and numbers, I believe I did answer that question. I am advised that the Minister for Family and Community Services wishes to answer that question regarding what happens in the process beyond that when she comes to the estimates' table.

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**Dr LIM:** Just as well you said that, minister, because I was going to put the question to you. Seeing that you tabled this document which is quite inconsistent with the *Little Children are Sacred* report, I will flag it now so that the Minister for Family and Community Services can prepare herself.

Having not seen the papers that Dr Krause has earlier tabled, can you tell me if, in those figures that were tabled, they include STIs for children for 2006?

**Dr BURNS:** That is the first one that I spoke about earlier, regarding STIs in children 14 years, including trichomoniasis.

**Dr LIM:** Right.

**Dr BURNS:** I think those figures run from – do they run ... I do not have it in front of me anymore.

**Dr LIM:** The heading here is: 'Notification of STIs in under 14 age group' and goes from 1995 to 2006. However, you will recall that last year, the then CEO gave the figures broken down in ages from under 12, 12 to 13, 14 to 15.

**Dr BURNS:** I think they are part of the figures coming to you, member for Greatorex. They cannot be too far away.

**Dr LIM:** Unfortunately, that means I cannot ask the question before our time runs out.

**Dr BURNS:** They cannot be too far away.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I will call ...

**Dr BURNS:** I did table them.

**Dr LIM:** It is all right; that is fine.

**Dr BURNS:** I acted in good faith, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** No, that is fine. I am not criticising you, minister, I am, just lamenting that I cannot ask the question. I will put the questions to your colleague, the Minister for Family and Community Services. I hope she comes in here well ...

**Dr BURNS:** Here they come now, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. It is a bit hard. I am holding people up. I will pass the questioning to the member for Braitling first, if she likes, while I study these figures.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Thank you, member for Greatorex. Minister, did you indicate that you did not want answer questions about the STIs?

**Dr BURNS:** No, I have said that where we go into the processes of FACS it is appropriate that the Minister for Family and Community Services, Delia Lawrie, answers those questions. What I have tabled here is the protocols regarding STIs and pregnancies. However, if you ask questions about numbers and processes, obviously ...

**Mrs BRAHAM:** That is the notifications?

**Dr BURNS:** ... these are specific questions for the Minister for FACS, which is appropriate. However, I am more than happy to answer questions about STIs. As that protocol shows, they are referred to the Hotline and, then, there is consultation, decisions made, and directions given.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, if I may address something, if the member for Braitling's is agreeable. Figures have been tabled by Dr Krause. On the second page, where there are tables of every Aboriginal and underage STI deaths – that page. I note that ...

**Dr BURNS:** Do you still have that? That was your copy.

**Dr KRAUSE:** That was my copy.

**Dr BURNS:** Can we get a copy, please, Terry and ...

**Dr LIM:** Sorry about that.

**Dr BURNS:** ... I will give it to Dr Krause so that she can speak to it.

**Dr LIM:** On the second page, looking at the chart rather than the bar graph. The 2007 figures are, obviously, only for six months to May – five months or six months?

**Dr KRAUSE:** Up to today.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. Up to today's date? Okay, about six months. Looking at that, assuming it is twice as many in 12 months, there would be a definite huge spike for 2007. Would I be right in making that assumption?

**Dr BURNS:** Which age group are you talking about, member for Greateorex?

**Dr LIM:** Could I draw your attention, minister, to the first block, 'Aboriginal Years 2006-07'?

**Dr BURNS:** We need another graph here, please, Terry.

**Dr LIM:** There is another set here.

**Dr BURNS:** However, what I can see on the bar graph is that, in 2007, there has been a reduction across all age groups. Maybe from 2006-07. What that bar graph shows from 2000 to 2007 is that there was quite a lot of volatility there. That is what I see from the bar graph, member for Greateorex.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I was referring to this page.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** In the very top table. Before I even commented on the table, I asked whether the 2007 figures were for the five months to the end of May or, in fact, until today. Dr Krause advised that it was today's figures ...

**Dr BURNS:** Which is very close to the end of the financial year, so ...

**Dr LIM:** That is right. Which ...

**Dr BURNS:** ... you are looking at a total of 357 in 2006 ...

**Dr LIM:** Let me finish ...

**Dr BURNS:** ... going to what will be 213 or thereabouts in 2007.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, let me finish so you can hear my rationale and you can tell me if I am wrong. I would assume that each of those years are calendar years and 2007 is six months. If that is wrong, please correct me. If I am right ...

**Dr BURNS:** No, you are correct there.

**Dr LIM:** I am correct. So it is calendar years?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** So, in 2006, you are looking at 14 STIs under 12 years of age; between 12 and 13, 63; and between 14 and 15, 280 STI cases. In 2007 – six months – under 12 we have already 14; between 12 and 13, we have already 42 cases; and between 14 and 15 years of age, 157 cases - for six months! Making the assumption that there is going to be twice as many over 12 months, I suggest to you that there is a spike – a big spike.

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to Dr Ashbridge on this.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I will pass to Vicki, however, I will make the point that I believe the assumption of doubling is a very bold assumption to make, given the volatility being described over

the previous 10 years. I am certainly not prepared to make that bold assumption and I will pass over to Dr Krause.

**Dr KRAUSE:** Thank you for that. You are right in that you are seeing an increase in cases. However, as you would well know, one year does not a trend make, and one six month period also does not a trend make. If we go back to 1995 or, indeed, back to 1991, it is actually in this very young age group that we do see this incredible fluctuation, because they are small numbers and they go up and they down. I would be very cautious in saying that that is a trend.

In the same light, we also know that there is possibly more awareness and there might be more testing. We also know that our testing has improved overall, and we know that the numbers overall in all age groups are going up, not only in Aboriginal communities, but in non-Aboriginal, not only in the NT, but overall in Australia. It is important that this be taken in context, but I understand what you are pointing out and certainly this is why we monitor these and report on them.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, you will allow me to say, I am sure, that I hold the CDC in high regard; they are our unsung heroes. They have done tremendous work and I will always treat statistics cautiously. I am not trying to rub the government's nose in the dirt. I am just saying that, when we are interrogating figures, it shows a trend. I am equally sure that Dr Krause is cautious about these trends and will be casting a very close eye on these to make sure that if it is happening that something be done with it very quickly. I am trying to be quite conciliatory. I am just trying to draw attention to the fact that there might be a problem, and hence the result which is the report called *Little Children are Sacred* and the result of the Commonwealth government's response. We should, none of us, be surprised that this is happening; both the report and the response, we should not be surprised. What I want to see happening is that the Northern Territory respond, rise to the challenge and respond accordingly so that our children are kept safe. That is what I am looking for.

**Dr BURNS:** No disagreement there, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister. We can agree, minister, so often we can agree.

Tuberculosis is another issue that has troubled me somewhat. We have not had any reports of the absolute numbers. Can you tell me how the incidence of TB is going? Is it increasing or decreasing across the regions?

**Dr BURNS:** This is another important issue. As you are aware, the Northern Territory has had problems with TB for many years, and it requires vigilance. We do have, from time to time, flare-ups in TB. However, with TB, often the more you look, the more you find. Like you, I commend the efforts of Disease Control because it does take a lot of resources to identify, treat, follow up and make sure that people are taking their treatment, and all appropriate protocols are adhered to. However, in trends of TB, I have to defer to Dr Krause.

**Dr KRAUSE:** Thank you for that question. It is very important to always raise a banner for tuberculosis, which is a disease that, as an infectious disease, kills more people throughout the world than any other. It is certainly something we need to pay attention to.

In the Territory, we have or have had the highest rates, as you would be aware. We have some of the risk factors which do promote TB; that is - and I do not think any of us would shy away from it - poverty, overcrowding, alcoholism; things that we are all trying to, in collaboration, to address. However, over the past 10 years, we actually have had a decrease in our tuberculosis. On behalf of my unit, I would like to say that we probably have the most extensive TB control efforts going on in the nation. We have very good compliance and good contact tracing going on. In that case, we are actually able to go out, do community screens, get TB when it is very early, especially in children when it is not communicable and not necessarily harming them - they might just have a slight cough and something on their chest X-ray. We are able to identify them, treat them, so that they will not progress to pass it to other people, or to relapse in their older age. On many accounts, we are doing a very good job in that area. We are keeping up the services as are needed.

We also share with the other jurisdictions, actually, in some of our protocol and guidelines. Therefore, we can feel comfortable but not confident because in no way is it gone. In the area,



specifically, we know in the past year or two that, whenever you do have a case, because that contact tracing happens, cases are found and treated. That is in the whole realm of treatment, being prevention, and that is ongoing.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, are you able to provide me, again, with the incidence and rate of an infection by region and by indigenous or non-indigenous distribution?

**Dr BURNS:** This is for TB?

**Dr LIM:** Yes.

**Dr KRAUSE:** I do not have that with me off the top of my head.

**Dr BURNS:** We have to take that question on notice, member for Greateorex. It can be provided.

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#### Question on Notice 5.1

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Greateorex, for the purposes of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, would you please provide the incidents and rate of infection of tuberculosis by region, and by indigenous or non-indigenous distribution; success of treatment; and follow up?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, member for Greateorex.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** We need to seek some clarification of the question. It might be best if I asked Dr Krause to seek the clarification, because there are issues about whether we talk about infectiousness, prevalence, incidence. We just want to get the question exactly right, if you do not mind.

**Dr KRAUSE:** If you are talking about TB cases, we can certainly give that to you by region and by indigenous and non-indigenous stats. Or, if what you are asking about infection, meaning LTBI, which will be your Mantoux test screening, we do that as part of school screening ...

**Dr LIM:** No, I mean ...

**Dr KRAUSE:** You mean the active cases?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, the active cases.

**Dr KRAUSE:** Yes, we can take that on notice and supply them.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** And the clarification is incidences, number of new cases per year, or at a point in time?

**Dr LIM:** Obviously, I would like to see the trend in the Territory ...

**Dr KRAUSE:** Yes, that is no problem.

**Dr BURNS:** Over what sort of time period, member for Greateorex?

**Dr LIM:** Well, I think the last five years is a good way to judge trends.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** We can probably give you 10.

**Dr BURNS:** So we better clarify the question for the committee.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Yes. Member for Greatorex, could you please restate the question in completion.

**Dr LIM:** With the additions of what the officers have agreed to which is the active infection rates, and over a 10 year period. That would be lovely. Thank you very much.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate that Question No 5.1.

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**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Are there any other questions?

**Dr LIM:** Yes. Minister, in terms of the Mantoux testing that Dr Krause alluded to earlier, I remind you of the incident in Alice Springs where there was a little bit of a hoo-ha at the Alice Springs Hospital when some staff were Mantoux-tested positive, when I believe there was an active case that staff were not aware of, and hence, the exposure and hence the screening of staff members. Could you provide me with some detailed description of what has happened with that incident since?

**Dr BURNS:** Obviously, that is an operational issue. I will defer to Dr Krause.

**Dr KRAUSE:** I believe you are talking about a sign that was put up in a central area of the hospital that talked about encouraging staff who had not come forward for their contact tracing around the case. First, I would like to say that you have very competent staff in Alice Springs in CDC in doing TB control, and they certainly were on top of the situation. In this case, we might refer to a situation in a small hospital; however, really they were doing their job. They, through the normal channels, were trying to get staff who had been named as contacts to come forward and get their appropriate contact tracing. Where they were having trouble, maybe they went a step too far in trying to say, 'You know who you are, come forward.' They did not at any time name the person, name the patient. They were just trying to do what they could do to promote appropriate action on the part of the health care workers for which they felt a responsibility.

We might take on notice that they could maybe pull in a little bit, but I do not really think any harm was done. The individual actually was handled appropriately and actually had other issues.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** For the purposes of *Hansard*, I would like to acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, regarding the case that Dr Krause and I are talking about, I suppose it concerns me that sometimes people are admitted to our health facilities, whether they be hospitals or whatever, and staff are not aware of an active infection being in their presence. In terms of HIV/Aids, through the standard sterile techniques, we can avoid contact with body fluids. But with something that is in aerosol form, there is no way that we can avoid contact unless we are aware, then we wear appropriate garments and barriers to prevent ourselves picking up the infection. Should staff be advised of cases that have active infections?

**Dr BURNS:** I will preface the answer to that to say that my Mantoux test was like a volcano. Those of us who have spent a lot of time out in Aboriginal communities have certainly come into contact with active cases. You are right in saying there needs to be the right protocols, particularly in the hospital situation around TB. As you have alluded to before, CDC does a fantastic job, and I suppose it is a difficult job. Patients move in and out. Sometimes patients have different veins. Sometimes there are difficulties there. I will throw to Dr Krause and maybe she can answer your question, or Dr Ashbridge.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** I will fairly quickly go to Dr Krause. I just want that ask we respond to that question as a protocol question rather than go to the individuals.

**Dr LIM:** Of course.

**Dr KRAUSE:** You are very right that obviously when someone has an infectious disease, you want to guide your staff. That is why we have infection control committees and we have infection control guidelines. I will give you the example of when someone comes in with a heart attack; you put 10 people in hospital usually to diagnose one who actually has a mild cardiac infarction. But everyone who comes in with a cough, fever, weight loss and sweats has to be considered whether they have TB. There are different things that you then have to do and obviously we try to educate people to do those things quickly as TB is diagnosed. I have probably more confidence in the Northern Territory in our health care providers recognising it and having them put in appropriate infection control settings. I take your point but I think that we do a very good job. We also do keep statistics on how many health care workers and whether we think that health care workers have acquired disease while within the Northern Territory. Again, that is a very hard thing, but we actually have no data to support that there has been acquisition. I think you bring up a very good point and we have a long history of having a good infection control and our statistics bear that out.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I was more referring to a known case of active infection who then presents to our health care facilities. Should that known case be identified to staff so that they are prepared? Rather than just somebody coming of the street with an undiagnosed TB, and eventually we find ...

**Dr BURNS:** Obviously it is a question for Dr Krause, it is an operational issue.

**Dr KRAUSE:** You are correct. This does happen. If someone is admitted with the diagnosis or even a suspected diagnosis of TB, they are put in infection control settings and priorities. So to my mind this is something that is well within our protocols and is routine business.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. No further questions.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Just briefly, minister. I have to admit the STI figures that you tabled were worse than I thought. You have to forgive my ignorance, but can a child only be infected with an STI by sexual activity?

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to Dr Krause for that answer.

**Dr KRAUSE:** Yes. I think we all have the things that possibly your friends told you about getting it from toilet seats and other things. But by large, we accept that most STIs are acquired by some sexual activity. The exception here would be at birth or in the neo-natal period when the transmission occurs from the mother.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Can you tell me if these are all the cases that have been notified? Is there an assumption that there also many that have not been presented?

**Dr BURNS:** I believe it is mandatory notification, but I will defer to Dr Ashbridge and Dr Krause.

**Dr ASHBRIDGE:** If the question is: are there STIs are out there which we do not know about, the answer to that will be yes. If the question is: have we treated and managed all the STIs we know appropriately, the answer is yes.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I do not wish to dwell on that; I think we have had enough. In the late 1960s I was in a community where there was leprosy and the nurses turned up to treat it. Is it still within the Northern Territory; do we still have cases of leprosy, or has it gone?

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to Dr Krause.

**Dr KRAUSE:** Yes. Similarly to, I suppose, tuberculosis as a disease that others might have thought of was something of centuries past, but certainly leprosy is still a disease which is diagnosed in the Territory. Again, it is a challenge for us as it means we have to have awareness amongst our health care professionals; yet another challenge for the Territory. We have maybe one to two cases, zero to two cases per year over the past, new cases.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Mainly in the Top End?

**Dr KRAUSE:** Yes, mainly in the Top End. Historically, most of the leprosy has actually been in coastal areas and down through following the train line to Tennant.

**Mrs BRAHAM:** Minister, that is all, no more questions on that. We will catch up.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 6.2. I note that the questions on Output 6.3 will also be addressed by the Minister for Family and Community Services on Thursday 28 June 2007.

**OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – HEALTH RESEARCH**  
**Output 7.1 – Health Research**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** We will now proceed to Output 7.0 - Health Research; Output 7.1 - Health Research. Are there any questions?

**Mrs BRAHAM:** I would prefer to go on to Police. I have no questions on that.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** There being no further questions, that now concludes consideration of Output Groups 1.0, 2.0, 7.0 and Output 6.1 and 6.2.

**Dr BURNS:** Madam Deputy Chair, before the Health staff leave, I thank them for all the work that has gone into the estimates process, and the way in which they have furnished information to this committee. I know it is a lot of work and I am sure all members join me in thanking the Health department for the work they have put in.

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, do you want a break?

**Dr BURNS:** We have to get the Police in here. I am right. I might just go and have a drink.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** We will call an adjournment for five minutes.

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The committee suspended.

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## POLICE, FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** I now invite the minister to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

**Dr BURNS:** Madam Deputy Chair, I will make some introductions and then make a short opening statement in relation to my portfolio of Police, Fire and Emergency Services. At the table with me are Paul White, Commissioner of Police; Audrey Ko, Executive Director of Corporate Services; and Rose Hallett, Director of Finance and Procurement. We also have today Bruce Mouatt, Director of Fire and Emergency Services. He will join us when we get to the Fire and Emergency Services output group.

Budget 2007-08 delivers yet another year of record funding to Police, Fire and Emergency Services as the government continues its commitment to building a safer community and rebuilding our police force. Funding for the Police, Fire and Emergency Services has been boosted to \$226m, a 65% increase since the Martin government came into office in 2001. We have committed this extra funding because this government is serious about fighting crime. When we came to office in 2001, we inherited a police force which had been starved of funds by the previous CLP administration, and damaged by a recruitment freeze that lasted nearly four years. We engaged former Queensland Police Commissioner, Jim O'Sullivan, to carry out an assessment of the resource requirements of the Northern Territory Police Force. Mr O'Sullivan produced his comprehensive report which made a total of 112 recommendations.

Our government is now in the final phase of the \$75m Building Our Police Force plan which has seen us add an extra 200 officers to the Northern Territory Police Force. I acknowledge the hard work over the past four years of all at the police college who have been responsible for training hundreds of new police. Today, the Northern Territory has the highest number of police per capita of any jurisdiction in Australia.

Budget 2007-08 delivers \$31m to continue the initiatives recommended by the O'Sullivan report including maintaining those increased police numbers and delivering improvements; delivering in working conditions for police in the Territory. Darwin's northern suburbs will get a new police station with \$4.8m allocated to the replacement of the 30 year old Casuarina police station within this term of office. We have also committed \$1.3m to establish highway patrols and rural area patrols as part of the government's Save the Roads initiative. One patrol of each type will be located in Katherine and Alice Springs and will operate on highways in communities throughout the Territory.

Budget 2007-08 also provides police with \$580 000 to expand activities under the *Criminal Property Forfeiture Act*, as well as a further \$633 000 to assist in the operation of the Night Patrol Service, which was transferred to the Northern Territory Police from Mission Australia in December 2005. Budget 2007-08 delivers \$700 000 to the Northern Territory Police to provide vehicles for Aboriginal Community Police Officers in remote areas. I suspect the highlight for 2007 for the Fire and Rescue Service took place earlier this week with the official opening of the new Marrara Fire Station. However, Budget 2007-08 also delivers \$500 000 in capital funding for the major fire appliance replacement program, which will see the replacement of old tankers at Elliott and Timber Creek.

This government is proud of the level of its spending on Police, Fire and Emergency Services. We are committed to maintaining significant gains we have made with Police, Fire and Emergency Services. In conclusion, Madam Deputy Chair, I look forward to any questions the committee may have with regard to the appropriation for this year.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Are there any questions regarding the minister's opening statement?

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. Good afternoon and welcome. Thanks for your opening remarks, minister. I would like, as has been the practice these Estimates, to ask some general questions in relation to the appropriation. I would be grateful if we could rip through it reasonably quickly. I am sure you are expecting these questions.

My first question is how much of the total appropriation for the output group goes towards corporate and executive services?

**Dr BURNS:** What percentage?

**Ms CARNEY:** Percentage is fine, yes.

**Dr BURNS:** The advice that I have here is that in 2006-07 the final percentage of corporate overhead charges and depreciation was 15.4%. In Budget 2007-08 the estimate is 12.79%.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you.

**Dr BURNS:** I could ask Audrey Ko to give a bit more detail about this and if you would introduce yourself, Audrey.

**Ms CARNEY:** If I may, minister, thank you, but I just wanted those figures. I am sure we can get that detail another time. It was just the figures that I am after, if that is all right.

**Dr BURNS:** There are some more details on what it comprises.

**Ms CARNEY:** No, but I understand and I know the department does too, Corporate and Executive Services. So if we could move on, I would be grateful.

**Dr BURNS:** Okay. Fair enough.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. Next question. What is the cost per square metre for cleaning offices, and is it undertaken by contractor or internal cleaners? As we have had with some other ministers, if the answer is 'go to DCIS', I am happy to accept that response.

**Dr BURNS:** I think as we found with Health, there is probably an overall charge for cleaning in terms of Police, Fire and Emergency Services across the Territory. I will defer to the Commissioner or Audrey to get some detail for that.

**Ms KO:** Audrey Ko, Executive Director, Corporate Services. Ours has a combination of elements to the cleaning costs. The lease building is handled by NT Property Management and the owned facilities are cleaned internally and most of them are outsourcings to contractors. Our annual cleaning cost is about \$650 000.

**Ms CARNEY:** \$650 000?

**Ms KO:** Yes. That includes all stations and buildings here.

**Ms CARNEY:** Next question is: could you tell me the square metre size of the CEO's office?

**Dr BURNS:** I do not have that sort of detail, member for Araluen, as I did say within the last session to do with Health. When I was DCIS minister, I certainly instituted a framework around an accommodation committee, a high-level committee within government, that set standards in terms of accommodation across all agencies and looked very carefully at costs of people moving locations. In terms of actual square metres in the CEO's office, I cannot give you an exact figure there, but I will ask the CEO whether he wants to respond to that?

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Paul White, Commissioner of Police. Twenty-eight square metres.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thanks, commissioner.

Next question: how much of the total appropriation for the output goes towards the cost of advertising? What are the design and production costs of radio, television, newspaper, magazine and other medium? Other ministers, I think, have had this answer that they have been happy to table in the interests of time. I would be grateful if you would consent to table that document. You may not want to, but if it is able to be tabled?

**Dr BURNS:** The advice I have is the advertising expenses to 31 May 2007 in thousands is \$4000 for marketing and promotion, \$26 000 for ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry, minister. If you are not going to table it, you will need to slow down. \$4000 for marketing ...

**Dr BURNS:** I am going to table it.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. Table it.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes. But I am just putting it on the record here. Marketing and promotion ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry, just a point of clarification. If it is tabled, it is part of the record? Correct?

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The minister has the latitude to be able to answer the question.

**Dr BURNS:** No. It is my prerogative, member for Araluen, to table after I have laid it on the record. Please show me the courtesy of allowing me to finish. Time is short.

**Ms CARNEY:** There is no need to be hostile, minister. By all means, go through the figures and take ...

**Dr BURNS:** I am not being hostile. I am being very friendly and courteous.

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, go through the figures and table the document. Get on with it.

**Dr BURNS:** Beautiful. I would be there now if you had not interrupted.

**Ms CARNEY:** If you had not been so absurd. You know. Come on. Move on.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, please allow the minister to answer the question.

**Dr BURNS:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

\$4000 for marketing and promotion; and \$26 000 for general advertising expenses. In terms of recruitment, the wonderful campaign that we have run around recruitment that has enabled 50% approximately of our recruits into our Northern Territory Police Force to be local, \$129 000. Great ads on the television; got a great response and a lot of competition in terms of people wanting to join our wonderful Northern Territory Police Force. Madam Deputy Chair, I table this document.

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

**Ms CARNEY:** Thanks, minister. If you are going to do a commentary in relation to every answer, you are not doing your portfolio any justice, with the greatest of respect.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, the minister has latitude in answering the question if you asked the question.

**Ms CARNEY:** Madam Deputy Chair, I asked a very specific question. You can play all you like but this is a serious business. My next question is: what is the cost of all advertising media which included the minister's image?

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised nil.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. What is the cost of postage associated with mass communication to Territorians and include the cost of letterbox drops?

**Dr BURNS:** What sort of promotions are you talking about here, or communications?

**Ms CARNEY:** Communication either from you as minister, where apparently there has been nothing that has had an image of you on it, which is interesting, but any communication within this department or from your office?

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised, if you are talking about say, the letter that I sent out in relation to paintball and the legalisation of paintball in the Territory, those costs go through the Chief Minister's Department.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. What about – you do a brochure? I do not have one.

**Dr BURNS:** 'Building our Police Force'?

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes.

**Dr BURNS:** Similarly.

**Ms CARNEY:** And that goes through Chief Minister's, does it?

**Dr BURNS:** I understand that.

**Mr WARREN:** I think that question was asked last night too.

**Ms CARNEY:** Well, it may have been but it goes through Chief Minister's? Okay.

**Mr WARREN:** The answer was given last night.

**Ms CARNEY:** All right. Thanks for your insightful contribution.

Next question: What is the cost of research or message development research? It may be none but if you could answer one way or the other, I would be grateful.

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer.

**Commissioner WHITE:** I am told it is not quantifiable.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. How much of the total appropriation goes towards the cost of media liaison and monitoring?

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to the Commissioner and Audrey on this one. So, specifically media monitoring, Leader of the Opposition?

**Ms CARNEY:** I will repeat the question: how much of the total appropriation goes towards the cost of media liaison and monitoring?

**Dr BURNS:** The information we have here does not specify media monitoring activities, member for Araluen. I am not sure. We have the show circuit expenses; air time for cyclone preparedness; giveaways at shows; violence against women; White Ribbon Day; things like that. In terms of media monitoring, I do not have a figure here.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay.

**Commissioner WHITE:** We have staffing costs but not media monitoring. We cannot break that down.

**Ms CARNEY:** So you have it and you cannot break it down?

**Commissioner WHITE:** We have staffing cost and operational costs, but I cannot see what media monitoring is but I can give you a staffing and operational costs.

**Ms CARNEY:** In relation to media monitoring?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Media and Corporate Communications do some media monitoring.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes okay, well, perhaps we will do it that way, and I can ask you a few more questions.



**Commissioner White:** The budget is a total of \$724 000 for Personnel and Operational; Personnel expenses being \$600 000 and Operational being \$124 000.

**Ms CARNEY:** So that I am clear, that is for media liaison and media monitoring?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Yes, it is. That is for the staff who work in Media and Corporate Communications.

**Ms CARNEY:** Sure. How many staff are in Media Communications?

**Commissioner WHITE:** There are five all together; one in Alice Springs, and one of those is Publishing, and that is not involved in the day to day dealing with the media, it is more publishing and the like.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. Thank you. I assume that you will not be able to provide the answer for this question, but I will ask it anyway: are you able to provide the specific cost of media monitoring?

**Commissioner WHITE:** I will have to take that on notice.

**Ms CARNEY:** If you would, that would be great, thank you.

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#### Question on Notice No 5.2

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, for the purposes of *Hansard*, would you please re-state your question?

**Ms CARNEY:** Can you provide the cost of media monitoring in 2006-07, including the cost, if any, of transcription?

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

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 5.2.

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**Ms CARNEY:** How much of the total appropriation goes towards the cost of reviews undertaken in 2006-07?

**Dr BURNS:** I do have some information in terms of consultancies here; some of them relate to reviews of services, for example, a review of the Communications Strategy and the Digital Radio Network. Others have been consultancies: the Salvation Army provides Chaplaincy services. There are a number of reviews. Probably the major review related to the O'Sullivan Report, which was some time ago, but possibly the Commissioner or Audrey Ko would want to speak more to this.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. I will just repeat questions so I am clear, and indicate that I will ask you a question about consultancies. This question is: how much of the total appropriation went towards the cost of reviews in 2006-07?

**Commissioner WHITE:** It all depends on what is meant by a review. I can give you some information in relation to consultants we engaged during the financial year.

**Ms CARNEY:** My difficulty is that presumably not all consultants were engaged in relation to a review.

**Commissioner WHITE:** I can answer this, minister. It all depends on what is meant by a review, but I can give you some information in relation to a consultancy engaged during the financial year.

**Ms CARNEY:** My difficulty is, presumably not all consultants were engaged in relation to a review.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Well, there was a review of our communications system in relation to digital radio networks, there was a review in relation to remote employment, we did a Police Auxiliary review, and that is probably it. I can give a breakdown of those costs.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, please.

**Commissioner WHITE:** In relation to the digital radio network, if I can call it a review, it was \$70 000. In relation to the review of remote employment, it was \$26 785. In relation to the Police Auxiliary review – I am sorry, I do not ...

**Ms Ko:** That was in-house.

**Commissioner WHITE:** That was in-house? So far as I can see in front of me, Ms Carney, that is the nature of the reviews. There were other consultancies, but that was the nature of the reviews.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. Commissioner, I assume that none of those reviews are available to the public?

**Commissioner WHITE:** No, no.

**Ms CARNEY:** That is fine. Can I ask you in relation to the consultants the following questions? This will not come as a surprise, I am sure. How much of the total appropriation went towards the cost of engaging consultants? I know you have mentioned two. How much went towards the cost of engaging consultants; how were the consultants appointed; how many consultants were there – or consultancy companies; what did they do – to some extent answered? Who were they and what did they cost?

**Dr BURNS:** Just to preface the answers given by the commissioner and Audrey Ko, of course, all our processes go through the government tender process, and that is strictly adhered to. In terms of a total for consultancies, it is a very modest total over the year. I will defer to Audrey and Commissioner White.

I am advised it is approximately \$200 000 for the agency as a whole, which is a very modest amount, given the total appropriation for Police, Fire and Emergency Services is somewhere around \$226m projected in 2007-08 and \$219m in 2006-07. Therefore, I think \$200 000 is a modest amount, Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms CARNEY:** Had my question been to ask you whether it was modest or otherwise, your answer would have been fine, thanks. However, my question was very specific. I see your colleague over there is keen to answer.

**Mr WARREN:** Point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! The question should be directed through the minister and not directed to the public servant. That is protocol and that is how we operate here.

**Ms CARNEY:** They are. Anyway, let us move on.

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to either the commissioner or Audrey Ko to talk about the number of consultancies that were undertaken.

**Commissioner WHITE:** I can advise there were consultancies in relation to the Tri-service communications; chaplaincy services; into project management regarding human resource management; remote employment; a Borrooloola scoping project involving work with responses to domestic and family violence; development of a strategic plan; specifications for the tender for the maintenance requirements for the police aircraft; for workshops in relation to volatile substance abuse prevention; an environment **scheme**; two grievance investigations ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry. I am assuming you are not going to table the document, so I have to write this down. Workshops in relation to volatile substance ...

**Comment [eno1]:** this sounded like scam or scheme - so take your pick of whichever you think it should be

**Commissioner WHITE:** Yes. An environmental scheme; two grievance investigations ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Grievance?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Two grievance investigations; a national community safety working group in relation to Fire and Emergency Services.

**Ms CARNEY:** Do you have names of the consultants who provided services and, if so, would you table that?

**Dr BURNS:** To save time, member for Araluen, I have no objections to tabling these documents here, so let us get on with it.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. How much of the total appropriation in 2006-07 went towards the number of full-time equivalents, and can you provide the number of employees at each level – if you have that in table form?

**Dr BURNS:** You are talking about as police officers, or including support staff?

**Ms CARNEY:** Everything.

**Dr BURNS:** I can certainly talk to the issue of police officers and Police Auxiliaries and ACPOs. So, I will start with that.

**Ms CARNEY:** Before you do, minister, will you also provide the overall figures, or are you just ...

**Dr BURNS:** I will provide the overall figure; I have no problem with that.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. Given that that ...

**Dr BURNS:** We are proud of the overall figure, member for Araluen.

**Ms CARNEY:** Whatever. I would be grateful if you could supply the cost of staffing – full-time equivalents, the number of employees. I am just after the global, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised 72% of the overall budget for Police, Fire and Emergency Services relates to staffing.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. And the number of FTEs and the levels?

**Dr BURNS:** I have that. Basically, the total, I am advised, for police and public servants is 1626 FTEs.

**Ms CARNEY:** Do you have that in table form - it would be ideal, obviously – for employees and their levels?

**Dr BURNS:** The employee levels? Yes, we have that.

**Ms CARNEY:** Happy to table?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** For the purpose of *Hansard* I would like to acknowledge that the member for Brainting has been replaced by the member for Nelson.

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, how much of the total appropriation went towards the cost of airfares anywhere and can you provide a breakdown of airfares between Darwin and Alice Springs please?

**Dr BURNS:** I will give this to Audrey Ko to speak to. Obviously there is travel as a major component in police work.

**Ms KO:** The 2006-07 official duty fares is \$1.1m. Down to Alice Springs, \$374 000.

**Ms CARNEY:** \$374 000?

**Ms KO:** Yes.

**Ms CARNEY:** And the \$374 000 is part of the \$1.1m.

**Ms KO:** Yes.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. I have some questions in relation to environmental matters. If you cannot answer, take them on notice if that is convenient. How much of the total appropriation goes towards greenhouse gas reduction strategies?

**Dr BURNS:** I will just take some advice on that. Once again, I emphasise that this is a government that is very focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As Minister for Planning and Infrastructure there was a plan developed for reducing government energy use and that would include police. Did you want to speak to this, Audrey?

**Ms KO:** We do not have that in dollar value but we have some processes and strategies in place, for example, in terms of buildings and the vehicles that we are using. Are you happy for me to just ...

**Ms CARNEY:** I have some specific questions in relation to those matters. I need to ask this question before I ask whether you take it on notice. Is it possible to quantify the figure for greenhouse reduction strategies? If it is not, I will live with it. But if it is ...

**Ms KO:** It would be a lot of assumptions.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, okay, not possible to quantify? Thank you. The government committed itself to a target of 1.5% reduction in emissions from Northern Territory commercial buildings by the end of June 2007. What adjustments to building and specific measures, if any, has this department done to reach the target?

**Dr BURNS:** Could you ask the question again, please.

**Ms CARNEY:** The government has committed itself to a target of 1.5% reduction in emissions from NT government commercial buildings by the end of June 2007. What adjustments to building and specific measures, if any, has your department done to reach that target?

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised that the Peter McAulay Centre, and the college and forensic buildings have installed power factor correction devices that will even out energy spikes and reduce energy consumption.

Peter McAulay airconditioning vents, they have had insulation of cushion head vents that close when desired temperature is reached. This lowers airflow of pressure and allows airconditioning plants to run more efficiently. Peter McAulay Centre airconditioning timers, each floor within the centre operates on timers that can be manually adjusted to operational requirements. Currently the second floor and landing airconditioning only operates during office hours.

In terms of the lighting for Peter McAulay Centre, reduction of all fluorescent lights in each ceiling cavity to three and on fluoro replacement so that means that NTPS use low energy tri-phosphorous tubes; in addition, motion activated light sensors have been installed in some area. JESC has a computer managed lighting system to modify lighting based on shift and tri-service sections within. In terms of accommodation at Peter McAulay Centre, street lights for the visiting single officers' quarters are all timer driven. The pool and tennis court lights are also on timer, and also they have a computer turn off policy on the leaving the work place.

**Ms CARNEY:** Great, thank you.

I reckon that is the best dissertation that I have heard while I have been here in terms of the departments efforts. Yes, so far that is very impressive. Good.

The government commits itself or has committed itself to a 5% reduction in per kilometre emissions from NT government vehicles passenger fleet by the end of the month. What specific measures has your department done to reach this target? Can you include the number of hybrid and or LPG cars? Through you, minister, I think this is what Ms Ko was trying to get to earlier.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I will defer to Audrey but I will preface the answer by saying we still need V8s on their highway patrols. Apart from that, I will ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you for that invaluable contribution, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, I am glad you liked it.

**Ms KO:** Most of our vehicle fleet are operational vehicles and there are certain standards that we have to comply with, the national police standards, which means that we have improved suspension, and we have to try [inaudible] so we have to stipulate the use of the two police pack type of vehicle, that is for our sedans. For our Hi-luxes, we have now changed to diesel so it is more environmentally friendly and as the replacement goes on there will be more and more diesel vehicles on the road and that would help the environment a lot. We are also in the process of reviewing to ascertain the maximum number of vehicles and, where possible, we actually want to down size it to a four cylinder.

However, in this organisation most of our vehicles, even though not deemed as operational, we treat them as a back-up to our operational vehicles. In emergency situations we commandeer all those non-operational vehicles for operational purposes. We are limited in the number of vehicles that we can use for the hybrid-type of vehicle because we still have to test the performance and look at the overall performance of it. At the moment we do not have a hybrid vehicle.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. Final question for this area, the government has set itself a 10% carbon emissions reductions target. Can you outline what specific measures your department is undertaking to meet or beat this target that has not already been listed?

**Dr BURNS:** As you said yourself this department has been quite extensive in some of its measures. I am not sure if Audrey wants to elaborate on anything further measures.

**Ms KO:** We do not have any more specific initiatives but we will attempt to look at it further in terms of overall energy savings in all areas.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. Thanks, Madam Deputy Chair.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION** **Output 1.1 – Community Safety and Crime Prevention**

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2007-08 as they relate to the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services. I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Output 1.1 – Community Safety and Crime Prevention. Are there any questions?

**Ms CARNEY:** The description of Community Safety and Crime Prevention, Budget Paper No 3, page 143, is clearly explicit. It refers to proactive services to address community safety issues; intelligence-led policing; problem solving; ...

**Dr BURNS:** Was that Budget Paper No 3?

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes.

**Dr BURNS:** Which page?

**Ms CARNEY:** I have 143.

**Dr BURNS:** Page 143 in my Budget Paper No 3 is Health Research.

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry, how about page 150.

**Dr BURNS:** Page 150. All right, I will let you off lightly there, member for Araluen.

**Ms CARNEY:** Oh, you are so good to me, minister. Gee, thanks.

**Dr BURNS:** I check everything you say, with good reason.

**Ms CARNEY:** I am just really glad you checked it, minister. Let us get back to it. Can you tell me, please, how many programs have been delivered in the last 12 months?

**Dr BURNS:** In terms of community safety?

**Ms CARNEY:** We are doing Community Safety. It talks about crime prevention, and education programs. Tell us about the programs. What is being delivered, and if you could name them in the last 12 months, that would be good. If you have a list of the programs that you can table, that would be even better.

**Dr BURNS:** There is a whole range of programs - social order, domestic violence, City Safe. I will leave the Commissioner to elaborate. I am sure he is very keen to do so.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Perhaps if I can attempt to best answer the question by indicating it is very difficult to try to split policing programs across the output groups, because a patrol car might also do investigations, and also prosecutions and coronials, and road safety. So it is very difficult to split them. The question is very broad, and it might be taken to mean a community-based program around Neighbourhood Watch, or it might be taken to include a particular target of policing operations, and there are any number of those ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry to interrupt, but would it help – it just says, on page 150 of Budget Paper No 3, the third bullet point down, 'visible patrolling, crime prevention and education programs'. So under the heading, I assume it is crime prevention and education programs. Are you able to specify under that heading?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Visible patrolling would be uniformed general duties, and that is their daily patrols, across the board, 365 days a year. In relation to crime prevention, an aspect of what they do in terms of reassurance policing is, in fact, crime prevention. But then again, we have a crime prevention section which deals with particular complementary programs, whether it be Police and Citizens Youth Club, or Junior Police Rangers, or Police Ethnic Advisory Group-type activities, and then we have the school-based Constables who deliver both crime prevention and education programs. You could probably place juvenile diversion amongst this as well. It is really all-encompassing.

**Ms CARNEY:** I note in the footnote it has programs delivered include community advisory committees, forums, meetings and public events, and so on. Through you, minister, how then do you, and I appreciate what you are saying, but under the Performance Measures, it says 'community safety and crime prevention programs delivered', and it has an estimate, a quantifiable estimate. So, if the definition is so broad, how can you be so accurate with quantifying it?

**Commissioner WHITE:** It is not easy. As I say, if you look at the various output groups, a police officer could be involved, in one hour, in community safety and crime prevention, and the next hour in general policing, crime detection, and then investigation of it and prosecution, so it is very hard to break it down. We run an activity survey one or twice a year, I think it is, Audrey?

**Ms KO:** Yes. Last year we only did it once, but we normally do it twice.

**Commissioner WHITE:** We attempt to derive an estimate from that. We collect the data and try to estimate from that the amount of hours spent. It is quite flexible.

**Ms CARNEY:** Just so that I have it clear: it is not like another department where they say it is the X program or the Y program.

**Commissioner WHITE:** No.

**Ms CARNEY:** It is difficult for the reasons you gave.

**Commissioner WHITE:** If a patrol car goes out on to a road at 7 am, the tasking that it attends, or the proactive job it might undertake, could be any one of those factors that I have mentioned.

**Ms CARNEY:** Does it follow then, through you, minister - sorry, I will ask it this way: where do you get the figure of 5000 from?

**Commissioner WHITE:** It is an estimation based on that activity survey. For instance, the Officer-in-Charge of Casuarina Police Station might go to a community forum or a community meeting, as will the Officer-in-Charge of Crime Prevention.

**Dr BURNS:** Or on a remote community – they are involved in lots of activities.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. The budget estimate was – if you wouldn't mind bearing with me. Okay, I will leave that area in the interests of time, and given the explanation. Thank you.

One of the performance measures is people feeling safe. I note in one of the footnotes that you used figures from the national survey of community satisfaction with policing. That is on page 150. Minister, can you table a copy of that survey? I note also that the footnote says that it is unpublished. Presuming that you would have it, are you able to table it?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Ms Carney, every year the Australian Centre for Policing Research did undertake a survey of community satisfaction. That survey information is included in the *Report on Government Services*, which is published each year.

**Ms CARNEY:** As part of that?

**Dr BURNS:** That is published by the Commonwealth government.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Published by the Commonwealth government each year. I can provide advice in relation to my particular areas. The general satisfaction is 75.3% against the national average of 74.6% ...

**Ms CARNEY:** I am sorry to interrupt, but I know what the results were because they are in the thing. You are saying that that national survey of community satisfaction with the policing is publicly available and can be found in the report?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Yes, it is.

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay. Thank you. Could it be found in its entirety?

**Commissioner WHITE:** No. The survey was undertaken by private consultations, I think Nielsen. They do, in fact, produce a report. It would be on their website, I suspect, or the Australian Centre for Policing Research's website.

Comment [eno2]: check

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay, thank you. Yes, I was going to ask you some more questions about that, but I should be probably moving on. Thanks for your answer.

I would like to move now to Mobile Police Vans. It fits neatly in here, given that we are talking about visible patrols in crime prevention, etcetera. Minister, I wrote to you before the Alice Springs sittings requesting details of the number of times and locations the mobile van had been in and around Alice Springs. You did not answer the question satisfactorily – in fact, at all - in your reply. I asked you again at the Alice Springs sittings and you still did not provide me with the information. I will ask you for a third time ...

**Dr BURNS:** Have we moved output, because I am advised this is in a different output area?

**Ms CARNEY:** Do you say, minister ...

**Dr BURNS:** Is that correct?

**Ms KO:** What was the question?

**Dr BURNS:** This is about mobile police vans. Is it in Output Group 2.0?

**Ms KO:** Yes.

**Dr BURNS:** That is where we have it.

**Mr WARREN:** We are in Output Group 1.0, I think.

**Ms KO:** You can actually use it in any group because it is policing. We are happy to answer that under ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. I will ask these questions for a third time, and hope that at Budget Estimates you provide a response. How many times since the mobile police van was launched in Alice Springs in June 2006, has it been located in Todd Mall?

**Dr BURNS:** it is my understanding it has been located in Todd Mall on a fairly regular basis as part of operation City Safe, however, I will defer to the Commissioner for that answer.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Yes, I can advise that the mobile police station was deployed to locations such as Larapinta, North Side, and Todd Mall.

**Ms CARNEY:** I am sorry; Larapinta, North Side, and?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Todd Mall.

**Ms CARNEY:** Todd Mall. How many times?

**Commissioner WHITE:** I do not have that information. I would have to search that out.

**Ms CARNEY:** Through you, minister, I assume that information is easy to get because your local commander would – I mean, they would not just get to work and say hmm ...

**Members** interjecting.

**Ms CARNEY:** No, bear with me.

**Dr BURNS:** A paper chase. They are out to catch criminals. They are out to keep the peace. Here you are asking them to dig in and sort of go through all the records and ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, through you ...

**Dr BURNS:** No. I am cutting it off there. The question was answered in the Alice Springs sitting. This is a mobile police station that moves from place to place in a flexible fashion. You are asking someone to sit down and do some sort of audit and fill in some sort of tab. Well, it is not on.

**Ms CARNEY:** Can I ...

**Dr BURNS:** We will move on. No, I am not taking the question. I have all ready answered it in sittings.

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, I am about to ask you a question. If you listen. My question, minister, is this ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, please refrain from screaming.

**Ms CARNEY:** My question is this: when your Commissioner, and/or you, allocate resources, is it not the case that an assessment of how many times patrols, officers, and the mobile police van have been out and about is a factor to be taken into account in terms of the further allocation and changes to be made to where and when those things are assigned?



**Dr BURNS:** These are operational matters, and I leave that up to the Commissioner for Police. That is the first thing. The second thing to say is that it is early days in terms of the mobile police post, and we have to give it some time. I know it has been very effective in a whole range of operations from the cyanide spill along the Stuart Highway, to antisocial behaviour in the Todd Mall, and even searching for missing persons out and around the Katherine region. I am more than happy with providing those resources to police. I am confident they are using them in an effective and strategic fashion.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Leader of the Opposition, are there any further questions?

**Ms CARNEY:** Thanks for the speech. I will ask this question: do you, minister, or your Commissioner, know how many times the police van has been located in Larapinta, North Side and Todd Mall since it was launched in 2006?

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to the Commissioner. The Commissioner is charged with the effective operation of our police force. Time and time again, in my conversations with the Commissioner, he says to me: 'I want my men, I want the operational side of it, out there catching criminals and ne'er-do-wells, and maintaining the peace'. I do not think we should be sending police on a paper chase just to satisfy your publicity machine. I will defer to the Commissioner and let him speak to what he has to say.

**Ms CARNEY:** But you will appreciate that you had that information because it is a factor in determining where the allocation – well, you had the information ...

**Dr BURNS:** You are just tying our police up in red tape, member for Araluen.

**Ms CARNEY:** You had the information ...

**Dr BURNS:** You would make a terrible police minister.

**Mr WARREN:** Point of order, Madam ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, I do not know where ...

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr BONSON:** There is a point of order. Will the Leader of the Opposition please have the courtesy to listen to the point of order?

**Ms CARNEY:** I will talk to the point of order. Firstly ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, please allow the minister to answer.

**Ms CARNEY:** ...it cannot be taken seriously. Secondly, if you want to be a bully and aggressive, that is fine and that is a matter for you. I am actually here to do some work and get the answers.

**Dr BURNS:** You are the bully. You are the person who has tried to bully me all the way along here.

**Ms CARNEY:** Do not finger point at me. If you have a problem with women, minister ...

**Dr BURNS:** You are very aggressive ...

**Ms CARNEY:** I am sorry. If you have a problem with women ...

**Members** interjecting.

**Ms CARNEY:** How dare you finger point at me and adopt that aggressive ...

**Mr WARREN:** Point of order. There is a point of order.

**Mr BONSON:** Madam Deputy Chair, the Leader of the Opposition has made an allegation that the police minister has a problem with women. I would ask her to substantially prove that or withdraw that.

**Ms CARNEY:** That is an absurd point of order.

**Mr Warren:** No, it is not.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms CARNEY:** Well, I will not.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** I ask you to withdraw then, please.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. It is a pity, minister, that you are – well, if this the sort of stuff that the minister, if the minister has this sort of difficulty...

**Dr BURNS:** Let's continue

**Ms CARNEY:** Oh thanks, minister. Great. See if you can answer that question.

**Dr BURNS:** Let's just go back and I will defer to the Commissioner.

**Ms CARNEY:** Whatever your problems, let's do some work.

**Dr BURNS:** Commissioner, can you just answer this question about the mobile police station and gathering data.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Ms Carney, my response to the question is that the mobile police stations are deployed at the discretion of the regional commanders. They are deployed according to meeting demands whether that be Darwin, Katherine or Alice Springs. The detail that you are seeking, I would have to take that question on notice and speak to the regional commanders and ask them to see if they can provide that data.

**Ms CARNEY:** You are a gentleman.

**Dr BURNS:** In terms of the time taken for that ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Look, you can prompt him.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Yes, I just do not know how readily we can access that, but we will seek to do that.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. I will put the question on notice.

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### Question on Notice 5.3

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, for the purposes of *Hansard* would you please restate your question.

**Ms CARNEY:** How many times has the mobile police van been deployed or operational at Larapinta, North Side and Todd Mall since it was launched in June 2006?

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

**Dr BURNS:** I am prepared to take that question on notice, Madam Deputy Chair. I would also point to the fact that there are resources involved in answering these sorts of questions and we will answer it to the best of our ability without compromising the time that police have to take them away from their duties.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Perhaps I will say, minister, that regional commanders are very conscious of the need to deploy mobile police stations. They are well and truly aware of that.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, Commissioner. For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate the question No 5.3.

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**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, I am asking these questions as is my right as a local member in Alice Springs, and of course the appropriation deals with things like the mobile police van. Your suggestion that I really should not be asking these questions, I do not accept. I will plough on with my questions in my endeavour to have them answered, in my third attempt at obtaining an answer.

Through you, minister, what is the average amount of time the police van was placed at various sites around Alice Springs? Similarly, I assume that will be a question on notice.

**Dr BURNS:** I will take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice 5.4

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Araluen, for the purposes of *Hansard* would you please restate your question.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you. What is the average amount of time the van is placed at various sites around Alice Springs?

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

**Dr BURNS:** Once again I am prepared to take it on notice. However, I am flagging up right here and now that if this is going to take senior officers away from their supervisory duties for inordinate amounts of time just to get some sort of answer for the Leader of the Opposition. In some stages these questions may not be answerable; I will reserve the right in my reply to the Leader of the Opposition to say so.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate the question No 5.4.

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**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, what is the difference between me asking a question about the mobile police van and for instance, sorry, Ted, was that a contribution?

**Mr WARREN:** I think that the member for Nelson should be given the chance to ask a few questions in the last few minutes.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, if you could stop interrupting all the time. Minister, what is the difference between me asking a question about the mobile police van in Alice Springs and details about the programs that are referred to in the Budget Paper? Surely both of those matters take time appropriately. Surely they are both legitimate issues to pursue.

**Dr BURNS:** And your next question is?

**Ms CARNEY:** Okay, so you still maintain that this is not legitimate?

**Dr BURNS:** I am not saying that. I am just saying there has to be a balance between the detail of questions that you ask and the impact that that has on senior police who will be taken away from whatever they are doing in terms of fighting crime to answer your questions in the detail that you are requiring.

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, you have been very defensive about these questions. Do you accept that my constituents are genuinely interested in how many times the police ...

**Mr WARREN:** I am sure they are intelligent people.

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry, Ted, what was that?

**Dr BURNS:** I thought it would have been more constructive if you had asked a question about Operation City Safe and basic ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, I am getting to that, and had you been able to provide the answers in a cooperative manner we may have got there.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition!

**Dr BURNS:** You are focusing on a police van. Operation City Safe is something that is being implemented in Alice Springs, and I understand it has had a very beneficial effect in a whole range of areas. You can isolate one area of policing, which is the mobile police station, but let us look at the global picture, as the Commissioner said, at all the elements of policing and the success that it has had. Do you want to ask a question about Operation City Safe?

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes. I want answers to these, because it is not as though I have not tried pretty hard to get it and I thought Budget Estimates was an appropriate place to get the answers.

Minister, the mobile vans were launched with great fanfare by your government. Various promises were made in respect to them. I will press these questions and I will ask that the answers be provided. Is the van staffed at all times when it is located at particular sites? Yes or no?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Araluen, this is an operational matter. I would imagine that, if police were called out from the van to a disturbance a block away that they would probably lock that van up while they attended that disturbance. I will leave those operational matters to the Police Commissioner and let him answer your question.

**Commissioner WHITE:** My answer is that it is not always attended. For most of the time it is. I have, in fact, myself asked regional commanders on occasions to place the van in a highly visible public area in terms of a contribution towards reassurance policing, whether or not that van is staffed. But overwhelmingly, yes, it is staffed. I have, on occasions, said, 'Place the van in Smith Street Mall. Work from it ...'

**Ms CARNEY:** Perhaps not the Alice Springs van?

**Commissioner WHITE:** Or Alice Springs. But, 'Do foot patrols. Speak to people. Be out and about'. So, sometimes it is not attended personally. But most of the time, yes.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thanks for that answer, Commissioner. I have tried on two occasions to get it. Now, I have it. Thank you.

I was going to ask some questions about the mounted police. I had a few questions there, but in the interests of time - oh no, look, I will ask. After the Alice Springs sittings or, I think, at the Alice Springs sittings, when government members had renewed interest in all things Alice Springs, there was a bit of a whisper going around that the mounted police would return to Alice Springs. Minister, can you confirm whether the mounted police will return to Alice Springs and, if so, when?

**Dr BURNS:** It is a matter for discussion. There is a brief coming my way. The Commissioner has been working on this issue, looking at the costs and other aspects of mounted police in Alice Springs. I will defer to the Commissioner on it.

**Commissioner WHITE:** My answer to the question is that we are looking at the prospect of re-introducing mounted patrols in Alice Springs. There is a cost benefit analysis to be undertaken. It does require some detail and I am expecting a report from the regional commander.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thank you.

**Dr BURNS:** Commissioner White, do you mind just elaborating on some of the issues there. I suppose there is not only the accommodation of the horses that has to be suitable, but also space for the mounted police officers.

**Ms CARNEY:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I thought I was the one asking the questions and I was very happy with the answer.

**Dr BURNS:** Well ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** I think that the minister can allow ...

**Ms CARNEY:** The question was answered. Thank you.

**Dr BURNS:** Talking about being the bully! I am sure the member for Brainting would be very interested in this answer, so Commissioner, could you just elaborate on some of those issues?

**Ms CARNEY:** I did not think you were allowed to speculate.

**Dr BURNS:** You asked a question and you do not want an answer.

**Ms CARNEY:** No. I did ask the question. I got the answer. I do not know what your problem is, minister, but gee!

**Mr WARREN:** A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair, the minister has a right to answer the question any way he likes, and he is answering the question. I want to hear the answer.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Please go ahead, Commissioner.

**Ms CARNEY:** You are very precious, Ted!

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to Commissioner White.

**Commissioner WHITE:** In summary, mounted patrols are not considered to be an effective crime reduction tool. However, they do add value in terms of reassurance policing. The cost involved is accommodation, agistment, veterinary fees, and so on. It is not inexpensive. The other major issue is the time spent in the saddle, with preparation of the horse and bringing them into the centre and then returning to stable, so to speak. I hear the debate about mounted patrols. I would like to reintroduce mounted patrols, noting some of their limitations. However, it does require a full analysis of the costs and the benefits. I have sought that report from [Commander Coffey](#).

Comment [eno3]: check

**Ms CARNEY:** Would you like to ask another question, minister, or are you happy for me to ...

**Mr WOOD:** Point of Order!

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition, do you have any further question ...

**Mr WOOD:** Point of Order! Point of Order!

**Mr WARREN:** There is a point of order.

**Ms CARNEY:** Sorry, Ted is talking again.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, you have a point of order?

**Mr WOOD:** I have sat here for a long time listening to some questions, but, Leader of the Opposition, you are wasting time with superfluous comment that really should be ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Well, aren't we just, member for Nelson, aren't we just!

**Mr WOOD:** No, no, I would like to ask a question at least in the last five minutes. There are just too many other things being put in this Estimates Committee that are unnecessary, and we are not getting to the point of what we are here for. That is a question for the department, and we should be more concise.

**Ms CARNEY:** Indeed, indeed. The minister ...

**Mr BONSON:** Madam Deputy Chair, speaking to the point of order ...

**Ms CARNEY:** I am sorry, I do not like to be talked over.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Millner.

**Mr BONSON:** Speaking to the point of order, the Leader of the Opposition may not be aware, but we are in a democracy. The member for Nelson does represent a constituency one quarter of the size of the CLP, and we would like him to have an opportunity to speak. We are all true believers in democracy.

**Mr WARREN:** I support that.

**Ms CARNEY:** Madam Deputy Chair, talking to the point of order. The one from the member for Millner does not warrant a response. In relation to the member for Nelson, I agree with you, member for Nelson, that if the minister would stop making the silly comments he has to date, we would be able to get through this quickly. I appreciate that there is five minutes to go. I have an enormous number of questions, not only as a local member myself ...

**Dr BURNS:** The member for Greatorex asked how much ...

**Ms CARNEY:** Excuse me.

**Dr BURNS:** ... it would cost to produce a meal at Royal Darwin Hospital! We spent about half-an-hour on that.

**Ms CARNEY:** Excuse me! Excuse me! Madam Deputy Chair! Come on!

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister.

**Mr BONSON:** It was \$11 or something, wasn't it?

**Ms CARNEY:** Excuse me! Are you putting up with ...

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms CARNEY:** I am a local member too, member for Nelson. I am also the Leader of the Opposition, and I will press on. I apologise that we are going to run out of time.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** There is no point of order. Leader of the Opposition, there is five minutes remaining. To get the best opportunity of the time remaining, would you please ask the minister a question.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, last year at estimates, do you remember the conversation we had about the PROMIS database? I asked you about it in relation to the collection of data in remote areas. When I asked the question, you said at the time, and I quote:

*The statistics are gathered from the PROMIS database. How the PROMIS database records statistics in remote communities, I am not sure.*

**Dr BURNS:** Is this a question in relation to my capacity as DCIS minister?

**Ms CARNEY:** Minister, do not be difficult. It is a preface ...

**Dr BURNS:** But you said you asked me the question.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, I did. I am so sorry, yes, the previous Police minister. Thank you. The previous Police minister said that he did not know how the PROMIS system records statistics in remote communities. My question - and you will remember, Commissioner, you gave some assistance to that answer as well. This is clearly within the heading of Enhanced Community Safety. I am wondering whether, one year on, statistics on PROMIS are still collected and fed into the system so that we have accurate data in relation to remote communities?

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to the Commissioner on this question.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Yes, the PROMIS system records all incidents and, in fact, records all reports of crime. It is a *prima facie*-based system as opposed to evidence-based record keeping system.

**Ms CARNEY:** Great, okay, thank you. Of course, the question is relevant in light of what is happening in indigenous communities. Do you publish the figures of levels of crime at remote communities in the annual report?

**Dr BURNS:** I defer that the Commissioner on this issue.

**Commissioner WHITE:** Thank you, minister. What we have done in recent years is to expand the statistical reporting in the annual report. What we are doing, in fact, includes Territory-wide statistics, but we break them down to the police regions, they being Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. We do not go beyond that in the annual report. We have significantly increased the amount of statistical information we do provide in the last four years.

**Ms CARNEY:** My question is not only in the context of enhanced community safety, but targeting repeat offenders, crime hot spots, intelligence-led policing, and so on. Is it possible, through you, minister, to publish that information from communities so that you, as the commissioner, have an analysis so that Territorians can better understand community safety and the crime prevention in these communities?

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose the first question is how far you want to break the statistics down. Some of these areas have quite small population bases. I am not sure how much that statistic would tell you. In relation to intelligence-led policing, of course all that data is used by the police to follow up on crime, like you say, domestic violence, and that has certainly been a target of the police and intelligence-led policing. That is why I suppose when you look at the statistics that the domestic violence figures have gone through the roof, and also the orders have increased because there has been a focus on it.

I am not sure if you go by community by community just how much that would add. Certainly in terms of the national issue within the Territory at present, if this helps we will cooperate with the federal government in relation to that. You would be aware that we also have the Australian Crime Commission Intelligence Desk in Alice Springs, located in Alice Springs. All this data is used by them in a proactive way and the information is fed back to Northern Territory police who then make arrests and make investigations.

**Ms CARNEY:** Thanks, minister. Madam Deputy Chair said we are out of time. I am sorry we did not get to anything. We could just keep going and going but time is against us. Thank you very much for coming and for your preparation.

**Dr BURNS:** Madam Deputy Chair, I thank the Police, Fire and Emergency Services' staff, particularly Audrey and the Commissioner, for all the work that they have put in. There is a lot of work with Estimates and I have certainly appreciated it. Thank you.

**Madam DEPUTY CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank officers from Police, Fire and Emergency Services who have provided advice to the minister today. We will be breaking until 6.30 pm and reconvening with minister McAdam.

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The committee suspended.

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## MINISTER McADAM'S PORTFOLIOS

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Good evening, everyone. I welcome the minister for Local Government, Housing and Sport, and the officials that you have with you, minister. Before I ask you to introduce them, I invite you to make an opening statement. I remind witnesses that they are subject to parliamentary privilege; however, if you give false or misleading evidence to the committee it can constitute a contempt of the Legislative Assembly pursuant to powers and privileges legislation. Officers should also be aware that, when they are requested by their minister to provide answers to questions, they are not required to comment on matters of policy. I also issue a reminder - it is a bit false, I suppose - but I ask when the minister does refer to a departmental officer, if that officer could state their name even if the minister has said 'I will refer to' whoever.

With that having been said, minister, would you like to introduce the officials and make an opening statement on behalf of Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport if you desire.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, and also members of the Estimates Committee and, of course, all the staff who have been assisting in this process. I take this opportunity to introduce some of the officials who will assist me and the committee throughout this evening's proceedings. I refer to Mr Mike Burgess, who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport; from within the agency, Mr Nick Scarvelis, Executive Director, Local Government; Mr Bill Stuchbery, Senior Director, Local Government; Ms Trish Angus, Executive Director, Policy and Coordination; and Mr Steve Rossingh, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation. I do not know if I have mentioned Meeta, did I? I did not, I beg your pardon. Of course, the most important person, the engine room of all those agencies, Mrs Meeta Ramkumar, who is Chief Financial Officer.

Mr Chairman, if I may before I commence, what I propose is to be able to speak separately in respect to Housing, if that is okay. Of course, the same will apply to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and also DCIS.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Before you continue, minister – sorry, my oversight - I should indicate for *Hansard* that the committee consists of Mr Gerry Wood, member for Nelson; Rob Knight, member for Daly; Karl Hampton, member for Stuart; me as Chairman, member for Brennan; the Leader of the Opposition, member for Araluen; and the member for Greatorex, Dr Lim. Sorry, minister.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you. My agency is currently driving two of the most significant reform agendas in the history of the Northern Territory government - local government and housing reforms. In 2007-08, this government identified over \$12m to support the reform of local government, and \$100m to improve remote area housing.

By 1 July 2008, nine new shires will be operating alongside the municipal councils in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs, managing a combined budget of \$350m. New local government is about improved services, career opportunities, and integrated planning at a regional level. The new shire councils will plan regionally and deliver locally. Shire councils will maintain a strong presence at the community level. The Local Government Advisory Board meets regularly, and its members have met with local government leaders in many communities. Transition committees for each shire are also providing advice on matters pertaining to the creation of the new shires.

The department has created a comprehensive information warehouse, which is being used as a basis for negotiations with agencies for service delivery arrangements by 2008 and preparation of comprehensive shire plans. Regional management plans are being developed with existing council staff and transition committees, outlining the shared administrative arrangements for the shires. The transition bill will be introduced into the parliament in August 2007. The department has prepared tender documentation for the acquisition of IT systems and the recruitment of senior staff for the new shires. This government has provided \$9.9m to assist with the establishment of the new shires. I am pleased to report that a further eight local coordinators have been recruited under a bilateral agreement with FaCSIA.

Finally, I would like to make a few comments about communication. Initially, we concentrated on communication with councils as the primary stakeholders. We are now turning our attention to greater public consultation. Departmental staff, working with transition committee members and interpreters, will visit 65 communities over the next seven weeks. A number of fact sheets have been distributed in newspapers, and radio advertisements including some in indigenous language, will be aired soon. I have



met with people in over 30 Territory communities over the last four months, and will continue to do so throughout the course of the reform.

I also have responsibility for water safety, libraries and knowledge centres, Aboriginal Interpreter Services and animal welfare.

There are a few points that I must clarify around the structure of the output briefs. In December 2006, the department undertook a substantial restructure to better reflect the priorities of government. The restructure includes the formation of a specific division to manage local government reform and the transfer of responsibilities for indigenous housing to Territory Housing,. In the context of tonight's proceedings, Output Group 4.0, Housing Services incorporates Indigenous Housing. I ask that all questions relating to Indigenous Housing be put under Output 1.3, Remote and Community Housing under the Territory Housing output group.

Obviously, Sport and Recreation is a separate output group and the Minister for Sport and Recreation has carriage of that. However, in view of the department's operating structure, this division has responsibility for managing water safety and animal welfare, and I continue to be responsible for these areas under Output 2.4.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. Leader of the Opposition? No. Dr Lim?

**Dr LIM:** No, I have nothing to respond to on the statement, Mr Chairman.

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Nelson, any questions in relation to the statement? That being the case, I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0 - Local Government.

#### OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – LOCAL GOVERNMENT

##### Output 1.1 - Local Government Reform

##### Output 1.2 – Local Government Management

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I will now call for questions on Output 1.1 - Local Government Reform. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, I have, Mr Chairman.

**Mr WOOD:** Mr Chairman, could I ask the minister, if possible, to combine those two as they really overlap at this stage – Output 1.2 and ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Outputs 1.1 and 1.2. I will ask the minister if he is happy for that to happen.

**Mr McADAM:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** Good, member for Nelson ...

**Mr WOOD:** You were thinking too long there ...

**Dr LIM:** I was thinking of other things as well. Anyway,

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. For the purposes of *Hansard*, we are considering both Outputs 1.1 - Local Government Reform and Output 1.2 - Local Government Management.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, in your opening statement you made some comment about the shire reform agenda. It appears that many people out in the bush and in the rural area who have been to those transition committee meetings have been unhappy with the way the meetings have been managed. Are you aware of why they are unhappy and have you done anything to address those concerns?

**Mr McADAM:** In respect to the transitional committees which have occurred throughout the Northern Territory in the nine shires, incorporating – I will get some details in a minute in respect to the number of transitional shire meetings which have occurred. However, it is fair to say that there has been concern. Rightfully so, there should be concern in the context of what this government has announced with the reform.

It is major reform; and there is no doubt that, when you are dealing with these sorts of issues, people take time to understand what the change is all about. Obviously, that is the role and brief of the agency and the development coordinators on the ground. The implication is - I am not too sure about this - you seem to indicate there might have been a concern across all the shires.

I free acknowledge that there has been some concern in the rural shires such as Litchfield, but I expect that there will be concerns and challenges. However, I am confident that, over time, with the transitional committees, as I indicated in my opening statement, there are some very comprehensive community consultations going on over the next period. Hopefully, these will add a new dimension to the information flow. Transitional, yes, now into the public. I freely admit that there are some concerns.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I do not know whether you are aware that I am receiving e-mails from Central Australia, the Barkly, and the Top End about how these community meetings are progressing. Some committee members have been told to get out of the committee because, if they do not want it this way, then they should not be part of the consultation process. Some people have reported to me, minister – and, hopefully, you are aware - that this is not consultation as seen by many of the people in the groups that you want to make into shires. They have been instructed what is going to be happening and they can either like it or lump it. Are you aware of that?

**Mr McADAM:** I am not aware that you are actually receiving e-mails in respect to some of these concerns, as that is the first time you have raised it with me. I am more than happy to respond to you directly with the concerns expressed by people in Central Australia and the Barkly.

In respect to some of the transitional committees, I am aware that there have been issues. I know there was one in my electorate; in fact I think it was the first transitional committee of the proposed Barkly shire. I was aware there were some concerns around that. I believe that matter has now been resolved and that the transitional committee is working reasonably well. I have heard reports, out of Litchfield, around the Cox Peninsula area, and the Marrakai area, and that also incorporates public meetings as well.

Back to your question; I am happy to respond to you directly in respect of any concerns you might have through e-mail, or other correspondence.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, it is not my concerns as much as the concerns of Territorians; I am just the messenger. There are comments made to me, for instance, such as: there is no community consultation, the attendance of people at meetings are really a name gathering exercise. Comments such as, we have not agreed to change, and no important decisions are being made or discussed, or debated.

Minister, I know you look at me with a frown, but what I am saying is it is important ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Excuse me, member for Greatorex. The minister is not sitting there with any expression on his face and I would appreciate it if you did not try and incorporate such comments in to *Hansard*. Please stick to a question. Thank you.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, would you agree with me that, perhaps, you need to be more personally involved in these consultation processes; that you should attend as many of these transitional meetings you possibly can to see for yourself what is actually happening or perhaps if, in your presence, consultation would be better conducted?

**Mr McADAM:** I agree with you, Mr Chairman, I was not frowning at all at the member for Greatorex - not at all. As I mentioned to you previously, I have visited something like 30-odd communities throughout the Northern Territory, both indigenous and non-indigenous, with respect to the local government reforms. I have met with representatives from Litchfield Shire on three different occasions to the best of my knowledge. I have certainly met with people from the Cox Peninsula council. I have also met with representatives from the Daly River Development Committee and, quite frankly, it is almost impossible for me to attend every transitional committee. I have been to two of the advisory board meetings.

As I said to you, over the next month, we are going to actually ramp up the public consultations, quite apart from the transitional committee which will continue to operate. As much as I would like to be able to attend each and every one of those meetings, as you would be aware, as a minister it is almost physically impossible to do the lot. Time just does not permit. As I indicated to you, there are some very

comprehensive, concentrated public meetings quite apart from the transitional committees that are going to be ongoing.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I accept your answer, but not necessary that you should not be attending as many meetings as possible, because I believe that the quality of the consultation would improve remarkably if you were there, rather than see meetings as lip service, and then you getting a report that has been sanitised. Anyway, I cannot ask you any more than I have done.

Have you made any guarantees about what will happen to pastoral properties, mining leases, and existing councils such as Litchfield, Coomalie, Tennant Creek?

**Mr McADAM:** I just want to correct for the record, I do not believe that officers from my department are paying lip service to the consultation process at all. I believe they are very genuine in engaging the community, both indigenous and non-indigenous. The question, I guess, you asked me was did I make any commitments in respect of the Litchfield Shire Council?

**Dr LIM:** Or the pastoralists, Litchfield, Coomalie, Tennant Creek?

**Mr McADAM:** In respect to Litchfield and Tennant Creek, the commitment I believe I would have given to them was that those dollars that they presently have as a result of their existing operations, I would guarantee would be quarantined for the use of that particular section of the community; that is, Tennant Creek Town Council, if there were dollars that were specific to that particular region. That is what I said to them. I said the same thing to the Litchfield Shire Council. I believe I would have said that particularly in respect to their surplus because there was some concern about it. I understand they have a reasonably large surplus, so I believe I would have made that commitment. I think you said the pastoral – sorry, the mining industry?

**Dr LIM:** Pastoral, mining and ...

**Mr McADAM:** In respect of the mining industry, I do not believe that I have given any commitment whatsoever. In respect of the pastoral industry, I do not believe that I have given them a commitment as such. What I have said to them is that I am very conscious and aware, and very appreciative of their industry in the context of its economic contribution to the Northern Territory. I was very conscious of the fact that, as we move forward - and this relates particularly to the rates issue, which we will all be aware will be an issue - I believe I said to them that I would try to be as fair and equitable as possible in respect to rates. I said that to other industries within the Northern Territory, because it is not the intent of this government to impose any unreasonable economic impost as a result of these reforms.

**Dr LIM:** Did you give any guarantees? Did you remind them that there were no guarantees about no job losses and, in particular, executive jobs?

**Mr McADAM:** I have spoken to the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory. I believe that I would have made it very clear that it was my intent. If it is interpreted as a guarantee in respect of job losses, we would do everything that we possibly could to ensure that job losses would not occur as a result of these reforms. Yes, I believe it could be interpreted that way.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I put to you that, with the reduction in the number of councils, there will definitely be less senior executive positions available than the number of senior executives that are now around the Territory. How are you going to ensure that these people do not lose their positions, or are they able to get jobs of equivalent position and equivalent salaries?

**Mr McADAM:** Perhaps I could answer this way. You would be very much aware that, over a very long period of time, there has been a very high turnover of personnel within the local government area. I am referring to CEOs, and bookkeepers and a whole host of others. Bearing that in mind - and I do not know whether we have the figures of staff turnovers in the local government level. If someone would like to get those figures?

**A witness:** It is over 50%.

**Mr McADAM:** That is an indication of 50%. That, within itself, indicates very clearly that that reduces the numbers.

The other thing is that there will still be community managers in each of the communities. We believe that there is great capacity to be able to relocate people as much as we possibly can in respect of their existing roles and functions across local government.

The other thing we have happening at the moment is that we just allocated some money to LGANT. The unions are on the advisory board as well. LGANT will very shortly, as I understand it, commence discussions with every council about staffing issues. Yes, it is achievable, given the fact that we have this very high turnover rate across local government traditionally.

**Dr LIM:** Would I be correct in saying that what you are saying is that there will be no forced redundancies, but there is very high likelihood of people going down to lower paying jobs in amalgamation?

**Mr McADAM:** I can say there will be no forced redundancies. I really cannot comment whether or not people are going to go down to lower categories. I do not really know that. I have been saying to the department that this, to me, is one of the critical issues when you make change. We are very much aware that people's livelihoods are at stake. We will do everything we can. Mr Scarvelis, did you just want to comment in respect to that? If you do not mind, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Not at all.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** Nick Scarvelis, Executive Director Local Government. In our discussions with the unions to date, and looking at the current salary structures of various senior community managers, we believe that salary maintenance should be a principle in the process of allocating people to goals.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, two points for instance, which I will put this to you. Once that area is incorporated into a shire, a person who is currently a chief executive officer of a community government council, , if he does not get the job of the chief executive officer and remains in that community as the community manager, will he be paid the same salary or at the lower level?

**Mr McADAM:** I believe Mr Scarvelis indicated to you earlier in respect to the salary maintenance, and that is our position.

**Dr LIM:** Okay, and that would be for an indefinite period, minister?

**Mr McADAM:** Well, it would be whilst that person remains in the employ, under the auspices of Local Government, yes.

**Dr LIM:** So where is there the rationale for the claim that there will be a cost saving in the amalgamation when your salaries will not change?

**Mr McADAM:** You are assuming, of course, that this high turnover of staff will automatically cease. What you have at one point in time will be the ongoing staffing establishment or the staff number across councils and new shires. As I have said to you, there is this very high turnover rate. I am very confident that no existing employee is going to be disadvantaged in respect to this reform. Certainly, there may well be some challenges in certain areas. I have every confidence that, because we are actually going to a new shire model, there could still be some capacity for these positions also to be assumed within existing local government operations and my agencies. You are not out there on your own; where there is capacity, a vacancy, or a requirement, there can be a transition into the agency, and that would apply for indigenous and non-indigenous people.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I put this scenario to you for your comment. I assume that community government council areas now within a shire requires an area manager, an essential services officer, and secretarial support. Maybe that is what is there now and they will stay on. Where is the saving?

**Mr McADAM:** Where is the saving?

**Dr LIM:** Where is the saving? If the person who was the CEO now becomes an area manager; if the person who was an ESO is still an ESO; and the person who was a PA still stays as the PA, where is the saving?

**Mr McADAM:** As I said, my previous answers stand. You are assuming that there is no high turnover of staff.

**Dr LIM:** No, not so much.

**Mr McADAM:** There will be a transition across, over time, to like a community manager. If you have X who happens to be in Y community, and that person wishes to stay there, that person would stay as a community manager, and would not lose their entitlements. However, as you transition forward - this is the idea; to get some efficiency into the reform. At the moment, you do not have essential services officers in each community. You might get a combination of more than one community sharing that particular resource. The same applies under the new shire model in respect to accounting, payroll, and procurement. Does that answer your question or not?

**Dr LIM:** Well, I am trying to get it clear. It is not. Let me just ask a few more questions. What I understand - and correct me if I am wrong, minister - is that you think that the ESO will eventually leave, so you save by attrition. You heard what I said, minister?

**Mr McADAM:** Sorry.

**Dr LIM:** No, that is all right. I assume then what you are saying then is that, eventually you anticipate that maybe that ESO will leave, and so there will be a saving through attrition. An ESO from another area within the shire will then provide services to that particular community that no longer has an ESO. Am I correct so far?

**Mr McADAM:** The essential services officers are funded by Power and Water to begin with, but they will be part of the new shire model. However, when you talk about savings, there will be savings in respect to staffing, personnel. We are not going to need the same number of accountants or secretarial support, as a lot of that staff is going to be taken over by the shire. I am talking about accounting, payroll, procurement, and tenders. Help me here – what are some of the others?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, let us not go down that path because we are getting into too much specifics. What I am trying to get clear in my head is you have several current community government councils in the bush that you are going to bring into one shire. I assume that you will have the shire office in one centre, wherever it may be, with central services, and that you will have area managers in those areas which are currently community government council areas where, at the moment, there are also essential services officers, and also personal assistants or secretarial support.

You anticipate that through attrition there will be savings as they will leave, then their duties will be picked up by the central service centre of the shire. Am I right then to say that the area manager's role or work will be modified, and he or she will be doing a lot more than what he or she is doing now as there will not be any more PAs, and you will not be putting a PA back in there to support that person?

**Mr McADAM:** I seek clarification Mr Chairman. Area Manager, you are talking about a shire CEO?

**Dr LIM:** No, you are talking about the manager of the area that is currently the community government council that is now incorporated into a shire. You have a shire with nine or 10 - or whatever number – of small community government areas. Each of those little areas would have an area manager.

**Mr McADAM:** They would have a community manager.

**Dr LIM:** Each would have a community manager, okay. Sorry, I used the wrong word. They might have been the CEO of that community government council in the first place, or currently. They currently work with ESOs and PAs. Therefore, with the development shire with a central office, you will still have the community areas with the community manager. Do you anticipate that the community manager's role or job or duty statement, would increase to absorb the ESO's job, as well as the PA's job?

**Mr McADAM:** I do not believe that will occur at all, member for Grotorex. The role of a community manager will be in respect to local government functions. That will be their role. Some places do not have essential services officers. That is where the challenge is; to try to ensure we are able to share those resources. Where one does exist at the moment, you could perhaps have one person, or you could actually have trainees under a qualified essential services officer. I suspect that the role of the community manager would become a lot more developmental in the sense of the community itself. That person would not have to concentrate in regards to submissions, chasing up Centrelink, which is the stuff that a lot of managers get bogged down in.

In fact, some CEOs are very highly paid and some are collecting firewood, and doing functions which they really should not be doing. We are talking about a different role for a manager on the ground in the future, and a lot of those functions would be taken up through the CEO at a shire level in coordination and funding submissions. It is taken out of the hands of the existing CEO who have become the community manager, and frees him up to actually concentrate on community development practice and principles within the community, as opposed to a lot of things that they are doing which, quite honestly, just do not fit in and they should not be doing a lot of those jobs. It is that simple.

**Dr LIM:** Do you anticipate that the shire councils would have a central supply of essential services officers who would then travel through the shire to provide essential services?

**Mr McADAM:** You are talking about essential services officers?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, let us talk about that for the time being. If you bring in the shire, you have a central office and your essential services officers or your crew, to maintain essential services, will be centrally based.

**Mr McADAM:** No, they will not be; they will remain in the communities.

**Dr LIM:** They will remain? So each community government's council area right now in your shire model will have a resident ESO? Is that right?

**Mr McADAM:** The point is that they are Power and Water Corporation-funded positions. As I understand it, they are not across all the communities at all. They do not fund every community. That is the idea; that we can get some efficiencies by working with Power and Water - and you are talking about essential services, I believe. They can be greater efficiencies in training and employment opportunities for indigenous people to be employed in those other areas that do not have essential services officers. There is great capacity for better coordination and efficiencies under the shire model.

**Dr LIM:** Irrespective of who pays the ESO, it is a cost to government or to Power and Water which is government. Okay? It is a cost. You say in one breath that there will not be resident ESOs in every community. If that is not the case, then somebody will have to travel to that community that does not have an ESO to maintain essential services. Would that not be the case?

**Mr McADAM:** We are getting bogged down in terminology here. You are using the word essential services officers and, traditionally, they are the ones who have been associated with the Power and Water. There are other similar positions in the communities which are not described as essential services officers.

**Dr LIM:** Handyman. Are you calling them handyman?

**Mr McADAM:** Oh, I do not know what - whatever!

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Excuse me, member for Greatorex. I know when you are following a line of questioning your mind is moving ahead of you. However, if I ask you to let the minister to finish one answer before you come in with another. I just think it might be a bit easier, minister, sorry.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. I do not think I can add too much more to this particular ...

**Dr LIM:** Let us move on, we are obviously not we going to get any further with this. Can you describe the core function of the shire councils that will be developed?

**Mr McADAM:** There are prescriptive functions, as you would have been aware, that operate under the existing *Local Government Act*. I am just talking about Local Government, but what you are going to find is that there will be also a roll-in of other agencies over time regarding other functions. Parks and reserves are councils assets, buildings, other fixed assets, cemeteries, local roads upgrading, construction, waste management, weeds, fire control, animal welfare and control, libraries, other cultural health services, civic events, local emergency services, training and employment, local laws or by-laws, administrative-type matters, street lighting, public, corporate ...

**Dr LIM:** Public corporate?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Could you please repeat that, minister. Sorry, I do not think the member for Greatorex heard.

**Mr McADAM:** Public and corporate ...

**Dr LIM:** What? Public and corporate?

**Mr McADAM:** This is just one of the functions under the *Local Government Act*.

**Dr LIM:** Yes, but public and corporate something. It has to be something; it cannot just be public and corporate.

**Mr McADAM:** It is rubbish - all those sort of things. Administration. That is what it means. I have given you a fairly comprehensive list there.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I asked you to differentiate for me whether the Darwin City Council and the Palmerston City Council have fire control responsibilities or training and employment responsibilities on behalf of the local government? Do they have that sort of responsibility?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, around their own assets they do. All municipal councils do.

**Dr LIM:** Including?

**Mr McADAM:** Sorry?

**Mr WOOD:** I said I do not believe that means that. I would have raised it later but I ...

**Dr LIM:** I would assume the fire control that you talk about is really wide scale bush clearing and that sort of thing. The Darwin City Council or the Alice Springs Town Council would instruct a ratepayer whose property is weed infested to tidy up the block.

**Mr McADAM:** I have been advised, but I will get Mr Scarvelis to elaborate. If you have a park or a bush in a municipal area, then you would be required to carry out some of those functions. Is that right?

**Mr SCARVELIS:** Weed control and management of weeds and maintenance of the areas around council's assets, including their designated parks and the like – yes.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I put to you, in a pocket handkerchief park in the suburbs of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin and so forth, the control of those weeds is significantly different to weed control out in the pastures in the shires. Talking about weed control, obviously, Local Government has not been ensuring our town councils and city councils maintain weed control, because of the amount of bindii everywhere in our parks.

**Mr McADAM:** Well, I have seen them doing it every couple of days in Tennant Creek when I am there.

**Dr LIM:** Weed control by the town council?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, the town council, yes.

**Dr LIM:** That sort of weed control versus weed control out in the pastures? Do you expect the shires to do that?

**Mr McADAM:** Well, no. I do not know where you are heading again. NRETA, I should imagine, has a function in that particular area. If you are talking about out in the pastures, DPIFM would also have a role there regarding your literal interpretation of weed control.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I put to you that I asked you and you told me what the core functions of shire councils were. One of the things that you listed included weed control and fire control. I find it difficult to conceptualise, particularly, fire control, but also weed control, in shire versus municipalities. They are quite different functions.

**Mr McADAM:** Well, if you cannot conceptualise, that is not my problem. All that I am trying to say is that, under the new shire model, effectively, they would assume those responsibilities which are required to be carried out under the *Local Government Act*. It is as simple as that. I also made the other point that, if you were talking about weed control and whatever it was – bindii or whatever – of course, within the

township itself, obviously, that would be a role, just as it is in Darwin or Tennant Creek. You do not expect people to get out there in the paddocks or pastures and chase down every rubber plant they see, or every *Parkinsonia*, because there are other programs out there for that sort of stuff. That is what I am trying to say to you.

**Dr LIM:** Well, minister, obviously, your definition and mine do not meet at any one point. I would assume – and correct me if I am wrong – that within municipal councils, their responsibility lies within their municipal boundaries. I would assume that, within shire councils, their responsibility lies with the shire boundaries?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, exactly.

**Dr LIM:** And within the shire boundary, the size of the electorate of Macdonnell or Stuart, there must be huge pastures out there that shire councils now must be responsible for to ensure weed and fire control is, as you said, core functions. How are these shire councils going to be able to manage these large areas? What sort of funding are you going to provide to them to do that?

**Mr McADAM:** There are already dollars allocated for functions as such under the Community Government Councils. There is a combination of dollars that are allocated for that purpose. I am talking about within a defined area. I am not talking about halfway between Timber Creek or Ali Curung and Murray Downs. At the moment, nothing is done in that area other than DPIFM, where it is required, under, I would imagine, the *Pastoral Act*, and then the same would apply to NRETA in respect to their functions. Under the new shire reforms, as difficult and as hard as it might be, it will at least be a function that presently is not included. That is where we come back to a shire being able to develop coordinated responses to all those sort of issues that you talk about because, at the moment, nothing is done.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. Minister, I will come back to that in a minute. Obviously, your decision is that shire councils would look after these discrete areas where the shire council premises and, perhaps, a small perimeter of several kilometres might be within their purview - not the jurisdiction of the shire council boundary. However, let us come back to that in a little while.

Would you comment on this conclusion that was in a paper written called, *An Analysis of the New Perspective on Amalgamation in Australian Local Government*, which found that council consolidation is not only largely ineffectual in reducing costs, but also generates significant unintended negative consequences?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, I readily acknowledge that there is a lot of pressure on local government in delivering its functions. As you would be very much aware, other states have moved to new models, new directions, in how they might be able to do that. It is important to understand that, when we are talking about local government reform here in the Northern Territory, we are talking about – and this is still subject to further discussion with the Commonwealth government, bearing in mind that the Commonwealth government has indicated in writing that they agree in principle with these reforms – effectively, that we believe that there can be a greater dollar input into the regional shires through Commonwealth government dollars. As a result of the new model, we believe there is a greater capacity in also being able to raise money, because we are talking about rates here. No one is hiding behind the fact that there is not going to be rates, but there will be capacity for extra dollars.

We believe that the Commonwealth government is also looking for certainty regarding their dollars going forward. Sometimes, we look at the other states and we think that we are going to impose what happens in the other states on to the Northern Territory. I would like to think that we could be a bit more creative than that. I am not too sure about the other states, but they certainly do not incorporate a lot of the Commonwealth dollars, through FaCSIA. We are hoping that, in this particular instance, those dollars will flow from the Commonwealth and into the new shire model. There will be greater capacity - no doubt about it. At the moment, there is no capacity whatsoever to be able to deal with all the financial pressures that traditionally other local government shires have experienced - and I acknowledge that.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. Confirm for me if you would, minister, that what you are saying is that creating the shires in the Northern Territory is primarily to bring in Commonwealth involvement and, therefore, Commonwealth financial assistance. Am I right?

**Mr McADAM:** No, that is not the primary reason because, as I said to you previously - and I have been saying it for quite some time - we have known for a very long time that the models that apply at the moment to smaller councils - that you knew about when you were minister, and Mr Wood knew about because of his



long experience in local government – have not worked. We know that they are unlikely to work in the future. We believe that this new framework will provide the certainty, in the first instance, to be able to attract dollars, not only from the Commonwealth government in regard to existing programs, but you have rates as well, the Financial Assistance Grants, and the local government operational grants. The question you have to ask yourself is whether you want it to retain the status quo as it is now, or do we have a look at options for a real future for people who live out in the bush?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, you made two points there. I wonder if I can ask you about those? One is that you said you will introduce certainty. I am not clear in my mind what you mean by certainty. Certainty for what, through the shire government reforms?

**Mr McADAM:** Well, certainty regarding service delivery, a certain compliance, and certain standard have to apply. Responsibilities that apply across other parts of the Northern Territory and other parts of Australia will apply. That, to me, is certainty. The other issue here, I believe as well, is that there is absolutely no capacity for governments to invest in the bush communities as it is now.

**Dr LIM:** All right. The other point that you made earlier, apart from certainty as you just described, was the rating system. It is definitely something that you propose to introduce. How do you propose to rate properties? I suppose you look at properties from the point of view of pastoral properties, pastoral leases, to mining properties or mining tenements. You look at indigenous community properties, whether it be individual houses or a community as a collective. Can you describe the rating system you are going to use?

**Mr McADAM:** I can. You have raised the pastoral industry, and we are awaiting a report from them regarding how they see rating that might apply across the pastoral industry. My understanding is that we are also seeking a response - and there is an indication that we will get a response back - from the mining industry. I am not too certain, but I will ask the officers in a minute to comment in respect of the Chamber of Commerce. That is why we put the Chamber of Commerce on there; to provide feedback on issues like the rates and economic opportunities that might apply. However, there are probably any number of different categories or models that can be applied in respect to rates. I will ask Mr Stuchbery to give you an indication. However, very clearly, we are still awaiting responses back from the industries that I have just indicated and also from the advisory board as well.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** Bill Stuchbery, Senior Director, Local Government, The current *Local Government Act* provides a number of rating options which will be retained in the new act we anticipate. As the minister said, the introduction of rating for mining and pastoral will be new. The opportunity currently exists under the act for service fees and charges in lieu of rates to be charged on communities, and that is already happening. It could be a combination of a standard rating using unimproved capital value, a differential rating system, or a combination of that. Some councils currently use a flat rate system. That could be considered as part of a model in new areas that have not been incorporated before. The current model provides the framework for which we can take the decision on in the future.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, am I right in saying that the rates will become due and payable during the 2008-09 financial year?

**Mr McADAM:** No decision has been made in respect to that.

**Dr LIM:** Interesting, because I have some papers that say that this is what is going to happen.

**Mr McADAM:** Where is that from?

**Dr LIM:** Written on 10 May 2007.

**Mr McADAM:** What does it say?

**Dr LIM:** 'Rates will become due and payable during 2008-09 financial year and, hence, it is imperative that new ratepayers not only acquire some understanding of the purposes and process to do with property rates, but are also aware of the potential impact on your finances'.

Am I right in saying that?

**Mr McADAM:** No. What I am saying to you is that some shires may choose not to do it at that point in time. The responsibility of the rating will be the responsibility of the shire council. Some shires might choose not to do it until two years down the track. It is not locked in across the board.

**Dr LIM:** No, it says: 'Rates will become due and payable during the 2008-09 financial year ...'. So they will say yes, the rate will be zero rate, but it will still have a rate. The rating will have to be implemented. It might be zero rate, but it will be implemented.

**Mr McADAM:** If the council chooses to implement a rating regime at that point in time they can.

**Dr LIM:** A rating system is imposed by local government because of services that it provides. What services will shire councils be providing to mining tenements or pastoral properties that they do not already provide themselves? If you are going to charge rates - fine, charge rates. But it is for a service that you provide. If the local government services are being provided by the pastoralists or the mining company themselves, what are you charging rates for? What are you giving them in return for the rates that you charge? That is the principle of charging local government rates.

**Mr McADAM:** Again, a lot of pastoralists and mining companies use local government services when they come into town. That is my understanding. Most of them would use it. You are assuming that there will not be capacity on the part of the shires to have a look at a differential rating regime. I am very conscious of that because what are some of the pastoral properties going to get out of it?

**Dr LIM:** That is the question I am asking of you

**Mr McADAM:** I am saying to you is that they are still users of local government services in most of the regional parts of the Northern Territory ...

**Dr LIM:** Yes, okay, minister.

**Mr McADAM:** ... and there can be a differential rating in place.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, that comment that pastoralists also use local government services because they come into the communities or come into the urban centres, applies to everybody who lives in the Northern Territory. Whether you live in the bush or in the suburbs, we all use urban roads, sooner or later in any 12-month period. We do that. Do you charge a toll for somebody who comes in from Amoonguna, Santa Teresa, Ali Curung or Tennant Creek? You do not. Of course you do not. You do not do that. That argument has no relevance; to say pastoralists will use local government services.

**Mr McADAM:** People from Ali Curung come in and use the services too.

**Dr LIM:** That is right, and they do not pay any rates either.

**Mr McADAM:** Actually, they pay community service charges which will be converted into some sort of rating system which will apply across the shire.

**Dr LIM:** I am asking can you inform me as to how you propose to introduce a rating system across the shires?

**Mr McADAM:** I do not know whether you are listening to what I am saying. What I am saying to you is we have asked for advice from the pastoralists through the NT Cattlemen's Association in respect to rating. We have asked for advice from the Mining Council, for the mining industry; the Chamber of Commerce; we are getting advice at the moment from LGANT and indigenous communities throughout the Northern Territory. Whilst it is very clear there will be a rating that will apply across the Northern Territory, I cannot say to you what it will be because we are still accessing some of the submissions and information. The actual rating itself will be a decision of the shire when they are in place.

**Dr LIM:** I think you may want to correct your comment that the shire councils will apply across the Northern Territory. They will apply across the Northern Territory with the exception of Nhulunbuy, Alyangula and Yulara. Am I right or wrong?

**Mr McADAM:** In east Arnhem?

**Dr LIM:** In east Arnhem, yes, in east Arnhem. Am I right?

**Mr McADAM:** We can give you an explanation in respect to why it will not apply in east Arnhem. In respect to Nhulunbuy and Alyangula ...

**Dr LIM:** Alyangula I think is also excluded, and Yulara is also excluded.

**Mr McADAM:** ... and Yulara also being excluded, the reason for that is, at this point in time, their status does not allow us to do that. However, I will ask the department . Nick, would you like to comment, or Mr Stuchbery comment on that? However, I guess my answer is, into the future they should be part of local government.

**Mr WOOD:** And East Arm?

**Dr LIM:** We will come to East Arm in a minute. Let us hear the explanation for Nhulunbuy, Alyangula and Yulara.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** The townships that you are talking about are mining towns where there are other arrangements in place. Until such time as there is an agreement between the mining companies that run those towns and the government, the current arrangements will stay in place. That could happen at some time in the future but, then, we would need to plan for that to happen tomorrow.

**Dr LIM:** Yulara mines what? What do you mine in Yulara? Water? Gold?

**Mr McADAM:** Tourists.

**Dr LIM:** Tourism. You mine tourism? Is that what you do? Surprise, surprise!

**Mr McADAM:** You said that.

**Dr LIM:** Let me ask this question, minister. Obviously, it is not a mining town, but I recall the howls of anguish ...

**Mr McADAM:** When you disbanded their local government

**Dr LIM:** ... when local government was disbanded at Yulara by the CLP government. Here you are with all the power in the world with 19 members, not giving Yulara back local government. Why is that?

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Scarvelis gave you an explanation in respect of the status of the land. We will probably talk to the Yulara Corporation at some point in the future. We would love them to be part of the new local government reform. We would love them to be part of a shire. Down the track, I believe the shires themselves will be able to have those sort of discussions into the future. The point I make is that they should be part of local government.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, do you have a time line for Nhulunbuy, Alyangula and Yulara? It could be 100 years from now, which means never.

**Mr McADAM:** I hope not.

**Dr LIM:** Well then, you should set a time line so they can work towards a target, rather than say: 'We do not know when'. Then, more effort will be put in by your department to work towards the ultimate aim of making the whole of the Territory under local government?

**Mr McADAM:** No, I am not going to give a time line. I have indicated to you that we will certainly be having ongoing discussions with the entities that you have described. However, I am not going to give you a time line. In respect to East Arm, I would like someone to respond to that.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** East Arm control area has been administered under the *Darwin Rates Act* for many years. It was land set aside for the development of the East Arm Port. The decision to retain it as a *Darwin Rates Act* area has been taken, and that is the reason it is not part of the local government reform at this time.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Can I just ask – voices are dropping at the table ...

**Dr LIM:** I can hardly hear you, Mr Stuchbery.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I am just making that point, member for Greatorex, thank you. I ask people to speak up - not just for the people here, but also for Hansard, so it is clear for them for their transcription.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** Sorry, Mr Chairman.

**Dr LIM:** Well, okay. I will read the *Hansard* of what Mr Stuchbery said because I did not hear him.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Would you like Mr Stuchbery to repeat that?

**Dr LIM:** If he would, please.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** I am sorry, Dr Lim. The *Darwin Rates Act* has been in place for many years controlling that particular area, and it will continue to do so for the strategic reasons that government has decided to retain that as a separate rating area outside of ...

**Mr WOOD:** And it is called taxation without representation.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Nelson.

**Dr LIM:** Yes. I thank Mr Stuchbery for that answer. Obviously, it is an answer, but he does not tell me anything of the rationale of why government has proceeded down the path of excluding these four areas.

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Stuchbery just explained it to you.

**Dr LIM:** It is government policy. That does not say anything.

**Mr McADAM:** Quite apart from that, it is of significant strategic importance to the Northern Territory.

**Dr LIM:** Well, minister, if I put this to you: that could be said of Nhulunbuy, Alyangula and Yulara forever and a day too.

**Mr WOOD:** Melbourne Port.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Nelson, keep the comments down, thank you.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, still talking about the rates, or the rating system, you said it is all very much in the melting pot. Nobody knows which way it is going to go; whether it be a flat rate, a differential rate, or goodness knows what. However, one of the models that is suggested includes one that is based on the potential carrying capacity of the land. Who will ...

**Mr McADAM:** Per head – beast?.

**Dr LIM:** I do not know what it is. It defines as 'potential carrying capacity'. Let me develop my argument for you to comment on ...

**Mr McADAM:** Well, I would not, because it is not going to happen, so ...

**Dr LIM:** It is not going to happen? Well, that is one of the models that were proposed.

**Mr McADAM:** That does not mean to say that it is going to happen. I just told you that ...

**Dr LIM:** Well, I put it to you then ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, if you could let the member ...

**Dr LIM:** It put it to you – if it is not going to happen, it is one of the models that the shire councils will consider, just like flat rate, differential rate or UCV rate. All these rating models will be considered. You have not ruled out any of those models as the one that a shire council will pick up. Assuming the worst scenario, that a shire council picks up the potential carrying capacity model, how would anybody be able to: (1) tolerate such a rating system; and (2) who will make that judgment or the assessment of the potential carrying capacity of the land?

**Mr McADAM:** Well, all I can say to you is it has been part of a submission, and you know it has been. I can tell you now, it is not going to happen.

**Dr LIM:** Okay, good. In other words, minister, you give your undertaking right now that you will rule that out?

**Mr McADAM:** On that one, I can.

**Dr LIM:** You can? Good. Then we can at least tell everybody not to worry about it. I would like to see that in legislation actually, so it is there, locked in. When your rate is set, how will the rating be applied? Is it on the fence line, the number of residences on a property or a piece of land, or each house? How do you propose the rating system to apply? It would be good for you to be able to give the shire councils that are going to be developing soon, some guidance as to how they should go about doing this.

**Mr McADAM:** The agency will be able to provide some advice to the shires. As I say, once it is considered by the advisory board then, obviously, the agency will be able to provide support and advice to the shires. Can you repeat the other part?

**Dr LIM:** The question is: how will whichever rating models are provided for the shire councils to pick, be applied? Will it be applied to a property based on a fence line, per residence, or on a cluster of residences in an area? How will it be applied?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** The current method, Dr Lim, would be those used in the existing municipals currently, using UCV or a differential system. The shires have the option down the track, as things develop; however, currently, they have access to service fees and charges. They would have access to the same rating regime as the municipals have on those parcels of land that would be similar to rating in townships.

**Dr LIM:** Take as an example, the community of Ali Curung, each house would be rated like the municipal rating system, or would the whole of Ali Curung be rated as a single community?

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Stuchbery.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** The current method of the council collecting fees and charges is through service fees. The potential, obviously, is with subleasing, to be rating the actual sublease on a house. However, those issues need to be developed down the track, as we understand, with our Australian government colleagues, as they are looking at leasing on the townships. Until we understand ...

**Dr LIM:** But that is in four or five years, isn't it, Mr Stuchbery?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** As I understand it, Dr Lim, that is correct. However, if leasing is cemented into place, either under section 19 or section 19(a), as I understand it, that would provide an opportunity for the shire to rate in a very normal manner as you would in a township. If that does not occur, the options are to continue the current system of collecting service fees and charges, which is equitable and fair, and provides the shire with the income they require.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I find Mr Stuchbery's answer quite curious, because I recall when you were in Alice Springs talking to a demonstration by the people from the town camps in Alice Springs, you were quite adamant that it was not to provide subleases.

**Mr McADAM:** I beg your pardon?

**Dr LIM:** They ought not provide the Commonwealth government with their land, remember?. You were against that.

**Mr McADAM:** No, I want you to quote me exactly what I said.

**Dr LIM:** Well, I do not have the papers in front of me so I am paraphrasing. If I am wrong, then please correct me. What did you say at Alice Springs?

**Mr McADAM:** You tell me what I said, and I will correct you, or otherwise?

**Dr LIM:** I have just told you that I do not have the papers in front of me. That is why I am asking what you said.

**Mr McADAM:** You tell me again what I said.

**Dr LIM:** I paraphrased that you advised the demonstration not to sign over the leases.

**Mr McADAM:** That I advised the demonstration not to sign over the leases - is that what you are saying?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, I have just said that to you.

**Mr McADAM:** Then how is it that, prior to that and after that, this government was in negotiation with Tangentyere Council and, indeed, the town camp entities who are the leaseholders, in respect to a sublease-type arrangement?

**Dr LIM:** I do not know how you managed to do that. I am asking did you, or did you not, say those things to the Tangentyere Council demonstration? Did you, or did you not, say to the people not to sign the lease?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Grotorex, in light of the fact that the minister has responded to that question, and that that goes towards a demonstration and not towards either of the output groups, I ask you to move on.

**Dr LIM:** Well, it is because it has to do with the rating system that Mr Stuchbery responded to. That is why I asked the question, otherwise I would not have asked it. The thing is the minister ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Grotorex, I will limit what I have said to the fact that the minister has already answered that question, and could you please move on.

**Dr LIM:** You can say that, and my response is that the minister is giving me that response on the assumption that it was a cause and effect. My question and your response have no relationship. I ask you did you or did you not say those things to the Tangentyere Council demonstration ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Grotorex ...

**Dr LIM:** ... and what you said was that you went and negotiated subsequently.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Grotorex, I have just ruled that the minister had addressed that question and asked you to move on beyond your discussion of what may or may not have been said at the demonstration. I appreciate you have more questions in relation to ratings and that sort of thing, but the minister has answered. If you again try to ask the question, I am simply going to come in again and state that the minister has already answered that question. So, please move on.

**Dr LIM:** You can save the minister anytime you like, and that is your prerogative, Mr Chairman ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Excuse me, member for Grotorex. Excuse me, are you questioning or reflecting on a ruling of the Chair of this committee?

**Dr LIM:** No, I am saying ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you for not doing so. I appreciate it ...

**Dr LIM:** Now, minister, what was ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** ... if you did not make comments that gave that suggestion ...

**Dr LIM:** Minister, what was ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Please do not start talking when I am finishing. We can proceed. You can ask your questions and you can get the answers and use this time effectively, and I ask you to do so.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, what will happen if property owners do not pay the rates?

**Mr McADAM:** What will happen if they do not pay the rates?

**Dr LIM:** If there was a revolt for instance, minister, and let me create a scenario for you. A pastoralist says 'Nope, not going to pay that because I am already paying the pastoral leases I am paying thousands upon thousands of dollars on pastoral leases, and now they are going to raid me again. I am not going to be double dipped'. What will you do to them?

**Mr McADAM:** I would like Mr Stuchbery to give an agency perspective.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** There is clear provision in the current *Local Government Act* for defaulters on rates or service fees. I anticipate that those sanctions would apply under the new act that comes into effect on 1 July 2008.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. If a property - wherever that property may be - owner decides that the rate was onerous and was impossible to meet, or for any other reason that property owner chooses not to pay the rate, then there will be sanctions, as Mr Stuchbery explained. What sanctions would they be? What are they?

**Mr McADAM:** I will ask Mr Stuchbery to answer that question in part. As I understand it, there would be appeal mechanisms under the act in the context of, say, that person not wanting to do it. I also believe there could be a capacity under the act in terms of financial hardship. With a pastoral property during drought, the shire might say: 'Okay, we will not apply that', or 'We will look at some other arrangements' - or with a big downturn in the tourism industry in respect to a roadhouse or something like that, or another catastrophe of large proportions just like 11 September, regarding tourism. There will be capacity to the shire councillors to take those matters into consideration. Mr Stuchbery, would you like to answer the other part?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** The sanctions that will apply is an attempt to make all councils in the Northern Territory subject to the same conditions. The new act will not differentiate as we currently have between community government and the municipal. The provisions for hardship which currently are in the *Local Government Act* will continue. As I understand, there are provisions in the pastoral lease rents currently for hardship, and for downturn in production due to drought or other natural disasters. There is also provision for hardship in general cases under the current act, and there will be ample provision for people to make that claim as they do now.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. I am sure that nobody will dispute that when somebody can demonstrate hardship that there will be a lot of sympathy and support from government and shire councils given to the destitute or a property owner who has financial difficulties. However, assuming that the property is doing very well and he says: 'I believe that the rating is unreasonable', but could not win the argument with the shire council. The pastoral property is now paying the pastoral lease, and now has a rate as well. He says: 'This is just too onerous, there is too much money being demanded of me, and it is not good for business'. What would you do then?

**Mr McADAM:** It seems pretty much like the previous question that you asked. There would still be capacity for an appeal mechanism just like there is at the moment under the *Local Government Act*.

**Dr LIM:** So, the sanction is really not going to be imposed. Is that what you are saying? You allow people to appeal ...

**Mr McADAM:** If I can, Mr Chairman, I will ask Mr Stuchbery to walk the member for Greatorex through. You are using the word sanction; I do not like that word.

**Dr LIM:** Well, this was not what I raised in the first place. The word 'sanction' was used by others and I picked it up.

**Mr McADAM:** I will check *Hansard* for that one.

**Dr LIM:** Yes, you do that.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** Currently, the ultimate sanction for the non-payment of rates in a municipality is to put the process through the courts, which may, ultimately, lead to the land been resumed by the shire or the

municipality. As I said, the object of the act creating new shires is to provide the same conditions as for people who are exposed to those conditions in a municipality or a town at present.

**Dr LIM:** What then, if that land was inalienable land? How do you then assume the property?

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Stuchbery, would you like to answer?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** We have advice that whilst inalienable land can be rated, you are right - the ultimate sanction of removing the land would be a difficult exercise, given ...

**Dr LIM:** An impossible exercise, I presume.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** ... that the land trust is not an entity and is controlled by the land council. There are other ways to get around rating. As I mentioned previously, you may not be rating land per such, but you might be rating a lot or might be rating through service fees and charges in lieu of rates, as an alternative. Those options operate very well now on communities throughout the Northern Territory.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, what does a levy on service charges entail and what services are being levied or charged for? What services?

**Mr McADAM:** You mean, as it currently is?

**Dr LIM:** Mr Stuchbery said that if you cannot rate inalienable land, you can charge service fee. What services will you be charging for?

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Stuchbery, would you like to answer?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** The current and typical service fees and charges may be in conjunction with the payment of somebody's rent, but would also extract a service fee for waste management and other community activities that might be decided by the particular community government or association council.

**Dr LIM:** If they do not want to pay the service fees, you will not collect their garbage. Is that what you are suggesting?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** These issues about collection of fees and charges and rates are a matter for the shires and the municipals. How they deal with non-payment is a matter that I am sure that they have extensive experience in it.

**Dr LIM:** Well, this is really passing the buck now. When you say we bring you several models of rating and there are other things that you can do, but it is up to you to do it and, if you get into trouble, it is your problem. That is what is being said at the moment to me now. I could be wrong, but that is what has been said. If you have inalienable land that you cannot rate, it is in a too hard basket for the government. Shire councils - its all your baby, you deal with it. Is that how you are going to do this?

**Mr McADAM:** You are asking me that question? Again, through the Chair, I am not too certain what you mean. At the moment, there are community service charges that apply across indigenous communities throughout the Northern Territory. And, I would dare say, there are not too many communities that do not apply some form of community service charges. Clearly, that gives some capacity and, if you are talking about rates, that is a community service charge. Right? Regarding what services that they pay for, Mr Stuchbery has just explained there is rubbish collection, waste disposal, the dumps, all that sort of stuff combined, parks and a whole host of other things that, at the moment, communities levy on their residents. Why can't that apply under a new shire model? That is what I am asking you.

**Dr LIM:** Okay, minister, I put this scenario to you. At the moment, Ali Curung has a community government council. More than likely, at the moment, Ali Curung Community Government Council collects a service charge from the residents at Ali Curung, and that money goes into the community government council's operational monies. Once the Barkly Shire is formed - and I assume the Barkly Shire Council offices will be based in Tennant Creek. I could be wrong, I assume. Assuming that that is where it is, then would the shire council in Tennant Creek then say to Ali Curung: 'You guys have to pay a service charge'? Remember, now we only have a community manager there now trying to collect the service charge. If the community manager fails to collect the service charge because people do not want to pay, then the community of Ali Curung, now without its community government council, does not have the funds in its



coffers because the coffers are now in Tennant Creek. How will the shire council based in Tennant Creek, impose sanctions on Ali Curung?

**Mr McADAM:** You are assuming that sanctions will apply ...

**Dr LIM:** That is right. It has to be equal for all Territorians; we have to apply sanctions.

**Mr McADAM:** Of course.

**Dr LIM:** Yes.

**Mr McADAM:** However, the point I am trying to make is that, at the moment, the community service charges are paid either through a direct Centrelink-type deduction, and/or through a rental-type arrangement. They are automatic deductions. Is that right? Through the tenancy agreements.

**Dr LIM:** Therefore, what you are saying to me, minister, if I am correct, is that the shire council based in – assuming it is - Tennant Creek, will have service charges automatically credited to the shire council's account from Ali Curung? So, the residents of Ali Curung will always 'pay rates'?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** How do you then ascertain who lives there? Is that something that would occur automatically?

**Mr McADAM:** As I said, at the moment, it goes through Housing tenancy-type arrangements. Just remember and bear in mind that we are moving to a Territory Housing framework across the Northern Territory, so there are great synergies in the local government reform and the proposed housing reform.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. Minister, if I then take you to a place such as Mt Allan at Yuelumu, which is a pastoral property that is owned by indigenous people at Yuelumu, who have already converted the land to inalienable land. How are you going to rate that or even charge a service charge?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** They pay the same as everybody else.

**Dr LIM:** How?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Sorry, you are responding to something I do not think was picked up, so I will ensure the answer is given, member for Greatorex.

**Mr McADAM:** I will refer that question to Mr Stuchbery.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** As I understand it, Yuelumu operates as a community government. It collects service fees and charges now, so there will be no difference.

**Dr LIM:** Yuelumu Community Government Council collects service charges from the residents at Yuelumu and the money goes to the Yuelumu Community Government Council?

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

**Dr LIM:** Okay. That being the case, the shire is now formed and it is part of the Barkly Shire that is rather large. I cannot remember the boundaries exactly; it could be in Stuart. Yuelumu is now part of the shire. The people from there say: 'We are not going to have our Centrelink payments deducted'. They can always withdraw from that; there is no compulsion that they have to sign an agreement. What do you do? Do you kick them out of their houses there? It is their land; it is inalienable. How are you going to impose sanctions?

**Mr McADAM:** They are the sort of things we are negotiating at the moment. We have the land councils – if that is where you are coming from – on the advisory board. There is a separate exercise occurring in respect to the task force which is having a look at leasing-type arrangements. I am very confident that residents will continue to pay what we now describe as a community service charge into the future; that is, rates, just like everyone else.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I put to you that this is your belief rather than anything concrete that you have. You are confident that it will happen, but there is nothing in place to ensure it does. That is my concern; that it is just a belief of yours that it will happen.

**Mr McADAM:** Again, Mr Chairman, I am just describing some new processes we are undertaking at the moment in negotiating a whole range of issues regarding local government reform. Very clearly, rates are one of those issues under consideration. We will continue to negotiate with the communities and land councils regarding rates and community services. I am very confident that we will be able to get an outcome that is going to be fair and equitable for everyone in the Northern Territory regarding a contribution or rating or community services – call it whatever you want. I am absolutely confident that that outcome will be achieved.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I appreciate and respect your confidence, but it appears to me that many Territorians do not. Perhaps the deadline of 1 July 2008 is probably too soon, and the whole process has been too precipitous. Would you consider deferring the date, perhaps to 2009?

**Mr McADAM:** No, there will be no changes to the time lines, as I indicated earlier, regarding the July and October of 2008.

**Dr LIM:** Would you consider that Litchfield Shire Council, Coomalie Shire Council and, perhaps, the Tennant Creek Town Council, be quarantined from this process for now because they have been able to demonstrate that they are capable councils, and have been able to, in fact, provide support services to bush community councils?

**Mr McADAM:** Litchfield, Timber Creek ...

**Dr LIM:** Litchfield, Tennant Creek and Coomalie.

**Mr McADAM:** No, there will be no deferral or changes to the existing ...

**Dr LIM:** Tennant Creek Town Council, if you recall, in the late 1900s – 1999 or 2000 – was in great difficulties financially. Through some cash injection and assistance when I was minister, it has now become quite a successful council. Surely, you would not want to get rid of that council that had been so successful? Similarly, for Litchfield and Coomalie.

**Mr McADAM:** I am saying to you that there will be no changes to the existing arrangements or announcements regarding time frames or any reconfiguration of what has already been announced.

**Dr LIM:** Would you consider that pastoralists, who now provide their own community government services such as power, water, sewerage, local roads and waste disposal at their own cost, be quarantined from rating because they already pay pastoral lease payments to the Northern Territory government anyway.

**Mr McADAM:** You are asking whether I can quarantine them from rating?

**Dr LIM:** Will you? That is right.

**Mr McADAM:** The point of the matter is that that will be the decision of the shire council; whether they choose to apply rates or not across the shire. You are asking me personally? No.

**Dr LIM:** The thing is, while it is not in your portfolio, the Northern Territory government will be receiving substantial pastoral lease payments following the revaluation of unimproved capital value of those properties by the Valuer-General recently. Therefore, the government is getting a very large share of their contribution to the taxes of the Northern Territory. Surely, quarantining them from rates will be seen as a very fair-handed way of dealing with pastoral properties.

**Mr McADAM:** I reiterate what I said before. My view has always been that there will be a fair and equitable contribution by all within the shire model.

**Dr LIM:** All right. Again, will you consider that mining leases be also quarantined from the rating system?

**Mr McADAM:** Mining leases?

**Dr LIM:** Just like you have already excluded Nhulunbuy and Alyangula, you might want to consider ...

**Mr McADAM:** It is certainly not the intent to exclude any from not paying a fair and equitable contribution to local government reform.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, you have excluded Nhulunbuy, Alyangula and Yulara. If that is good for them, why would any other mining lease not be treated like that?

**Mr McADAM:** As I have indicated, and I think Mr Stuchbery indicated to you, regarding the status of existing tenure or the land arrangements, the intent is not to incorporate them as far as the local government reforms. However, that does not mean to say that, into the future, that might not happen.

**Dr LIM:** That is fine. I will pass it on to the member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Thanks, Mr Chairman. Minister, I have a range of questions; some are broad and some are more specific to the area that affects me and a lot of other people; that is, the Litchfield area. You have developed this amalgamation plan. Why was there not some formal public consultation period set up before the amalgamation plans were set in concrete? In other words, obviously, you have had amalgamation plans in mind for a long time. This did not just come overnight. Why did you ask, at the first stage, for public input?

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you for the question, member for Nelson. You would be aware that, over a very long period of time, that different options and models have been talked about regarding local government reform. You would agree that was over a very long period of time. We announced, going back some months, indicative boundaries and other matters, as you would be aware. We have actually allowed a consultation period to occur. We have set up an advisory board which is representative of a wide range of people across the Northern Territory – both indigenous and non-indigenous – and from different industry bodies. We have also established transitional committees right across the Northern Territory specific to the regions. As you would be aware, there have certainly been some challenges with a whole range of issues.

However, I believe that we have put in place a consultation phase regarding a whole range of issues around the local government reform. In the case of the boundaries, I think I indicated initially March, we have actually extended those out because we wanted to genuinely allow people out there to have a say in the boundaries. Whilst we have been very definite in the process, we believe that there are adequate consultation opportunities for people to provide input. The boundaries are one indication. I do not have the report before me, but I am aware that there have been some variations to what we put out initially, and we will take those into consideration.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, I was not actually getting at that.

**Mr McADAM:** Sorry.

**Mr WOOD:** No, no, I will not try to ask another question about what you have said – it covers another area that I was going to deal with. The government decided on nine shires. It must have done that based on somebody's opinion. What concerns me is that the public was not involved in that decision. This is not about indicative boundary; this is about the foundation of local government in the Northern Territory.

You can look Queensland and the amalgamation issues. Whether you agree or not - and I have not come in here with any red garments to protest - they have lots of local government at the moment and, even if they amalgamate, they still have lots of local government. Victoria is the same. We have one-fifth of Australia and we have created nine shires which is vastly different in number than all the other states. Why was that not up for public consideration and discussion?

**Mr McADAM:** As I say, there has been considerable discussion and consultation over a long period of time of different local government reforms. When the government decided to go with the nine shires, which is the model that you refer to, that was based on some very detailed analysis in a context of economic and social issues.

The most important thing here, you will agree, is that we have local government across the Northern Territory which is not working effectively, and that is both indigenous and non-indigenous, and that there was greater capacity to give greater efficiencies out of a new reformed model. The most important thing, I believe, is that, into the future, as a government, we have a responsibility to provide for certainty and the

opportunity to provide levels of service for everyone. That has not been carried out at this point in time. I believe that the reform model we have in place is by far and away the most equitable way to advance all Territorians who live outside the major municipal councils. It just happens to be a fact that the majority are indigenous people; however, at the same time, there are non-indigenous people as well.

I believe it is time for government to bite the bullet and to be fair in how we do it - and we are doing it, even though some people might disagree. The bottom line was that we had to do something, and that is what we chose to do.

**Mr WOOD:** I need to put this in context. It has been said that I was involved in the amalgamation process way back in my role in local government, and that is true. My dealings in local government related nearly entirely to the proposed Tiwi Island Council at that stage. As your CEO will probably remember, a great debate was held at a Local Government Association meeting in Alice Springs with the then Minister for Local Government over what was happening on those islands. My fundamental problem, at that time, was not about the amalgamation but the governance which was being proposed, a governance which now, funnily enough, we are getting rid of. I believe it was the wrong form of governance. You had a governance where people elected a managerial board, who then elected people to the local government. I believe that system will go out the door, thank heavens.

There have been many attempts to amalgamate local government. There has been the Pine Creek/Coomalie/Jabiru triangle. I had nothing to do with that. Personally, I thought it was not workable. There was a program by your own government for stronger regions and stronger councils, which recommended 21 regions. I know the government is saying bite the bullet, but the blame is being put on the wrong people here. The government put a proposal to the House that they were going to go ahead with this program of stronger regions, stronger councils, with 21 regional councils. I have heard hardly anything about that since it was proposed and, out of the blue, comes nine shires. Is it not unfair to say to people like me and other people: 'You have had the opportunity to do something, therefore, we have bitten the bullet and here are nine shires' when, really, it was the government who put forward these proposals under your predecessor, Mr Ah Kit, but did not carry forward what they said they were going to do.

**Mr McADAM:** I just made this comment through the Chair. Stronger Regions, Stronger Future was potentially, ideally, something that could have worked.

You made mention previously, I think it was in regards to a Tiwi Island council. They remain as they are - nothing changes for them. In fact, the difference under this new model is that there will be greater management administrative support by the efficiencies gained. You know what I mean there regarding management administrative support principles which a lot of these communities have never been able to access. The important thing is that there will also be linkages.

We are talking to the existing municipal councils, rather than chucking communities out there on their own saying: 'You do what you have to do and deal with all the problems, accept all the responsibility, but we are not going to give you the resources, the expertise or the support'. That is, effectively, what we have done as a government. That is what the CLP has done. Ask yourself the question: is that sustainable into the future? The obvious answer is no, it is not. It is for that reason that we took the decision, as a government, to incorporate the people outside the major regions, if I could put it that way, applied the same principles regarding support, compliance, and the same management principles, and come in through a level of governance which is recognised right throughout Australia. It is not for me to ask you questions, but ...

**Mr WOOD:** You can, I will go shadow.

**Mr MILLS:** There will come a time.

**Mr McADAM:** There will come a time, absolutely.

**Mr WOOD:** Well, we will be waiting.

**Mr McADAM:** I do not think you will be there, but we will see. You threw me off there, Mr Mills.

**Mr WOOD:** Could I just come back to the issue of the big council, because the one thing that I have seen in the discussion you have had with the shadow is that we have spoken about economics - all economics; how we are going to create better services, better this, better that. I have had this map up before. This is a map that worried me because local government is about community, not just about

economics. You take this council in the middle here, which goes from Lajamanu, Tobermorey Station - which is the same distance to Darwin - and Tennant Creek. You might have a perfect economic scheme for this, but where is the sense of community going to come from a council that is that big, or like the Barkley one which must be nearly as big as Victoria? Where are you going to get what is just as important as your economic advances: the community feel, community belonging which is what local government is about.

My argument is that is what the debate should have been about. Should we have had 18 shires? It would have been better to have these cut in half. I do not think the population is that important. You are still going to get your money. You might have an extra CEO but you are still going to get your money from the federal government, and still going to have the same roads. I believe that is the debate that was missing at the beginning, which we should have had.

**Mr McADAM:** You talked about a sense of community. I believe that there is great opportunity to develop a sense of community across a region. We have seen it occur under other models. Not the stronger future model, but we have seen it being developed under other national models. I am referring to the old ATSIC model. There was a great sense of community. I suppose the argument would be that it was an indigenous sense of community, and that has been the problem in the past. I believe that has been our shortcoming and our failure, because we have just said indigenous communities.

We are talking about everyone who lives in a region having the same capacity and opportunity to be able to get benefits out of it, which has been the problem in the past. I believe people have been short-sighted and, to a certain degree, caught up in vested interests and not acting in the best interests of everyone outside the major regional centres of the Northern Territory.

I make no excuses for the fact that, quite apart from the existing model not working, that is one reason alone to make these sorts of changes, to improve the quality of life, the quality of service, and provide certainty for people. That is not only indigenous people; that is everyone who lives in the region. That is the trouble we have had in the past between some entities within a council. I will give you an example, if I can, Mr Chairman. Who is accepting responsibility for roads in the bush communities? Who is accepting responsibility for a whole lot of other functions? You have town camps all around the Northern Territory which are operating under a different model and you have a municipal council that sits next to it. Have a look at the level of service. Have a look at the quality of life. Have a look at the standards of infrastructure. Ask yourself the question: is everything fine? The answer is no.

Why is it that in a place like Tennant Creek, where they get funded for Roads to Recovery, but no one accepts responsibility for infrastructure in the town camps? The Northern Territory government did not in the past and the Commonwealth government will not, and the municipal council will not. Street lighting? Kerbing? Roads? Parks? Ask yourself the question: has that been a fair, equitable outcome? Yet, next door, you have a level of service which is worlds apart. That is where I am coming from. We should not have to sit back and make excuses and pass the buck, knowing full well that next door to us, we have people - not by choice - living in absolutely inferior circumstances. It is not all their fault because we do not have the guts to say: 'You are entitled to the same level of service but you have to pay rates'. It is equity, it is fairness. That is where I am coming from. We can argue as much as we want but ...

**Mr WOOD:** I am not disagreeing. What I am arguing about is not saying that I am disagreeing with what you put forward just then. I am just saying that we have talked about consultation. Here is something, I think, which was crucial for the setting up of this amalgamation process; that was a reasonable debate about the number of shires. I do not want to go further. I accept what you say, minister.

Could I say something on what you just said about 'we live close to third world countries'? I do. I have the Palmerston Indigenous Village and I have Lagoon Road or 11 Mile. I believe someone put an SMS in the other day about me, and it probably jerked my conscience. It said: 'What are you' – that is me – 'doing about those crap places?' I suppose the only thing except saying there should be full employment, I have been able to do very little else. They are both leaseholds. Council do not go and run the lease infrastructure. The 11 Mile pays rates. It pays \$660 and there are about 15 houses there.

There would need to be also on the other side of what you are talking about, a change in the way the land is seen from a public perspective. I will give you an example. You pay rates for a gazetted road. That is a public road. Once the road goes inside someone's property, as in an Aboriginal community, it is not a gazetted road. Therefore, your rates are not going towards that road. They are some of the issues that, from an outsider's point of view, there is going to have to be some way to get around that because, at the

present time, it is not council's job to do up a road either at the 15 Mile or the 11 Mile. How do you get round it? They pay their \$660 rates but it is the outside road, not the inside road.

**Mr McADAM:** That is precisely the exercise that we spoke about in respect of the town camps in Alice Springs.

**Mr WOOD:** Would you make them part of the town?

**Mr McADAM:** Absolutely, and you provide the same level of service and the same support, the people pay rates and, for the first time, people are treated the same as everyone else. At the moment, you have this inequity. Just because you are a blackfella town camp, you are not entitled to anything. No one is out there - and this is part of this reform - to say: 'We believe that these reforms can actually deliver benefits that have otherwise been denied because of the structures that we have had in place'. It is about treating everyone with the same level and equity of service. That is all we are trying to do here. That is what it is all about. That is the bottom line.

Who knows what is happening with the intervention on the part of the Commonwealth government. We do not know. We still have some details to go through. However, in a way, that is what we were trying to achieve with the Commonwealth government in regard to the town camps around Alice Springs. That is why I still take heart today. I do not agree with everything that the Commonwealth government is doing, but I believe there are real opportunities here quite apart from the obvious alcohol abuse and the need to do something there, or in regard to child abuse or domestic violence. This is also an opportunity to engage with the Commonwealth government in terms of dollar input.

The Territory does not have the capacity at this point in time, and we are not ever going to get every red cent out of the Commonwealth. However, at the very least, if you provide a model that is acceptable, that is recognised, that is a proven model across Australia - and I do not draw these comparisons with Queensland and Western Australia; we are different - I believe that we can actually get some really good outcomes through the local government reform. I just use that as an example. That is why it is providing the same standards that everyone else expects. I was out at Palmerston - I have actually been out to Palmerston Indigenous Village three times I think - certainly twice with the local member and almost without ...

**Mr WOOD:** Ahem!

**Mr McADAM:** I beg your pardon.

**Mr WOOD:** You did not let me know, minister – not protocol.

**Mr McADAM:** I beg your pardon; I will let you know next time. However, I think it is fair to say that without exception the people there wanted better housing, better roads, better transport, better street lights, parks, the same as you and I enjoy. Without exception, that is what people want and this model allows that to happen.

**Mr WOOD:** Could I just follow that down the road a little. You are saying you would support places like the Palmerston Indigenous Village and the Lagoon Road area becoming more or less freehold so that there would be a public road in there. Therefore, the public road to the Palmerston Indigenous Village would be a gazetted road, an open public road, so the Palmerston City Council can maintain that road with street lighting, and Litchfield Council could do the same for Lagoon Road. I have not been involved in the Alice Springs issues. How practically would that happen? How is that going to be? Who is going to make the big move to tell Phillip at the 15 Mile that we are going open the 15 Mile, just like a suburb, with a public road?

**Mr McADAM:** They are the type of discussions we have been having in a roundabout way with the people at Palmerston Indigenous Village. We have actually had them at Bagot as well, and in Katherine and Tennant Creek. People are prepared to negotiate. This is the difference; if you negotiate something and people understand fully what it is, then people are prepared to move down this path.

In the case of the town camps in Alice Springs, similar to what we have talked about was where we are heading. There were in-principle agreements in the context of municipal-type services. Alice Springs Town Council provides this; you pay rates – agreed to in principle agreements.

Also, in regard to the Territory Housing model, that is where we were going – and we were not far apart. I suppose the bottom line is time ran out in respect to that exercise, quite apart from the fact that

Tangentyere, and its entity community bodies, chose not to go to the model that we suggested. It is a real pity, because time ran out for that and now, time has run out for Tangentyere Council, because you have heard some of the proposals as a result of the intervention from the Commonwealth government. However, despite that, I have every confidence that we are able to negotiate with all the town camp entities, Tangentyere Council, Julalikari Council, Kalano, Bagot, and Palmerston. We believe that we can get an outcome, which will give you the same status; that is, a suburb, for the want of a better word. The same level of services with all those things such as roads, lighting, power, kerbing - all those things. I believe that we can still achieve it through this model.

**Mr WOOD:** It might need some dog control by-laws at the Palmerston Indigenous Village. I go there reasonably often and, sometimes, it can be frightening.

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, it is an issue, it is a problem, and you deal with it. The only way you deal with it is by allowing the people the same opportunity. At the moment, we do not do that.

**Mr WOOD:** Just leading on from that, I ask you then, in relation to roads. Roads attract funding through the Commonwealth. When you have roads on Aboriginal land, the only roads that actually can attract the funding are the gazetted roads. I believe Bathurst Island got a fairly large amount of money for roads on Bathurst Island but, in theory, are those roads on Bathurst Island public gazetted roads?

**Mr McADAM:** Sorry.

**Mr WOOD:** I believe it is important, because we are just talking about some of these small communities coming into the system where they can attract funds through rates, which would require certain roads to become gazetted roads. In larger communities, with large areas where there are roads going through Aboriginal land, they can only attract money for maintenance of those roads if they are gazetted public roads. Is that correct?

**Mr McADAM:** I ask Mr Stuchbery to answer that.

**Mr STUCHBERY:** I do not think they have to be gazetted, member for Nelson. The consideration by the Territory Grants Commission is, if a road has been maintained and accessed by the council, it is taken into consideration for distribution of a fair grant, whether it is gazetted or not.

**Mr WOOD:** Would that apply to a large pastoral lease where the company or people who owned it also maintains that road?

**Mr STUCHBERY:** I could not answer that.

**Mr WOOD:** It is an area that needs some clarification.

**Mr McADAM:** Would you like to get a response on that? Would you like to put that on notice?

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#### Question on Notice 9.1

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Re-state the question please, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** What is the status of attracting Commonwealth funding in relation to roads on Aboriginal land and on pastoral properties?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, for the purposes of *Hansard*, are you prepared to accept that question on notice?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 9.1.

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If I can just state, where questions are taken on notice, if an answer is received before the end of the session, if you could just make a note of that question number because it will make it easier for us to track what answers relate to what question. Thank you. Anything else?

**Mr WOOD:** Mr Chairman, I will combine a couple of questions here that I have. I attended a transition committee meeting today, and one of the things that was said to me was that the government will support the idea of one vote, one value, within a certain variance. That caused the transition committee to now have to go back and rethink their original recommendation that they put forward to the advisory board, which was way out of line with the principle of one vote, one value.

Minister, why did the government not set that as a baseline right at the beginning, as a fundamental principle of good governance, before these transitional committees went down the path of debating it, only to be told later that this was not the process that the government would accept?

**Mr McADAM:** As a result of today's meeting, you are saying that they have gone away again to reconsider how they might ...

**Mr WOOD:** Fit in with that model.

**Mr McADAM:** Okay. Fit in with the principle of one vote, one value? I am not too sure ...

**Mr KNIGHT:** Can I just make a point of order? Are you able to confirm that discussion? I was there too. I do not would remember it being alternative government policy. Are you able to prove ...

**Mr WOOD:** Well, the ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I will let you respond, but it is not a point of order.

**Mr WOOD:** He said: 'This will have to go back. You will have to re-look at this because the government will not accept this in its existing form'. The reason he was giving is because, in some cases, the variance was not 30% or 20%, it was in triple figures. In my remarks earlier, I said it was a pity. Why could you not have come out in the first place and say: 'The bottom line when were are dealing with wards is one vote, one value, with a certain variance' – that is up to the government to decide – and that would have saved what has, to some extent, been a waste of time for the transitional committee.

**Mr McADAM:** I guess my response to you, member for Nelson, is we have probably had this debate via the media more than we have by any other means. I have always said that the principle of one vote, one value, is something that, where possible, we should adhere to as a principle.

In respect of the Litchfield Shire Council, I am aware that initially, I think, they came with five. That is the reason why they have now gone back to reconsider or reconfigure how they want to do it. I acknowledge that, particularly in relation to Litchfield Shire, the proposed Top End Shire - whatever they want to call it - there are going to be some issues there. I believe that is a challenge for us to work with that shire to try to come up with some configuration which, as far as possible, will apply to the one vote, one value.

However, the transitional committee has probably gone back and, I believe, there is still some capacity to make it more representative. As I said to you, one vote, one value is very important but, at the same time, there has to be some give and take. The bottom line is that that is exactly what the situation is regarding Litchfield. In most of the other shires, that principle is in place.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you. I heard that today and I thought it was great because one of the reasons why it is important to keep the one vote, one value is to start to get away from parochialism so that we are all working for a community. I will not get back onto how big the community should be.

Is it true that, originally, Litchfield Shire - which is, by the way, a municipality not a community government - was not to be dissolved and this was a late decision by the government to include it in the local government amalgamation process?

**Mr McADAM:** It was never the intention of government to dissolve Litchfield?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes.

**Mr McADAM:** The advice I have received – and I stand to be corrected on that – was that the Top End Shire has always been under consideration.

**Mr WOOD:** Inverted commas.



**Mr McADAM:** Whatever. What I am saying to you is that my understanding is that the Top End Shire has always been under consideration, certainly under the previous model. I am not aware of any intent to dissolve Litchfield. What was your question again?

**Mr WOOD:** Was the original intention not to dissolve Litchfield Shire but to leave it as it was because it is such a successfully run council? The reason I am saying that is because the word I have heard is that the reason we did not have anyone as a member of the Northern Advisory Board, is simply because the Local Government Association was not expecting Litchfield Shire to be part of the amalgamation process.

**Mr McADAM:** In respect of that representation of the advisory board - and again I stand to be corrected and will seek advice here - initially there were no nominations from Litchfield. That is my understanding.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** Mr Michael Bowman had submitted an application to be on the advisory board. It did not come via LGANT.

**Mr WOOD:** I mention that because I was going to ask you what happened to the Northern Advisory Board did, but ...

**Mr McADAM:** It was always our view - my view - that Litchfield would be incorporated as part of the Top End Shire proposal.

**Mr WOOD:** Could you say how many people on the Local Government Advisory Board are local government managers who have experience in local government? I am not taking on here Tony Tapsell because he is representing a manager's association. I am looking at people on the ground who know about local government?

**Mr McADAM:** On the Northern Advisory Board?

**Mr WOOD:** I will come to that. At the moment, the peak body.

**Mr McADAM:** Do you have a list of the core advisory?

**Mr WOOD:** I have it. What I am getting at, minister, I think there were none. There was Ray Wooldridge representing local government, but a key area of input is missing here. People who have long-term experience running councils - not being an elected member, that is fine, or being a member of the land council or a member of the Chamber of Commerce or whatever, but the people who actually know what local government is physically.

**Mr McADAM:** Quite apart from Ray Wooldridge ...

**Mr WOOD:** He is a councillor, not a manager, a CEO, or someone who worked out in the field of local government.

**Mr McADAM:** If I might, Mr Tapsell in respect to the core advisory board. It is also important to understand that the core advisory board does not meet separately. It is incorporated as part of the Northern Advisory Board, and it is incorporated as part of the Southern Advisory Board. They do not meet separately as such.

**Mr WOOD:** It was one of my follow-up questions. What happened to those advisory boards? They did not seem to show up in the ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Nelson, if I could ask you to let the minister finish his question before coming in, thank you.

**Mr WOOD:** I was helping him.

**Mr McADAM:** In respect to that Northern Advisory Board members and the Southern Advisory Board members, I would think that you would agree that almost without exception the majority have some connection with local government.

**Mr WOOD:** I am looking more at your managers. The people that know how a road is built, they know the nuts and bolts of local government. Sometimes, I have to admit, the councillors do not know that. They turn up to a meeting, have a look at the agenda and go home. However, if you asked them how a road was

being constructed, what are the difficulties in doing some of the landfill for waste, or construction of football ovals, they are sometimes the people who know a lot more about local government than a lot of the people who were put on the advisory board.

**Mr McADAM:** I accept that. We also have another group and that is the Local Government Managers Group made up of a group of managers from the different community government councils. It also provides input. Of course, you also have a transitional committee operating at another level and there is capacity for CEOs and other people to attend those meetings.

**Mr WOOD:** That was my follow up question. Why are there not these people on the transitional board? I know you said there is capacity, having been an observer today, that that is where they would be invited in as an observer. You do not have, unless requested I suppose, an opportunity for input unless you are a part of the appointed group in that transitional committee. It just seems to me that we have a lot of people on a transitional committee and they are fine people. However, I am not sure we have people there who can actually tell us about the nitty gritty of running local government.

**Mr McADAM:** I think I have answered that to the best of my ability regarding the role of the transitional committee and their capacity to draw on expertise from within. I refer part of the question to Mr Scarvelis.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** There is a process now to also include the network of senior officers, particularly the CEOs from each of these councils, to meet on the nuts and bolts implementation issues in between the transition committees, with the view that they are directly involved in the development of the shire plans that are then taken back to the elected bodies. I guess the elected bodies still have the authority to provide some direction on what sort of policy directions and how they want the councils to actually run, but we are meeting now with the groups of CEOs from each of those groups. As an office, we also meet with the Local Government Managers Association monthly through our senior officers.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, it was announced today there would be three public meetings in the Litchfield - maybe Top End - region. Do you think three is sufficient? Why are they happening at 5.30 pm, especially in a rural area? Why not advance it out to places like Dundee and the Douglas Daly? Will we be getting a public meeting or will we be getting a PowerPoint presentation on local government at these meetings?

**Mr McADAM:** That information I am not across. I understand, as a result of a meeting you had today, I know there have been other concerns expressed of not enough public meetings. I ask the agency to respond back regarding some of your questions. However, if you want to put a proposal regarding more public meetings throughout the Top End Shire, we are happy to do that. I have been scheduled to go to one at Cox Peninsula, and I know that I have actually scheduled other meetings that are into the proposed Top End. I will do that. However, if you would like to put an alternative suggestion - I do not know what it is that went out there today. What I am saying to you is that I am very amenable to have you look at other options of the number of public meetings, where they might be, and the time frames. I will get Mr Scarvelis to respond.

**Mr WOOD:** These were coming from the department, not ones raised from an independent source.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** The forums you are referring to will not be PowerPoint presentations; they are community consultations. The format will be that they will be advertised in local papers in the very near future, and people who wish to speak will have an opportunity to register. Those people will be given the opportunity on the evening to speak about whatever aspect they want to raise about their proposed new shire, and then others will be invited after that to make comment. The commentary from advisory board members who might attend those meetings and others will be very limited. It is mainly about listening to comments from the community, and they will be facilitated meetings.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, I presume a public servant running the shire transition committee meeting today, said in his opening statement to those members of the transition committee that, basically, those who are still opposed to the amalgamation should consider whether they should be part of the continuing negotiations. Do you feel that is a bit rich or 'big brother' tactics, because people can still hold an opinion that they do not agree with the amalgamation, but they can still also say, 'Well, the government has asked us to come along in a process that they have the right to do, the amalgamation plan, and we will still participate in that process', without some public servant saying, 'If you do not like the amalgamation, then please go'. Do you think that is an inappropriate statement for that public servant to make?

**Mr McADAM:** I cannot confirm or deny that that actually occurred today. Suffice for me to say - and I have said it before - there will always be challenges. There are always be differences of opinion in how you arrive at a point. My view is, regardless of your position, it is your democratic right to express whatever you wish to express, and you should be given the opportunity to do that. That is my personal view. That is not an impression in the context of what was said there today. I am just telling you what my view is.

**Mr WOOD:** Would you at least look into that? There were minutes taken.

**Mr McADAM:** Sure.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** With respect, member for Nelson, that might be something you can write to or discuss with the minister outside this process, simply because you are referring to a comment made rather than anything that comes out of the output group. That is out of the meeting that you had today ...

**Mr WOOD:** Which was a transition committee meeting.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** It might be better to raise that outside of this process.

**Mr WOOD:** It would probably be easier if I keep going. I will leave that.

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Chairman, can I ask Mr Scarvelis to provide some comment in respect to the question asked by the member for Nelson?

**Mr SCARVELIS:** It is my understanding that the comment that the officer made at today's meeting was most appropriate. What he actually said was that he encouraged people not to use the planning session, which they were party to, as a forum to protest about local government reform. He acknowledged that there were many other forums where that was appropriate. However, whilst engaging in the planning process, that was not appropriate, and that would be entirely consistent with the terms of reference of the transition committee.

**Mr WOOD:** I remember, Mr Chairman, talking about the tone in which things are given. I say that the tone in which that public servant spoke, was not in the same tone as your CEO spoke.

**Mr KNIGHT:** Mr Chairman, I will jump in to the defence of the public servant involved here ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Well, member for Daly, I accept you were there, but ...

**Mr KNIGHT:** I disagree with the member for Nelson, I do not agree with that.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Daly, if we can just move on ...

**Mr WOOD:** Move on.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** ... from there. If there is further discussion that is to be had, this process is not the one to do it in. Member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** In relation to ward boards – or boards belonging to wards - what is the concept that the government is putting forward? Are these going to be like mini-council with some funding, or are you, basically, going to have a group of people who volunteer their time from a range of communities within a ward, perhaps, who lobby towards their local council? Is that how you see it, not a mini-council?

**Mr McADAM:** Are you referring to what we describe as the boards of management? Is that what we are describe as ...

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, for the ward, I think it is.

**Mr McADAM:** Boards of managements can have different roles or capacities in responsibilities or functions in their community. I will give you an example, for instance, the Tennant Creek Town Council will not longer exist, but there is still going to be a need for the Purkiss Reserve Hall, which is the sporting complex hall. They can still exist as a group, as an entity. They can be contracted to look after the Purkiss Reserve. It would be the same as other functions within other configurations or shires, across the new shire arrangement. There could be an entity in a community which could be contracted to undertake a certain function under a service level agreement. A board has many functions. A board can perform many

functions, many capacities. I am just trying to think of a function quite apart from what I have said. I ask Mr Scarvelis for a comment.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** Community planning.

**Mr McADAM:** Community planning.

**Mr WOOD:** The Litchfield council already has what they call a management board to look after all their reserves. Generally speaking, they are all volunteers except for Freds Pass, which is paid. They all receive some funding for operation of that particular reserve. You see something in line with that which is already existing. There have been some good things come out of Litchfield Shire ...

**Mr McADAM:** I agree, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** ... including the flat rate and the name! One vote, one value for wards.

Minister, I will skip a few things. We have discussed rating. I do still have a problem – and it needs to be something that has to be sorted out – with the issue of rating on Aboriginal land. I accept the service fee; I have no problem with that. There is a problem that I have been asked about as well, and it will come up at public meetings. That is, if an Aboriginal person on Aboriginal land does not pay their service fee, you cannot take their land away, you cannot take their house away, and I would be a brave bailiff if I walked into some communities and said: 'I will have your television and your boat!' There must be some mechanism for a council to recover rates not paid. That is what is the crux of what, maybe, the member for Greatorex was getting at. Certainly, that needs to be explained as to how that will happen.

**Mr McADAM:** I believe that I may have responded, in the sense that we are in discussions with the Northern Land Council and the CLC in respect to this particular issue. I acknowledge that it can be, potentially, a problem. However, the important thing is that if you engage and sit down and talk to people, then maybe there is a way of overcoming this. That is why the CLC and the NLC have been, as I say, on the advisory board. I think we have meetings scheduled next week on Tuesday to talk about this very issue and other issues, particularly those that have now arisen as a result of the response by the Commonwealth government in regard to child abuse reports.

**Mr WOOD:** A fundamental question, because what you put forward as a reason for amalgamation and the supposed benefits was increased funding. The part that I have a lot of difficulty with is that you are saying to people there is a hope out there that we will be able to get extra Commonwealth funds. You are not saying there is Commonwealth funding; you are saying that, if we amalgamate, there is a hope that we will get Commonwealth funding. I think Ray Wooldridge was going down to talk to the minister for Roads who previously stated that road funding will not happen; we will not be getting any extra road funding for the Territory. If we do not get that money that you hope you will get, then you will rely on existing funds. If we just take the road funding, that road funding first of all comes in as a grant from the Commonwealth, based on population. That is how we get our money. Then, it is distributed on a horizontal equalisation scheme.

Then, from the road funding point of view, you put your money up based on how many roads, kerbs and guttering, plain bitumen, etcetera. If we do not get any extra money from the Commonwealth, we have taken up all these extra roads. Before, local government took up 5% of the Territory, now it takes up 95% of the Territory. In the case of Litchfield, it just increased its size six times. A lot of those roads are on incorporated land. If you do not get the funding from the Commonwealth that you hope to get, will that not mean that places like the new Litchfield Shire will not receive the same amount of money it is getting now - in fact, less because the same amount of money has to spread over more roads - and that there are only two options the council will have: decrease its road maintenance or increase its rates?

**Mr McADAM:** I suppose the comment I have is: if you did not go down this path of reform you would not have a hope in hell of getting anything - full stop. That is the bottom line. At the very least, and what I have always said, is there is a greater capacity to be able to attract, to leverage, dollars on a regional basis from indigenous/non-indigenous, pastoral industry, mining industry and indigenous community. They all use the roads, they all realise how very important roads are to their local economy, for health services, and travelling to and from for shopping. I argue that, at the very least, by having a new shire-type model you would get a common cause, a common interest across the region which would allow greater capacity. That is a step forward from what we have at the moment.

It is very true that you either spend less on roads - and again, that is an option; I do not deny that - or you increase rates to do that. However, there is another opportunity, I believe anyway. The point I am

trying to make is - and I need to check these figures - my understanding is that for the next five years there is going to be something like \$57.5m input into roads, in the main, across the bush. I will check that. If someone could actually check that for me, but that is my understanding. That, within itself, is indicative of the Northern Territory government recognising the roads and then allocating this amount of money over time.

We have written to the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, Hon Jim Lloyd MP, in respect to this very issue. We have commissioned a report in regard to the position of the Northern Territory in terms of dollars for roads. We have used the same people who did the report in South Australia, using the same logic. South Australia is, I think, able to receive an extra \$16m over four years. That does not mean to say we are going to get it but, at the very least, that is what we have done to try and secure extra money. The other issue is that - I have lost my train of thought, Mr Chairman. There was one other issue that I wanted to raise on the roads component. The other thing I wanted to say is we have written to the minister, Hon Jim Lloyd, in respect of that consultancy report but, also, as part of local government reform to an establishment of some sort of grant in recognition of us moving into a new reform process. They are the sort of things in train. However, I accept your argument. There is no guarantee but, I argue, there is a greater percentage to secure extra roads funding through this model than what we have at the moment.

**Mr WOOD:** That may be true.

**Mr McADAM:** I would like Mr Scarvelis to comment in respect to DPI.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** In relation to the risk to shires, the model does not put any additional responsibility for roads on the shires that they might then have in their shire if, in fact, that funding is not there. Where there is a transfer of specific roads - and I understand there was some extensive discussion in the transition committee meeting today from the Department of Planning and Infrastructure - there would also be a commensurate shift of funding that is currently spent on those particular roads to the shire. Therefore, there is a process for that movement, both within the Northern Territory government. Certainly, all the messages that we are receiving from the Commonwealth is that, by identifying the roads in the way that we are as part of a structural change, they are very sympathetic to the view that there clearly needs to be additional money coming to the Territory.

**Mr WOOD:** Would the government give a guarantee that if there was not any money forthcoming that the money that you are saying that will come from the Northern Territory government when these roads are passed over to the new council will continue? You have to remember when Litchfield Shire started there was a \$13m establishment package, and then Litchfield did not get any more money. It was not a community government council, it was on its own. I would be concerned if you say: 'We will give you some money for two years and then you are on your own'. You say there will be benefits and I believe you would get support in the new shire if those benefits were benefits. However, you will get no support if people know we are living in hope and there could be a likelihood of less money for roads or an increase in rates. It is up to the government if it wants to convince people in my area and the member for Daly's area to support the amalgamation, that the benefits are actually benefits and not something pie-in-the-sky.

**Mr McADAM:** I cannot give you that guarantee. However, the fact that we are talking about \$57.5m over five years, which I will confirm, I believe is indicative in the sense that the NT government is very fair dinkum in trying to address the imbalance that occurs between the bush roads and other major roads. That, to me, is certainly better than zero over the next five years.

**Mr WOOD:** I know we are pushing for time again. Just a couple more questions. There was the issue raised of the CEOs and their future employment. I can say for sure that the CEO of Litchfield is leaving because of the statements made by the government, especially in one of its documents where it spoke about the benefits of the local government. I will paraphrase down to where it says: '... that there will be stable government administrations and higher quality managers'.

Also, minister, when I asked you a question in parliament regarding why Litchfield was being dissolved, you basically said it was because you believed that, into the future, it would not be a viable council. I believe that just cut that CEO to the core. He has run the council for 20 years. Litchfield Shire is not a non-viable council. He is a good quality manager. He has done a good job because, as you said, it is a financial council, it has surplus money in reserves, and those reserves are important as they were asset replacement reserves. Yet, he is being asked to be on committees which, basically, say: 'You are out the door'. He is packing up his bags next week. It is very unfortunate, in the case of Litchfield, which was not a

dysfunctional council. It is good council and, yet, some of the things that have been said, which may not have been intentional, but they certainly reflected on him.

Surely, the government should have looked more carefully at what is going to happen to good CEOs. They do not belong to a union and you will not be able to employ them all. They will simply have to leave their jobs eventually, as you would not get the savings you were trying to get in the first place. I understand why you are doing it, but they seem to be the people that are told: 'Goodbye, thank you very much, but we are bringing in some new people with our \$9.9m package'. Has the government really given enough consideration to those people, many of whom have worked long and hard in local government?

**Mr McADAM:** I was advised this afternoon that the gentleman in question had either signalled his intention to resign or had resigned. I was not aware of all the circumstances in regards to his resignation, and I am still not aware of them all, other than what you have just told me. However, it is suffice for me to say that, clearly, he is a man of integrity, he is a good manager. He has, obviously, done a good job with the Litchfield Shire Council, and I thank him on behalf of the Northern Territory government.

You used the word dysfunctional, and I do not believe that I have ever used that word in the context of the Litchfield Shire Council.

**Mr WOOD:** It was not actually trying to refer to Litchfield as dysfunctional.

**Mr McADAM:** Well, you used the term, and I do not know in which context, but I want to make that very clear. The other point I make is that, regarding being viable, it certainly is a viable council at this point in time. My view is that, into the future, it will not have the same capacity as it would under this proposed model. I am absolutely convinced of that, and that applies to some of the regions around there. I believe that, over the next few years, it will become obvious why the economic and social opportunities are going to flow into that region. I have no doubt whatsoever about that. It will become an even more viable shire under this new model.

The other point I make is that, perhaps he is the sort of person who should have applied for one of the CEO jobs. I encourage him to consider that. What more can I say in response to your question?

**Mr WOOD:** My comments about being dysfunctional were not saying that you said Litchfield is functional. I used the word in relation to one of the reasons we were amalgamating councils was because of dysfunction. However, in relation to the shire clerk, I suppose the qualifications the government is looking for in these super councils, perhaps will be something he does not have because he is actually an engineer who took on the job as a shire manager.

He also believes that the process we are going through, to some extent, could destroy a philosophy of a council which is different. I do not think people in government have really understood this. I have heard people say: 'You should raise the rates; you should change the rates to UCV; Litchfield council is subsidised by Darwin City Council'.

Litchfield Shire is unique in that it has stuck to the flat rate based on the cost of providing services. It has kept very minimal bureaucracy; it has approximately 11 staff. It works on a contract basis for workers. It has a process of rating roads while the majority of people are asking for their road to be rated. It has kept money in the bank to ensure that, if there was a disaster and a road needs to be repaired, there were adequate reserves. It has done things that are what rural councils should be about.

Yet, for some reason, I do not think enough emphasis has been on looking at it. This is a possibly a great model. You said we were going to do things different, not like Queensland. This is a model that has worked for 20 years.

People might complain about dogs and the rubbish and all that; that is the political side of it that you worry about before an election. As a council, financial and running well, it is an ideal model that the government agency should be looking at as a possible model of other councils in the Territory. Unfortunately, you have talked about UCVs and all that sort of stuff, but here is a model council that we should have looked at. The Shire Clerk has seen the end of that possibility. He is a fairly old person; he is not likely to get another job. At that age, he would be pushing to get a job. He sees a lot of work gone down the drain and, possibly, more could go down the drain. We need to put a bit more emphasis on what would happen to CEOs when we have the amalgamation.

Just one final question then, minister. We were talking about core functions before. I have that document you were using yourself from the Business Planning Group. It talked about a whole range of things. Again, my belief in this, is the core function should be simplified. We work on the roads reserves and rubbish - a principle. Street lighting is part of roads, do not make it a core function. Make it a function that is necessary when you need the street lights. Weeds and fire which, I presume, you are actually referring to council assets, not pastoral properties ...

**Mr McADAM:** I have said that.

**Mr WOOD:** That is right. Well, Litchfield Shire Council, when it slashes its roads, it does spray weeds. It comes under roads. Do not make it a core function. There might be some times the council cannot do it, for whatever reason. There might some places where you cannot have street lighting. You are making things more complex than they need to be – that is what I am saying. Again, this tends to be of the old southern approach. This is the model council we have seen somewhere else. I am saying look at Litchfield, it does things a lot simpler; it allows for variations.

For instance, today it was said that councils will have to bring up, say, the construction of roads to a certain standard. I know Coomalie Council and Litchfield do not go to the standard of Transport and Works in building a road. They find out where they can get the cheapest gravel, they do the best they can, and they might be a road which is up to about 85% of what Transport and Works think is a good road. We must have that flexibility built into our core functions, otherwise you will have cost that people do not want.

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Chairman, I have been publicly on the record saying that this is one of the greatest challenges in the local government reform. It is how we apply the functions or the core service deliveries, or how we apply something you need, something that is special in the context of a Territory environment. That is the challenge for the transitional committees going forward. It may not be achieved in that first period, but I would be very disappointed if, in fact, the shire councils did not incorporate the uniqueness of their respective regions.

I will give you an example. If you are down south, a local government has a very prescriptive function, I would dare say, very prescriptive. However, here in the Northern Territory, indigenous and non-indigenous people live together. They can belong to the same regions, the same shire. A lot of them have lived side by side for a long time. I would like to think that, in certain circumstances in certain shires, that the cultural heritage tradition would be incorporated as part of the shire ethos, or whatever you want to call it. That, to me, is a good thing. It will make the Territory a little different. I do not know whether Queensland and WA are going down this path, but that is what I believe could happen here in the Northern Territory. I am probably repeating myself, but there has always been black, white and never the twain shall meet. I hope that each shire could incorporate some of those values and delivery of service models that are unique, still within a framework but flexible enough and suitable enough for their respective shires. Mr Scarvelis could comment.

**Mr SCARVELIS:** Only to simply say that the origins of the core list are not being invented from something new. They have, essentially, come from looking at the councils like Litchfield, Palmerston, Darwin and Alice Springs. They are based on the current Schedule 2 that is in the *Local Government Act*. We would probably not be too much in disagreement with the member regarding the roads, rubbish, reserves, and probably facilities is the other one. The other comments under that are subsets, I guess, of those key issues. The key thing that we would be looking for is a level of improvement in the delivery of those basic services which, I think, are sometimes taken for granted.

**Mr WOOD:** I think Litchfield Road is pretty good considering the amount of bitumen that has been put on it. But thank you, minister. Okay. I thank you for ...

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#### Answer to Question

**Mr McADAM:** If I may comment, I would just like to respond to question No 9.1, if I might, Mr Chairman? The actual situation is that there is a \$35m increase in repairs and maintenance over the next four years bringing the repairs and maintenance budget to this particular year to \$57m. I apologise.

**Mr WOOD:** Whose funding is that?

**Mr McADAM:** This is the NT government. I am happy to table that.

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**Mr WOOD:** Could I just thank the minister?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Please do.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you for the information. I still have some concerns but that is part of the job. If this is going to succeed, constructive criticism is needed. Also, whether it is successful or not, we will wait and see. There is information out there that I got today that I will give it to the constituents anyway.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you, member for Nelson. I think we are meeting on Tuesday night next week.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes questions on Output Group 1.0, Outputs 1.1 and 1.2. That seems a convenient time to have a five minute recess and we will add that five minutes on at the end.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** In the interests of time, if we can reconvene. We have concluded consideration of Output Group 1.0. Minister, it has been noted on the schedule that Output Group 2.0 - Sport and Recreation, Outputs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, which sit within your portfolio, will be addressed by the Minister for Sport and Recreation tomorrow evening.

#### **Output 2.4 – Water Safety and Animal Welfare**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now proceed to Output 2.4 - Water Safety and Animal Welfare. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** I thought it was deleted, in brackets.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, Events is underneath it.

**Dr LIM:** Events is a different one. I thought it was animal welfare events. Obviously, no.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any questions in relation to Output Group 2.4? There being no questions, that concludes consideration of that output group.

#### **OUTPUT 3.0 – COMMUNITY SERVICES** **Output 3.1 - Libraries**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee shall now proceed to Output Group 3.0 - Community Services, Output 3.1 - Libraries. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** No, there are other more pressing issues, Mr Chairman. I will defer that as well. Sorry, gentlemen and ladies, if you are here for libraries.

**Mr WOOD:** I have one quick question.

**Mr McADAM:** Before we commence the questioning, I welcome Trish Angus.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thanks, minister.

**Mr WOOD:** My question is more a policy one. One of the core functions mentioned was libraries. In the case of Litchfield, we have a library which is run by the Library Service and the department of Education. Is it the intention of the local government amalgamation scheme to make Litchfield Shire Council take over that library?

**Mr McADAM:** In respect to the question from the member for Nelson, NT Libraries will commence a review of the Public Library Agreement. Of course, as part of that, consultations will occur with all groups and stakeholders in the circumstances around the library which, as I understand it, is in the Taminmin High School.

**Mr WOOD:** A very good library.



**Mr McADAM:** Yes, we acknowledge that. We are also aware that there are some problems, particularly in respect to the capital works or infrastructure, which will kick in regarding the middle school. We know it is under a lot of stress and pressure at the moment because of the proposed middle school. I suggest that it has probably moved beyond its traditional role as such ...

**Mr WOOD:** Make it bigger.

**Mr McADAM:** In fact, libraries are one of those areas which are critical, not only in Litchfield but right across the Northern Territory. They play a very important role. It is a changing role regarding the traditional library. We all believe the libraries in the knowledge centres in the bush communities to be an integral part of our community. I am probably spinning a yarn here, but what I am trying to say is that there is going to be a review. I hope out of it this review, we get a better outcome for all in regards to Litchfield, or the proposed Top End shire.

**Mr WOOD:** You cannot say proposed Top End ...

**Mr McADAM:** I keep saying the name is ...

**Mr WOOD:** That was by a biased transition committee. Okay, thank you, minister. I will keep an eye on what is happening.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

### **Output 3.2 - Aboriginal Interpreter Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will move to Output 3.2 - Aboriginal Interpretive Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** No, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No. That concludes consideration of Output 3.2, and Output Group 3.0.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – HOUSING SERVICES**

#### **Output 4.1 – Housing Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I will now call for questions on Output Group 4.0 - Housing Services, Output 4.1 - Housing Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, if I may, just for clarification. It is not a specific question on anything. You mentioned in your opening comments that you wanted to incorporate indigenous housing in the Business Line of Housing as well. So, are you going to do Housing Services per se as it is in the budget book?

**Mr McADAM:** I would prefer if we could deal with that under Territory Housing. I also introduce Fiona Chamberlain, the General Manager of Territory Housing; and Mr Dwayne McInnis, the Chief Financial Officer, from Territory Housing.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, indigenous housing monies for IHANT and all that, has been incorporated into one pool now ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I am sorry, I seek clarification. I thought the minister wanted to deal with the indigenous housing under the Territory Housing Business Line. This would be Housing Services – the exact opposite of what appears in the schedule, not incorporating indigenous housing. Is that correct, minister?

**Dr LIM:** Well, we are not going to have much time. I will just forgo that, thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay. Member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** I will leave mine until Territory Housing.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay. That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

### **Non-Output Specific Budget Related Questions**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any non-output specific related questions in relation to Local Government, Housing and Sport?

There being no questions indicated, it is probably a bit late to thank those officers who assisted you with that part, minister, but please pass on the committee's gratitude for their services tonight.

### **TERRITORY HOUSING Business Line – Indigenous Housing**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, in your opening address you made reference to indigenous housing and we are discussing a business line here. I invite you to make another opening statement if you choose.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I did indicate that I was going to make an opening statement but, in the interest of time, it is okay, I will defer that.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right then. The committee will now proceed with questions regarding the business line incorporating any questions around indigenous housing.

**Dr LIM:** Mr Chairman, I seek your guidance. Are we doing this line as a whole or are we doing Output 1.1 - Public Housing, Output 1.2 - Government ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I do not intend to work through the list as such because it is a business line. It was set out because that is the way it has been set out in the budget papers. However, it is only for convenience.

**Dr LIM:** You agree to deal with the business line as a whole?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Yes. I specifically mentioned the Indigenous Housing just to reinforce to Hansard that that was incorporated here.

**Dr LIM:** In regards to Territory Housing stock, minister, what is the stock? Can you provide me with the list of housing stock owned by Territory Housing in terms of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom premises and by regions?

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Chairman, I am happy to table.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, I appreciate that. Minister, in tabling that document, do you have the housing stock as I asked earlier, disaggregated into years as well, for the last five years?

**Mr McADAM:** My advice is that we do have that information.

**Dr LIM:** Would you be able to table that too, minister?

**Mr McADAM:** Would you like that tabled as well?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, will you do that? Thank you. Minister, looking at public housing properties across the regions, do you have data relating to whether occupants of public housing are indigenous or non-indigenous?

**Mr McADAM:** Your question was?

**Dr LIM:** I initially asked whether you had data relating to the numbers of one-, two-, three- or four-bedroom properties across the regions for each year back five years. You provided me with a tabled document of that.

**Mr McADAM:** I will just seek clarification if you do not mind.

Member for Greatorex we are happy to table some information in respect to indigenous housing in percentages.

**Dr LIM:** I did not ask specifically for indigenous housing. What I said was if you could first of all provide me with any figures on the number of one-, two-, three- or four-bedroom residences across the Territory divided into regions?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, we can do that.

**Dr LIM:** Then I also asked whether you could provide me with that data going back five years? If you have it for this year, you must have it for last year and the year before and the year before, surely. Yes, if you could table that it would be good.

**Mr McADAM:** My advice is that we do have that information. We do not have it with us, but we are happy to table the information you require.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Put that on notice?

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#### Question on Notice 9.2

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Can I suggest that the way to do that is a question on notice, so if the member for Greatorex could restate the question.

**Dr LIM:** My question on notice to the minister is that would you please provide me with data for the last five years of the number of one-bedroom, two-bedroom, three-bedroom and four-bedroom residences, disaggregated into the regions for the past five years.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you happy to take that question on notice?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, and we will provide the information to the member.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate that question No 9.2.

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**Dr LIM:** I further ask minister, after you provide me those figures, could you possibly provide me with figures over the same period of time in the previous question, of how many residences are occupied by indigenous people and how many are occupied by non-indigenous people?

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Chairman, my advice is that we have data here in respect of the current year. However, we do not have the data in regards to the preceding four years, but, we can provide that to you.

**Dr LIM:** I would like to have that, thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Greatorex, would you restate the question for *Hansard*.

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#### Question on Notice 9.3

**Dr LIM:** Minister, would you please provide information relating to the number of premises that are in Territory Housing, whether one-, two-, three- or four-bedroom, for the last five years included in that information the number of residences that are occupied each year by indigenous people and non-indigenous people?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you happy to take that on notice?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, I am.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** For the purpose of *Hansard* I allocate that question No 9.3.

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**Dr LIM:** Of the tenants that are occupying Territory Housing properties, how many tenants have had complaints made about them that have been followed up by Territory Housing, and action taken?

**Mr McADAM:** Bear with me. You wanted the number of complaints?

**Dr LIM:** The number of complaints that have been received regarding tenants, and what action has been taken.

**Mr McADAM:** I will ask the General Manager of Territory Housing to respond to that. We probably do have that information.

**Ms CHAMBERLAIN:** Fiona Chamberlain, General Manager, Territory Housing. We have figures here that tell us how many complaints we have had per region as at 31 May 2007 for this year. Do you want me to go through each region?

**Dr LIM:** Well, if you have the figures available and if you are prepared to table that, that would be easier for us to look at the tables rather than to try to listen and keep them in my head.

**Ms CHAMBERLAIN:** We are happy to do that.

**Mr McADAM:** We will table that.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you very much, minister. Of those tenants that Territory Housing has received complaints about, what action has been taken, and have there been any evictions as a result of any action taken?

**Mr McADAM:** Again, I ask the General Manager to respond.

**Ms CHAMBERLAIN:** Action was taken with regard to every complaint that was received. A follow-up letter was sent to every complainant, as well as a phone call offering to check with the complainant about what the actual issue was. Some of the complaints are more serious than others. Where they are serious, they are always followed up with a visit to the tenant involved by our officers, where they are reminded of their responsibilities under the *Residential Tenancies Act*.

If it is a recurring problem, then we are likely to already have action under way. If not, we would begin some sort of action in line with the *Residential Tenancies Act*. We may choose to put the tenant on an Acceptable Behaviour Agreement if that is the most appropriate way forward. In some instances, if the behaviour is already serious, we may go straight to eviction action. We certainly do have some tenancies that result in evictions, and I do have figures here on evictions. Our key evictions are around either rental or arrears, or evictions for noise and nuisance. Noise and nuisance are the ones that relate generally to the complaints.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, are you prepared to table this for us as well?

**Mr McADAM:** I believe we can do that, yes.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, how many Acceptable Behaviour Agreements have been signed with tenants of Territory Housing?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, again, I am prepared to table this.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you.

**Mr McADAM:** There have been 48 ABAs, as I understand it, that have actually been signed. There are nine pending.

**Dr LIM:** Pending to be signed?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes. Discussions are ongoing. It also refers to the pending ABAs on a regional level, so if you would like, we are happy to table that as well.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister, I appreciate that. Of the ABAs that have been signed, have any one of them led to escalation of ...

**Mr McADAM:** Are you talking of the ABAs signed?

**Dr LIM:** Have they been escalated to an eviction? Or have they resulted in a good outcome, that you suddenly had good neighbours because of the ABAs?

**Mr McADAM:** Seven seriously breached the ABAs. Three moved out before Territory Housing could take any legal action. There are currently four being processed with Territory Housing's solicitors for

eviction. One of these actions has been set down for court on 2 July. All that information, I have been advised, is on the sheet which we are about to table.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, with properties that have been damaged by tenants, what recovery efforts are made to ensure that cost of repairs and maintenance, subsequent to tenant damage, is recovered?

**Mr McADAM:** Member for Greatorex, we do have some figures which we are happy to table. I will ask the general manager to respond to you. I have been advised it is very complicated.

**Dr LIM:** Whether you recovered costs of repairs maintenance from tenants who have damaged properties is very simple.

**Ms CHAMBERLAIN:** Actually, with the tenant responsibility maintenance, it is something we have taken quite a focus on in the last 12 months. It is a very important area for us. One of the problems we had in the past was that we were not dealing with tenant responsibility until the end of the tenancy. Some of that was in relation to rules under the *Residential Tenancies Act*. We have had changes to that legislation where we now are able to link tenant responsibility to the tenancy agreement, so we are able to, through our inspections of our properties, determine tenant responsibility throughout the tenancy. It allows us to identify tenant responsibility early and make sure that we enter arrangements such as time to pay agreements with our tenants to repay that tenant responsibility. What you will see in our figures which the minister was prepared to table or has tabled, is an increasing level of tenant responsibility. That is a strategic response by us in order to identify it and recovery actions taken in regard to all tenant responsibility.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I am sure the department is aware of the particular case where a repair bill was charged which, according to the tenant, was unfairly charged because the bond was also retained. How do you deal with cases such as that, when somebody comes in complains: 'You have taken my money and you still send me more bills', and they feel that is unfair.

**Ms CHAMBERLAIN:** Some tenants will dispute the tenant responsibility charges. That is entirely their right. We have a system for reviewing decisions of that nature, both internally and via our external appeals mechanism. In all cases where a tenant does ask for that to be reviewed, we go through it in detail and we ensure that what we are charging is fair. If it is not, then we will review the charge and adjust accordingly.

**Dr LIM:** What is the mechanism apart from that? The appeal is to Territory Housing. If Territory Housing charges them for what Territory Housing judges to be a fair charge for damage bill, and the appeal is to Territory Housing, how are you going to win on that argument?

**Mr McADAM:** Territory Housing has put in place a housing appeals mechanism which was effective from October 2005. It allows people to refer their complaint to that particular group. The process is that initial complaints are dealt with by Territory Housing and then, of course, if that cannot be resolved the matter is then referred to the Territory Housing appeals mechanism. The Territory Housing Appeals Board is made up of independent members appointed by me and they have the capacity to independently review all complaints. There are three levels of complaints that have to be dealt with. There is no cost in respect to the complainant. I am happy to provide you with that information.

I can give you details that there were, as part of the process, 23 complaints considered by the Territory Housing Review Panel. Nineteen were heard by the Territory Housing Appeals Management Board. Currently, there are four Level 2 appeals pending, and one Level 3 appeal pending also. I am quite happy to give you the information ...

**Dr LIM:** If the minister is prepared to do that and I will put a question on notice that I be provided with a written ...

**Mr McADAM:** I am happy to ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Sorry, member for Greatorex. Just to save you from repeating it again, I will formally ask you restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard*.

**Dr LIM:** Would the minister kindly provide me with a written description of the process that a person could undertake to put in an appeal against a retention of bond money and other subsequent charges that a tenant may incur from Territory Housing?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are you prepared to take that on notice, minister, or do you have the answer there already?

**Mr McADAM:** We have the answer and we are happy to table that.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Will that satisfy you?

**Dr LIM:** Well, that is fine. I will have a look at that and if not I will ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I will not allocate that question on notice a number.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, turning to building homes in the bush. I recall a statement that you made, I think either this year or late last year, where you expressed concern that the government has not been able to keep up with the pace of housing demand in the bush. In fact, according to figures that you provided, the number of homes in the bush now are fewer than five to six years ago. What are you doing now to ensure that there is an increase in construction of homes out bush so that indigenous people do have homes to live in?

**Mr McADAM:** I have been on the public record in the past about the whole issue to do with the indigenous housing, particularly in the bush communities. There are probably two things that have to happen. One, effectively, was that we have to engage in with the industry in the private sector, to open it up and to look at ways and means of driving down the cost of housing. To that effect, I believe that we had two lots of engagement with the private sector and, indeed, other players, with the sole purpose of trying to get some efficiencies into indigenous housing in design, materials, and the whole construction costs out in the bush. That was the first point that I wanted to make regarding driving down the cost of housing. It was to go out to expression of interest to try to engage people in a real way in regard to those things I have just described. We have achieved both of those outcomes.

The other point I want to make is that the dwellings in the bush are totalled at around about 683, and this incorporates improvised dwellings as well. I know we have had a disagreement in the past about this - the THS data and the ABS data. My advice is that they are formulated from a different premise. However, the point of the matter is that there has been an increase in indigenous housing in the bush. You would probably disagree with me but our data indicates there has been an increase from 5800 in 2001 to 6807 in 2006.

**Dr LIM:** In light of the recent report *Little Children are Sacred* which comments upon the density of occupancy of homes in the bush - in fact, the report quoted you as saying, and I paraphrase it: 'that overcrowding in the houses are strongly linked with social and welfare issues, including violence and abuse to the children'.

I do not accuse you of contributing to it by not building homes. However, how do you propose to significantly increase the number of dwellings in the bush because, obviously, this is going to be a pressing issue now that the Commonwealth government has come out with its commitment to deal with this problem? How are you discussing matters with the Commonwealth government to make sure that the Territory gets some benefit out of this?

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you, member for Grotorex. I come back to my initial point. There are two things that had to happen. By way of explanation, one was to engage with industry to try to drive down the costs. It would naturally follow that there would be more houses built if you were able to do that. We can demonstrate we have achieved some success in that particular area. It comes back to the other point I have raised in the context of local government; that is, to provide a framework of certainty in regard to housing into the future: management, R&M, life skills, and all those other programs that are equally as critical in maintaining housing stock and going forward. They are two good premises upon which to go forward.

You will be aware that the Northern Territory government has allocated \$100m over the next five years for the construction and refurbishment of new houses throughout the Northern Territory. The first \$5m has been set aside this year which is, effectively, for land servicing-type arrangements.

You are absolutely right when you say that overcrowding in houses is a contributing factor towards all levels of abuse, including child abuse. Obviously, that is one of the biggest challenges for us as a jurisdiction and, more so, from the Commonwealth government, particularly in light of their intervention in the Northern Territory.

We have actually been working quite closely with the Commonwealth government on this new management model. The advice that I have received is that they are likely to have a look at this model as a vehicle to provide certainty in funding, and to provide ongoing programs into the bush.

The challenge for us will be to engage communities out there in being able to carry out some of the new arrangements under the Territory Housing model, because we still believe they have a role to play out there in the communities. It is not a case of the Territory absolute control of housing in the bush; we have to link that in with employment and training opportunities.

My point is we have engaged the broader industry in trying to drive down the cost of housing, incorporating new design, new construction, materials etcetera. Second, is that we have provided a new framework over the Territory Housing model, which is what I believe the Commonwealth is looking for - indeed, any government funding body would be looking for that second component. Add that to the \$100m, which is absolutely important now, in light of the child abuse report by Rex Wild and Pat Anderson. It is absolutely now critical that the Commonwealth engage in a very genuine way in a big dollar input.

I actually say to the Commonwealth government: this is your opportunity to alleviate a set of circumstances which have given rise to the dysfunction that occurs in the community. This is your opportunity, and we will engage and we will work professionally with you to deliver these houses in a very sustainable way. We hope that the Commonwealth government will have a look at a bigger injection of funds for new housing and refurbishment of existing housing, I guess not dissimilar to the proposal that was put on the table regarding Tangentyere Council and their \$60m package.

That is all I can say to you. I believe that we now have the right model. Also, we are a bit more engaged, I believe, with the broader industry in being a bit more realistic in how we drive down the cost.

**Dr LIM:** I have two quick questions so the member for Nelson can get on with his questions; we have DCIS to go as well. Can you give me an aggregate figure of how much money is going into the construction of indigenous homes in the bush this year - Commonwealth money, the whole aggregate amount? How much is going in this year?

**Mr McINNES:** Dwayne McInnes, Chief Financial Officer, Territory Housing. Just as a point of clarification, are we talking about the 2007-08 year or the 2006-07 year?

**Dr LIM:** 2007-08.

**Mr McINNES:** We are talking, in total dollar terms, about \$86m of which \$43.8m of that will be for new construction. There will be another \$5m for land servicing; \$17m for repairs and maintenance programs; and \$5m for management grant programs.

**Dr LIM:** And the Territory contribution is?

**Mr McINNES:** There is \$6m, plus \$4.8m at the moment. Plus the \$5m of the \$100m.

**Dr LIM:** Okay.

**Mr McADAM:** \$19.8m.

**Dr LIM:** How many new homes would you expect to build with that aggregated sum?

**Mr McADAM:** I defer to Mr McInnes.

**Mr McINNES:** For the 2007-08 program, it is proposed that we achieve 122 houses in construction for the new year. Thirty-five of those are in train at the moment and will, hopefully, be completed in the first half of the year. That represents more than a 50% increase on 2006-07 year.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, are you able to provide me with similar figures that I have just been provided with for 2007-08 for the preceding four years?

**Mr McADAM:** I defer to Mr McInnes.

**Mr McINNES:** We will be able to get that data for you. We do not have it here, but I am happy to take that one on notice.

**Dr LIM:** Could we have it on notice, Mr Chairman?

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**Question on Notice 9.4**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I ask you to repeat the question for the purposes of *Hansard*, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, will you please provide for me the aggregate amount of money spent in the construction of homes in the remote Northern Territory for the last five years, for this coming year and the last four financial years in the way that the response was given earlier?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. I allocate that question No 9.4.

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**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, the final question from me. The biggest disappointment I have had this year for Alice Springs was the failure of the Tangentyere Council to accept the committed \$60m funding from the federal government for Alice Springs to upgrade, refurbish, enhance, and redevelop the town camps in Alice Springs. Without wanting to sound as if I am criticising you, can you clearly describe what you and the Chief Minister did to push as hard as you possibly could to try to deliver this project?

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you very much, member for Greatorex. It probably requires a comprehensive written response regarding the amount of effort that has gone into it. It is important to understand that this really dates back to October 2005. It is important that we put it in context. I actually met with Tangentyere Council - Mr Shaw and Mr Tilmouth and other members, but mainly those two. They were the first to acknowledge that something needed to be done on the town camps.

As a result of that, the Chief Minister announced the town camp task force. As you know, that was made up of Commonwealth government representatives, Territory representatives, the Alice Springs Town Council, and other key stakeholders in Alice Springs. As a result of that, a report was commissioned by the NT government, which alluded to a whole set of problems. Clearly, one of the things to be identified there was the housing situation ...

**Dr LIM:** Minister, if I can interrupt for a second. You did say that this is a fairly complex issue, so perhaps a written report might be better. Is there one in existence, or are you in the process of preparing one? Would you be prepared to table that and save time?

**Mr McADAM:** I can certainly table the town camp task force report.

**Dr LIM:** This is not a report about why the money was rejected?

**Mr McADAM:** No. That is what I am saying. I am prepared to take on notice a question you asked requesting a comprehensive, detailed report in respect to the effort put in by the Chief Minister and me - that was part of your question ...

**Dr LIM:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr McADAM:** ... to secure these dollars for the residents of the town camps in Alice Springs.

**Dr LIM:** I could not have worded the question on notice better than you did!

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Well, this is going to be interesting.

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**Question on Notice 9.5**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Can I ask the member for Greatorex, with or without assistance, to restate the question?



**Dr LIM:** With the words already in *Hansard*, I request the minister provide me with a detailed report on the efforts that he and the Chief Minister went through to secure the \$60m from the federal government to the Tangentyere Council.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Excellent wording. Minister, will you accept that?

**Mr McADAM:** Great question! I am happy to do so.

**Dr LIM:** I am going to flick across to the member for Nelson now.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Before we go on too far, I allocate, for the purposes of *Hansard* that question on notice, No 9.5. Thanks, member for Grotorex.

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**Dr LIM:** Finally, minister, will you take on this issue to investigate and come back to me? When I earlier mentioned a tenant losing bond money and then further billed, this was a case of a resident in Katherine who had left the home in Katherine in a good state but still lost the bond money of \$600, and was billed further for \$1500. His name is David Hawcroft.

**Mr McADAM:** Yes. I thank you very much, member for Grotorex. I am aware of the issue. I received several e-mails from Mr Hawcroft and, quite appropriately, the matter has been referred to the Territory Housing appeals mechanism board for their consideration. As soon as we get a response back, we will advise Mr Hawcroft.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, in regard to public housing, do you have a list of how many people are on the waiting list for each classification of houses, and towns in which those public houses are situated? To make that a bit quicker, could I also include the waiting list for priority housing as well, if that is on that list?

**Mr McADAM:** Member for Nelson, we can provide you with some information.

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

**Mr McADAM:** I can read all this out.

**Mr WOOD:** Could I get it tabled or ...

**Mr McADAM:** It incorporates the public housing wait times and it is across regions and also on the category of one-bedroom, two-bedroom.

**Mr WOOD:** While it is being tabled, minister, can you say why we have such a long waiting list for public housing? Is it simply a case we do not have enough public housing?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, we probably do have levels of our waiting time that is blowing out. Compared to the other states and other jurisdictions throughout Australia, we are still the second lowest. However, that is no consolation for people who are waiting for housing. I suspect that there is a combination of reasons as to why that is occurring. Probably the biggest reason - and we have actually been talking to the Commonwealth government about this - is there has been no increase in the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement for a very long time. Effectively, there has been no increase whatsoever in the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement funding for public housing. I am trying to give you an answer in the context without having to look at a lot of notes. The bottom line is that there has not been any significant increase at all from the Commonwealth government. That is certainly one of the reasons.

I believe that there has been a larger focus over my period of refurbishment or upgrades to existing housing stock. There has been HomeNorth Xtra. It has filled part of the market and indications are that something like 65% of existing Territory Housing tenants buy the existing stock.

The other thing that we have to take into consideration is the imbalance between the cost of housing. We know how that has blown out over the time. The other issue, of course, is that there is the land releases.

We have actually set up a group to talk to all the industry players such as the developers, the Real Estate Institute, Treasury and DPI to try to engage the private sector in building houses through an arrangement with the Territory government. In the case of Larapinta in Alice Springs we are talking about six first homebuyers. I think there is something like six units that we are looking at to provide Territory Housing accommodation for senior citizens. In the case of Bellamack, I am very much aware that the minister for planning is presently in discussions around the same sort of arrangement; X percentage for public housing and also a percentage for first homebuyers.

It was in response to your question in the House the other day that I said that it is probably important for Territory government to engage with the private sector. I still believe there is a lot of capacity there, particularly in the aged care area, to partner with the private sector in providing not all of the stock but, alleviating the pressure on the Territory government in public housing.

As I said to you before, the Commonwealth government has to recognise the whole issue around housing affordability and the lack of public housing stock right across Australia is now of critical proportions. They have to do something from a national level that can only be driven by them. I hope that they might give some consideration to the issue. We are meeting next Wednesday. I do not know where we are going to go there. However, the sort of arguments I have used regarding the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement does not have any traction, not from the other states.

**Mr WOOD:** In reality, we are actually losing houses because the figures you gave the member for Greatorex earlier shows that in 1999-2000 we had 6469 houses, and the actual number we had in 2006-07 was 5378. Therefore, we had a decrease of 1091. The estimate this year is that we will go down to 5288, which is a loss of nearly another 90 houses. Should we not be trying to at least increase that number slightly because there are pressures now on young people who cannot afford to buy a house – especially single income families.

I mentioned it the other day. There are people falling through the cracks now. Not everyone can get a HomeNorth loan; it just too much for them, especially with the median price of houses skyrocketing. You have got a 24-month waiting list just for a one-bedroom house in Darwin and a 36-month waiting list in Alice Springs. I see this as a really urgent matter. I saw it firsthand with the closing of the Sundowner Caravan Park – people had nowhere to go. The priority list seems to get longer, which puts the people who are not on a priority list back further. I see this is just as important as the crisis you have with indigenous housing because, as much as we might not like it, indigenous people tend to at least live in the one house - overcrowded it might be. Sometimes non-indigenous people simply cannot do that because they are on their own.

Do you think that we really should be going backwards with our housing stock instead of actually trying to - I heard what you said about working with the private industry. Do you really think our target should not be as it is shown in their estimate - 5288 for 2007-08. Should we not be trying to turn that around?

**Mr McADAM:** I agree with you. The levels are blowing out, as we talked about, regarding time. Certainly, there is a lesser number of housing stock. There are probably two things we can do. One is to continue to engage with the Commonwealth government, as they do have a responsibility regarding public housing right across Australia and, indeed, the Northern Territory. Their figure is around \$13.3m. It has been pretty constant. All the other states are in the same predicament as we are. One would have thought, given the critical nature of the whole issue of housing availability and affordability, with a surplus of \$15bn or \$16bn, they might look at reconfiguring their existing arrangements for first homebuyers and the Commonwealth rental assistance.

With the Commonwealth rental assistance and the first homebuyers - and there is one other - there is \$4bn. I honestly believe that there is great capacity for the Commonwealth government to be able to reconfigure within that \$4bn. I believe it is tilted at the wrong end of the market, the first homebuyers. Most of the banks and mortgage companies are very competitive these days, and people who can afford it can get into the housing market, as demonstrated, not only here but right across Australia. It is a very competitive market, but you are dealing with people on a lower income so you have an affordability issue. Why not redirect the \$1.2bn, which is for first homebuyers, regardless of what you earn. That is a real opportunity, to redirect those sort of dollars into public housing. That is an argument that I have pushed hard and long for.

Apart from that, I still come back to the point that we have not fully explored the options with the private sector in special categories of accommodation. That is something I would like to do. I believe it can be done; you can leverage it off the private sector. There might have to be some changes to stamp duty to

make it attractive for the private sector. There might have to be some other changes regarding depreciation, which is over 25 years at this point in time. You can make it attractive to the private sector to depreciate it over a lesser period of time. They are the sort of things that are not impossible, and that is what we have been talking to the Commonwealth government about for a long time.

The other one, about which I have not given too much thought to, is we might have to look within Territory Housing and reconfigure what we are doing and target a capital program. We are selling houses, but a lot of those houses are going to existing HomeNorth clients. However, that is another option, to have a look at what we are doing inside Territory Housing.

**Mr WOOD:** Quickly, as we are running out of time, but would you look at building on your own land? You own the Crown land that we develop. At the present time, it has a market price, but the government does not necessarily have to have that market price. If you develop your own land, you are not subject to that market price because you are developing land for public housing. I am not sure why governments cannot look at using their own land to reduce the price of ...

**Mr McADAM:** Philosophically, I probably do not disagree with you. However, I believe you are in competition here with the marketplace ...

**Mr WOOD:** These people cannot buy a house.

**Mr McADAM:** ... with the private sector.

**Mr WOOD:** They cannot buy a house; that is why we have public housing.

**Mr McADAM:** That is the point I am trying to make. That is a philosophical thing. It is a marketplace. You have to be very careful in how you engage through some sort of model that you talk about, without impacting on the prices of other people's houses within the marketplace. That is a very legitimate concern.

**Mr WOOD:** You can put restrictions on and say I want ...

**Mr McADAM:** Yes. However, philosophically, I have some differences regarding engaging the private sector out there in the marketplace, because I believe they are the best drivers of these sorts of things. However, I come back to my other point that we have to explore options with the private sector.

**Mr WOOD:** They will build the houses on your land. That is the same ...

**Mr McADAM:** They are the sort of options we have to start having a look at. I have given an indication already regarding Bellamack and Larapinta. That is a bit of change in focus, I would say.

**Mr WOOD:** There are 140 to 160 people in Darwin, Palmerston and Casuarina all waiting for housing. That is really something you will need to address.

I had better stop because the DCIS people will go crook. I just have to ask one question about Aboriginal housing. Who actually owns the housing at both the 11 Mile and the Palmerston Indigenous Village we discussed today?

**Mr McADAM:** I might seek some advice on this. The leases are held by the Aboriginal Development Foundation ...

**Mr WOOD:** On both?

**Mr McADAM:** The leases are held by the Aboriginal Development Foundation on both areas.

**Mr WOOD:** Who is the person who maintains those houses?

**Mr McADAM:** Yilli Rreung has the contracts for the ongoing operations management of the houses.

**Mr WOOD:** I have more questions, but I will not go any further, thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of this Business Line. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who provided advice to the minister today.

**ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY  
OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PROTECTION OF SACRED SITES  
Output 1.1 – Protection of Sacred Sites**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now move on to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

**Dr LIM:** No questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no questions, that concludes consideration of that output group.

**DEPARTMENT OF CORPORATE AND INFORMATION SERVICES**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now progress to the Department of Corporate and Information Services

**Dr LIM:** Mr Chairman, while we are waiting for the officers to arrive at the table, can you advise what time we stop?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** 11.05 pm.

**Dr LIM:** By that clock?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Yes. I have been keeping a close eye on that and my own.

**Mr McADAM:** Will you bear with us? We will have to extend it beyond the time.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay. Do you want to go until 11.10? Will people be down here by then?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, they are on their way down.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will extend to 11.10; that way we will be safe for any time.

Minister, I will repeat that witnesses should be aware that evidence given to the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. I also remind witnesses that the giving of false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute a contempt of the Legislative Assembly pursuant to powers and privileges legislation. Officers should also be aware that when they are requested by their ministers to provide answers to questions, they are not required to comment on matters of policy. I ask anyone with the mobile phone to either turn it off or put it on silent please.

I now invite the minister to introduce officers accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I will not give a statement in the interest of time. We welcome Kathleen Robinson, Acting Deputy Secretary of Department of Corporate Information Services (DCIS); Mr Brad Irvine, Executive Director of Procurement Policy; and Katrina Harding, Executive Director of Property Management.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I have previously allowed general questions that would relate to a statement even if one was not given. Member for Greatorex, would you like to do that?

**Dr LIM:** Mr Chairman, I will not, but suggest that we incorporate the whole of Output Group 1.0 - Corporate Support Services into one and finish off this for the sake of time because we are running of time now.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, I prefer to run through output by output just for the sake of Hansard making it easy to follow through.

**OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – CORPORATE SERVICES  
Output 1.1 - Financial and Accounting Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** What I will do is now call for questions on Output 1.1 - Financial and Accounting Services. Are there any questions? Yes, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** Mr Chairman, many of the questions that I am going to ask of the minister relate directly to DCIS. However, also many of the questions will relate to other agencies because this morning and the last couple of days, when we asked other ministers for information, they all referred it back to you. Therefore, if I ask you a question and you feel that you could have the responsibility with the other agencies as well, that you give me the answers either in a tabulated form or take it on notice and go from there.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Just for my clarification, these are the questions that have been run through previously?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That is what I was referring to when I asked if you had any questions of a general nature. If the minister is happy to accept them, I am happy to allow them notwithstanding they do not ...

**Mr McADAM:** I am happy to.

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

**Dr LIM:** Okay then. Then I put this to you, minister. I am happy for you to take a whole copy of this. They are all blanks and they can form the questions on notice and you can provide us with the answers for all the agencies that DCIS has corporate services responsibilities for.

**Mr McADAM:** So, member for Greatorex ...

**Dr LIM:** For instance ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I might still have to get you to quickly run through the questions ...

**Mr McADAM:** I am happy to take the questions.

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#### Questions on Notice 9.6

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If we can do it this way, member for Greatorex. If I simply now ask you to restate the question and you run through all the questions there, I will then ask the minister if he is happy to take them on notice. I get an indication that he will be and then we will allocate that a number. So if you restate the questions for the purpose of *Hansard*.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I put these questions to you:

Question 1: How much of the total appropriation for your Output Group, DCIS, goes to its Corporate and Executive Services?

Question 2: What is the cost per square metre for cleaning offices, and is it undertaken by contract or internal cleaners for DCIS? However, I also understand that you are responsible for the contract management for other agencies. I ask that you provide me with the same responses for the other agencies.

Question 3 ...

**Mr McADAM:** I am sorry, we do have that information.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Well, what we might do is cut it there. I will ask you if you are prepared to take those questions on notice as one, allocate those questions as question No 9.6.

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If you have some responses now did you want to get those responses now, member for Greatorex, or just run through.

**Dr LIM:** Well, I do not need the responses now. Let us get on with it, okay?

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#### Questions on Notice 9.7

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay, perhaps if we group them into three or four question blocks. So if you could restate your next question for the purposes of *Hansard*.

**Dr LIM:** My next question is question 3: What is the cost of maintenance for offices for DCIS and for the other agencies for which you have corporate services responsibilities?

Question 4: What is the cost of office rental, and if you have the information available, can you please tell me the square metre size of each of the CEOs' offices and the square metre sizes of all executive contract officers?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

**Mr McADAM:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That group of questions that were just ...

**Dr LIM:** I will read the question again, if you like.

**Mr McADAM:** The advice that I have is that in respect of the CEO office spaces we have it relevant to our agency. We do not have it across other agencies but, as I understand it, we are happy to provide responses in respect of those two questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If you are happy to take those questions on notice, I will allocate those questions No 9.7.

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**Dr LIM:** Thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** And again, restate the next question.

**Dr LIM:** My next question: for DCIS, specifically, how much of the total appropriation for your agency goes towards the cost of advertising, and what are the design and production costs of radio, television, newspaper, magazine and any other medium?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are you happy to take those on notice?

**Ms ROBINSON:** No, we can answer those.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** You will answer them now?

**Mr McADAM:** Mr Irvine will respond to that.

**Mr IRVINE:** Brad Irvine, Executive Director, Procurement Policy. Our total expenditure as at 31 May 2007 was \$382 384. Marketing, advertising was \$4663. DCIS recruitment training, which was representing whole-of-government was \$27 740. Our CAPS tender advertising was \$306 837 and our *Gazette* advertising for CAPS was \$34 875 and our general advertising was \$8269. The drafting and the - what is the right word for it? The design is factored within our cost model. We do not extract that out of our costing.

**Dr LIM:** Will you just give me the full description of the acronym, CAPS?

**Mr IRVINE:** Sorry. Contract and Procurement Services.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. Minister, my next questions is for DCIS specifically: what is the cost of all advertising media which includes the minister's image?

**Mr McADAM:** My image?

**Dr LIM:** Your image.

**Mr McADAM:** I can tell you it is nil.

**Dr LIM:** You know what, minister? Congratulations! You are the first minister who could answer that question directly.

**Mr McADAM:** And the first part of your question again?

**Dr LIM:** No, that was it. That was what I was congratulating you for.

My next question is: what is the cost of ...

**Mr McADAM:** You had me in a state of shock there.

**Dr LIM:** For congratulating you? What is the cost of postage associated with mass communication with Territorians? I am sure you do that too. And what is the cost of letterbox drops?

**Mr McADAM:** Again, I have been advised nil to both.

**Dr LIM:** Nil? Okay. Does DCIS conduct issue or policy research or message development research into the community?

**Mr McADAM:** No, we do not.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, how much of the total appropriation for DCIS goes towards the cost of media liaison and monitoring?

**Mr McADAM:** Nil.

**Dr LIM:** What is the cost of media monitoring and what is the cost of associated transcribing services?

**Mr McADAM:** Zero.

**Dr LIM:** How much of the total appropriation for DCIS goes towards the cost of reviews undertaken this financial year, both internal and external?

**Mr McADAM:** The total figure of reviews undertaken this year is \$384 593.

**Dr LIM:** Are you able to disaggregate them into what the contracts were, and are you prepared to table the document?

**Mr McADAM:** I will just seek advice on this, but it is only to see whether it is of a commercial nature or not.

**Mr IRVINE:** These figures have been gazetted, so they are available publicly.

**Mr Mc ADAM:** I understand that they are available publicly so we are happy to table it.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, how much of the total appropriation for DCIS goes toward the cost of engaging consultants; how are they recruited; how many; what consultancies did they do; who were they; and what did they cost?

**Mr McADAM:** My advice is that the information contained in that question is all available in the documents that I am tabling and we are happy to table them.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you very much for tabling them, minister. How much of the total appropriation for DCIS goes towards the cost of staffing? That includes the number of full-time equivalents and the number of employees at each level?

**Ms ROBINSON:** The total cost for DCIS for staffing in 2006-07 was \$4m, or our budget is \$40 000 085. As at the end of May, we had spent \$36m on staffing. I have a table here of our classifications for our employees. The FTEs total for DCIS, as at the last pay, was 558.1.

**Dr LIM:** Are you able to table that?

**Ms ROBINSON:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** I understand that DCIS also provides payroll services for all other agencies. In questions to other ministers, they directed my queries to you. Could you provide me with a breakdown of the payroll for the other agencies?

**Mr McADAM:** My advice is that that information is available from the office of the OCPE.

**Dr LIM:** Regarding airfares: how much of the total appropriation for DCIS goes towards the cost of airfares, including airfares to say, between Alice Springs and Darwin, and then for training as a separate item?

**Ms ROBINSON:** Intra-Territory airfares for DCIS were \$71 568, of which the travel between Alice Springs and Darwin was \$68 868.

**Dr LIM:** And in regards to training?

**Ms ROBINSON:** Mr Chairman, we are happy to take that question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice 9.8

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Could you restate that question for the purposes of *Hansard*, member for Greatorex.

**Dr LIM:** How much of the total appropriation for DCIS goes to its provision of training for staff. If you could break it up into executive versus administrative officer staff.

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

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, I am, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I allocate that question No 9.8.

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**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Minister, how much of the total appropriation for DCIS goes towards greenhouse gas reduction strategies?

**Ms ROBINSON:** For DCIS, in our appropriation for greenhouse gas strategies, we have brought programmable timers and done reviews on our lighting and things like that. However, we do not capture the data in our ledger as a greenhouse gas target item.

**Dr LIM:** The Martin government did commit to a 1.5% reduction in emissions from the Northern Territory government. I would have thought that DCIS would be one of the main agencies to be driving that, as the Corporate and Information Services agency.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you, member for Greatorex, for your question. Except that the targeting was 1.5% target projected and, clearly, not our results are available at this point in time. However, DCIS expects that there will be substantial improvements. In the case of the electricity consumption in 2006-07, this was decreased by 6%.

The other issues that are part of the DCIS management strategies include: the airconditioning systems being reviewed; modifications being carried out to reduce electricity consumption - and already I have been advised that there have been substantial reductions in the Archives building; building lights are set on automatic timers which turn off at the close of business; programmable timers installed on water heaters and photocopiers to reduce electricity consumption; there is an energy audit program contracted by the Government Printing Office building; and key recommendations relate to building lighting. A project to address these recommendations is currently being implemented. Machines are also reviewed with a view to reducing the number of machines where feasible. Examples include two multifunction print devices replacing nine printers and copiers, and reducing personal computers. I have been advised all DCIS staff are encouraged to turn off their computers each night.

**Dr LIM:** Well done. Minister, I will leave it at that because we have only seven minutes left. I have no more further questions on Output 1.1.



**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions? There being no further questions that concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

#### **Output 1.2 – Human Resource Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider questions relating to Output 1.2 - Human Resource Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** No, I do not have time for that. I have, but I am going to leave them.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay. That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

#### **Output 1.3 – Procurement, Policy and Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output 1.3 - Procurement, Policy and Services.

**Dr LIM:** We will move on, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

#### **Output 1.4 – Information and Communication Technology Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output 1.4 - Information and Communication Technology Services.

**Dr LIM:** We will move on.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no questions, that concludes Output 1.4.

#### **Output 1.5 – Archive Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will now consider Output 1.5 - Archive Services.

**Dr LIM:** We will move on.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no questions, that concludes Output Group 1.0.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 - OFFICE LEASING MANAGEMENT**

#### **Output 2.1 – Office Leasing Management**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will proceed to Output 2.0 - Office Leasing Management, Output 2.1 - Office Leasing Management.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I asked earlier in the questions about the cost of maintenance for offices. I now ask for the cost of leasing of offices, not only for DCIS but for all agencies that you have property management responsibility for?

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you very much, member for Greateorex. Katrina, would you like to?

**Ms HARDING:** Katrina Harding, Executive Director, NT Property Management. We actually have a list here for agency ...

**Dr LIM:** If you are happy to table it, because it is a big, long list, minister, it might save time.

**Mr McADAM:** I could read it. No, I will table it.

**Dr LIM:** Do not do an Ah Kit on us. He loved to do that.

**Mr McADAM:** I am happy to table it.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you very much, minister. Minister, I will leave it at that. We can go down to the other items that are still on your list.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

#### **Non-output Specific Budget Related Questions**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any non-output specific budget related questions?

**Dr LIM:** No, Mr Chairman.

#### **DATA CENTRE SERVICES**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will move on to Data Centre Services. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** No, no questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no questions, we will now move on.

#### **GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now move on to the Government Printing Office. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, the Government Printing Officer prints material for government. Are you able to provide a breakdown of what printing jobs have been provided by the Government Printing Office for the various agencies in government, and the dollar value of each of those printing jobs provided?

**Mr McADAM:** Specifically government work?

**Dr LIM:** Including things such as the report *Little Children are Sacred*, which was printed by the Government Printing Office, or at least contracted out by the GPO.

**Mr McADAM:** My advice is that, yes, we are happy to provide that advice.

**Dr LIM:** Would you like to table that?

**Mr McADAM:** On notice.

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#### **Question on Notice 9.9**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Greatorex, would you restate that question for *Hansard* please?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, will you please provide a breakdown of the various printing jobs that have been provided by the Government Printing Office, either directly or through its operations to outsource it - printing jobs for government for 2006-07?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, we are.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** For *Hansard* purposes, I allocate that question No 9.9.

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any more questions, member for Greatorex?

**Dr LIM:** I would like to move on to NT Fleet now

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of this Business Line.

#### **NT FLEET**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will now move on to NT Fleet. Are there any questions?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, if government committed itself to a target of 5% reduction per kilometre emissions from the Northern Territory's passenger fleet by the end of the month, what specific measures has DCIS done to reach this target? What specific measures has NT Fleet done to reach this target across all agencies?

**Mr McADAM:** As at the end of April 2007, 48% of the fleet comprised of four-cylinder vehicles. NT Fleet is on track to meet its 50% target by the end of 2006-07. This compares to 40% of four-cylinder vehicles in 2005-06.

As you would be aware, the Northern Territory government strategy for greenhouse action requires NT Fleet to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions from the Northern Territory government's passenger fleet by 5% per kilometre travelled by 30 June 2007. Increasing four-cylinder vehicles has enabled the Northern Territory government to exceed its target and achieve a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 8% - contrary to what the member for Katherine thinks - as at 30 June 2006. This is compared to emission levels of 2003-04.

Examples of fuel efficient vehicles include the Toyota Prius hybrid sedan, Ford Falcon dedicated LPG sedans and station wagons, Holden Astra, and Volkswagen Golf, or similar turbo diesel hatchbacks. There has been an increase of hybrid vehicles across the fleet in excess of 100% in the past year. At estimates in 2006, NT Fleet reported they had provided 12 hybrid vehicles to government. As of today, there are 30 hybrid vehicles in the fleet, with another four on order.

**Dr LIM:** How many LPG cars?

**Mr McADAM:** We do not have the actual number of LPG vehicles.

**Dr LIM:** Well, you do not have it there. You do not have any LPG vehicles in the fleet, or you do and you do not have the figures?

**Mr McADAM:** I do not have the figures in front of me. I am aware that we do have LPG sedans, but we are happy to take the question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice 9.10

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Would you repeat that question, member for Greatorex?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, will you please provide for me the number of LPG vehicles that are in NT Fleet?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

**Mr McADAM:** Yes, we are.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I allocate that question No 9.10.

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**Dr LIM:** I am happy to leave my last question, thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of all related output groups. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister attending today, and also thank those officers who provided advice to the minister, and those officers who were here, but whose area was not considered. Minister, pass on our thanks to all of your officers. Thank you.

**Mr McADAM:** Thank you Mr Chairman, I certainly will pass the thanks to all the people who have attended estimates with me here this evening. I want to thank them for their outstanding efforts over the last few weeks or, indeed, the whole year. To all my agencies, thank you very much.

There is one thing I would like to say is that Mr Jeff Stead as the Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority was looking forward to tonight very much because he has not appeared for such a long time. I think it might have 2002 on the last occasion. Mr Stead is retiring this year and, as I said, he has been the CEO of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and he has worked for the NLC and the CLC for a long period as well. On behalf of the Northern Territory government, I extend my sincere thanks to Mr Stead and wish he and his wife and family all the very best in their retirement.

**Dr LIM:** Hear, hear! And thank you very much too.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Please pass on the committee's thanks to him as well.

**Mr McADAM:** If I can I was just going to add Mr Frank May, he has been in charge of the NT Fleet for 25 years; 42 years in the public sector. Frank is retiring after a truly magnificent effort. I adjourned the other night in the House, and I want to thank him again for his outstanding effort and to his wife, Desley. I wish them all the very best too on behalf of the NT government.

**Members:** Hear, hear!

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The committee suspended.

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