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Madam Speaker Purick took the Chair at 10 am.

MOTION

Changes to Committee Membership – Public Accounts Committee and Select Committee on Opening Parliament to the People

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that, pursuant to Standing Order 179, the Assembly discharges the Member for Stuart from the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committee on opening Parliament to the People, and that the Assembly appoints the Member for Brennan to the Public Accounts Committee and the Member for Namatjira to the Select Committee on Opening Parliament to the People.

Motion agreed to.

**TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY LAW REFORM BILL
(Serial 15)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms FYLES (Health): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill now be read a second time.

The Termination of Pregnancy Law Reform Bill 2017 proposes to create a new act to replace section 11 of the *Medical Services Act*, which will be repealed, and bring Northern Territory termination of pregnancy legislation into the 21st century.

Consequential changes proposed to the Criminal Code will decriminalise the termination of pregnancy, but at the same time protect Territory women from harm.

It is no surprise to any member of this House that this bill is one that is very important to me and, indeed, many Territorians. It will probably be the most passionate, personal and controversial issue for women in this House to debate—for Territorians in this House to debate.

The topic of the bill has previously generated a great deal of passionate debate in this House, when the Member for Goyder introduced an amendment bill to the *Medical Services Act* in November 2015.

Madam Speaker, we know that you are particularly familiar with the complexity of amending section 11 of the *Medical Services Act*, and I would firstly like to explain why we have chosen a different approach with the bill you have before you today.

Contemporary legislation requires robust provisions of all gestational phases of pregnancy.

Contemporary legislation requires evidence-based practice by health professionals who make decisions about when, how and where to implement treatment. This is done according to:

- an assessment of the health and wellbeing of women within a framework of professional practice guidelines
- an approach to consent for termination of pregnancy which is in line with consent for other medical procedures
- provisions for conscientious objection
- provision for referral to another practitioner who can provide appropriate services
- provisions for safe access zones in the vicinity of treatment facilities.

Amending the *Medical Services Act* to achieve these requirements would be problematic for a number of reasons. These include the act's limited application, regarding terminations, to hospital services only. Private and out-of-hospital facilities, such as day surgeries, are not capable of being authorised as settings where the treatment can occur. Therefore substantial consequential amendments would also be required to enable the *Private Hospitals Act* to include other private clinical facilities.

Any amendments to either act would require substantial and resource-intensive approval and compliance monitoring and would not fully address the clinical risks.

For these reasons the government intends to repeal section 11 of the *Medical Services Act* and enact separate legislation specifically dealing with termination of pregnancy. This approach is in line with other jurisdictions and contemporary legislative practice.

The approach requires minimal amendments to the *Criminal Code Act* and reduces the necessity for more or numerous complex amendments to other acts.

With the repeal of section 11 of the *Medical Services Act*, this bill also proposes repealing parts of the *Criminal Code Act* which refer to the offences of procurement of an abortion, or the supply of drugs or instruments for procuring an abortion.

Fellow Members of the Legislative Assembly, we have spent significant time in the past debating the amendments proposed by the honourable Member for Goyder.

We all know this debate is not about the moral rights or the wrongs of abortion.

As I mentioned in my previous speech in response to the bill last year, I acknowledge that this is a difficult debate for some people and can cause discomfort. But I cannot over-emphasise the importance of this issue for Territory women.

This bill is broader than the medical abortion drug, RU486, which, as I have spoken about before in parliament, had a delayed and contentious arrival in Australia.

The Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial responsibility for approval of RU486) Bill was passed in 2006. It proposed that the decision to allow RU486 to be prescribed in Australia be made by the Therapeutic Goods Administration rather than allowing the then federal Health minister, Tony Abbott, to continue to hold veto rights over introduction of the drug.

I would like to remind members here in this House that this legislation was:

... a cross party private members' bill in the federal parliament ... moved by Senators Fiona Nash from the National Party, Lyn Allison from the Democrats, Claire Moore from the Labor Party and Judith Troeth from the Liberal Party. This was the first time in the federal parliament that a private members' bill was moved by representatives from four political parties. It was a huge signal. Their efforts were ultimately successful when the bill passed in February 2006 following a conscience vote.

I hope this Assembly can take a similar bipartisan approach and work together cooperatively to support the successful passage of this important bill. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the contributions and engagement from my colleagues within the government, as well as the opposition and Independent members.

To date, certainly for me, the amount of work that was done before this bill was presented to the House is huge. I acknowledge the time—the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has already had briefings on this matter, as have my colleagues. It is an issue that we have been out talking to our communities about.

Before going to further detail of the bill, I would like to explain a bit about the necessity of this legislation. Yes, terminations can be performed legally in the Territory under the current legislation; however, when Territory women choose a termination now, something they do not do lightly, they are faced with very restrictive conditions.

They can only receive this treatment as a surgical procedure as an inpatient in the hospitals in Darwin and Alice Springs or travel interstate to seek treatment. They may not be able to have their friends and family around them for support and to help them with the important decision-making process.

The current laws do not provide for a choice of treatment options, places of treatment, health practitioner, or contemporary healthcare practices.

This bill is about providing Northern Territory women with access to choose safe, evidence-based healthcare in a supportive environment that is equivalent to services that have been available to women in

every other Australian jurisdiction for the past decade. In fact, these services have been available to women around the world since the 1980s and 1990s. Other Australian jurisdictions have provided for their women to access this service for over a decade.

Nevertheless, everyone here knows that we must grapple with and carefully consider the unique circumstances of the Northern Territory.

Medical care of any sort in the Northern Territory is challenged by the tyranny of distance. Having the right services available at the right time, delivered by the most appropriate healthcare professional, is always at the front of my mind as the Minister for Health.

Without the right legislation there is also grave concern that increased access for women may also mean increased risk. It is for this reason that the Labor government is proposing a new bill rather than amending the existing legislation under section 11 of the *Medical Services Act*.

We are not going out alone though. We have based the bill on contemporary legislation in other states, and we have taken on board the advice of the Australian Medical Association and the strict written guidelines of professional bodies such as the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

Madam Speaker, the bill we are proposing today builds on the work undertaken previously by you in 2015. I acknowledge that work and the work of the community that worked with you. To explore the key issues associated with this reform, the Department of Health has undertaken widespread consultation with the community, organisations and individuals.

I would like to outline some of that now to the House:

- There were 142 written submissions received over a seven-week formal consultation period.
- More than 11 direct briefings have been conducted by the department.
- As the minister responsible, I have taken it upon myself to meet with leaders from the Aboriginal health sector, from the Catholic, Uniting and Anglican Churches, and many other community stakeholders to hear their wide range of views.

In terms of tackling this in the Northern Territory, as the Minister for Health I have made myself available to different community stakeholders. Some of them we do not see eye to eye and agree, but I have taken on board their considerations and thoughts.

Some of the key issues raised have included:

- the need to improve choice and access to services for women
- the provision of information and counselling to women, including resources for women and families with English as a second language
- the role and number of medical practitioners
- the role of medical and health practitioners who are conscientious objectors
- the right to free speech in relation to terminations of pregnancy
- the importance of safe services, particularly in remote settings.

I would like to acknowledge the time and effort everyone has made to participate and offer advice on this very important subject. I thank all members of the community, key stakeholder groups and the Members of the Legislative Assembly for their thoughtful considerations. It is not something I take lightly; every single one of your views, I have listened to.

A particular issue arose in relation to the continued application of an upper limit of 23 weeks for terminations of pregnancy. A concern has been identified for women who, late in their pregnancy, are informed that their foetus has a condition which makes it highly unlikely it will survive after birth.

In other jurisdictions there is no upper limit for termination of pregnancy. There have been some responses received which suggest this would be preferable to imposing a limit of 23 weeks on termination of pregnancy services.

I am aware the community will have a range of views on this topic. I intend to place the 23 weeks in this legislation, but we will review this area of law within 12 to 24 months of this bill passing the House to allow the community ample time to consider the issues before making any changes to this limit.

This came up in consultation in approximately the last month, and I can see the arguments for it but feel that, in regard to this bill, the 23-week limit is appropriate for the Northern Territory now.

Introduction of this bill represents a significant and historic change in the way termination of pregnancy will be regulated in the Northern Territory. It is the final step in a process that is long overdue and which the Labor government undertook to complete after its election in August last year.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Chief Minister for his support to me as the Minister for Health in preparing and investigating the best options and bringing forward the bill today. I think it shows courage in leadership to allow me to consult broadly, have difficult conversations and bring a robust bill into this House.

We are now confident to say that, although the *Medical Services Act* was contemporary in the 1970s when it was first drafted, there are specific elements of the act which have not kept pace with the changing nature of medicine, best practice in medicine, our expectations as a society or legislation elsewhere in Australia.

For example, in the Northern Territory all termination of pregnancy procedures must take place in a hospital.

However, there is national and international evidence that termination of pregnancy procedures performed during early gestation can be conducted safely in out-of-hospital facilities, such as day surgeries and dedicated clinics.

Evidence also shows that termination of pregnancy procedures up to nine weeks' gestation can safely be performed in a woman's home with appropriate medical review.

The current *Medical Services Act* requires that termination of pregnancy under 14 weeks can only be performed in a hospital; two medical practitioners must examine the woman; and at least one of those medical practitioners must be a gynaecologist or obstetrician, unless it is not reasonably practicable in the circumstances.

Together these requirements have limited termination of pregnancy procedures specifically to the Royal Darwin Hospital, the Alice Springs Hospital and the Darwin Private Hospital, with reliance on a small group of specialist medical practitioners who are only located in the major population centres.

These requirements have particularly limited the options for Territory women seeking an early termination of pregnancy using medication such as RU486, compared with women in other Australian jurisdictions.

Women elsewhere in Australia can be prescribed this treatment by a suitably qualified medical practitioner, receive the medication from a nurse or pharmacist, commence the procedure in a day surgery, clinic or doctor's surgery, and then complete the treatment at home or another location providing it is within close proximity to emergency services.

These changes have taken place because, over the last 10 years, advances in medicine have made it possible to perform early terminations of pregnancy through the use of a drug if the woman is less than nine weeks pregnant. These medical advances were not contemplated when section 11 of the *Medical Services Act* was drafted in the 1970s and, therefore, are not currently available to women in the Territory.

In early pregnancies, at no more than nine weeks, or 63 days, drugs are now commonly used to perform a termination of pregnancy. The two drugs used for early medical terminations were registered for medical termination of pregnancy in 2012 and are on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme as a package call MS 2-Step.

Women are prescribed MS 2-Step by a medical practitioner who has registered with and completed a TGA-certified training program. MS 2-Step is dispensed by certified pharmacists. The first medication, RU486, is

taken by the woman under the supervision of the prescribing medical practitioner or a registered nurse, midwife or Aboriginal health practitioner acting under the direction of the prescribing medical practitioner.

At the moment, in all other Australian jurisdictions, the woman may be given a second medication to take at home, providing she remains within close proximity to emergency services and has 24-hour access to an emergency department. The two medications induce termination of the pregnancy, which has the same effect as a naturally occurring miscarriage.

The whole process may take between three and 14 days and the woman must be seen by the referring doctor after two weeks.

The treatment is not available to women in the Northern Territory because the existing act requires that the entire process must take place in a hospital.

Hospitalisation for medical termination using MS 2-Step is not practical for women, is unnecessary from a clinical standpoint and would represent a poor use of a hospital bed—tertiary medical—required for acute care.

As a result, the majority of termination of pregnancy procedures in the Northern Territory are currently provided as same-day surgical procedures.

In relation to those terminations of pregnancy which are undertaken at more than 14 weeks, the *Medical Services Act* requires only a single medical practitioner to examine a woman whose pregnancy is between 14 and not more than 23 weeks gestation. There is no comparable requirement for the medical practitioner to be a specialist in obstetrics or gynaecology, or for treatment to be provided in a hospital, even though medical risks in these cases might be considerably higher than for the termination of pregnancy for women at an earlier gestational period.

This is an anomaly that currently makes it more difficult and with more stringent safeguards to obtain a termination in early pregnancy, which is a lower medical risk than in a later stage of pregnancy. This bill will address this anomaly and manage the risks more appropriately.

The bill we are proposing today removes the requirement that a woman must have a termination of pregnancy performed in a hospital. We are leaving this decision to the medical practitioner based on the clinical assessment of a woman, the risk and access to emergency services. We are trusting health professionals to make a judgment.

Whilst it is considered that a number of surgical terminations of pregnancy will still occur at public and private hospitals in the Northern Territory, through the provision of the bill it will also be possible for other providers with suitable facilities such as day surgeries or specialised clinics to offer medical or surgical termination of pregnancy services.

This bill places the responsibility on medical practitioners to make decisions with the woman about her clinical care, having regard to the professional standards and guidelines which cover this area of practice.

In this way the bill will ensure the same level of safety for women receiving termination of pregnancy treatment at all stages of pregnancy.

The bill defines termination of pregnancy as the inducement of abortion by a medical practitioner through the performance of surgical procedure, prescription, supply or administration of a drug or drugs, or any other action.

The definition means that terminations of pregnancy can be provided by medical practitioners in out-of-hospital settings using drugs such as RU486 in circumstances that comply with the professional standards and guidelines.

The definition also allows for surgical terminations of pregnancy to be conducted in clinic settings or hospitals where these are established in accordance with professional standards and guidelines.

The bill sets out the definition of 'suitably qualified medical practitioner'. A suitably qualified medical practitioner must hold the qualifications of obstetrician or gynaecologist, or have completed training or be credentialed in the provision of advice, performance of procedures and giving treatment in the area of

fertility control, or hold another qualification prescribed by the Chief Health Officer in accordance with regulations.

It has been standard practice for many years in clinics and hospitals across the NT and Australia to credential medical practitioners and confirm that they have the right qualifications, training, skills and experience in order to perform their roles safely and to ensure that the facility can support the work.

This is an essential component of ensuring clinical safety of a service.

The bill will ensure the same standardised practices occur in relation to the provision of termination of pregnancy services.

For these reasons the bill does not contemplate a suitably qualified medical practitioner directing a medical practitioner who is not suitably qualified to perform or assist with a termination of pregnancy.

Any directions issued will be to authorised health practitioners, for example a nurse, and the suitably qualified medical practitioner will retain responsibility for the performance of each aspect of the termination of pregnancy by authorised health practitioners in accordance with the direction issued.

For a termination of pregnancy for women who are no more than 14 weeks gestation, the suitably qualified medical practitioner is required to assess the woman having regard to all relevant circumstances, medical circumstances, her current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances, and to provide the relevant care in line with the applicable professional standards and guidelines.

For women between 14 and no more than 23 weeks gestation, assessment for termination of pregnancy is undertaken by two suitably qualified medical practitioners.

After each of the suitably qualified medical practitioners has assessed the woman, having regard to all relevant circumstances, medical circumstances, her current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances, one of the suitably qualified medical practitioners will be able to perform the termination in line with the applicable professional standards and guidelines.

By including these provisions, government is assigning to the suitably qualified medical practitioner the responsibility for the performance of the termination, including his or her assessment of the woman, the risks, access to emergency services and all other matters the medical professional standards and guidelines require of the medical practitioner. I will return to that point in a moment.

The bill also sets out the role of persons assisting with a termination of pregnancy, including various registered health practitioners. The bill authorises the supply of drugs by a registered pharmacist, and the supply and administration of drugs, but not prescription, by a nurse, midwife, or Aboriginal health practitioner for the purpose of causing a termination of pregnancy where this is at the direction of the medical practitioner.

These authorisations ensure that this bill aligns with the *Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act*, and that health practitioners assisting with a termination of pregnancy do so in accordance with both.

With the changes to the Criminal Code that I will outline later, this authorisation is critical to ensure that all health professionals who participate in the termination of pregnancy procedure are legally exempt from prosecution.

Importantly, the bill only allows a medical practitioner, including one who may not have qualifications in fertility control, to perform a termination of pregnancy at any gestational age if the procedure is necessary to save the life of the woman.

This provision is brought over from the current act and, in practice, allows an obstetrician, gynaecologist or surgeon to perform a termination of pregnancy under life-saving circumstances.

The new bill extends provisions in relation to conscientious objectors.

As in the current act, a medical practitioner may have a conscientious objection to performing a termination of pregnancy. However, in this bill, the medical practitioner is required to inform the woman of this and take steps to refer her, in a clinically appropriate time frame, to services where there is no such objection. This is an additional safeguard to protect access to termination of pregnancy services by women.

In addition, the legislation includes a requirement for the medical practitioner to ensure that health practitioners who assist with the termination of pregnancy do not have a conscientious objection.

These provisions are qualified by the requirement that, regardless of a conscientious objection, a medical or health practitioner has a duty to perform a termination or assist with this should the termination be necessary to save the woman's life.

I now return to the issue of the professional standards and guidelines to which the medical practitioner must have regard in the assessment of each woman seeking a termination.

The use of MS 2-Step is an effective alternative to surgical termination of pregnancy when used for early medical termination of pregnancies less than nine weeks.

Early medical termination of pregnancy has been extensively reviewed in the academic medical literature.

There is a known failure rate of approximately 3.5%, meaning that women who do experience complications will need to be safely managed and transferred to a hospital in a timely way.

The new act requires medical practitioners to refer to, and act in accordance with, the relevant professional standards and guidelines when prescribing drugs for medical terminations of pregnancy to ensure the safety of the woman in the particular circumstances.

Under regulations, once made, the Chief Health Officer will be able to develop more detailed Territory-specific guidelines for safely performing medical terminations of pregnancy in various clinical settings across the Northern Territory.

Firstly, according to the current Commonwealth *Therapeutic Goods Act* requirements, all medical practitioners who prescribe MS 2-Step must be certified to issue the prescription for the drugs.

Requirements for certification set out strict prescribing, drug administration and patient management criteria. In particular, the medical practitioner is required to provide care to the woman beyond simply prescribing the medication.

There is also a requirement for the medical practitioner to remain responsible for the woman's care until the procedure reaches its conclusion with a follow-up appointment to confirm the woman's health and success of the treatment at 14 days after MS 2-Step is taken.

Current provisions also require pharmacies to be certified to possess and supply the drugs.

The drug distributor also provides TGA-approved guidelines in its product information. These guidelines impose obligations on the medical practitioner to only prescribe the medication to a woman when key clinical risks and disorders have been excluded.

Under these requirements the medical practitioner must be satisfied the woman will have the ability to access 24-hour emergency care if required if there are complications.

In addition to these legislative requirements, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has issued college statements in relation to the management of terminations of pregnancy and the performance of early medical termination of pregnancy.

College statements are updated periodically to reflect contemporary evidence-based practice, setting professional standards and guidelines for medical practitioners who undertake terminations of pregnancies or perform early medical termination of pregnancy.

They set out explicit expectations of the prescribing medical practitioner's role in the supervision and responsibility for arrangements for the entire process of termination of pregnancy, from seeking informed consent and the commencement of the termination procedure to its completion, including the provision of follow-up care.

Specifically, the prescribing medical practitioner is required to make arrangements for the woman, which includes 24-hour access to specific telephone advice, support and provision of surgical emergency care.

The college statements also specify that medical termination should not be performed in an isolated or an inaccessible setting which lacks ready access to suitable emergency care, from commencement of the termination and administration of the drug until termination of pregnancy is complete.

I firmly believe that by keeping the decision regarding the termination of pregnancy in the hands of the woman and her medical practitioner, with his or her knowledge of the woman's health, risks and access to emergency services, and with the medical practitioner's full regard to the professional standards and guidelines covering the performance of these procedures, government is ensuring best-practice requirements for performance of terminations of pregnancy relevant to their setting. In this way women's access to these vital services is improved and safety will be maintained.

The Department of Health has recently established an advisory group. The group consists of clinicians and consumers to provide advice on the development of guidelines to assist medical practitioners and consumers with access to relevant information about the law and all relevant standards and guidelines, and to advise on the safe implementation of the legislation in the Territory in accordance with the professional standards and guidelines and multidisciplinary practice that I have just set out.

Clinical and consumer guidelines will be developed to support women and medical practitioners to make these important decisions.

These NT clinical health guidelines will include how to ensure the woman provides informed consent, the provision of safe termination of pregnancy care, the need to inform consumers of available services, and ensure that pathways to additional support are available, including counselling and support services.

In addition, the bill includes provisions to make suitable regulations for the Chief Health Officer to require the collection of related data to inform the effectiveness of the legislation and safe delivery of services.

It is important to draw your attention to the fact that the bill does not include provisions expressly relating to consent.

The principle of 'informed consent' is well established in the common law as a requirement for medical practitioners to provide sufficient information about the condition, the treatment options and the risks to enable a person to make an informed decision about accepting or declining treatment.

In the majority of cases it is the person who seeks medical advice about their own condition who would be providing consent. However, in some cases that person is not competent, due to their age or other conditions, to give informed consent because they lack the capacity to understand the condition, the treatment options and risks.

In cases where a person is not competent it is necessary to obtain consent from another person having a special relationship with the person before treatment can be provided. Provisions are made in the *Guardianship of Adults Act* and the *Advance Personal Planning Act* for adults who lack competence. For minors, the common law principle known as 'Gillick competence' is applied.

The requirements for obtaining informed consent are also set out in professional standards and guidelines, and will be expressly dealt with in NT clinical health guidelines.

The bill acknowledges that the community has a range of views about termination of pregnancy, which can sometimes impinge on the decision-making of others and their rights of access to services. For this reason, provisions authorise the establishment of safe access zones in the vicinity of premises where terminations of pregnancy are performed. Premises include clinics, hospitals, and medical practices.

A safe access zone will apply to the premises where terminations of pregnancy are performed and will extend 150 metres outwardly from the boundary of those premises.

It is intended that the outer part of safe access zones be measured from the boundaries of premises delineated on property titles, leases or declarations. A boundary may be an external land perimeter, whether fenced or not, or a physical attribute such as a wall, but will be consistent with the outer perimeter, and should not be measured from any specific entry point of a building within the boundaries.

The intention is to provide protection to persons accessing the premises for terminations of pregnancy, whether they are working there or seeking services.

The bill makes it an offence to engage in prohibited conduct within a safe access zone, including harassing, hindering or recording of a person without that person's consent.

I have set out the key provisions of the bill, and turn next to the consequential amendments required to remove performance of termination of pregnancy from the *Criminal Code Act*.

Termination of pregnancy is currently a criminal offence in the Northern Territory under the *Criminal Code Act* except if performed under the limited circumstances described in the *Medical Services Act*.

Sections 208A to 208C of the *Criminal Code Act* make it an offence for an individual to procure an abortion through the use of drugs or instruments, or to supply drugs or instruments to a woman to procure her own abortion.

The bill repeals sections 208A to 208C of the *Criminal Code Act* and inserts an offence for an unqualified person to induce an abortion on a woman.

A qualified person is defined as a person who is a suitably qualified medical practitioner, or who is an authorised health practitioner when acting in accordance with the Termination of Pregnancy Law Reform Act.

Importantly the offence does not extend to the woman who consents to, or assists with, the performance of the termination of pregnancy on herself.

Modern legislation that reflects current clinical practice and community standards is long overdue. Northern Territory women should have the same choices as women in other jurisdictions of Australia. We had this debate federally in 2006; it is now 2017. The women of the Northern Territory deserve improved access to safe options for termination of pregnancy services.

Medical and health practitioners have strongly advocated on the need to improve safe access to termination of pregnancy services. Indeed, a wide range of individuals and groups have long campaigned for abortion law reform.

In summary, the Termination of Pregnancy Law Reform Bill before the Legislative Assembly today will provide safe options for termination of pregnancy in out-of-hospital settings alongside the existing options in hospital settings, and will provide the same choices that women living in the rest of Australia have had for a number of years.

It will bring legislation up to date with contemporary medical and legal practices and ensure that legislation keeps pace with medical advances in the future. It will also achieve the long-awaited amendments to the *Criminal Code Act*.

The Labor government is committed to improving Territory women's access to evidence-based healthcare. The campaign for law reform has been a long one.

I am pleased that the Northern Territory now has legislation before the Legislative Assembly to provide Territorians with a modern legislative framework which reflects widespread community views and current political practice in relation to this important women's health issue.

Madam Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly, I appreciate that you, like the community you more broadly represent, have a diverse range of personal views on this matter which are shaped deeply by personal, ethical, moral and religious values.

I appreciate the passionate debate and engagement of all members with this bill, which reflects the debate that has occurred in all parliaments to date on the matter.

I acknowledge all the work of those over the last 10 years and more, by the cross-party private member's bill in the federal parliament to pass enabling legislation for medical terminations by a conscience vote. I hope the debate on this bill will, at all times, respect the diversity of views held in the community and the Legislative Assembly.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

MOTION
Note Statement – Supporting and Growing Jobs

Continued from 14 February 2017.

Mr PAECH (Namatjira): Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Treasurer's statement relating to important matters that affect each and every one of us in the Northern Territory: jobs, employment and economic participation. When we took office in the Northern Territory it is fair to say the Northern Territory's economy was at a critical crossroads, a time when economic certainty was clouded by the previous government's instability and when businesses across the Northern Territory lacked confidence in the previous government.

I notice that times are changing and confidence is being restored. I have had a number of conversations with constituents right across my electorate. This government is growing the economy and getting on with business, and that is evident through a number of programs and incentives this government is introducing.

In the electorate of Namatjira, communities were left disempowered. Places and people, like the people of Alice Springs, were left struggling to make ends meet because of the lack of jobs, economic stimulus and planning for our economic future. I am proud to report, as part of the Territory Labor team, that this is changing. We are investing in Territorians and jobs right across the Northern Territory.

Over the past six months our transition to government has been smooth, rewarding and stimulating for all Territorians. I am proud to report ...

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: I pick up on the interjections and ask that those members hear me out with the wonderful Territory Labor government initiatives that I will proceed to announce.

We have delivered our economic summits and have had a range of these discussions across the Northern Territory, particularly in Alice Springs, where we have met with a number of people to engage with them and make sure they are involved in shaping and evolving our thinking around the work and services that Territory businesses need. That includes looking at a roadmap to economic growth and providing a positive future for all Territorians.

This process has been an inclusive process with Territorians and experts on the ground, and I am proud to report I have observed these economic summits in Alice Springs. More than 100 people participated in those summits. I note that a summit is taking place in Alice Springs today—speaking about very important issues to people in Central Australia and shaping the way forward.

Territorians are being empowered and supported to reach their full potential through economic support and development from this government. Hundreds of people in Namatjira are finally seeing results after four years of asking questions and lobbying government to change the way we do business, look at employment in regional and remote places and think about jobs, as well as changing the language we use when we talk about what makes a 'real job'.

This government is committed to working with all Territorians. I am especially interested in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Northern Territory to make sure they are not forgotten, as they have previously been.

A number of people in my electorate do not care about politics or political agendas; they want the opportunity to engage in meaningful employment and to know they are supported to grow and have confidence in the business sectors and our communities—to know there is a solid foundation in regional economic development.

It is fair to say our Primary Industry minister, Minister Vowles, is committed and has strong aspirations in government to make sure our commitment to growth in food and agribusinesses, and the ability to intensify beef production, are cornerstones of this government, shaping our future economic growth in this area.

Yesterday the Treasurer and minister for Housing, Minister McCarthy, talked about our government's commitment a never before seen \$1.1bn investment in remote housing. I am happy to be a part of this team which has made the commitment to people living in regional and remote areas to establish that. It will

make such a big difference to people in the bush to ensure that we begin to see a reduction in the poor living conditions and overcrowding that people are faced with.

This will build thousands of homes right across the Northern Territory. I am glad to report that before coming to parliament I was in the Utopia region, where I was very happy to see work from Minister McCarthy's department translating into positive results out on the ground. In the Utopia region three homes are being built. They are in the final stages of construction—the sheer appreciation of people living in that region to finally have a government that is committed to delivering appropriate housing and resources for them.

Minister McCarthy, thank you and your department for getting that process under way and for getting those houses built. It is a huge thing for people living out in the bush to see a government that is finally delivering and providing an economic stimulus in the Northern Territory for organisations to build those houses, and providing some of our most vulnerable people with safe, secure and affordable housing.

We are building homes. It was a key commitment of our government because we know good homes lead to good education, healthcare and outcomes for the local community. We understand that for the future, moving forward for our regional and remote places, these homes will provide local jobs for people out on the land. We understand it is imperative that people out on communities are engaged in meaningful employment.

Over the next 10 years we are investing \$1.1bn in remote housing. It is broken up into the following: \$500m for remote housing under HomeBuild NT; \$200m for the Room to Breathe program; \$200m to expand government employee housing, including housing for local government employees and people who are engaged with the public service in regional and remote places; and \$200m for additional repairs and maintenance, which is critical for people living in remote locations with harsh environmental conditions.

We have brought forward \$10m to commence our innovative Room to Breathe program because we understand the urgency of overcrowding issues and the pressures placed on families. Room to Breathe is a Territory government initiative which is having a huge and positive impact on people living in the bush. They are very excited. I have taken the time to get out to all my communities and talk about the wonderful initiatives of this government. They are very excited at the prospect of this work being done on their properties.

I understand 23 communities have been selected, based on levels of overcrowding, to provide fair geographic distribution across all regions—that is right; we will look after all regions of the NT. And, where existing Indigenous businesses have the capacity to undertake the work within the time frame, we will work with them across the NT.

I am very happy to report that three of the 23 communities are in the electorate of Namatjira—Ampilatwatja, Engawala and Titjikala. It is about time we listen to the people and understand that they want additional rooms built onto their houses, understanding that Aboriginal people often like to live together in a community and close network. Our Room to Breathe program is just that; we are allowing Aboriginal people to live together without being overcrowded or living in conditions that we would not expect to see anywhere else.

I have been informed by Minister McCarthy that these community consultations are under way in a series of communities, with further on-the-ground consultations expected in the coming weeks. We are listening and talking to people, taking feedback on board and making sure it is reflective in all our initiatives across the Territory government.

We understand the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural connections to traditional lands, and we are working with organisations, authorities and people on the ground to ensure that homelands and outstations are no longer the land of the forgotten people. That is right; I am very happy to make sure outstations are not forgotten, that they are looked after and that the people there, who have a deep connection to country, are a centrepiece of this government and are consulted and spoken with.

Our government is committed to working in partnership to improve services and conditions for some of the NT's most disadvantaged people. I very much look forward to participating in that volume of work.

As a government we will work hard to deliver good results in the areas of outstations and homelands. We have an Indigenous subcommittee of Cabinet, which is a strong committee and will look at ensuring the

voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the NT are heard and reflected in all Territory legislation and initiatives. I am very proud to be part of that team and a co-chair for that committee. I also hope other members will agree with me that this committee will ensure that economic development on Indigenous land is a cornerstone, and that we must continue to work hard on that.

In Central Australia we have had many positive results, thanks to our Treasurer, Minister Manison, with the First Home Owner Grant for existing properties and removing the stamp duty on the first \$500 000 of a purchase. I have many friends and family who have been able to get into the market as a result of this decision alone. We have seen more than 50 applications in Alice Springs, with many still pending. This has been a wonderful incentive. To see Territorians being able to buy their first home and get into the market—as a local member representing the subdivision of Kilgariff it is really rewarding to see the government's commitment to making sure we look after young Territorians and help them to engage in the market.

We have introduced the new and improved Home Improvement Scheme, which has had good results across the Territory. The amended changes have seen a better appreciation from local tradies in Alice Springs, now that we allow them to carry out more works on properties. This is an additional \$15m stimulus into the Territory economy. That needs to be acknowledged.

When members of the opposition criticise this government on our lack of stimulus and lack of economic work, it is just nonsense. This is an additional \$15m that will translate into Territory jobs and Territorians having work done on their property. The Member for Port Darwin mentioned yesterday that the Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce estimated that the impact would be in the vicinity of \$80m. That is truly rewarding to hear.

Our major commitment to regional and remote towns will give local businesses confidence in this government. They will be supported by this government with a range of innovative measures that will continue to support and grow local businesses. Another truly rewarding mechanism introduced by Treasurer Manison was the implementation of a rolling infrastructure fund plan, which is also known as the forward procurement forecast. It shows the future of work available, which allows local businesses to plan for tenders. That is a positive step forward to ensure that Territory businesses are aware of the scope of work and that they have the potential to place a tender.

This is the leadership and innovation that Territorians longingly deserve. The confidence that was eroded by the corruption and lack of respect of the CLP is being restored. We are committed to making sure Territorian businesses are being looked after. Our government will leverage the Northern Territory's unique strength, combining expertise from local voices and local Territory businesses together to build a bright and positive future for all Territorians. Providing the best economic opportunities for everyone is very important to this government. We are committed to ensuring that job creation and economic growth continue to be a centrepiece of this government. We are serious about meaningful employment for all Territorians. This means ensuring that jobs are safe, properly resourced, meaningful, not tokenistic, and that they are sustainable into the future.

I am very happy to be working with my Territory Labor colleagues to ensure that this is the case, and that Aboriginal people are engaged in meaningful employment and can deliver much-needed work in the bush. Our plan for jobs is what the Territory has been lacking for the last four years. Our plan is clear, concise, smart and adaptable in changing times. Our plan has been very well articulated in our policies.

Early childhood services and remote housing are just two areas in my electorate that we have been able to deliver on, and they will deliver a positive result and positive employment opportunities for our people. We cannot expect people to hold down a job if they do not have the appropriate housing. When we took government, that was not the case; it was shameful. I travelled long distances during my election campaign and saw the conditions the CLP were forcing my people to live in, and it was shameful.

Boosting the tourism economy is another example of how we are growing jobs and the economy, creating spaces and opportunities for local businesses to grow and bloom. Our plans for tourism will boost and encourage interstate and international markets, like the India and China markets. Yesterday Minister Moss highlighted some of the key agenda items in the tourism space to grow the tourism economy and local jobs.

In the Alice Springs community alone we have a very positive tourism industry. I have had the opportunity to meet with Ministers Moss and Wakefield on a number of occasions and hear of the great work they are doing. I look forward to hearing about many more projects and incentives of the tourism industry.

How we will do this is very clearly articulated in our policies. Minister Moss and I are working on the national Indigenous art gallery, which will be in Central Australia. This project will not only create jobs for local Central Australians but will showcase and recognise our first Australians and be a major drawcard when we are talking about economic stimulus. It will bring tourists in from not only around the country but internationally to showcase the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make through songs, stories, dance and culture.

We are investing \$20m in an Indigenous cultural centre in Alice Springs. Members of the opposition and some of the Independent members criticise our lack of investment in Central Australia. I think they are dreaming. It is right here in front of you and you are hearing it today.

We are investing in Central Australia. We are passionate about Central Australia. It is my home and I want to make sure it is looked after. We are investing \$30m in the Katherine, Tennant Creek and Arnhem Land galleries as well.

Mr SIEVERS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I request an extension of time for the member, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mr PAECH: Member for Brennan to the rescue. Thank you.

As I was saying, we will link community galleries together to make sure they are showcased, and we encourage tourists to support local galleries in our regional and remote places.

These projects will deliver major investments across the Northern Territory and the regions. I am confident this government will deliver. I am so happy; this means jobs in Namatjira and right across the Northern Territory. We will deliver them, unlike the CLP.

We will do this by working with Indigenous communities and making sure they have strong representation with organisations. We will make sure government and Indigenous people living in communities have strong participation in the economic development areas—growing a vibrant economy that will provide meaningful employment for everyone. We need to make sure we have a strong economy, because a strong economy means that local jobs can be achieved in regional and remote places.

We are talking about Indigenous communities that should be, and are, receiving strong infrastructure investment under this government. This will be focused on providing housing to ensure opportunities to work are being created in these communities to keep the money flowing through.

The \$1.7bn infrastructure program is a great one. I am very happy to be working with the Infrastructure minister to make sure we look after all regions of the Northern Territory. We are investing in our roads and logistics capabilities for the long term. The difference between the CLP and Territory Labor is, we plan for the future.

It is vital that the civil construction sector is looked after and supported with Territory initiatives. We need a strong civil construction sector because it delivers the critical infrastructure we see throughout the Northern Territory.

Yesterday the Infrastructure minister said that this year's roads infrastructure program is now \$696m, compared to last year's roads infrastructure program, which totalled \$605m. That is an increase of 14%. It is a much-needed and appreciated infrastructure increase.

Some of these great initiatives are in the electorate of Namatjira. Some of the \$37.5m on beef roads infrastructure is in the electorate of Namatjira. Minister Vowles, the Primary Industry minister, is very strong on supporting the cattle industry and agribusinesses right throughout the electorate. I have met with him a number of times in the electorate of Namatjira—speaking to people about local jobs for Indigenous people within the pastoral industries.

Mr Vowles: Thanks for the plug.

Mr PAECH: No worries, mate—\$35m on the Outback Way roads in Central Australia is yet another initiative that is being delivered and seeing positive results in the electorate of Namatjira. Outback Way projects totalling \$40m—stage one is complete; stage two, on the Plenty Highway, is in construction. I had

the opportunity last week to see that work on the way to a community visit. It was very rewarding to see that work being done and to see a number of local people engaged in stage two of the construction of that area.

There is \$10m in the Immediate Works Stimulus Package for communities and not-for-profit organisations, which is designed to create work where it is needed. It is about looking after our assets for all Territorians, making sure ageing assets and infrastructure are looked after and there are plans for the future. This \$10m is available to all Territory community and not-for-profit groups—grants up to the value of \$100 000 for much-needed repairs and maintenance.

Territory Labor looks after Territorians and plans for the future. We want to make sure that these ageing pieces of infrastructure and assets are looked after. I have had many visits from people from multicultural societies, churches and non-government organisations who have come in to the electorate office to find out about this wonderful investment in communities.

I have had many conversations with them, and had the opportunity to provide them with many information booklets. I have been to the Braitling electorate office to grab some more because they are going like hotcakes. This is an initiative that means a lot to Territorians and which we are very proud to support.

This will support Territory businesses in the short term and will deliver a long-term gain to the Northern Territory. Beyond the \$100 000 grant, the Northern Territory Government will match dollar for dollar up to another \$100 000 to fund even bigger improvements. If that is not a true commitment by government, I do not know what is. It is truly refreshing to see that level of commitment.

This is a targeted stimulation package. It is creating jobs, encouraging investment and improving infrastructure whilst supporting community groups in our wonderful and vibrant communities across the Northern Territory.

I am passionate about Namatjira and growing the economy. I am very privileged to stand alongside members of the Territory Labor team who will make sure people living in Namatjira are provided the avenue to have economic stimulus and the opportunity to engage in meaningful employment that is not tokenistic, and which means a real job now and into the future.

We have also been very supportive in providing the rural residents of Alice Springs—Madam Speaker, I would never forget the rural residents as they are very important to you and me—the best opportunities to succeed in economic participation. That means making sure small home-based contractors are supported and have strong representation on local issues.

Namatjira has some of the Territory's top tourist destinations. I am very fortunate to have a good Tourism minister, Minister Moss, making sure we are working with these tourism organisations right across the Northern Territory, not just in Namatjira, to make sure they are being supported and encouraged to grow and adapt to evolving markets. There is an evolving market in the tourism industry and we need to work with them to continue to have people visiting and spending money here. We need to ensure tourism operators continue to have the opportunity to employ local people in the tourism industry. Jobs and growth is in the interest of all Territorians; therefore, we must ensure all Territorians are considered. That is what this Territory Labor government is doing.

Economic growth is the key to providing a better future for everyone. Our government is working with Territorians to provide the opportunity for every Territory business, and every Territorian, to be innovative, to unleash their creative forces and to participate. That includes the private and public sectors.

Under this government the bottom line is, no one in the Northern Territory will do it harder than they did under the previous government. We will grow jobs and the economy whilst looking after every Territorian, and we will do that by investing in ageing infrastructure, communities and the non-government sector so they are funded appropriately.

I pick up on the interjection from last night—in regard to comments by the Member for Blain. I stated that we will look at investing resources into the community and non-government sectors; that equals jobs for people to be able to work with our young people to ensure they are looked after. It is a win for all. We will invest in resourcing community organisations that will then have the opportunity to employ people to ensure that we look after our generations.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to hear the Treasurer's announcement about investing in jobs in the Territory. I praise and support the significant work that is being done by this government to grow jobs across the Territory.

Getting and keeping a job can be very difficult, especially in hard economic times. This is especially true when we know that our local businesses and economy have been doing it tough over the last four years—four very long years. I am proud to see that this government is only six months into its first term and has already established a strong economic plan that is in operation and benefits all Territorians.

In my first speech regarding jobs and local businesses I discussed how bad it had become under the previous government in 2016. They are times we all wish to put behind us. In that speech I discussed the local business stories I had heard, all advising they were going broke and could no longer survive under a CLP government. There were many lessons to learn, and we listened to local people and local businesses. We learned that creating employment opportunities makes a significant difference to an individual and their family. The flow on effect includes improvements to people's physical and mental health, their hygiene, lifestyle choices, families, education, and their ability to save, spend or invest in the Territory and local businesses.

We understand we are facing some initial tough times; however, this government is committed to supporting local businesses and local employment. We will work together towards a stronger economy that provides a better economic future and opportunities for all Territorians and their families. We will continue to consult, listen and deliver on our government's stimulus, infrastructure and investment projects in consultation with key industry sectors.

We are a government that moves with the times, and our Chief Minister and government have shown that we will always put Territorians first, with the announcement of the improved Home Improvement Scheme.

We have heard all the shocking stories of how the former CLP government sold the farm. It cashed in on a sale and let down Territorians who worked damn hard to make the NT such a great place. Territorians were rightly outraged and voted for a government they could rely on, which would put Territorians' best interests first and not only fix the damage to our farm, but make our Territory one of the best damn farms in Australia.

This is an incredible challenge, which every one of my colleagues in this Chamber is totally committed to. As we live here and raise our children here we also invest here, and we want more opportunities for all Territorians. This government is up to that challenge and we thrive on the work we need to do. As we know, the work done now will prosper all Territorian families and children of the future.

I am very pleased to hear we are working together across local, state and federal governments to improve the NT economy. Our Chief Minister is not sitting still for a moment, and has been in Canberra, meeting with the Prime Minister and senior Cabinet ministers to further support our Territory.

I take this opportunity to thank all government services and people who have spent many hours over their Christmas to ensure our government's commitments are on track. These people and their families are also committed to making sure the Territory's future is bright.

I welcome all the announcements by our government to create jobs, and I am very excited about the announcements particular to Palmerston and within my assistant ministerial portfolios. These include:

- the announcement of the first home buyer scheme, under which an additional 262 Territorians have purchased their own home in the Territory, 71 of which being in Palmerston
- the Buy Local scheme, which enforced that 30% must be driven through the whole of the tender and project, and the buy local condition is now applied on all capital grants issued by the Territory government
- government and NGO contracts will now be five term. Publishing of all forward procurement plans are now required, and 96% of tier one, two, three, four and five contracts have been won by local businesses, with a value of over \$185m
- the bigger and better Home Improvement Scheme is putting people before politics
- the Immediate Works Stimulus Package for local businesses, including local steel manufacturers

- putting \$5m into urban Territory housing upgrades, creating more jobs for Territorians
- the upgrades to local ageing public multipurpose halls, churches, NGO facilities, childcare centres, sporting groups and many community organisations that support Territorians
- the new Palmerston police station
- the Palmerston hospital, and a multistorey car park at Royal Darwin Hospital
- the PET scanner project at RDH
- Warren Park and new netball courts
- Palmerston road upgrades, including Roystonea Avenue, Temple Terrace and Terry Drive, and further work to complete these intersections
- Palmerston school funding for upgrades, and those schools having more teachers and support staff in the classrooms
- recruiting and increasing our Palmerston police force and resources to operate the new Palmerston police station.

We will also address youth crime with the Palmerston youth services and victim conferencing resources. Most importantly, we implemented changes across government that will save taxpayers millions of dollars through consolidation over a number of key government departments. This creates an efficient and effective public sector. As the Treasurer has announced, the list goes on, and it reaches all parts of the Territory.

I note that most of this work has begun within six months of having a new government. That is a credit to all involved. It is clear that we have—and continue to—listened and worked with Territorians and local businesses whilst pushing for a better NT for all our families and children. It is also clear that this government, its representatives and the people I work with every day have all decided that we are keeping the farm and we will make the NT a better place for all those who decide to live, work, grow and invest in it.

Ms NELSON (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I support the Treasurer's statement outlining the significant work being undertaken by this government to support and grow jobs across the Territory.

Katherine is definitely a winner with this government; it was this government that took a detailed jobs plan to Territorians before the last election and is delivering on that plan. We have built upon and strengthened that plan in consultation with local businesses, NGOs and the broader community. We saw a \$5m commitment to upgrade Katherine police station brought forward by three years. We have the national iconic arts trail in which Katherine will be receiving \$10m towards infrastructure.

The Katherine community also received a boost ahead of Christmas with more than \$300 000 in grants funding being awarded. Late last year the first round of the community fund grants application was assessed, with \$9338 approved in December for Katherine-specific projects. The approved grants include \$192 727 for the Katherine and District Show Society, \$6143 for the Historical Society in Katherine, \$3257 for the Katherine Volunteer Unit and \$31 946 for Katherine Regional Arts.

The one I am incredibly proud to announce is the \$181 689 that was granted to the Katherine RSL so it can move the cenotaph. It has been seeking this funding for 11 years, and it took a Labor government to deliver it. This is a significant win for the Katherine community. The grants will provide significant improvements and upgrades while also creating an important flow-on effect to the community and our local economy.

This government has shown, once again, that it is inclusive. We are sincere when we say that we are a government that listens to its constituents. We have also shown that we are humble enough to admit when we have made a mistake and give credit when credit is due. We did this by reintroducing the Home Improvement Scheme and making it bigger and better, giving homeowners a greater opportunity to do home renovations, which in turn generates more jobs for our local tradies. This has been, and will continue to be, a huge boost to the Katherine economy.

Katherine is a winner in this budget. I commend the minister's statement.

Mr McCARTHY (Housing and Community Development): Madam Speaker, I support the minister's statement on jobs. We came to government at a time when people were leaving the Territory and the economy was declining. After a decade of growth and prosperity, the chaos of the previous government has brought much of the work in the Territory to a halt. The previous government failed to capitalise on the INPEX project, which is now close to wrapping up its construction phase.

The previous government failed to plan for Territory life after INPEX. It sold our public assets and failed to manage our budget. We now have the job, as a new government, to deliver on our policies in housing, health and wellbeing, education and justice in the context of what we have inherited as a shrinking and slowing economy.

I find it a bit rich that the members opposite, the last of the CLP, continually crow that we are blaming and finger pointing and that we should move on. I see this House as the most essential place of debate. With respect to the previous four years—deconstructing policy and political decisions that went wrong. I find it difficult that those opposite want to retreat from their own responsibility in that chaotic regime.

It is about time those on the other side, Independents as well as the remaining CLP, stand up, fess up and be counted in a true sense of bipartisanship. To deconstruct what went totally wrong, why we are in a significantly shrinking economy, why we have suffered 9000 Territorians leaving our borders and travelling interstate—how we plan, as a Territory government in a bipartisan sense, to turn that around.

I think one of the important messages that the community needs to process, contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition says, is this: the worst thing that happened in the Northern Territory was that Labor lost government in 2012. We had the plan and policy but we lost control of not only governance, but the economy. One area that needs mentioning is economic management; that relates to stability, good policy implementation and, at the end of the day, it relates to Territorians.

It is important to get this sorted out here and now. The opposition members have a responsibility to stop their whingeing and whining and join this government, in a bipartisan sense, to make sure we get the best outcome for all Territorians.

The government has the key to the future prosperity for Territorians. It will not be easy; it is a difficult task, but essentially what this statement brings to debate is the plan to create Territory jobs.

Throughout the portfolios I have been tasked with—a privileged position—we aim to unlock the opportunities for all Territorians no matter where they live. The Labor government's \$1.1bn remote housing program will provide broader and better job opportunities. Our plan is to improve remote housing, create jobs, stimulate the economy and build local capacity. Throughout our investment in remote housing we will also deliver sustainable employment in remote communities. We want to put control back into the hands of local people and let communities lead the way forward.

This approach has been called for by community leaders and will provide business and training opportunities for locals to participate in the work at all levels. It will promote local economic development and develop local skills to build and manage housing. We will deliver this policy over 10 years into regional and remote communities around the Northern Territory.

In regard to the Member for Nelson's contribution—what that essentially means is we will build capacity from the ground up. We want young Territorians in regional and remote areas engaged in work that is relevant, such as the initial stages of repairs and maintenance to houses. From there they can progress into the logical Room to Breathe program, which is significantly more innovative in regard to building amenities and other construction.

When you have five-year agreements and have travelled through these credible phases of training to employment, then the new constructions begin.

This policy is about sustainable jobs, Member for Nelson. It is not from the past; it is not a one-off. This is new policy, and that is why it is being embraced by Territorians, and, consequently, Labor won the last general election.

The programs included in this housing policy relate to the significant investment of \$500m for new remote housing under HomeBuild NT; \$200m for Room to Breathe; \$200m to expand government employee housing, including housing for local government employees; and \$200m for additional repairs and maintenance funding.

Late last year \$15m of the \$1.1bn remote housing program was brought forward into this financial year. A total of \$10m will be used to build additional bedrooms and living spaces in existing houses through the Room to Breathe program. That will ease overcrowding in existing houses. The remaining \$5m is being spent on remote public housing repairs and maintenance.

As well as increasing the level of repairs and maintenance, some of the money will be used to establish proper cyclical maintenance programs. The cyclical maintenance program will reduce the level of reactive repairs. Each of these programs is laying the foundations for improved social benefits, such as better health, social and emotional wellbeing, and supporting education. These programs will deliver real change to people's lives because it will be done with the people.

The delivery of these programs will be funded through five-year funding agreements, providing long-term opportunities for ongoing employment of a locally-engaged workforce and partnerships with other Territory businesses. Member for Nelson, I think you will be complimentary of that policy position because a five-year agreement enables communities to employ relevant accredited trades that will then mentor and guide the local capacity. It will give Aboriginal organisations and Territory businesses more certainty. It will provide sustainable training to employment and will be ongoing in terms of great and innovative regional economic development. This policy will ensure that local community workforces continue to grow.

The early works Room to Breathe program is progressing well. An extensive engagement program has commenced across the Territory regarding the delivery of the early works Room to Breathe program. Twenty-three communities have been selected right across the Territory for these early works, and I continue to welcome the input from local members who have not only embraced this policy, but are also on the ground consulting and making important links back to government.

The early work communities that have been identified are Ampilatwatja, Areyonga, Belyuen, Beswick, Bulman, Engawala, Gapuwiyak, Hermannsburg, Jilkminggan, Kintore, Kybrook Farm, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Milikapiti, Milyakburra, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Ramingining, Titjikala, Weemol, Wadeye, Warruwi and Wurrumiyanga.

Community consultations have already begun and the consultations in Ramingining and Gapuwiyak have led this strategy. The 23 communities were chosen based on the levels of overcrowding to provide fair geographic distribution across regions and where existing Indigenous businesses have the capacity to undertake the work within the time frame.

These communities represent where nearly half of the locations where remote Territory housing stock is located. Early work will focus on providing additional living spaces that do not require water and sewerage infrastructure. The early works program will focus on households that need more space for larger families and aged or other high-dependency residents. It will provide the first steps to reducing overcrowding in remote communities.

These housing works will drive the creation of local jobs and provide a much-needed boost to the economy. It has been heartening not only to visit other electorates—the Member for Arafura's electorate and those wonderful people he introduced me to—but also back home in the Barkly and in Central Australia, embracing the concept of improving the whole amenity of a dwelling.

It is not just about built form; it is about good consultations where local residents are bringing forward good, practical, pragmatic ideas that inform the Room to Breathe concept. An essential element underpinning government's investment on remote housing reforms is our engagement with communities, to work in partnership and create opportunities for participation in programs and decisions that will impact on communities.

We are focused on place-based consultation and solutions. This reform agenda will not be driven from a government agenda, but is being done hand in hand with Indigenous communities.

I think the Leader of the Opposition struggled with that last year. I welcome the opportunity to brief the opposition to understand that concept.

The partnerships must be based on mutual respect, with engagement between government and communities to take place at a local level. Since coming to office I have had the privilege to meet with land councils, regional councils, Indigenous business enterprises, housing groups and local businesses throughout the Northern Territory. I have listened to their concerns regarding housing and the need to ensure local decision-making and ongoing local employment. This is why five-year funding agreements will

be available, to allow enterprises to plan for long-term employment and training packages that provide apprenticeships or traineeships in relevant trades.

The delivery of housing works will feature local participation that will encourage both local economic development and the development of locally-based skills to manage housing stock into the future.

The recent \$22m Immediate Works Stimulus Package provides a significant \$5m boost to the local construction industry for repairs and maintenance to urban public housing stock. I am pleased to say it has been well received by the local trades. As of late Monday I was advised that 148 small businesses have registered from across the Territory, 44 requests for quotes have been issued, and works under this program have commenced in Casuarina and Palmerston and will soon follow in other areas across the Territory.

This \$5m boost ensures funds flow directly to smaller local contractors in the construction sector over the next six months. It is translating into real Territory jobs. This is ahead of work commencing on the government's fast-tracked \$120m major infrastructure projects. This is an immediate injection into the local economy before our fast-tracked infrastructure funds start flowing into the general construction sector, also supporting the local trades.

It is also delivering much-needed upgrades to public housing stock in urban areas. Funding will go to much-needed upgrades to roofs, kitchens, bathrooms and fencing. It is also for disability modifications and security upgrades.

The faster we can repair public houses, the faster we can allocate them to the most in need on our waiting lists.

If tradies have not already, I encourage them to get online and register. This scheme will boost the local economy and create Territory jobs in a sector that struggled over the past four years under the previous government. There are also significant job opportunities through the Department of Housing and Community Development's urban housing strategy. The largely self-funded strategy will see significant investment into urban public housing across the NT, with a focus on renewal and regeneration of housing stock. This translates into economic opportunities for Territory businesses.

Commercial infill development involves the identification of dwellings that are of an appropriate size, location and zoning for redevelopment. Replacement of social housing dwellings will be delivered through commercial partnership with private developers of strategically selected infill sites. The department is currently working with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics in relation to planning requirements to make this happen. New social housing dwellings will also be built in targeted locations across the NT. Planning and logistics is under way for the delivery of the first 10 dwellings under this initiative. We are also focused on upgrading existing public housing dwellings. This will be carried out over a five-year period and be part of a coordinated program—again, generating jobs.

When tenants vacate their properties, upgrades will occur. We are growing the community housing sector and are focused on transferring a number of social housing dwellings to non-government community housing providers.

Recently the department transferred a 22-unit complex in Alice Springs to the community housing sector for the provision of supported accommodation and community housing. This will enable the non-government sector to increase service provision and employ additional staff.

These initiatives provide opportunities for small and large Territory businesses in construction and other industries. Territory businesses in these industries will also have the opportunity to work with local Indigenous community organisations as part of our remote housing reform package.

All these initiatives translate into much-needed jobs for Territorians that underpin this government's policy.

Community development—infrastructure program and stimulus spending, directly and indirectly, provide work for Territorians across urban, regional and remote areas. These opportunities provide money, skills, experience and, most importantly, work. Directly through the Housing and Community Development portfolio, we deliver a range of programs that employ Aboriginal people and provide opportunities for economic participation.

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing is the largest Indigenous housing program ever undertaken by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. It has a program value of \$1.7bn in Australian Government funding and \$240m in Northern Territory Government funding over 10 years to 30 June 2018. A key element of this partnership and the current national partnership on remote housing is Indigenous employment. This week I will meet with the federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs to discuss the way forward post-June 2018.

On a broader scale, we currently employ 260 interpreters through the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. We want to ensure the role of this award winning service is expanded as we develop the government's local decision-making initiatives across all portfolios. This has already started to engage with our remote housing programs. These interpreters carry out about 4384 individual interpreting jobs. That equates to 32 434 hours of interpreting jobs across the Territory in the last financial year, which provides an essential service for those who need to participate in the economy.

The homelands jobs program funds around 141 full-time equivalent positions in 36 homelands via service provider organisations. This program also provides funding to homeland service providers for the delivery of repairs and maintenance services to homelands and town camps. It is government support for programs like this that creates local jobs, which in turn provides skills and experience.

The Indigenous Jobs Development Funding program provides funding for Aboriginal employees in local councils. This program support councils by providing their core local government services to employ their Indigenous staff working in parks and gardens, sport and recreation, waste management, animal management, council administration, running the local library, civil works and other activities. Through this program, created by the last Territory Labor government to encourage Aboriginal employment in the local government sector after the 2008 reforms, over 500 jobs have been created and sustained.

Despite the changes to the CDP scheme over the last few years, the Territory shires and regional councils have managed to maintain around 70% of jobs for local Aboriginal people. My job needs more time. It is an important job.

Mr KIRBY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I request an extension of time for the member, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mr McCARTHY: It is important to make sure this message is in the public domain for all Territorians. This Labor policy relating to jobs has been able to be maintained through considerably turbulent times, and 70% of the jobs that were created through that important program in regional and remote areas were maintained for local Aboriginal people.

The critical task of creating jobs in regional and remote areas that relate to specific instances—I am running out of time so I will cut to one example. The critical task of removing asbestos in remote communities—240 workers have received qualifications in asbestos removal, and 147 are still engaged in this work in their community.

This speech goes on to other critical areas, but I want to manage that example briefly. We give credit where credit is due. The previous government talked about maintaining this program and developing this strategy. There is one we can share together, Leader of the Opposition. We can unite and link arms because it is something the Territory can see as a productive policy. But, by jingo, we will still remind you of the dysfunctional, chaotic policies that drove the Territory to distraction for four years. That put us into the very challenging position we face today.

Throughout the Territory the construction of solar PV installations in remote communities to reduce their reliance on diesel generators is providing jobs and training in construction and maintenance. Not only are we generating sustainable energy, we are committed to generating sustainable jobs.

On the research end, the government is working with Charles Darwin University to deliver the Remote Engagement Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research project. This project forges a partnership between the government, CDU and local research organisations at Ali Curung, Galiwinku, Hermannsburg and Ngukurr.

Almost a third of the \$366 000 budget will go toward paying local Aboriginal people to carry out or participate in the research project; they are engaging community members. The Aboriginal members of this

research team are acting as senior consultants, researchers and mentors, with training and professional development provided.

I want to mention Valda and Geoffrey Shannon, who have explained this program to me in detail. I have seen the work they do on the ground and I congratulate them for standing up and being great mentors in the region.

Focusing more broadly, the government is the largest employer in the Northern Territory. The Territory is also home to thousands of Commonwealth public sector workers. Public sector employment provides broad employment benefits to the entire Territory. An office of public servants provides patronage for surrounding cafes, shops, dry cleaners and so on. A government infrastructure program gives local business the opportunity to provide their services in important building management. A government department provides service contracts to companies that sell office supplies, cleaning services, information technology and training. Public servants provide productive labour for our economy. They also rent property, eat at restaurants and go shopping.

In short, public sector employment not only provides Territorians with jobs but provides opportunities for local businesses.

I came to the Territory as a Commonwealth public servant many moons ago. Our public servants teach our kids, nurse us in hospital, put the fires out, maintain order and provide countless other vital services for our communities. The public sector will be, and continues to be, an enabling institution investing in our children, restoring trust and growing jobs.

Last year I had the pleasure of presenting regional public servants, and Top End public servants in the big end of town, with recognition of milestone awards. There were 150 public servants; collectively that represented a massive 3200 years of combined experience in the Northern Territory.

By publicly recognising our long-serving public servants we are showing our appreciation for their hard work and dedication to the Territory over the course of their employment. Some of them have been with us for over 40 years. The amount of combined knowledge possessed by that group was staggering. However, the next generation of Territorians entering into the public service will be equally as important. We are doing everything we can to make sure we continue to support the Northern Territory Public Sector.

The Future Leaders Program is currently made up of 46 high-performing public servants aged 30 and under. They undertake a syllabus of group learning, work challenges, mentoring and professional development over two years. These are the kinds of programs we need to undertake and build on if we are to future-proof our public service provision and make sure our public sector is operating at 100%.

A Labor government recognises the different abilities that individuals possess. We have to do more to make sure people with disabilities are able to contribute to the workforce so they can enjoy a fulfilling career. This measure will start with government. The number of public servants with reported disabilities is 1%; this is not reflective of the broader Territory community. We have to move forward with measures to ensure our workplaces are inclusive, that workplace culture is accepting of disabilities and systemic barriers are torn down. The current employability strategy, which aims at increasing employment numbers and retention of people with disabilities, has not achieved its aims.

On expiry at the end of this year—we are working with the Commissioner for Public Employment to develop a new strategy which will focus on the development of a broader inclusion program. We are also acutely aware of the need to hone in on employment numbers and improve the experiences of employees working with a disability. That is what we believe, and that is what Labor stands for.

We need to ensure our public sector is efficient, skilled and happy. Our big challenge will be to retain people in the Territory. A robust economy is directly linked to the size and wellbeing of our population. Labor's policy is that the public sector will now work to a 30% local procurement model. This will drive more local jobs and encourage excellence in our local businesses. The scale of a government project might sometimes be too big for our smaller local businesses. We want to give everyone a shot, so we need to make sure the contract packages are the right size, so local businesses can win them. We have to rebuild trust in government. Our policies will open up the workings of government and the public sector, making the machinery of government less opaque.

Territorians and local businesses need to be confident that our processes are fair and that there is no favouritism in awarding contracts or delivering government services. By providing confidence in government we will help create the conditions for private sector jobs to bloom.

As a government we must get ready to embrace future technologies. The government will play a large role in the implementation and regulation of new technologies. It was the previous government's failure to pay attention to future jobs that contributed to the state we are in at the moment. But, by being open to innovation, open for business, fair, accountable and trustworthy, we will create a new space where Territory businesses will employ more workers and contribute to the economy and the growth of the NT.

Technology is a very important area, as are many other areas in this well-written speech. I do not have the time to finish this, but I will make one point: great policies are inclusive of all Territorians. That is important to remember and not lose sight of. Labor's underpinning policy is about our children, our youth. It is about remaining cognisant that every area of policy development will be underpinned with that worthy statement, action and value. Our kids are the future of the Northern Territory.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

PETITION **Petition No 7 – Bring Dan Murphy's to Darwin**

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader) (by leave): Madam Speaker, I present a petition not conforming with standing orders from 643 petitioners relating to changing *Northern Territory Government Gazette No S119* to bring Dan Murphy's to Darwin. I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read.

The Gunner government changed Gazette S119 with no public consultation. This means that no bottle shop is able to have a footprint larger than 400 metres-squared. This came directly after Dan Murphy's proposed a 1200 metres-squared bottle shop.

The Gunner governments excuse? 'They took it to the August election' if we remember correctly, they didn't release their policies until the day before the election.

Let's stop the grave injustice! We will not be the Nanny State!

ELECTORAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO 2) **(Serial 8)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

This bill is to amend the *Electoral Act* and the Electoral Regulations. The new act will reverse the decision by the previous government to introduce optional preferential voting and allow the return of full preferential voting.

The original changes to the voting system were made by the previous government in the hope of improving its chances of winning the election by avoiding the need to receive at least 50% plus one of the vote, and to reduce the chances of minor parties or independents being elected. They claimed it would reduce informal voting, which it may have, but the accidental informal vote for the whole of the NT was not that high in the first place.

Looking at the results of the last election, the change backfired on the government. Regardless, it is still important that the legislation be returned to what it was previously. There are a number of reasons why this bill should be supported, especially as the next local government election will be held next year.

Members: August this year.

Mr WOOD: August this year. That is what I meant to say. Firstly, optional preferential allows a candidate to be elected without receiving 50% plus one of the vote. It can become a de facto form of the first-past-the-

post system. The Electoral Commissioner, when making comment on the proposed changes by Adam Giles, the then Chief Minister, said:

In small electorates like the NT, the optional preferential voting system could result in a de-facto 'first past-the-post' system, with candidates elected with less than half the vote.

When you receive less than 50% plus one you know more people did not vote for you.

Secondly, we have two other levels of government, and even though local government uses a proportional system and the federal government uses preferential and proportional, they all require all positions on the ballot paper to be marked. By introducing optional preferential into the NT there is a greater chance of an increase in informal voting at both local and federal elections. The Electoral Commissioner, when commenting on his information paper on the Electoral Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, wrote:

The Queensland experience has also shown that, with a change to optional preferential voting for Legislative Assembly elections, consistency in vote marking information would be lost, and may result in an increase in informal voting rates at federal and local government elections.

This would be even more so in remote communities, where there is already a fairly high informal vote and the change to optional preferential will only add to the informal vote. If we are to avoid problems at the next local government election, on 26 August this year, we need to have these changes agreed to soon so the Electoral Commissioner has time to tell people to fill in all the squares when voting in their local government elections.

For consistency's sake, to reduce the overall informal vote and to make sure a de facto first-past-the-post system is not introduced where a candidate could win with less than 50% plus one of the vote—this bill will achieve those objectives and, therefore, I commend this bill to the House and I am happy for it to go to a committee under the opening parliament to the people policy promoted by the government.

Debate adjourned.

PLANNING AMENDMENT BILL (Serial 9)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

This bill is called the Planning Amendment Bill 2016, and the object of this bill is to return the role of the reporting body as described in sections 22, 23 and 24 of the NT *Planning Act* to the Development Consent Authority.

In May last year, about one month from the election, the then minister, Mr Tollner, decided to take away the powers of the Development Consent Authority as the reporting body for Planning Scheme amendments and pass that role to the Planning Commission. This meant that the DCA, which had local members, could no longer report on Planning Scheme amendments. Instead, the Planning Commission, which has no local representatives, was given the job and, to make matters worse, there only needed to be one person to conduct hearings. This change was not supported by the Local Government Association or the opposition at the time. There was no consultation.

I am fairly certain the Chair of the DCA had little or no involvement in this decision also. This was a minister's bright idea, a bit like Richardson Park. The minister gave no real plausible explanation as to why he pushed for this change, but perhaps it could be summed up in his own words at the end of debate:

This is simply a change of the reporting body from the DCA to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission is working hard to develop plans; rezoning is a matter of planning and, as such, should be handled by the Planning Commission.

The minister was only able to pass this legislation with the help of the then Member for Arnhem under a secret deal with the government, which had been done to win her support. Not exactly an honest way to pass legislation.

The Development Consent Authority, once called the Planning Authority, deals with planning as its role comes under the *Planning Act* and is guided by the Planning Scheme. Each area under this jurisdiction has local members which add local knowledge to any decision-making or reporting.

The Planning Commission has no local representatives, just people appointed by the minister. In the case of amendments to the Planning Scheme the final say is still with the minister, but at least the minister knows that the report comes from a more representative body.

It should also be noted the Planning Commission can appear before the Development Consent Authority when it is conducting a hearing if it so wishes.

I commend this bill to the House and am happy for it to be sent to a committee under the opening of parliament policy promoted by the government.

Debate adjourned.

MOTION
Northern Territory Taxi Industry

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I move that:

1. the Assembly refers to the Public Accounts Committee for inquiry and reports the efficiency, effectiveness and probity of the regulation and licensing of the Northern Territory taxi industry, having particular regard to:
 - (a) the allocation of taxi licences by the Department of Transport
 - (b) the subleasing of taxi licences
 - (c) the future of the taxi industry in the Northern Territory.
2. this resolution has effect despite any inconsistency in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory taxi industry is in definite need of a major overhaul. There are two areas of concern that need attention:

1. the allocation of taxi licences
2. the 'not lawful' practice of subleasing taxi licences.

I was first approached about the problems within the Alice Springs taxi industry approximately 12 months ago. A group of people who work in the taxi industry told me a story of how four taxi licences had been issued in Alice Springs in November 2015. The process used to allocate these four taxi licences was, apparently, not compliant with the process advertised by the Northern Territory Department of Transport on its website, which stipulated that a ballot is used to allocate all taxi licences.

These four taxi licences were allocated without using a ballot. Unusually, these four Alice Springs taxi licences were issued at the discretion of the Director of Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport who is authorised on ministerial determinations under the Northern Territory *Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Act*.

When I checked the Department of Transport's website to see what information was provided pertaining to the allocation of taxi licences, this is what I found out:

There is a cap on the number of taxi licences operating in Darwin and Alice Springs and licences are currently issued through a ballot.

Taxi ballots are held when licences become available. The ballot is advertised at least three weeks in advance.

If a taxi licence has expired for more than three months it will be considered cancelled and placed on a list of licences available in the ballot

I found no mention on the website of the discretionary powers of the Director of Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport, who I will refer to as the director, to allocate taxi licences in the Northern Territory. This process of allocating taxi licences determined by the director was not mentioned on the Department of Transport's website.

Why did the director determine who was allocated these four taxi licences in November 2015 and why was a ballot not used as advertised?

The explanation given by Department of Transport officials as to why a ballot was not used to allocate these four taxi licences was simply that the director has the authority to do so if he wishes. In this case, the director assessed that the four Alice Springs taxi licences available for allocation were being subleased to four parties. The director assessed that the parties subleasing these taxi licences had invested considerable money into their subleases and if they were not allocated these taxi licences they would lose their investment and be placed in financial hardship.

The people who were unlawfully subleasing the four taxi licences were allocated the licences by the Department of Transport, the minister and the Director of Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport.

Most people involved in the Alice Springs taxi industry are of the view that this decision, although technically within the determination of the act, was unfair, peculiar, not transparent, highly controversial and lacking goodwill. But, most of all, the perception is that this decision, made by the director, effectively condoned the unlawful practice of subleasing taxi licences in the NT.

The decision effectively rewarded the four parties who were subleasing those taxi licences. The decision took away the right of anyone else to have a chance of being allocated a taxi licence by not using a ballot. The process was not done openly and transparently. Interested parties had to wait many months for the Department of Transport to give a full explanation as to why this extraordinary decision was made to allocate these four Alice Springs taxi licences without using a ballot.

I, too, wrote to the Department of Transport, asking for a full explanation. Instead of a written response, which is what I specifically requested, I was offered a face-to-face briefing with the Department of Transport. I declined the briefing and, again, requested a response in writing so I could share this with my constituents within the taxi industry. I did not receive a written response from the Department of Transport in answer to the question, 'Why was a ballot used to allocate these four taxi licences?'

Why was there such secrecy? If this process is acceptable, fully legal and well known in the taxi industry, why were people not informed of these decisions made by the Director of Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport in advance rather than in hindsight? One reason for the director to do this discreetly is obviously because it would have created a furore.

The decision to not use a ballot has been met with considerable anger by many people in the taxi industry in Alice Springs. Understandably, people feel they have been deceived, ripped off and treated unfairly, and that there has been an injustice. A full and detailed explanation still needs to be provided to Territorians as to why this decision was made by the minister and by the Director of Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport.

Government should always operate fairly and as openly as possible. It would appear the Department of Transport has failed this test on this occasion.

Why was a ballot not used to allocate these taxi licences? The Australian Taxi Drivers Association in Alice Springs wrote several letters to the Department of Transport asking for an explanation as to why the department chose to not use the ballot system to allocate these four licences. The taxi drivers became frustrated and dissatisfied with the lack of details and the responses they received from the Department of Transport, the Minister for Transport and even the Chief Minister. The responses they received were considered inadequate and the questions were not answered to their satisfaction.

The Alice Springs taxi drivers group then resorted to using the services of a solicitor as a means of getting some proper answers from the bureaucracy. Most of the taxi drivers in this group are from an Indian or Pakistani background. English is a second language for all these people, many of whom have not lived in Australia for very long. As a group they are somewhat disempowered by their ethnicity, their language and their need to work hard and long to generate an income to survive.

Taxi drivers work long hours. They are all self-employed and the security of their work is usually tentative based on the relationship they have with the taxi licence holders who pay them to drive. The solicitor who the drivers engaged was able to get a much more substantial response from the Department of Transport and the minister, who at the time was Peter Chandler.

Although the responses still remain slow, perhaps it is a reflection of the pace at which the department works, but it was incredibly frustrating for the drivers who wanted answers.

The large group of taxi drivers I met with regularly over the last 12 months all feel very angry at the process used to allocate these four taxi licences in November 2015. They wanted answers to questions regarding the process used. They wanted to know why this allocation process was not made clear to the people in the taxi industry. Why was the whole Alice Springs taxi industry not informed that a ballot would not be used? Why was there no open and transparent process used? Is this process fair and ethical?

Over the last six months I have developed an understanding of the machinations of the taxi industry, particularly in Alice Springs, regarding taxi licences and the practice of subleasing. The taxi industry is a tough industry. It employs over 100 people in Alice Springs as drivers, operators, call centre workers and licence holders. In Alice Springs the taxi industry is regulated by the Department of Transport. The number of taxi licences is strictly controlled by the Department of Transport. I am told there are currently 36 taxi licences in Alice Springs. It is unclear, in some areas, what a regulated taxi industry means in practice. It remains unclear to me what the Department of Transport does to monitor and ensure compliance in two areas: the allocation of taxi licences and the practice of subleasing.

Other areas of the taxi industry are reasonably well regulated, and these are not the focus of this motion before parliament today. Darwin also has a regulated taxi industry. It has a ballot system to allocate taxi licences. In July 2016, 13 taxi licences were allocated, using a ballot, in Darwin. This information was published in the 2015–16 Department of Transport annual report on page 25. In the annual report it states that there was a taxi ballot on 1 July 2016 which allocated the 13 taxi licences; there is a list of exactly who was allocated those licences.

The question begs, why was a ballot system used in Darwin in 2016 to allocate 13 taxi licences, but not in Alice Springs in November 2015 to allocate four taxi licences? Why was the allocation of the four Alice Springs licences not listed in the 2015–16 Department of Transport annual report?

From my investigation, it is clear that everyone who applies for a taxi licence should be directly advised when a taxi licence is available for allocation and that all applicants should be advised of how the taxi licence will be allocated by ballot or at the discretion of the director. If allocated at the discretion of the director, the applicant should be provided with a reason for this. At all times the director should aim to be open and transparent in the process of allocating taxi licences.

To stop the proliferation of taxi licences being subleased, I recommend that all taxi licence holders are required to provide proof of residency every 12 months, in line with the terms of a taxi licence. The practice of subleasing is rife in the Northern Territory. In Alice Springs it is estimated that up to 50% of all Alice Springs taxi licences are subleased. Subleasing is not legal. It is not lawful. This means, rather than being illegal, it is not lawful because it has never been tested in court. It is clear that the *Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Act* does not provide for the practice of subleasing taxi licences. The taxi industry is, by provisions in the legislation, a highly-regulated industry that does not provide for what is corrupt, black-market trading of taxi licences. Even within the taxi industry the trading of taxi licences is referred to as the black market.

If the Member for Araluen knows about this black market of trading taxi subleases, the Department of Transport must also know. It would know more than the Member for Araluen. The Department of Transport has been turning a blind eye to this market for a long time and I want to know why. Why does the Department of Transport continue to ignore unlawful activity in one of its core areas of business and responsibility; that is, regulating and ensuring compliance in the taxi industry in the Northern Territory?

Taxi licence holders usually decide to sublease their licences for a number of reasons. Some have left the Northern Territory and can no longer personally operate their taxis. Subleasing generates a generous income for the licence holder because they can name the price and people will pay it to sublease the licence. Taxi licence holders sometimes do not want to work, but still want to generate an income from their precious taxi licence.

Subleasing is a dodgy practice. Everyone knows it is happening. I have spoken to people who have taxi subleases, people paying anything up to \$30 000 for subleases in Alice Springs; then they pay a weekly fee to the taxi licence holder for using the sublease, usually around \$200 a week, I understand.

The Department of Transport is regularly provided information or evidence of people subleasing. The department knows it is happening. It is the role of the Department of Transport to stamp out subleasing. People within the industry want change; they want subleasing stopped. Even people who sublease want this practice stopped. It is a racket and they want a fair taxi industry.

The question needs to be asked, what does the Department of Transport do with information it receives about cases of subleasing? What is the process of investigation undertaken? What is the time frame used to report and investigate these matters? What information is reported back to the person dobbing in or reporting these allegations of subleasing?

These internal processes and procedures of the Department of Transport for dealing with complaints, irregularities and problems remain unclear and undefined for the likes of the taxi drivers of Alice Springs.

I recommend that the Department of Transport reviews and reforms these aspects of its operations—the internal processing and handling of complaints, such as allegations of subleasing of taxi licences. I recommend that the Department of Transport makes sure its website and other public information is accurate and gives people clear information about the processes and functions of the department. To say you allocate taxi licences in the Northern Territory using a ballot system and then not use a ballot system to allocate four taxi licences is misleading, unfair and unethical.

I recommend that the Department of Transport improves its communication with the taxi industry, particularly the taxi drivers. It is clear to me that the taxi drivers of Alice Springs are at the bottom of the pecking order, the most disempowered, vulnerable and misinformed. Better systems of communication between the Department of Transport and the taxi drivers needs to be established. Part of that responsibility falls with the taxi drivers to be better coordinated as a group and more communicative with each other. The taxi drivers in Alice Springs are already working on this and have formed an association so they may be better represented in their industry now.

For a long time the Northern Territory taxi industry has been poorly regulated, which has fostered a culture of dodgy activity. For whatever reason, it seems the Department of Transport is not doing its job effectively. It is not regulating the taxi industry in a diligent, fair and transparent manner. It must take the large part of the responsibility for these questionable and unethical practices dominating the taxi industry.

The decision by the Department of Transport to award these four taxi licences in November 2015 to four people who were subleasing was a dubious decision. The four people who were unlawfully subleasing and were then granted the taxi licences were never sanctioned, punished or fined by the Department of Transport in any way. These four people did not receive retribution of any kind from the Department of Transport for knowingly and intentionally participating in the unlawful practice of subleasing. Quite the opposite—the Department of Transport rewarded them.

Anyone who knowingly engages in any activity that is not lawful also knows they stand to lose what they have gambled. They should not be rewarded for their high-risk unlawful practices. This decision by the Minister for Transport, the director and the Department of Transport is not fair and could be seen as collusion. What message does this send to the taxi industry of the Northern Territory from the Department of Transport? It is a very confusing message, that the ballot system may not apply where people are found to be subleasing the taxi licences that have become available, that subleasing is not a problem, and that people who sublease will be rewarded for their illegal dealings.

The small number of taxi licence holders I spoke to in Alice Springs all agree that the industry needs an overhaul, and they supported my push to undertake a review, especially into the practice of subleasing.

All stakeholders know this is a dysfunctional system. Most stakeholders would agree the system is broken and needs to be fixed. If you are to have a regulated taxi industry, the government needs to properly regulate it. The Department of Transport needs to allocate the resources to ensure compliance with all the rules, legislation and requirements. The Department of Transport either does not have the resources or it has chosen not to allocate the resources into this area.

How do you stop the practice of subleasing? The illegal practice of subleasing taxi licences is not unique to Alice Springs; the problem exists in the Darwin industry also. We are talking about a small industry in which

everyone watches each other very closely. Nothing goes unnoticed. The system as it operates now, because of the proliferation and possible acceptance by the Department of Transport of these irregular practices—there is a sense of unfairness and even corruption. People have clearly been allowed to get away with doing the wrong thing for far too long.

Time is up—no more. It is time this parliament fixed the taxi industry in the NT. The situation as it stands is pitting the different factions against each other and possibly heading for serious legal consequences. It would be totally remiss of this parliament not to do what I am proposing today—to allow the Public Accounts Committee to conduct a full inquiry and investigation into these matters involving all stakeholders in the taxi industry of the NT.

From my understanding of the taxi industry over the past 12 months, it would take no time for anyone investigating this industry to get the names of people holding taxi licences or subleases, or those holding licences who are living outside of the NT.

What is missing is the goodwill and the intention to truly regulate this industry. This motion is not meant to be a witch hunt; it is purely intended to fix up some long-term, entrenched, systemic problems. It is time for this system to be repaired, for the NT parliament to provide the support for an inquiry and for an investigation to take place.

An internal Department of Transport review will not be acceptable. Many of the problems I have identified are entrenched practices within the Department of Transport—possibly negligent, possibly corruption, and I emphasise ‘possibly’.

An inquiry into the NT taxi industry must be independent and impartial. For this reason the option of a Department of Transport-driven review into these problems will be treated with scepticism and distrust. The Department of Transport should not be responsible for a review of this importance, in which its practices have directly contributed to the problem. After some consideration it is clear that the best option is to hold a parliamentary inquiry, undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee. This provides the most impartial option. The committee has a history of undertaking comprehensive investigations of controversial public matters, such as this, involving the NT Government. The Public Accounts Committee is well placed to meet with all stakeholders within the taxi industry and objectively assess the problems and recommend reforms.

I look forward to the debate this evening on this very important issue, and I commend this motion to the House.

Ms MANISON (Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Araluen for bringing this very important motion before the House to appoint a Public Accounts Committee inquiry to report into the efficiency, effectiveness and probity of regulation and licensing of the Northern Territory taxi industry.

As a new minister in this area, and from a local member perspective prior to becoming a minister, this is an area people have discussed with me before. People have reported stories of the issues of subleasing and the frustrations they have faced in relation to that.

I went into the job as a new minister, engaging with the taxi industry and the peak bodies. One of my earlier meetings was with the Alice Springs taxi association representatives, and it was a wonderful opportunity to hear directly from drivers about the taxi industry and their frustrations with their experiences.

One issue was subleasing—trying to get a grasp on how far and how wide this issue extends throughout the Northern Territory’s taxi industry. It is a very murky issue. As the minister, I want to get to the bottom of this and have clarity on the issue. It was deeply concerning how frank people were, including drivers, plate holders and people from peak representative groups. The figures I have seen quoted range between 30% and 60%, which is deeply concerning.

As a previous member of the Public Accounts Committee, I am wholly supportive of this motion, as is government. It is the best place to take this type of matter to give it the scrutiny it deserves, and we can ensure that is the process of the parliament. I will ensure that whatever the requests of the Public Accounts Committee are in regard to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, we will provide that information and the staff to speak to the committee about their issues and questions. It is a welcome opportunity for drivers, plate holders and the peak representative bodies of the taxi industry to be able to have their say and share their experiences on the record. It is timely that we get to the bottom of this.

The Alice Springs experience shows that there is inconsistency in the application of the regulations and rules. As a minister, I like consistent guidance. There needs to be a consistent approach to the issue. We were not in government at the time and I was not the minister involved in this issue in Alice Springs, but there were four plates which were found to be subleased.

The people subleasing made considerable investments into those taxis because it was an opportunity to support their families and so forth. They appealed to government at the time in regard to the financial hardships they would face if those subleased plates were taken away from them. The government at the time made a decision in regard to the allocation of those plates, which meant they did not go to ballot. This created an immense amount of frustration for those drivers who just wanted to have a go and have control over their own destiny and the future of their family. Once they have the plate, they are effectively running their own business. We all want to know that we control our own destiny.

There has not been a ballot in Alice Springs for a long time due to the population issues there. When four plates came up—four opportunities for four families to run their own business—they felt incredibly frustrated that they did not get the opportunity to apply for them. I heard that frustration loud and clear from representatives from the Alice Springs taxi association. You can see how competitive it is, even in Darwin, when there is a release of a ballot, and how people do everything they can to get into that ballot since it is a rare opportunity.

As a minister I want to approach this in a consistent way. If you were to use that Alice Springs example alone, you would see that is not consistent with what the rules are. It is an issue I would like to get to the bottom of. I think the Public Accounts Committee is a good way to do it.

We want to see a strong taxi industry in the Northern Territory. We want to know it is a reliable and safe industry that takes care of its workers and provides vital services to people across the Northern Territory. Taxis are very important transport options for people in all regions—seniors, people without licences, without access to vehicles or with disabilities. Our taxi networks are essential.

The taxi industry is regulated under the *Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Act*, and the enforcement of the act, as the Member for Araluen pointed out, is undertaken by the transport inspectors based in Alice Springs and the commercial passenger vehicle inspectors who are visiting or based in Darwin.

Departmental staff based in Alice Springs are supported by Darwin staff and administer the act, including the delivery of accreditation and licences. Under the act the minister can determine or direct, in the public interest, how many licences are issued. Currently, allocation of any licences which become available is by a ballot process, and, as the Member for Araluen pointed out, in Alice Springs that did not occur.

Plates can be transferred in special circumstances, such as incapacity or death. The director, under the act, issues a licence to a person in order for that person to directly operate that licence. Subleasing is not the intention of the act and the act prohibits the transfer of licences to another person.

The department, following the rules, can cancel somebody's licence if a person transfers the responsibility to another person. If they sublease that is what is meant to happen. Clearly we have seen a very public practice which has created an issue in Alice Springs, where that simply did not occur. The feedback I have received from the department in the past is that it is sometimes difficult for them to prove somebody is subleasing a plate. It can be very complex in tackling some of those investigations.

People want consistency and to have confidence that they know what they are getting when they step into a taxi. It creates a whole new level of oversight—what regulation and confidence can somebody have in that investment when something is subleased and government has no sight of that whatsoever when it is meant to? People step into that taxi expecting regulation from government. Once it gets subleased that line starts becoming very blurred.

I want to see, in this Public Accounts Committee inquiry, that we are able to ascertain how broad the issue of subleasing is, to understand how far it goes throughout the Northern Territory in each regional market. It is important for us to know. We need to know how far this goes. We need to know if there is a positive effect of this occurring; is there a negative effect? We need to understand the key issues around this. Why is the subleasing occurring in the first place? What are the impacts?

It is concerning to think if plates are being subleased, and it is not a legal practice, it is effectively money under the table. It is not taxed. Where is it going? You hear stories from interstate and sometimes overseas. We really want to get to the bottom of those issues.

For an element of fairness we need to establish the solutions going forward if it is found to be an extensive issue. We hear a lot of stories, but this is about seeing proof behind those figures. It is important to look at how other jurisdictions have tackled these issues. In some jurisdictions people pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to own a licence plate. In the Northern Territory that is not how it works; we lease plates to people. There is a cap as to how many plates are available and now it appears subleasing is rife. There are some questions that need to be answered.

When you look at the costs of those plates—in Alice Springs a licence holder will pay an annual licence fee of \$16 445 for a standard taxi, or \$8223 for a multipurpose taxi, which is the wheelchair accessible taxi. The maximum number is limited to one taxi per 900 of population, or 36, whichever is greater. In Darwin the annual standard taxi plate cost is \$20 240, and a multipurpose plate is \$10 120. Katherine has a standard taxi cost of \$11 385, and a multipurpose plate costs \$5693. In Nhulunbuy a standard plate is \$6325, and a multipurpose plate is \$3163. Tennant Creek has a standard plate cost of \$5693, and a multipurpose plate is \$2847.

The number of plates—this is where we recognise that not everyone can lease a plate, because there is a cap on the numbers. In Alice Springs the taxi industry is currently made up of 36 standard and nine multipurpose taxis. Darwin has 156 standard and 34 multipurpose taxis. Katherine has 19 standard and four multipurpose taxis. Nhulunbuy has seven standard taxis. I apologise to the Member for Barkly as I do not have the number of taxis for Tennant Creek.

A member: One.

Ms MANISON: One; there you go.

There has not been a taxi ballot in Alice Springs for some time, which has further added to the angst of drivers. In May 2016 there was a ballot with 13 licences added—nine standard taxis and four multipurpose taxis. When the ballots are open everyone has a go. If they already have some, they will try to get more; a driver will try to get their first one. It is a big process and there are a lot of interest.

The Ridesharing Steering Committee has highlighted many elements of the commercial passenger vehicle industry and worked very hard to look at the issues. I have had extremely strong feedback. We are looking at options of how we can create a fair playing field for the taxi industry to allow for ridesharing.

It is important that we have a strong taxi industry. These people have invested a lot of time and effort in their future in the Territory to ensure they are supported through this technological change and the emergence of the new service. I am looking at the issue very closely. I cannot stress enough how many taxi plate operators have knocked on the door in the last few weeks, talking about their concerns and saying if the cap were removed it would end the issue of subleasing, but what would it mean for those who have invested a lot of time, effort, money and support for the Territory into the taxi industry?

Some people say it will eliminate the issue of subleasing, but I am concerned about the impact it will have on those who have done the right thing in the taxi industry for a very long time. I have received clear feedback from the plate owners that the last release of licences in the Darwin area—the extra 13 plates—hurt them. They thought that went too far and that the removal of the cap would not be the way to go. I have heard that very loud and clear; we are considering that.

In 1999 the Northern Territory Government bought back all taxi licences from licence holders for a price equal to that being paid on the open market. At the time, the buyback cost to the Territory government was in the order of \$27m, so it was not a cheap exercise. In 2003, in response to concerns raised by the industry, citing low driver income and oversupply of taxis, the government took the decision to place a cap on the number of taxi licences available in Darwin and Alice Springs.

The ratio used was one taxi per 900 head of population, and any new licences were meant to be issued through a ballot process. As we have seen recently in Alice Springs, there was an inconsistent application of that commitment. The department assures me that if it can get sufficient information on subleasing when it is reported then it pursues it. However, it can be very difficult, and this is why I think the PAC process will be helpful and constructive moving forward. We can get a clear understanding of the issues so people in the taxi industry will be able to have their say, put it on the record and make a submission so we can get some real clarity around the issue.

People in the industry are very willing to have a chat and share their experiences. I imagine a lot of people will be keen to get their views on the record as part of this work. There are also many people who might not

necessarily be driving taxis anymore but are still in town and know a lot about it, and they might want to share their knowledge with the committee in its investigations.

Government supports this motion. Referring this matter to the Public Accounts Committee is very sensible—to provide scrutiny, transparency and an opportunity for people in the industry and the public to share their stories and views on what should happen going forward in this matter of subleasing.

I hope we get some very firm figures on how extensive people think subleasing is. I hope we can understand the impacts of it, positive and negative. I hope to have a serious look at some of the recommendations from the PAC—ways that we can make a stronger, better taxi industry for all Territorians. There are a lot of nervous people in the taxi industry, but I give my assurance that we support the taxi industry going forward.

With regard to changes in ridesharing, we will make sure it has a strong future in the Territory and we will make a level playing field for the drivers. This is an important matter. I have not been able to get any real clarity on it, but I think the PAC is the right place—as the minister responsible, I look forward to that report. I look forward to ensuring the department fully participates with the committee, and we look forward to the findings. I will watch this very closely.

I thank the Member for Araluen for bringing this to the House.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, the opposition also supports the motion to refer this to the Public Accounts Committee.

The Treasurer said a couple of things that I completely agree with—that is, if you simply remove the cap on the number of licences, you have an impact on the value of those licences. I have drawn a comparison on this before when people have told me there was a stack of deadman blocks down at Southport and asked why they were not released. I said to them, 'If you just release all those blocks of land and put them on the open market, the fellow who paid \$100 000 for his block yesterday will only be able to sell it for \$50 000, so they will not be very happy'.

It is a major consideration. A lot of cab drivers have raised similar issues with me, such as those raised by the Member for Araluen, about subleasing. A lot of these people are not game to stick their necks out or put their names to it. I hope the Public Accounts Committee can come to some conclusion.

I looked at this motion at the same time the ridesharing position paper was released. I looked at the position paper and noticed some conflict with the taxi tax, as I refer to it. I am not saying I agree or disagree with it. A lot of people do not realise that if we implement something like Uber you have to control, regulate and police it.

The Member for Araluen has said there does not seem to be any policing by the department, and that is a concern. The ridesharing report highlights that \$4m a year is being raised in fees from the licences, and then it recommends we cost shift that to \$1 or \$1.50 for every ride. I think it said there were about three million point-to-point trips annually in the Northern Territory, so if you charge \$1.30 that is \$3.9m—so you get your \$4m.

My concern is if policing is not being undertaken effectively, what is happening to that \$4m we have now? How is it being spent? I think it is a clear role for the Public Accounts Committee. Looking at that cost being shifted to consumers—Uber will be set up in Darwin, but it will not be set up in Alice Springs, and definitely not in Tennant Creek or Katherine, but everyone will have to pay the additional cost.

It is a bit disconcerting to hear that the money is not being used efficiently by the department in its policing. That is a very clear indication that it should go to the Public Accounts Committee; it is in the committee's scope. I went through the Ridesharing Steering Committee's report and I could not find anything that looked at this. It disappointed me that it missed that side of it.

In New South Wales they were charging \$1 per trip for five years to compensate for the buyback of the plates. That was a recommendation in the report. South Australia uses a dollar levy similar to ours.

From my point of view, whilst we had a lot of surveys I am not sure they were on the right people. We did 3200 surveys—20% of the taxi vehicles are multipurpose, but only 3% of people surveyed have disabilities, so we are missing something there. Only 13% of the respondents were over 55. To me, that is a small percentage. In some regard, we need to be careful when using the information from the surveys.

The opposition supports the motion to go to the Public Accounts Committee. I do not have to amend the motion to say the Public Accounts Committee also should take into account the position paper that was done on Uber—to look at the taxi tax and how that money has been spent in the past, and how it will be spent in the future to make sure the policing issue is properly addressed.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased the government is supporting this reference to the Public Accounts Committee. The Member for Araluen has spoken to me and raised a number of her concerns.

It is good that this has been broadened, because the taxi industry has its ups and downs. I was getting some information while other members were speaking—I knew there had been some reviews of the taxi industry. In May 2002 the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Environment conducted a review of the commercial vehicle industry. A discussion paper was released, which included some recommendations. That would be worth looking at.

In February 2003 a report called *The Impact of Deregulation on the Northern Territory Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry* was done by Professor Des Nicholls, School of Finance and Applied Statistics, Faculty of Economics and Commerce, Australian National University ACT. That was also set up by the Northern Territory Government.

I have not had a chance to go through those documents; all I can say is we have to be careful we do not reinvent the wheel and have another inquiry. These inquiries are worth looking at. If we do have another inquiry it should be a smaller one ...

Mr McCarthy: One more—2009. That was a big inquiry.

Mr WOOD: I thought there might have been more.

If we are to have the PAC look at this issue—some documents are worth looking at.

I support the Member for Araluen and I thank the government for also supporting the motion.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am thrilled to hear the contributions made by the Deputy Chief Minister, the Opposition Leader and the Member for Nelson, who have all stood in support of this very important motion this evening to undertake a parliamentary inquiry into the Northern Territory taxi industry, specifically focusing on the practice of subleasing taxi licences and the sometimes questionable allocation of taxi licences.

I want to add a personal touch to this debate. The Deputy Chief Minister touched on this in her speech. The taxi industry is about people; it is about some amazing personalities, people from all over the world, people who have lived here a long time and those who have lived here a short time.

The people I have had a lot to do with over the last 12 months while investigating this matter are mainly a group of taxi drivers, most of whom are family men from India or Pakistan, as I mentioned earlier. The fact they missed out on being part of a ballot in the allocation of the four taxi licences in November 2015 had a profound impact on these people. These people have come from nothing to Australia, looking for a future and an opportunity to make money. They are driven by the idea of becoming wealthy and securing a positive life for their families. When this happened to them they felt a great sense of injustice; they felt their future had been ripped away from them. They felt that the opportunity they thought they would be availed of in Australia, with a new life, had been taken away from them.

I have heard many stories over the last 12 months, including stories from people who own taxi licences, who have described some of the difficulties they have experienced. I spoke to a chap in a meeting who sat next to me and said, 'Robyn, I purchased a taxi sublease for around \$30 000 or \$40 000 in Alice Springs'. He told me it was crippling because he was required, as part of the agreement, which is not in any formal contract—it is based on goodwill and a verbal discussion—to pay a couple of hundred dollars every week to the taxi licence holder, as well as \$30 000 or \$40 000 to buy the lease. He said to me, 'I just cannot get ahead. This is not right. It is not legal or ethical. I would be prepared to lose the \$40 000 I paid for my taxi sublease rather than see this situation continue.' You have to question who this system benefits; this unlawful practice of subleasing only benefits a few people.

The Deputy Chief Minister questioned whether this was being declared as income by the taxi licence holders. There are many levels of concern in the scenarios described to me and to the Deputy Chief

Minister in her investigations. I am pleased at the outcome, as it seems I have the full support of the Chamber tonight on the inquiry into the taxi industry.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION
Use of Language in the Legislative Assembly

Mr GUYULA (Nhulunbuy): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that:

1. this Assembly remove all words in Standing Order 23A and replace with the following: A member may rise to speak in any language other than English so long as an oral translation is provided in the English language by the same member immediately prior to or after the words spoken in the language other than English
2. a new Standing Order 23B be adopted as follows: A member may be assisted on the floor of the Assembly by an interpreter to provide interpretation from the English language into the first language of the member and from the first language of the member into English. The interpreter will only be present for the purposes of interpreting and not for any other purposes and must vacate the floor when not undertaking those duties.

Currently, according to Standing Order 23A, I must translate English into my language of Yolngu Matha. This does not make sense to me when I am speaking to an audience of English and other non-Yolngu Matha speakers. The better practice would be to interpret my Yolngu Matha language into English when speaking to *Balanda* or clan groups other than Yolngu.

In this order it helps me, a speaker of English as a foreign language, to participate in dialogue. It helps me get the depth of my thinking out of my mind and into the world. Once my thoughts are expressed through my native tongue, it is easier for me to interpret that idea into English.

When debate is happening in this Chamber I am thinking in two languages all the time. If I am then to respond in debate, first with English and then with Yolngu Matha, I am effectively doing triple the thinking work compared to monolinguals. If I can respond first in Yolngu Matha and then reflect what I have said into English, I will at least have followed my most natural thinking process and saved some effort. I will still be doing more thinking work, but at least the situation is improved.

I have requested that all the written requirements of the existing order be scrapped because, in my opinion, they offer no practical purpose except to make non-English speakers do extra work. There is already an oral translation, so why would the Chamber require a written translation?

Paragraph two of the current orders says:

Apart from existing arrangements for extensions of speaking times, no allocation of additional speaking time is provided for translation purposes.

There is no point having this in the order except to remove Chamber flexibility and choice. There are already existing orders regarding time allowances, so why go further? My motion is about this Chamber's flexibility and choice, and it is about increased participation for members. I do not know the original intent of the current order, but it seems punitive to me, making more work for members like me who speak English as a foreign language.

I do not have a problem with accepting English as a national language or as the primary language of the Chamber, but one out of every four people in the Northern Territory speaks another language before English. Indigenous Territorians make up most of this number. We have done nothing wrong in being born speaking our own languages. To be forced to do double or triple the amount of work compared to a native English speaker just to participate is not okay, and it is not efficient or fair.

My motion also suggests we allow an interpreter on the floor. This is also about members' timely ability to participate. It allows a member like me to write speeches or provide responses and debate in my own language and have it orally translated without the imposition of an extreme added workload. A member may not always use this option, but, nonetheless, it would be there to allow improved participation. Not only could I use this option, but others in this Chamber might also find this valuable. I have worked as an

interpreter, and translation into written material, compared to oral interpretations, requires an extreme increase in workload.

The cost of this proposal is also minimal, especially if we remove the imposition to provide everything as written translations, which take many hours of work and cost a lot of money. The current order will cost a lot of money if I start using it.

To be honest, allowing an interpreter into the Chamber is common sense to me. Our Madayin system of law operates over several language groups across the north from East to West Arnhem Land. When we have official business and, say, a Kunwinjku speaker from the Bininj attends a Yolngu hosted Ngarra parliament, or other gathering, we arrange an interpreter so the official can communicate fairly.

The same would happen to me if I, a Yolngu Matha speaker, had to do official business in West Arnhem Land. The Bininj would arrange an interpreter for me. This happens all the time and has been happening for thousands of years. We accept this as fair and honourable behaviour. Out of this experience I, representing the Yolngu Ngarra authority, was surprised to discover that a similar courtesy was not allowed in this place.

In any case, we need to start seeing language needs, especially those affecting Indigenous language groups, as base expenditure in the Northern Territory. These matters should be perceived as a right for Indigenous Territorians.

Language is a big issue for the Northern Territory. One out of four people in the Territory do not speak English as their home language. Language difference, or, more so, the inability of government systems to accommodate language differences, is potentially the single biggest issue that causes the gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Territorians. The inability of government systems to accommodate language needs for Territorians means that more people go to gaol or are sick, and fewer people receive adequate education.

We need to address all Territorians' needs. We need to address language needs. The obvious place to start this is here in this Chamber. Thank you for hearing me. I commend my motion to all my fellow members.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I completely understand the frustration of the Member for Nhulunbuy in this area. I support the parliament coming up with a solution to this. I have spoken in this parliament before in regard to backpackers and the problems you have in translation.

If they are Vietnamese or German it does not matter; they need to translate into English. If the people they are working with happen to be Vietnamese they have to translate from English into Vietnamese. Things are often misinterpreted or the meaning has not gotten across properly. From that point of view I support the member in the sense that it is a lot easier to speak in your native language and have it translated later.

In my own electorate I make a lot of trips—English is a second language out there. Some of the constituents there do not even speak English. While I have been able to pick up some words—if I know what they are talking about to start with I can understand how the conversation goes, but if I have no idea where they have started I have a lot of trouble picking it up and I never try to speak their language. There are a lot of difficulties in that. I always make sure I have a local with me or someone who wants to help to ensure that I get the right interpretation.

I think this subject has come up before. From my point of view, it would be to my advantage to have the English translation of a speech before someone read it in another language.

I think this debate should be taken up by the Standing Orders Committee. Even for members in here to say it is a good idea to review it—all the different proposals need to be given consideration. We, as a parliament, need to find a workable solution that meets all the requirements of not only the people with English as a second language, but everyone in this parliament.

That is all I want to say at this point in time. I hope the other members make a contribution as it is an important issue.

Mr MILLS (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, I support this important motion, which has within it a significant and challenging issue for all of us to consider, that is, the recognition of language. It is not specified in the

motion, but I make this comment in anticipation that this is referred to Standing Orders Committee, which I think is an appropriate place.

We need to acknowledge that it is not just any language but, more specifically, Australian Aboriginal languages. Inherent in that is the challenge for all of us to consider the place and respect Australian Aboriginal languages, which precede the establishment of the institution in which I am using English. We are in a phase of transition of making sure all our citizens are able to move into this space. Just as we have bilingual programs in schools, where we move from the known to the unknown—the language spoken at home moving to the language of the dominant culture—you have to start somewhere.

I want to see, in any reference to the Standing Orders Committee, that we are specifying this to be any Australian Aboriginal language. I have an additional reason based on the history of this place. I recall one member who was proficient in another language. He was born into a Dutch family, and we knew that by his surname. He surprised all of us by using a similar standing order to seek permission to speak in Dutch. It was not for the edification of the Chamber but for some other purpose. That is not what this is about. It is not so I can get up from time to time and speak in Indonesian just for the fun of it; that is not right. In the case of Australian Aboriginal languages it is a very different matter, and it moves our thinking in the direction of how we can start to reflect on deeper issues for the Northern Territory.

The Member for Katherine would be familiar with the parliament in East Timor. They seriously have to engage this issue as there are three languages in play. There are members in that Chamber who may not clearly understand the words being expressed by one speaker, say in Tetum. Someone's dominant language may be Portuguese and another may be Indonesian, and they have to work that out.

If you work with languages you have to ensure the meaning is established. Knowing how difficult it is in this Chamber, all speaking English to gain a correct understanding of any legislation, imagine if it was coming from three different languages. That is just an illustration of a very near neighbour; they have a real challenge to develop a common understanding through three different languages. That is a serious investment in the process of making sure everybody understands the decisions being made; by understanding the language you are understanding the culture.

This is a significant motion. I first saw it in regard to the capacity to have additional resources for someone who may want to speak in another language, but it is a very significant issue for all of us, as Territorians and Australians, to consider. The Territory could lead the way by specifying that it is Australian Aboriginal language for a particular reason; those languages precede the languages currently being used in this Chamber by convention.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, as people know, about two years ago I went to northern Canada. One of the territories I went to was Nunavut, which is mainly Iqaluit territory. Most people there speak Inuktitut, which is their language, but they also speak French and English.

Their parliament is set up to cater for three languages. If you are sitting at your desk as a member of parliament there will be a radio receiver with a set of headphones. If you are an English member of the parliament you can put those on and listen to the Inuktitut language being translated automatically into English. It was not often I heard French there, but there was a movement of English and Inuktitut across the Chamber. To do that, they had a series of sound-proof rooms, roughly where our cameras are. They employed local Inuktitut people who were translators. Those people translated immediately from the language that was being spoken.

Debates were held in either language, and there was little change from either Inuktitut or English, depending on the speaker. English has its own issues when it comes to native languages being used to translate English words, especially technical words. I will read from the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* called *Inuktitut and Parliamentary Terminology* by Paul Okalik. He is talking about the Nunavut Legislative Assembly:

Our Chamber is well equipped to deal with bilingual and even trilingual proceedings. Simultaneous interpretation is available to all Members and witnesses. Our Hansard reflects the languages that are spoken in the House. English and Inuktitut versions of Hansard are produced on a daily basis.

The choice of language used in the House is not only determined by the preference of the individual Member but, in many cases, is influenced by the topic under discussion. Certain subjects relating to modern life and its technical aspects lack formal Inuktitut terminology. For example, during the Second Legislative Assembly (2004-2008), a three-day debate in Committee of the Whole focused

on the issue of 'bad gas' with Members discussing and questioning the chemical properties of that year's supply of gasoline, which is purchased in bulk once a year and transported to the North by ship. While the cost and quality of gasoline has a significant impact on traditional activities such as hunting and harvesting, in order for MLAs to discuss the specific details affecting cost and quality, we had to resort to English in order to ask questions about such gasoline additives as Methylcyclopentadienyl Manganese Tricarbonyl (MMT).

He was emphasising that even if you are fluent in a language, you sometimes have to refer back to English because there is no translation of those technical words.

In some ways Iqaluit people had it a little easier because there is only one native language there, and then there is English and French. I am not sure how many Aboriginal languages we have in the Northern Territory; it must be close to a hundred. Some of them are dying away. My wife is from the mouth of the Daly River. She is a Watyiginy woman and her language is Batjamal. She recently brought out a book on the plants and animals of that area. There is the Jawoyn book, the Tiwi book, the Wagaman book and the Wardaman book. She has brought out the book for Batjamal and Emi, another language. The last lady who could speak Emi died while they were putting this book together.

It is really important to preserve a language, even if it is not spoken any more. Another way of preserving a language is to allow it to be used in this Assembly. Not only does it give an opportunity for that language to be used in this parliament, but it tells people in the broader world that there are other languages besides English and Kriol. Sometimes those are the only languages people hear from Aboriginal people. There are some beautiful languages which have been put together in a way that is completely different from the way our language has.

I read that just by changing the sound of a word you can make a word go from meaning 'dog' to 'person'. The author mentions that they have a word for dog, which is *qimmiq*. The word for heel is *kimmik*. There is a subtle difference in the sounds uttered.

We have languages like Inuktitut, which are different from our own language in many ways, such as the grammar and how they are put together. I was not a very good speaker of Tiwi. I called it the machine gun language because it is spoken very fast. That language has particular nuances with how it changes regarding who you are speaking to. It is important that we try to preserve our languages in the Northern Territory. Those languages have been here longer than English. As a parliament we can be part of preserving those languages and allowing them to be used in everyday discussion.

We need to look at the practical implications of this motion against the philosophical requirements. On one hand it is good to preserve the language and to recognise that people in this House speak other languages. Where we can, if it is possible to do it in a practical way, we should encourage that language to be used. On the other hand we have *Hansard* and other documents in English, and most of us do not speak other languages, so we need to be able to hear things in the language of Australia, which is officially English. How do we match the two?

From memory, when this went through the Standing Orders Committee I did not see any purpose in having a written translation, but if you were to use your own language and then have it spoken in English, *Hansard* would pick up the English and write it down. I was not sure why a written translation had to be tabled at the same time. I have two issues with this; if you want to do that do you cut your time in half? The Member for Nhulunbuy mentioned time available—on average you get 20 minutes to speak. If you are to put part of that debate in language and part in English, do you get 40 minutes or do you have to refrain and have 10 minutes for each half? That is an issue that the Standing Orders Committee needs to look at.

The other issue comes from the original debate about someone saying something in language and someone else thinking they said something nasty about them. Someone would probably have to check—and this is not saying anyone here is dishonest—*Hansard* would need to ensure that what was said in language matches what was said in English. They would take into account that some English words cannot be translated into language, so there will be some different phrases.

I would like to hear other languages spoken. I could stay in my comfort zone and think it is fantastic to hear English, but one of the special things about this parliament is that there are many Aboriginal people here. Many Aboriginal languages are fading away. I am not saying Yolngu is fading away—it is a very strong language—but this is an opportunity for the House to recognise and encourage the use of those languages, and find ways to fit this into parliamentary discussions and debate. I support this going to the Standing Orders Committee because it raises a number of questions.

In Nunavut you can find someone to interpret straight away, so there is an immediate translation. One day there was a beep to the Speaker and he had to stop talking because the lady translating could not understand what he was talking about. Sometimes translators have trouble understanding some of the technical language. They had to stop and start again to make sure the translation was correct.

But the interpreter is sitting in a soundproof room and only dealing with one language. Our discussion is about one member of this parliament who speaks one language—possibly others, but his main language is Yolngu—asking that an interpreter sits in parliament to help him understand what is going on in debates.

To some extent, I do not believe that is a problem because we have the adviser's box, which the Member for Nhulunbuy sits next to. My understanding is that there is nothing wrong with a person sitting in there who could advise the Member for Nhulunbuy what is going on. Under the present circumstances that would be okay; I do not have a problem with that.

One of the problems I have is this: who will pay for this person? We have to think of that because there has been discussion about financial assistance to the Independents so they can have research people, but we should also understand that someone coming in from where the Member from Nhulunbuy is from needs to understand our standing orders, legislation and systems.

When I first came here I did not have a clue what was going on, my knees were shaking, and legislation was very difficult. Over time I became used to how things work. I do not regard myself as an expert; I use the Clerks when I have trouble understanding standing orders. But for someone from the bush to understand these processes—government has to at least encourage people from the bush to know they will get support and will be provided the staff to help them understand what is going on.

One of the problems here is that the Member for Nhulunbuy is an Independent. When the CLP had the Members for Arnhem, Arafura and Namatjira they had offices and people helping them. I know this because I was next door to them. There were a lot of people assisting those members when they were in this House. That is because the party wanted to make sure their local members were happy and knew what was going on. They wrote speeches for them and gave them questions because they were willing to put staff in those positions to help the people who had difficulty understanding what was going on in this place.

Part of the standing orders should be to look at how we assist people and whether there should be a budgetary item to help people, like the Member for Nhulunbuy, who find this to be a strange place. If I went to the Member for Nhulunbuy's place and he told me to sit down and they started a ceremony, I may find that a strange place. I am sure he would explain what is going on, but this place can be a lot more difficult to understand when you first come here.

The good thing about this motion is that it opens up discussion about the use of Aboriginal languages in this House, how it would work in a practical sense and how a member from a community who is having trouble understanding the systems of this place can be helped.

We can look at the negatives, but we should look at the positives. The positive side is that we can encourage more people to stand in this parliament even if they come from out bush. If we can encourage the use of language, help preserve the language and have it used as part of our culture, making sure it is recognised as part of being a Northern Territorian, then it is good.

I support the motion to send it to the Standing Orders Committee, if that is what the eventual motion is. I thank the Member for Nhulunbuy for bringing this forward.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Hon Stephen Hatton

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of former Chief Minister Steve Hatton. Welcome. I hope you enjoy observing our discussions.

Members: Hear, hear!

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for bringing forward this motion. It is clearly a matter of importance to the member; however, I am concerned that the member has determined that the Assembly must act on this matter today to bring into effect a new standing order.

The use of any language within this Assembly has been debated previously, with a view to change standing orders on the floor. I will not go into the details of that debate as that time was fraught with distraction, political grandstanding and fabrication of the true facts by the previous Member for Stuart. Suffice to say this Assembly has never prohibited a member from speaking in another language.

Previous members Richard Lim, Kon Vatskalis, Alison Anderson and John Elferink all spoke in languages other than English and transcripts were supplied either before or after the speech so all members could appreciate the speech. Even I have spoken in another language, when I welcomed a group of Italian women in Italian and a French family in French, in this Assembly—sort-of French; poor French.

I gave a brief speech to the Vietnamese community on the Speaker's Green in Vietnamese, and that was hard going, but I got there under the careful tuition of the Department of the Legislative Assembly's CFO, Diem Tang.

Language has never been an issue in this Assembly, nor should it be. It is important to uphold convention and adhere to standing orders and parliamentary practices and procedures. Many of us have come into this Assembly with limitations, whether it is being a bit shy, having no knowledge of committees or struggling with the order of the Notice Paper. Plus we have to get our heads around bills, amendments and motions. Some of us speak well and some of us not so well, but we all get on with the job and learn as each day passes.

I compliment the member, or any member, who speaks a language other than English. The past Member for Namatjira speaks five languages, and she is exceptionally fortunate. My younger sister, Thisbe, speaks three Aboriginal languages, so this is not about me or anyone to do with my family having an issue with language being spoken in this Chamber. My sister speaks Yolngu Matha, the Nyangatjatjara language and the Pitjantjatjara language. She speaks them fluently and can write in them. My family is very familiar with Aboriginal languages.

I am sure there is some member here today who speaks a language other than English. The Member for Blain has often spoken about his skills in Bahasa Indonesian, and I am sure members of remote seats who have been in the bush for years all speak language to some degree, if not a couple of them, including dialects.

In talking to this motion I want to assure members that this debate is not about a person's race, creed, colour or culture. This is about adhering to proper parliamentary procedures and practices. Let me put some details on the table for members who may not be fully aware of the past members in this Assembly.

The parliament in the Northern Territory has had an Aboriginal person in it for every session. In this session we have six or so members with Aboriginal history and ancestors. We have had Chinese, Greeks, Italians, Dutch and Indians, and who knows where else people have come from. We are the leader in this country, in my view, when it comes to having representation in parliament of people from other cultures and races, as we do in our local government.

In local government in the Top End we had a Chinese mayor before any other place in Australia. Harry Chan was elected to local government in the 1960s and went on to be elected to the Legislative Council, and was unanimously elected as its president in mid-1965. Harry Chan's bust is in the foyer of this parliament as a tribute to what a good fellow he was.

The late Alec Fong Lim was the country's first Lord Mayor of Darwin. His daughter, Katrina Fong Lim, is our current Lord Mayor. Some years back Michael Ting was the Mayor of Palmerston. In fact, he was the first Mayor of Palmerston, when the city was declared. For a few years both Michael Ting and Alec Fong Lim were mayors at the same time. This is a place that embraces the diverse mixture of cultures and races, historically and currently, and will continue into the future, at the Territory, local and federal government levels.

Instead of the Assembly taking the unprecedented approach to changing its standing orders and immediately adopting a new suggestion, it would be best if the motion being considered by the Assembly today is referred for a detailed consideration by the Standing Orders Committee. The Standing Orders Committee exists to examine proposals to do with the rules of debate and the orders of this Assembly. That committee, which has a majority of government members, but also has Independents and opposition, will be able to take the time—a short time if that is preferred—to examine the procedures and precedents, conduct research and analysis, and report to the Assembly with recommendations on the best ways to achieve outcomes for the Member for Nhulunbuy and other members who may come along in the future.

To rush this motion through would circumvent the normal procedures of this Assembly, as applied when it comes to changing standing orders, and I stress the word 'circumvent'. This parliament should not circumvent our standing orders and proper processes and procedures. From time to time, as members should know, the Assembly adopts sessional orders to test procedural innovations and refine them before they become standing orders.

Standing orders are never changed on the spot, as is being proposed today. That is setting a precedent that we should not embark on or accept. A lengthy review process over the past two years resulted in the Assembly adopting new standing orders on 1 December 2015.

For two years the committee reviewed the standing orders, working with the Clerk's office and others. It was not a light exercise and the set of orders we have now reflects the level of our Chamber, plus works to assist all members.

For two years the Clerk and the committee worked to review the standing orders. Documents went to the Labor, CLP and Independent members at the time. We kept asking, 'Do you agree with how we are changing this? Are you comfortable with this? Is this the way for a modern, contemporary parliament?' There was considerable consultation when working on changing standing orders in this parliament.

The Standing Orders Committee has not had the opportunity to consider this proposal and provide proper advice to the Assembly. That is what the Standing Orders Committee is about: providing sound, decent advice as to what could, should and might be the way forward. It is up to the Assembly if it accepts the recommendations of the Standing Orders Committee.

To proceed today to establish an unfortunate precedent, where the proper committee is cut out of consideration and its role of analysis and providing advice for us all, is not right.

Why have the Standing Orders Committee if every time you want to change a standing order you bring a motion to the parliament? It does not have to take long to have it reviewed by the Standing Orders Committee. It can be given a reasonably short time frame.

On that basis, I move the following amendment to the motion: delete the words after the word 'that' and insert the words, in brackets, 'the Standing Orders Committee is requested to inquire into and report to the Assembly with recommendations about Standing Order 23A and any proposals to amend that standing order and that the Standing Orders Committee reports back in due course'.

A copy of my amendment has been distributed to all members. I commend this amendment to the motion to the House and I ask members to support it because it is the appropriate way to go.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Nhulunbuy for bringing in this important motion to the House today. We welcome this debate on a very important topic. I also note the amendment that has been circulated by the Speaker, the Member for Goyder, and we will support the motion as amended by the Member for Goyder, which is the matter be considered through the Standing Orders Committee.

We recognise the importance of first languages, and we debated a similar motion just last year. I was clear on the matter at the time. I reflect back on my comments and I feel equally as strong today.

We strongly support a parliament that reflects the diversity of the people of the Northern Territory. We recognise the importance of including everyone in the parliamentary process. We know the Territory faces unique and significant challenges, and we need to have that diversity of views represented here in the Chamber, representing a range of communities across the Northern Territory.

As the Member for Goyder outlined, the previous Assembly considered the matter at length. That followed a request from the former Member for Stuart to amend the standing orders. The Assembly at that time determined that any proposed changes to standing orders should be referred to the Standing Orders Committee for appropriate consideration. That is what the Member for Goyder has outlined today.

Those proposed changes were referred to the Standing Orders Committee because it allowed the Assembly to fully consider and investigate the considerations and options at that time, following the request from the Member for Stuart. We have talked about a number of issues today regarding practicalities, costs, translators and interpreters. This is the process for the Standing Orders Committee to look in depth at these proposed changes.

The Standing Orders Committee is the appropriate setting to consider any changes to Standing Orders. The standing orders are the rules that support our orderly debate and conduct in this parliament. I was involved in the process of the new standing orders that we worked on over the previous term. I understand work was done before I was even a member.

The standing orders need to be fully considered. We need to look at any challenges and opportunities to explore everything so we can make sure we do not come across any unforeseen circumstances.

The Standing Orders Committee has representation from government, opposition and Independents. It has the capacity to undertake significant research, speak with experts, receive comprehensive reports and consider information in full before reporting back to parliament, so everyone is informed to contribute to the debate. This is important.

There was a detailed report following the work we did previously. We looked at other jurisdictions in Australia and other countries, as the Member for Nelson mentioned. It is an interesting and important body of work. We support the Speaker's amendment to send this to the Standing Orders Committee. The Member for Goyder outlined the terms of best practice for parliaments around the world, that is, to continually review our standing orders to ensure they continue to meet the needs of parliament and the wider expectations of our community.

We recently reviewed the full standing orders, which was a huge body of work, and we looked at this issue of English as a second language. We welcome the opportunity to once again review this important matter through the proposed amendment in relation to referring this to the Standing Orders Committee.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, the opposition supports the amendment. The amount of work that went into the standing orders review—the whole committee worked on that for a good period of two years. There was also a subcommittee that I, the current Chief Minister and the Clerk were on, and we spent a lot of time reviewing the standing orders and consulting both parties.

It is important that this parliament realises the committee put a lot of time and effort into updating the standing orders, but that does not mean they are 100% correct. They should be constantly modified. The option of a sessional order is also something that the Standing Orders Committee should consider, that you could tailor the standing orders through a sessional order to match a specific circumstance.

The opposition supports the motion as amended.

Mr MILLS (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, if I did not foreshadow it in my earlier comments, it is appropriate that it has been brought here for our consideration and then directed to the Standing Orders Committee. I am sure the Member for Nhulunbuy has no concerns with that, but it is up to him to say.

Mr GUYULA (Nhulunbuy): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for listening to my speech. I am very happy for this motion to be forwarded to the Standing Orders Committee.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

MOTION

Business and Consumer Confidence

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I bring this motion before the House because there seems to be no ammunition left in the Gunner Labor government's gun. There seems to be no plans.

There are reports after reports, time after time, on every forward-looking measure and every leading indicator for the Northern Territory. The CommSec *State of the States* confirms that the Northern Territory economy is slowing, having slipped from fourth to sixth in its latest quarterly report. This motion calls on the government to take seriously the challenges facing the Territory.

What is clear from the CommSec report is that on every forward-looking measurement we are either last or second-last in the country. I am greatly concerned by the downward trend and the acceleration of that downward trend. Sensis, CommSec, REINT, Deloitte Access Economics and the Department of Business all report the same story: business and consumer confidence is evaporating. Where is the government's plan?

We are fast approaching the completion of the construction phase of the INPEX project. Where is the plan for post-INPEX? The key promise of the Labor Party was to create 12 000 to 14 000 jobs each year.

I seek leave to table a press release by the Chief Minister, dated 3 February 2016, where those figures are clearly outlined.

Leave granted.

Mr HIGGINS: How will the Territory economy and community cope with a tsunami of job losses? Yesterday the Treasurer spoke of the need for a plan; the opposition agrees with her and looks forward to hearing it. Likewise, we look forward to the realisation of those thousands of promised jobs, 12 000 to 14 000 of them each year.

All we have to do is look at the numbers and the facts to see there is real trouble ahead. Population growth is critical to the success of the Territory. The facts show the Northern Territory achieved the lowest increase in population in the whole of Australia. The rate of increase of an anaemic 0.2% is negligible, and the contrast with the national increase in the 12 months to January 2017 is stark.

The population level is critical for a jurisdiction so dependent on increases in numbers to deliver and maintain services and amenities, yet, in light of these facts, what has the government done? Where is its plan for population growth? All we have heard is that the two part-day public holidays will increase the population. We look forward to seeing the evidence of this. It is laughable.

The Gunner Labor government is making the Northern Territory a less attractive place to live and do business. We need people and we need business. As was evidenced by the continuing Dan Murphy's debacle, the Gunner Labor government is all too ready to kowtow to donors on policy.

When we should have evidence-based policy, we have donor financed policy. Decision-making that is in the best interest of vested interest, not the best interest of Territorians.

The mid-year economic forecast report handed down in December showed a disturbing development. Without any consultation or justification, the Gunner Labor government is now using the contingency reserve. This was never intended for the normal operation of government programs or policies. This is reckless and dangerous. It contravenes established and recognised practices. The Gunner Labor government has thrown best practice to the wind and drawn down the contingency reserves.

The government launched a \$2.4m review to try to understand 43 Aboriginal town camps. That is more than the previous Country Liberal government spent on maintaining over 700 homes for town camp residents in a year. That \$2.4m would have been enough to employ about 200 average Territory public servants in full-time work on the project for the same period.

Aside from the population, other leading indicators or predictors of where the economy of the Northern Territory is heading are sales of new cars, housing, finance for owner occupation, and private business investment. All of these key forward-looking measures are down.

There is no reason why it should be all doom and gloom. There is unbelievable resource wealth in the Territory, much of it untapped, and it is a source of hope and optimism. Our greatest source is our rugged, resilient and reliable people. Significant investment in the human capital of the Northern Territory over many decades means we now have the confidence and ability to look north and do business across the globe.

It is a shame that only 5% of our income, in regard to gross state product, is derived from export. That export figure has not changed. It is tragically frustrating that we do not appreciate how great an opportunity we have on our doorstep.

Never has there been a better time to start a business, particularly an internationally-oriented business. The Territory is rich in energy, agriculture, business and other industries, and has vibrant and growing communities. It remains underutilised relative to the rest of Australia, despite its natural geographical and strategic assets. In recent years economic growth in the Territory was approximately 10%, the strongest growth in Australia, with gas, minerals, tourism, agribusiness, health, infrastructure development and services the key contributors to this powerhouse performance.

As the years go on we must continue to export our minerals and produce. We should also zone in on how we can export our professional services. By 2030 the Asian middle class will grow from 600 million to almost three billion. It is this growth that offers the Northern Territory unparalleled opportunity. This is an exciting time to be a Territorian, but, with a visionless government, not too many Territorians are excited about our future.

People from Alawa to Alice, Tiwi to Tennant, Nhulunbuy to Noonamah and Wulagi to Wadeye have no confidence in a government that has no plan for the Territory. We should make the most of the historic free trade agreements with China, South Korea and India, and we should push to get the free trade agreement with Indonesia.

We must get on with the job and build the roads of the 21st century. We need more and better beef roads. Instead of making investments that make money for the Territory and secure our economic future, the Gunner Labor government doles money out to vested interests. It wastes money, for example \$250 000 on an unnecessary and impotent Fuel Watch website and \$550 000 on an October to March economic summit series, which had only two written submissions well past its half-way mark. I also pointed out yesterday that they only had 35 views of their Facebook video. That is pretty poor.

There was \$700 000 for a report into delivering an undeliverable 50% renewable pledge by 2030. When will we review that figure? This is despite the fact the previous Labor government commissioned not one but two reports into achieving a 20% renewables target by 2020. The central findings of those reports were that there would be massively increased power prices, and it would still be unachievable—but we have now gone to 50% by 2030. How unrealistic.

The one thing that declining retail sales, dropping new car sales and falling owner-occupied mortgages all have in common is that they are all a measure of confidence. Without a plan there is no confidence.

When Labor came to power the first thing it did was rip money from the infrastructure budget. That was called reprioritisation, but a cut is still a cut and the people of Central Australia and the regions were most impacted by Labor infrastructure cuts. Tonight is an opportunity for the backbenchers who experienced those cuts to speak up for their constituents. Get the courage to do it.

The Member for Stuart has had the courage to say they are being driven by fifth floor blind people. It was called reprioritisation, but a cut is a cut. The people of Central Australia and the regions are most impacted by the cuts. Where was the openness and transparency? Where was the consultation? There was not any consultation and there is no plan. The Member for Stuart was not consulted.

Economic reports warned that the Northern Territory has a lot of eggs in one basket and is quickly approaching a construction cliff due to the winding down of a phase of a major gas project. The Deloitte Access Economics Business Outlook report for March 2015 said the Northern Territory's economy was travelling along 'quite nicely', but that was driven, to a large extent, by the increases in construction work from the \$34bn Ichthys gas project. The construction phase of this project is due to end soon. That means a huge construction cliff is quickly approaching the Territory. The government needs to spend less time worrying about jobs for its friends and the backbench, and get back to basics. Get a plan and start delivering opportunity for ordinary, hard-working Territorians.

The truth is, in fact, 91% of small and medium business enterprise in the fourth quarter of 2016 reported to Sensis that they believe the economy had stalled or was going backwards.

The Chamber of Commerce survey of its membership, which is a comprehensive and true reflection of business sentiment in the Northern Territory, indicated that crime and lack of investment in strategic infrastructure were the two key concerns of businesses in the Northern Territory. Terrific engagement was achieved in that with over 420 responses from businesses out of their total membership of 1200. This demonstrates how passionate, and engaged with, these business owners are on the subject matter.

Then there was Dan Murphy's. It is incredible that this government has had only one meeting with the Dan Murphy's group. I know that one is better than none and for many businesses in the Territory there has not been any consultation or any input into decisions affecting their livelihood.

Think about the fracking moratorium and the message that measure is having on potential investors interstate and overseas. This Labor government fails to grasp the fact capital is global and fluid, and will invariably follow the path of least resistance.

The government should be trying to attract investment and bring jobs to the Territory, not scare them away or, in the case of Dan Murphy's, prohibit a massive jobs creation investment because of an arbitrary floor space restriction. The government needs to front up to Territorians and demonstrate the evidence that justifies the jobs ban.

Shane Tremble from Dan Murphy's told ABC's Adam Steer that in a survey of hundreds of people 70% of the community was in favour of Dan Murphy's being built at the airport, 20% was against and 10% was neutral.

I seek leave to table the full survey.

Leave granted

Mr HIGGINS: The question for Labor is, when will you govern for all Territorians and not just the minority?

What we have seen from the Gunner Labor government is mixed priorities and no urgency. There has been no real action or ideas. Evidence to block Dan Murphy's and back the 400 square metre rule is pretty flimsy.

With a crime crisis and a slowing economy, it is time for real action. Cut the red tape and let business get on with business. Let us remind all Australians and all our investor friends overseas that the Territory is open for business.

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Daly for that particularly insightful speech, reminding us of the chaos and dysfunction we saw over the last four years, which spectacularly placed us in the position we are in now.

We had a government that was so worried about itself it failed to plan for the Northern Territory. It failed to plan for the post-construction phase of the INPEX project, and that is why the Northern Territory is in the situation it is in.

We had four years of chaos. Madam Speaker, you were part of that for a little while. We felt the impacts of that. A CLP Chief Minister was knifed, sacked, rolled whilst he was on a trade delegation in another country. That highlights the last four years.

Since we have come to government we have been working to address these issues with a sense of urgency and efficiency so we can get the Territory back on track, moving away from the CLP brand of politics—the politics of chaos, ego and dysfunction that steered us directly into these challenging economic headwinds.

As a government we are providing for the short term and planning for the medium and longer term so the Territory can grow again and we can have the prosperity we deserve. Our agenda will give businesses the certainty they need in order to be ready for opportunity. There is a lot of opportunity coming our way.

I will outline some of the things we have done as a government in the six months since we were elected to this privileged position. There are many ways in which we have already addressed business confidence, and there are many things we will do in the future to assist business confidence. We have started by listening. That was a key point of the past four years, in which we saw a government that was so focused on itself it forgot who and what it was here for: listening to and representing Territorians.

Territorians have told us it is not the time to take our foot off the infrastructure pedal. My colleague, the minister for Infrastructure, is focused on that. We have told businesses there will be no U-turns; they will get certainty. We will roll out the \$1.7bn program, which includes \$120m of new and fast-tracked projects. This is a significant point—some of the new and fast-tracked projects that have been based on consultation, as well as community and industry needs, include \$15m to the Palmerston police station to deliver a project to a growing community which needs it; \$5m for the Katherine police station, which the Member for Katherine is a strong advocate for in her community; and the Royal Darwin Hospital, which I am working on with the minister for Infrastructure to deliver. This week we have passed legislation in the House for a multistorey car park worth \$12m. We are focused on delivering projects that will help our economy whilst benefiting the community.

We are committed to the new home for rugby league at Warren Park, which is worth \$25m, as well as netball courts in Darwin. There are also projects in our regional areas such as the national iconic arts trail.

We have increased the tourism entrance statements for Tennant Creek by \$1m. There is also \$6.5m for an integrated school project in Tennant Creek.

We are also investing in much-needed youth detention facilities. The Minister for Territory Families has outlined a clear plan for that. We are awaiting the Royal Commission, which will hand down an interim report in March. We have committed funds to rebuilding Don Dale and the Alice Springs facility.

One of our significant projects in the bush is in remote housing repairs and maintenance. The Room to Breathe project will be community led. Our communities are telling us what they need, and, as a government, we are focused on delivering that. These housing projects in communities have the benefit of providing economic stimulus and much-needed additional housing, as well as a flow-on effect.

There are also health effects. As the Minister for Health I am well aware of the issues we need to tackle, such as rheumatic heart disease. Some of that comes back to the housing program—providing more housing and more rooms for people in their existing dwellings. Education and the ability to have a place to have a peaceful night's sleep are really important. Not only are these projects delivering economic benefits, they also provide a vast range of social benefits. These strategic investment projects will spread government contracts across a range of industries to create jobs and confidence in more parts of the economy.

On top of these projects we are also getting money flowing to businesses. We have heard the community; we have been listening. The Chief Minister, the Members for Fong Lim, Sanderson, Port Darwin, Karama and I recently spoke to local businesses alongside the Chamber of Commerce. We are listening to local businesses about what they need now. We are rolling out packages such as the \$22m Immediate Works Stimulus Package. This is a really important project; not only is it delivering for small to medium business in the Territory right now, but it is giving our community facilities and sporting clubs an asset for the future. It is targeted in its delivery and it is being rolled out quickly. We are not waiting for the end of the grants project—I am talking about the \$10m available for not-for-profits and community groups for much-needed upgrades and repairs.

Traditionally, when grants are rolled out there is a closing date, and time is taken to assess the applications. For this project they are being assessed as they are received so we can award the grants without waiting three or four months for the period to end. That is important and it is unique to this project. It is Territory-wide.

Sporting organisations and community groups—Madam Speaker, I am sure there are many in your electorate that will apply for it—are eligible to apply for a grant up to \$100 000. The organisations that have been fundraising and working hard on facility upgrades—we will match dollar for dollar above that. That is an opportunity for a significant investment in our community infrastructure while helping our economy in this period.

We should blame the CLP—the Leader of the Opposition was in the previous Cabinet and they failed to plan for the slowing economy following the INPEX construction phase.

My colleague, the minister for Housing, will continue to update the community and the parliament on the \$5m for repairs and upgrades to urban public housing stock. This provides much-needed repairs and upgrades to give jobs to small-time contractors—painting the outside of a building or concreting a driveway. It is aimed at the contractors across the Northern Territory who are struggling right now. This project will also allow us to provide those much needed repairs to public housing stock. It is an important project that is not only supporting the economy, but is providing for improvements to our public housing stock.

Another \$5m is aimed at providing work for the Territory steel industry, which the Chief Minister is passionate about and which the previous government ignored. This includes \$1.2m for bus shelters and \$300 000 for crocodile traps. After the big Wet Season I am sure we will need them. It includes shade structures for parks across the Territory. My colleague, the Minister for Tourism and Culture, is passionate about our parks, and we have many tourists and locals who enjoy them each year. There is \$1.2m for shade structures there.

There is an additional \$1.25m for shade structures for sport and recreation, shade shelters for the Larapinta trail in Central Australia, picnic tables, park barbecues, bike racks, equipment shelters, bollards and fabricated fencing, not straight off the shelf but using Territory steel. That is an important part of ensuring we can try to drive Territory business, especially for our steel fabricators, who are doing it tough.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke in detail about our population level. We all acknowledge that we need to strengthen our Territory population. I am pleased we have delivered the stamp duty relief for first home buyers to buy existing properties.

I grew up here in the Territory, in the Top End. Many of my friends want to buy a house, but they do not want to buy a new house; they would like to move into an existing suburb. They may have grown up in the area or they may be living there now. We have to make sure we have stimulus packages that not only support the economy but ensure we can keep Territorians here. The \$24 000 stamp duty relief includes \$10 000 for home renovations so people can buy an existing dwelling and access a payment to help them do some work on that property.

I am proud of this government policy. People have approached me in my electorate over the last four years who wanted to stay here and buy an existing property. They did not need anything flash, fancy and new. They just wanted to stay in their suburb. It is fulfilling to see some of those people now purchasing their own home. It is a fabulous story because you know they are going to stay in the Territory. I knew a family last year that left our community because, even though she wanted to stay in our neighbourhood and the children were well-established at school, there was no incentive to buy an existing property. They made the decision to go back down south. We have all been in that situation where family and friends have moved away, so every incentive to keep people in the Territory is important.

While I am speaking about keeping people in the Territory, it is important to acknowledge education and training opportunities. I was in Alice Springs a couple of weeks ago and opened the new learning centre at the hospital, which provides state-of-the-art learning and ensures our medical staff—doctors, nurses, health professionals, Aboriginal health workers—can do their training in the centre. When people leave the Territory, for whatever reason, they do not necessarily come back. The more we can provide in the Territory—we do not give them the excuse to go away. Even if they say it is just for a little while, sadly they often end up staying away.

That is something for me to consider in terms of my responsibilities as the Minister for Health. The Flinders medical program at CDU—making sure we have pathways for training in the Territory so our born-and-bred Territorians can be trained and will stay here. It is also for when people come here and decide they love the Territory, so that they have those pathways. So many people leave for legitimate reasons, such as education and future opportunities, and never return.

It is important in terms of the population, which the Leader of the Opposition raised—our policies support people to get into their own homes. We have strengthened the buy local principles. We have heard lots of stories over the last couple of years where it was evident that as much as government had the intent of supporting local businesses, it did not. We are ensuring that is driven through contracts because one of the smartest ways to drive the confidence of small and medium businesses, which is our economic bedrock, is to open up more of the Northern Territory Government's huge annual expenditure on goods and services. Upon coming to government the Chief Minister and the Treasurer beefed up the buy local principles so 30% of our local content weighting is applied across all stages of government procurement.

We have also extended those principles to groups which receive government grants. I come back to the immediate works project and the grants for community and sporting groups; there is a buy local content there. Not only are we ensuring communities get access to facilities, but we are ensuring the work stays in the Territory and they cannot order in a bunch of air conditioners or netball poles from down south. We are making sure that work is local.

Last week we announced that we would go further to support local businesses in regard to changes to the Home Improvement Scheme. We have committed \$15m on a bigger and better Home Improvement Scheme, where Territorians who had already spent the \$2000—there were many who had not—could claim another \$2000. We are encouraging Territorians to use that \$4000. The Leader of the Opposition and I are in agreement on this; he is giving me high fives across the Chamber.

We want to make sure Territorians use the Home Improvement Scheme, and subcontracting will now be encouraged under the scheme, meaning tradies can get work from other tradies. We took the opportunity to make sure we were getting the best out of this scheme. The total economic value of our scheme is expected to inject about \$60m into the economy. The Chamber of Commerce, which is rapt with what we are doing, believes it could be as high as \$80m. We have listened to Territorians and acted to improve that scheme. We are not sitting back and waiting for things to turn around; we are driving the economy and doing the things which should have been done a couple of years ago so we would not be in this situation.

The Chief Minister spent Monday and yesterday in Canberra with the Prime Minister and the federal ministers for Defence Industry and northern development, pushing the Territory's case for Defence industry contracts. This is a really important point; we cannot sit back and assume the federal government will think of us in the Northern Territory. We need to be in Canberra building strong relationships. The Chief Minister has driven that and he has the respect of those federal ministers. I cannot remember all of them, but he met with numerous federal ministers, highlighting the Territory's case. The other states and territories are advocating to get that work, but we know Defence industry contracts are huge for the Northern Territory, especially in the Top End, between Darwin and Katherine.

The Chief Minister said that next month he will announce a team to base itself in Canberra to advocate constantly on behalf of the Northern Territory and its businesses.

Later this year the Chief Minister will host public forums in Darwin and Katherine to let them know how to prepare for projects and find out what businesses need from the government in order to support them. As much as we are rolling out the stimulus packages and injecting Northern Territory Government funds into projects, we also need to drive businesses by supporting them. The upcoming budget will contain more programs designed to support and stimulate small business. One of them includes \$1m to support innovation in small business and \$250 000 for any enterprise in the federal government's incubator support program. We are not leaving anything out; we are throwing everything at it to support Territory businesses.

We have expanded the focus of the Small Business Champions to provide case management and support to help navigate government regulations and processes. The mentor support program will help mature businesses, not-for-profit organisations and Indigenous enterprises that are operating successfully but would like to be mentored and helped follow a business plan.

The Department of Trade, Business and Innovation is also providing business upskill workshops and our Trade Support Scheme provides funding to assist businesses to become more export ready. The minister for Primary Industry is particularly passionate about that in regard to making sure they have business planning and marketing assistance—and developing an online presence.

Our government is providing funding to employers for training initiatives and programs that support business and industry to build their workforce and increase their productivity to benefit all Territorians and support individuals to take job opportunities. It is important that we make sure we have support in place for the pathway into business. We must also make sure we have the education opportunities in the Northern Territory.

We are passionate about providing the best education for Territorians. I am not only talking about school education, but also vocational education and training, and tertiary education—making sure we have pathways for international students to come to the Top End and Alice Springs. We are close to Southeast Asia, and we have a similar climate and the same time zones. There are advantages for those in Southeast Asia who want to study abroad. They can come to the Top End of Australia rather than going further south.

The Member for Port Darwin is very passionate about and doing a lot of work in his assistant ministerial portfolio for a vibrant CBD. In Question Time today the Chief Minister outlined plans for the Alice Springs CBD.

Small businesses in Katherine are very excited about our plans to invest in Katherine as an inland port and an agribusiness centre of national significance.

Ms Nelson: Absolutely.

Ms FYLES: I pick up on the interjection from the Member for Katherine. Katherine is optimistic about these proposals. It is a real opportunity.

The people of Tennant Creek are excited about the plans to invest in a cattle and mining hub there so we can not only have investment in tourism, sports facilities and learning facilities, but we can focus on the cattle and mining hub.

The Chief Minister successfully travelled to Japan. Success can be rated in different ways. I think the Member for Blain will agree that it was successful. Sorry, Member for Blain.

The Chief Minister travelled very early on in our term of government to Korea, Japan and China to build relationships across industry sectors, including education, primary industry, tourism, mining, property and

infrastructure. The Member for Johnston signed the memorandum of cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to promote and progress Territory research and development opportunities.

That is just the tip of the iceberg. The Chief Minister has updated the House on his very successful visit to those countries, building relationships and making sure the Northern Territory is thought of as a strong player.

Trade missions will be undertaken by the Chief Minister and other ministers to Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Singapore and China so we can build on the work that was done. All of our travel is undertaken in an open and transparent manner, as we heard the Member for Johnston outline last night to the House. We are being upfront with why we are going. If a minister is going somewhere and there is other business that can be done representing the Northern Territory, then that happens. They are not the free-for-all junkets that we saw from the CLP. Sometimes one could question, did they really need to go for the interests of the Northern Territory, or did they pick a couple of trips? There was a minister who went to London, Seattle and somewhere else that seemed obscure. We need to make sure we are open and transparent about travel in order to rebuild Territorians' trust.

Our economic summits process is only a few weeks away. It will be continued through the newly-established Small Business Round Tables. Businesses are excited by that and looking forward to it. There is a lot happening.

We have a comprehensive plan, unlike the previous government, to create jobs and support business confidence. It is disappointing—we understand small and medium businesses across the Territory are doing it tough. That is evident when you have a government that is more focused on itself than its plans, which is what we had with the previous government. It failed to plan for the Territory properly. Businesses have had a tough time over the last few months.

We will not stop; we will continue to pursue opportunities and work together as a team. When you travel overseas and work with business, it is our responsibility as members of government to ensure those views are listened to and we are continually updating policy.

We have spoken about the issues the Leader of the Opposition raised. We are taking immediate action to address business and consumer confidence. We are doing a lot of work across many areas. We are focused on picking the economy up and helping it grow. We will tackle the issues around population levels. We are focused on education and opportunities for international education. There are a lot of exciting opportunities.

We are taking action and we can support the Leader of the Opposition's motion. I have outlined numerous reasons for that by highlighting what we are doing and how we are delivering it.

I thank the honourable member for his motion.

Mr MILLS (Blain): Madam Speaker, this is an ongoing project for whoever has the responsibility of government. There is the role of opposition to scrutinise and hold the government to account, and the government can defend, set an agenda and explain its actions. The role of an Independent, which I am becoming more familiar with, is to give a broader context to the whole discussion regarding economic development for the Northern Territory.

Having said that, I am endeavouring to speak in a way that is not tripping over political lines, but is giving a broader take on the economy. It takes us outside of 'us versus them', 'the old mob versus the new mob' and 'the last mob let us down and we will fix it'. We need to get bigger than that; the community is expecting it. I see a level of activism in the community that I have not seen before. I mean that in a positive way. Industry groups are getting together and are chewing over the issues that concern them, proposing action in a more confident way than they have in the past. This will have an influence on government.

That is a healthy change we have had in the Territory, whereas in the past business has been very close to government, so there has always been a sense of genuflecting to government and trying to work with its agenda. It is now emerging that industries, in some ways because of current economic circumstances, are becoming more confident and organised rather than wanting to placate the government. Industries will be setting the agenda and looking for a more healthy relationship with government to support initiatives they propose. I see that as a healthy development.

The broader context of the INPEX project and the opportunities afforded by it were not being properly capitalised on by the previous administration, so it is our job to fix that. We have to put it into a broader context; otherwise we do not understand the problem.

The bigger problem with INPEX, notwithstanding the great opportunities, in many ways was an economic game changer for the Territory, and many challenges are associated with a change like that. It was the talk of the government at the time, and I acknowledge the success of former Chief Ministers Clare Martin and Paul Henderson, and Paul Tyrrell in his role of identifying this as an opportunity for the Northern Territory. No matter what side of the political equation you sit on, if you are mature enough you have to acknowledge that as an amazing achievement.

Once that had occurred there was a requirement to then develop policy initiatives to prepare for that. At that time the criticism of opposition was that government was trading off the great potential that was to come. Opposition was saying, 'You need to prepare now because there will be an increased demand for land, so you need to create the space now and release land'.

Before INPEX started it attracted attention, nationally and internationally, to Darwin. It increased the price of land. The minister for lands, at the time, stood in the parliament and rejected the call for the release of land. He said it should not occur because it would dilute the value of current holdings. Did I want to be responsible for that? I, the Leader of the Opposition at the time, was told I should not do that because people who currently owned land would not like it if we released more land and reduced the value of theirs.

Ultimately sense prevailed because the community put pressure on the then Labor government to begin the process of releasing land. It was immensely difficult and bureaucratic to get land into the system, but we managed. That was one of the core objectives of the CLP government, to get the land going, but sadly we had missed about six years of getting land into the system. Prices went up and value increased, but for people entering the market their debt load increased as well.

We feared INPEX would come to the end of its phase. It had a beginning, middle and end. It was all properly flagged. The beginning part—release the land; make sure there is more room in the marketplace for development and expansion so we keep the pressure off the market and increase supply to keep demand down. Then, well over halfway, we are at the other stage—they always talked about the cliff. The problem was, because the supply was so limited, demand was so high. We are now left with many people who came into the market late with enormous debts. That has created another problem.

Debt was one of the problems the new CLP government had to deal with. There was a large burden of debt on the Territory economy. They made unpopular moves and were exploited by those who had their own agendas in the government's side to maximise the chaos and spin a particular narrative, which resulted in me making a trip to Japan as Chief Minister and returning as the Member for Blain. That is all history. We are not worried about how we will proportion blame. This is where we are now.

It was predicted that there would be a cliff. We were concerned that the cliff may be difficult if we were not properly prepared for it. In the chaos of the last administration there were some efforts made to deal with this, but we have to deal with the problems that are right in front of us.

What concerns me is the economic downturn, which is clear. I am not talking the economy down by saying that. There is a severe economic headwind facing the Territory and it will not abate for some time.

Listen to what the bankers are saying about exposure to risk in the Northern Territory. Bankers are very conservative when it comes to assessment of risk. I am certain the Treasurer and Cabinet, and all members opposite, have had the opportunity to hear how difficult it is for the banks to back any development in the Northern Territory at the moment. It is simply their calculation of the risk.

It is unfair that some have to take on enormous burdens just to keep the show on the road. When you find that banks have those risk levels, it is an indication of their confidence, or lack thereof, in the future of the Northern Territory economy. We will have to dig deep, but there are some things we can do.

Crime is significant because it feeds into the morale of the community. There have been some prodigious spends announced recently. The community will accept the expenditure and increase in debt when revenue starts to slow down—if there is improvement, gain and progress. They will work together and face these headwinds, and we will find our way through it. But if there is no progress, if there is increased social chaos and disorder in our communities, and if lawlessness increases—and the spend may increase—it will severely erode the morale of the community.

That is why I came to the conclusion that we must close the Royal Commission down early. It is doing some good work, but we cannot afford it for two reasons. One is that it is drawing resources out of government, whether it says so or not. It is drawing the attention of the community to the Royal Commission. It is costing money and not counting the other resources that are going into it. But it has another cost: people do not have much hope it will produce something that will make a difference.

We will get recommendations—and we have plenty of those. This will be over \$50m worth of recommendations. Will they make a noticeable difference?

In the community groups that meet in Alice Springs, or wherever they choose to meet, there are so many good people who have skin in the game who could be involved, at minimal expense and great return, in coming up with the solutions of how we turn this around. Government will have to trust the community and the business sector. We are all in this together.

The crime issue is not just a matter of dollars, cents and resources; it is also a morale issue, and that is why it is critical. I got upset last night because we need to take this seriously. We are heading into a significant crisis and we have to be aware of that.

I want to mention the references to trading off our strategic geographical advantage in the region and the talk of northern development. I have not made a point of criticising, but I will make this reference—it may come across as a criticism. I was concerned that the Chief Minister, in his first statement, made no reference to Indonesia.

It is not because it is a favourite country; we have an obligation to engage our immediate region. So much has been invested in that relationship and there is an expectation, as a result of the capital built up on the other side, both in the eastern part of Indonesia and in Jakarta—senior people who have been educated. Some senior business people went to school here as exchange students. They believe the big stories they have been told about the Northern Territory, but to be overlooked and then, on the very first visit, to go to other places—in a diplomatic sense—was a problem. It will be a bit difficult to recover from that.

Fortunately we have some ongoing engagement with the cattle industry, and there is other work flowing backwards and forwards. That is one of the reasons I chose to become more actively involved in the Australia Indonesia Business Council as a support to government and anyone who wants our responsibility to engage the region. They are looking to us but are starting to lose interest. They will come to a tipping point where their economy starts to grow dramatically.

Right now there is an election going on for the Governor of Jakarta, Ahok, and it will be interesting to see how that plays out. It is a maturing economy and its economic growth is significant. There are 250 million people. It is a very varied place, and we are close to the area they want to develop, which is in eastern Indonesia, where all the gas reserves are.

If we maintain good and mature relationships at the highest levels in Indonesia, all the way through to the provinces, and engage in dialogue with East Timor, we are able to position ourselves in a cooperative way to deal with the developments in the north to our mutual advantage, but we have to work in a very nuanced way and with some skill. We got off to a bad start by not even referencing Indonesia, and it was difficult when you had the consul sitting here, being overlooked. That will be noted in Jakarta. That needs to be dealt with.

The opportunities in education, particularly in the eastern part of Indonesia, remain. It is challenging, but those challenges are on our watch and are immediately in front of us. They are related to two things. When I came back into the public space in the Territory I noticed the commentary was around the backpacker tax. The backpacker tax is the cream on the cake in some ways; it is not something you can completely bank on. It does feed on to our promotion as a tourism destination, but for our mainstay industries of hospitality and horticulture need to be able to bank on a labour force.

We have the capacity to build strategic education links right through the regions, starting with the eastern part of Indonesia. We already have the Seasonal Worker Program, but that needs to be upgraded so it is much more useful for the needs of horticulture and hospitality in a way that is straightforward and meets the needs of industry here. If an Australian does not want to do the job, we should have a labour force that comes in to allow the economy to expand. In times like this we need to do everything we can to expand what we currently have.

Horticulture has the capacity to expand but it is missing labour. The labour is in our immediate region and we have the capacity to engage in a very sensible way and be a benefit to our neighbour. The horticultural sector can then bank on not having to worry about labour, but have it sorted out. There are ways we can do that and they are the projects we need to turn our mind to if we really want to weather this storm that is coming.

Dan Murphy's—it was a mistake to instinctively say no. I did not immediately think, 'You say no to Dan Murphy's and I say you must have it'. I did not come at it that way. I thought about it and listened to the arguments the government was providing, and I found them unconvincing, and then I thought about it. At a time like this we need private money—much better than public money—going into keeping the trades moving. We need to fill in those gaps. If we miss any opportunity to have tradespeople occupied, turning over money and keeping the show on the road—if we do not do that we will lose core strength. We have to keep that going. Economically it is very important. I am quite ambivalent; I do not see how the building of Dan Murphy's will create an alcohol problem. We have a broader frame of reference that we need to seriously consider to deal with that.

I have talked about opportunities and how we can work together to sort those out. The next one is onshore gas. As a part of this nation we have an opportunity to provide energy supplies to the east coast. It is on prime agricultural land that should be used for agriculture. Where our gas lies, it does not interfere with agriculture and is deeper down. It will open up economic activity in our remote areas and we can be the supplier of energy to the rest of this country.

Have your inquiry and deal with the politics of it—we cannot play games with the challenges that are coming. We have to get through this. As a community we will rally around and find a way through this. We need those pipelines to be connected and the energy to surface. We will have a revenue stream that will be of great benefit to the Northern Territory for years to come, and we will play our part as contributors to the great Australian story.

Finally, a small project that is really significant—I asked today about the local content and contracts. It is not a tricky question. I know how challenging it is. I have heard everyone since I have been in this Chamber ask about it, starting with Shane Stone, then Denis Burke, then Clare Martin and then Paul Henderson. There was another bloke after that, but I cannot remember who he was. We all talked about it; we believe it. Figuring out how to do it is the challenging bit.

We are all willing and wishing success in this part. The key is in the capacity to police it. My belief is—and I will take council from those directly involved, which is the Manufacturers Council and others—it should be in the private sector. It is in their interest. The ICN would be well placed to provide that policing role. We have to do it. There is no time for that sort of luxury. We do not have that slop in the machinery anymore. We have to tighten up and make those hard decisions. You will have everyone on your side and cheering for you if you can get that policing mechanism in place and ensure we follow through.

It is a funny turn of events. This seems to be couched as an attack on the government. The government says, 'Yes, we are taking action'.

Government supporting the opposition is what I picked up. We are all cheering for the same thing, which is to build the Territory economy and all play our part in it. With that said, I support this.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will not say that all things are in a terrible state.

If anyone opens today's paper they will see, 'Coolalinga Central reaches final stages'. In my electorate there is some action. I do not think it is because of any specific government, because it was on private land by a private developer. The article states that it is a huge development of 77 000 square metres with Coles and Kmart going in there. Gwelo has been working on this for a long time. It took a long time to get off the ground. It had some ups and downs, which I know because this building development has stopped at times, but it is 85% completed. It will provide about 800 jobs. That will be a tremendous boost for local jobs. It is a boost for contractors because this is one of the biggest shopping centres around.

Most of the car parking at this shopping centre will be underground. It has been built for the tropics, to attract people from out bush and those coming interstate for the tourist season. In early discussions regarding how this shopping centre would develop, Mr Gwelo and I discussed the need for places to have bigger car parks than the usual tight car parks you get in Palmerston and Casuarina, which have never been designed for four-wheel drives, trucks or caravans. He has tried to incorporate this into this development because this will be a stopping place for many people coming from out bush. It may even

affect some of the business in Palmerston, Casuarina and even the CBD because people will come to Coolalinga. There will be a Kmart and a food store. That is generally all people want. Then they will go back home.

It will certainly be a busy place. Further down, in Palmerston, Gateway is nearly complete, but it seems to be taking a long time. They are now rearranging the bicycle path on the highway. There has been a lot of development and a lot of business. The issue is whether we now have an oversupply. It will be interesting to see how that all fits in.

The minister, in response to this motion, mentioned the steel suppliers and how they have put money into things like bus shelters. There is a road near me that has had bus shelters of all shapes and sizes in the last 12 months. I am not sure what the focus of the department has been in relation to bus shelters. Bus shelters are very nice but we do not have the buses; that is the problem. There are school buses, but there are only three public buses in the morning and three at night.

We have a bus shelter that is a concrete slab because the people living there did not want a shelter opposite them. We have another one which is nice, with seats and a roof. We have another one that is a concrete slab and a sign to tell you what time the three buses come. We had another bus shelter which, for technical reasons, was staring to be developed but two weeks later it disappeared. I am not sure what is happening to that bus shelter.

We could probably do a tourist trip down Hillier Road and explain the different bus shelters that have been built. If the government will spend money on bus shelters then it also needs to spend money on putting more bus services into the rural area.

The Member for Spillett talked about the Palmerston police station—I know Palmerston loves to have everything in Palmerston. The hospital should be called the Palmerston and Regional Hospital. Regardless of what you think about having a new police station in Palmerston, the best site for it would be on the corner of Howard Springs Road and the Stuart Highway.

There is a big increase in population in the rural area. You really want your police station at a point where people can access it quickly. You can access it straight up Lambrick Avenue, from Howard Springs and from the highway. There is land available there that would make an ideal site. We can get parochial about where things fit, but even though we have boundaries between Palmerston and the rural area, people live in both areas. They should be served equally. On the highway would be the perfect place because police would have quick access down the highway.

Palmerston police, as mentioned at the meeting the other day, do not only look after Palmerston. They look after Howard Springs and the areas towards Girraween, Belyuen and Berry Springs. I am now sure how much further—they might go to Dundee. They have a big area to cover. They are not purely there for Palmerston, even though some of the big issues they have are in Palmerston. The central location would be an ideal place for the Palmerston police station.

While I am mentioning that part of the world—I will still put my two bobs' worth in—there is that beautiful water tank going up on the corner of Lambrick Avenue. Please do not put mobile phone tower junk on it, like the poor old water tower in Palmerston. It looks terrible.

I would like to see the ability for tourists to go to the top of the tower and use it as a viewing platform, if nothing else. It sits right near the highway. There is an opportunity for tourist development—a restaurant, souvenirs and even an entrance statement for Palmerston and parts of the rural area. It is probably one of the best views you will have from that height. I am told that Power and Water get shivers down their spines at anyone doing anything with their facilities.

Another classic example is the fact they shut down public access to Darwin River Dam. The minister received a letter from me saying that decision was a lot of bureaucratic nonsense. Since Darwin River Dam was opened in 1970—something by Billy McMahon, it has been open to the public from 8 am to 5 pm. People can have a barbecue or just walk across the wall. All of a sudden there is some risk in that. I have no idea how the risk is different from 40 years ago to today. You can shut the gate, go down the road around the corner, walk up the hill and you are in the dam. The shutting of the gate does not make any difference to risk. There is a caretaker's cottage there. If there is vandalism—why have a caretaker? To keep an eye on that.

Sometimes we get overcautious about some of our facilities that people have been able to enjoy for years. At a moment's notice, without consultation, someone said the gates will shut and you have to make an appointment. Every year I go to that dam to check out the height of the water, and now I have to make an appointment. I think we should not get overprotective of those facilities, which are good for the community to visit and good for tourism. Allow people to see some of the infrastructure that is important for Darwin.

I also note that the minister talked about Warren Park. I was talking to the Leader of the Opposition about that. I was involved with the parliamentary committee, the PAC, which looked at the issues behind the government's decision to put money into Richardson Park. If you want a small paperback story, that is the one to write about. Some shonky stuff went on in relation to that. Yes, some people were passionate about keeping Richardson Park, but there were also people saying things that did not hold up when they were investigated. My concern is that I do not want to see \$25m wasted.

The discussion is about a development at Warren Park. A lot of the discussion I was involved in as a member of the committee was about there being a rugby league field which would have temporary grandstands that could be used for other places, with a permanent grandstand on one side, with change rooms and the possibility of having a sports medicine centre there.

I am not sure if in the \$25m there is a price for lighting that is suitable for televising a Parramatta game. My understanding is that was supposed to happen. One of the reasons behind the move to have a headquarters for rugby league was to have one game a year between Parramatta and somebody else. When you have a number of CLP ministers who are mad keen Parramatta supporters, you wonder if they will make the right decision.

I hope the government still looks at whether the rugby park could be used as that type of facility. It has lighting already. Could that be upgraded? It is the same sized field, is right next to Warren Park and has seating. Some of that could be upgraded. I think the government needs to come back to us with a report on what the \$25m will give rugby league. Will they get a first-class rugby league stadium and facility? Will it be suitable to televise an NRL match from Darwin? That is what most people are expecting. If there are some doubts about that—the government should tell us exactly what that \$25m is for.

Some nights you just lock the door and get to work, and someone sees you there and knocks on the door. That happened a couple of Sundays ago. This person is involved in the paint industry—I will not tell you who he is but it is in the Palmerston area.

He said to me, 'Sometimes the government wastes money'. I asked why and he said, 'I am asked to give some quotes on painting some public housing. All they really need is a touch-up. The paint work is quite good, but they have told me I have to paint the whole place. It just needs a bit of work because there is a bit of damage and it is a bit shoddy here and there, but we have to paint the whole lot. That costs a lot of money.' He cannot see the sense in it.

I am only getting this from the horse's mouth. He is just saying that sometimes it looks like the government wastes on things that perhaps do not need doing.

I suppose it is easier to say, 'We have 10 houses and they look a bit—let's get a contract and just paint them all'. He is saying, 'When I look at it—we do not need to do all that work'. I suppose he is saying we can save money just by doing the paint work that is required, not a total makeover and paint.

The Chief Minister spoke about the CBD when he spoke to the Property Council. He mentioned a couple of things that were debated in the previous government's days. I remember making a statement about wanting the Chan Building knocked down. I was speaking to the Government Architect about that, who was also concerned about it.

The Leader of the Opposition will remember that his government was going to spend a heap of money on it. I thought that was crazy, because when the original plans for state square it said, 'That building goes because there should be a line of sight through to the Administrator's cottage. At the same time it should be that you can see both the Supreme Court and the Legislative Assembly building, and the car parking should go underground.'

The Chief Minister got up and repeated all that, but it was not his idea. I am glad he is regurgitating that idea; it should happen. We should also recognise that a long time ago there were people who released those plans and they have never come to fruition.

I congratulate the government if it goes down that path. That area would be a major tourist attraction because of the buildings. They are beautiful buildings, yet they are hidden. If you do the right landscaping and remove the big block across the road—somehow we have to take all the IT stuff out of there. Some of it is moving to that strange place, the archives. Lord knows why it is going there, but they need all the room they can get.

It would be a good thing for the CBD. People ask me, 'Why do you make comments on the CBD? You do not live there.' I say, 'Because it is my capital city and I am proud of it; I want it to be a good city.' I have always felt that previous governments, including the Labor government, allowed much of the city to become what I call an apartment town.

Along Woods Street you see blocks of apartments next to blocks of apartments. I used to criticise the Gold Coast from a distance, but there are big blocks of skyscraper apartments with space to walk between them. There are gardens and cafes.

We have a city where the landscaping is about as wide as my desk. The little plants all grow straight—it is like a jam sandwich. Someone built a block of flats on the corner of Knuckey and Mitchell Streets years ago, and then someone bought the Administrator's house, where the tennis court used to be—I think Char is there now—and sliced a piece off it. Then they built a block of flats right up against the people who once had a lovely view of the harbour.

A lot of mistakes have been made. We had an opportunity to build a city where buildings were set back. A classic example of how that should be is on Smith Street. Down the bottom, before you get to St Mary's School, some buildings are set back and have a nice nature strip. We gave those buildings some space. Unfortunately people have decided they will use every square inch of their land for a block of flats, and the idea of landscaping and space has disappeared.

The Chief Minister has spoken about trying to green up the city, and I understand that, but it is hard when a lot of those buildings have been designed to have very little landscaping. I do not think we should copy Singapore. It is an equatorial city and gets rain all year around. It has its own distinctive characteristics, including its vegetation. We have some beautiful native vegetation that we have not yet come to grips with which can be used as top-class landscaping that would signify you are in Darwin. If you want to see one of the top pieces of landscaping, go to MacKillop College in Palmerston. Whoever did the landscaping and used native plants is a top-class landscaper. They knew the types of plants to grow and how to mix them, and it is one of the best examples.

That is the sort of thing we should be trying to achieve in our city, showing people we do not have a cultural cringe in our vegetation—no more sweet potatoes and swamp lilies down the middle of Tiger Brennan. That is the worst thing the government could do—all bought from a Queensland nursery. I shake my head at that sort of intelligence.

We need to make our city look good, and we can do that with native plants. We have restrictions because of buildings and water, which is one of the issues we have to discuss. I have a question about the future of water.

Mr HIGGINS: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I seek an extension of time for the member.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WOOD: If we want to develop Darwin as a green city, we need water. That is what annoys me so much about Tiger Brennan, where it goes past Tipperary Waters—intensive water use should not be required.

I used to grow sweet potatoes commercially at Bathurst Island. They require a lot of water to keep them alive, yet we put them in the middle of a median strip. At the same time, Power and Water is saying, 'Let's get smart about water use'. That is sending mixed messages to the community.

I am all for what the Chief Minister is trying to do. He mentioned Myilly Point—something needs to be done about the old hospital site. How long ago did Mike Reed have the nurses' quarters knocked down because it had concrete cancer? And how long ago did we knock the old power house down, which could have been used for something good? We knocked it down and nothing happened with it. The area at the end of Mitchell Street is just a paddock; it has been sitting like that for ages.

Is there an ability to build a museum there which deals with the history of the Kahlin compound and the people who worked at the hospital—and maybe some beautiful gardens? Someone mentioned doing up the gardens and putting in some statues of people or some artwork. That is important, but that part of the city, at the end of Mitchell Street, should be looked at as part of the bigger picture.

This all seems to be a bit of hotchpotch, but we need to think big for the Territory. We cannot rely on the GST and money from Canberra continuing. One day it will decrease and maybe even dry up.

We have offshore gas—perhaps the Treasurer can tell me where the royalties go from the offshore gas that comes through our harbour. How much of that money do we get? Money will come in from INPEX from off the Western Australian coast; who gets the royalties from that?

I have been looking on the website, comparing the enormous royalties received by Qatar or Dubai, the big producers of LNG, from the gas they send overseas. Are we getting enough royalties? We need that sort of money to invest back into the Territory. I am interested in our long-term benefits from offshore gas.

We need to look at the possibility of onshore gas occurring. I am the fan of some reservation of gas. I do not want to be seen to buy gas from overseas simply because the Territory has run out. Some gas should be required to be retained in Australia and not sent overseas. If a company wants to drill for gas in the Territory, a percentage of that gas must stay for the benefit of Australians.

Can we use that gas to improve infrastructure in parts of the Territory, such as the Barkly and Sturt Plateau? Then we can have better roads, electricity and water in areas where there is good horticultural potential. If we are to use gas, we need to benefit from having it for a lot longer. We need to look at the bigger picture, at things like tourism and what we can do to develop industries in remote communities.

In today's paper there is a thing saying, 'Stop talking and get on with it'. It talks about unemployment in remote communities. How will we develop long-term industries on Aboriginal land? Rangers get a bit of work, and there are Aboriginal companies working successfully and employing people, but what is the long-term future of Aboriginal people on their own land from the point of view of having sustainability? Can they develop industries so they do not rely so much on the government propping them up? Currently the government puts money in—a lot of industries are there simply because the government has put money into them.

Those communities have arts, tourism and a little store, but if the government money did not come through then a lot of those industries would close down. We do not discuss that a lot, but we need to think 40 to 50 years ahead of where we are going. We need to look at the micro as well as the macro issues.

Pop out to Coolalinga in May and you will find a very big shopping centre and a lot of people employed there, especially local people. I will be pleased to see that shopping centre opened.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to support this motion calling on the government to address immediate concerns around business and consumer confidence. I cannot help but rebut some of the issues the Attorney-General raised in her contribution and flag some issues that are important to Territorians.

The flagship style we have seen from this government is a fundamental lack of judgment on almost every issue it has come across in six months. It is reminiscent of a government that is finding its feet. It is astounding that we continue to leap from lack of judgement to lack of judgement, making decisions that are baffling, only to be reversed. That is welcomed because usually the reversal of a decision results in something good. There are a number of examples in which we have seen that played out over the last six months.

The \$2000 Home Improvement Scheme was a classic example. I commend this government for bringing a version of it back, but why did it take five months? We told you that your ideas were good, and they were welcomed by different sectors—such as the \$100 000 grant to community groups. That is important community infrastructure. Of course community groups will say, 'Thank you for that \$100 000; we will take that.' But it is not rocket science to know it would not create the stimulus that something as simple and basic as a \$2000 home improvement voucher should create.

It is interesting to watch the journey of this government as it comes to the realisation that the measures it has put in place have failed, having promised to Territorians that they would deliver economic stimulus and

help the suffering economy. Now the government has to revert back to something which already existed and worked.

Granted, you have changed form a little—you have upped it—but you have not upped the pool of money so, essentially, you have given fewer people access to the scheme by increasing the dollar amount each individual can utilise. My colleague has spoken about that in the media previously.

The Chamber of Commerce is screaming for action to bring back the voucher. We had a petition with over 2000 signatures. It was a tremendous community-led campaign, yet it took five months for this government to act. We welcome the action; do not get me wrong, but this this lack of judgment and inability to read the room—you have not read Territorians right in six months. Another example of this is the part-day public holidays—a snap decision. Bang! Straight out of the hip pockets of small business and employees.

Small businesses are the greatest employers in the Territory and you hit them when tourism is down and things are generally slow in the Territory. Everyone knows things are slow over the Christmas period—you know that as you were all on holiday—yet you decided to target small business in such an aggressive and non-consultative way. This is the same government that said to Territorians in the lead-up to the election, 'We will consult, and we will listen'. What was one of your very first decisions? To do the absolute, fundamental, exact opposite.

Where is this government's judgment and decision-making? You have not reversed that decision yet; it is probably too late for that, but small businesses, and the opposition, will continue to remind you of how harmful that decision is.

You have promised economic summits; there is one coming up in March. You had a private luncheon which was organised on the hop late last year. You have chatted with selective groups, but where is this huge, open process that will inform your budget? By March, Budget Cabinet will be all wrapped up and ready for the budget in May. I am not sure how much consultation or credence you will put into your economic summits. How much of that information will feed its way into government policy? That remains to be seen, but I will not hold my breath.

I link that back to some other decisions—I think you intended very well, but how will the summit in March link to public policy as well as decisions and outcomes that affect Territorians and support Territory business?

One issue that pricked my attention this evening was the comments on the Palmerston police station from the Attorney-General. For all intents and purposes I largely agree that it does not strictly need to be within the Palmerston boundary. The police station needs to focus largely on Palmerston, but we recognise that Palmerston police already service a huge amount of the rural area, which is quite a distance out. It needs to be functional and located on the sides—we have heard nothing from this government about where it will go. In the lead-up to the election there was talk about it being buried in a suburb out the back of Palmerston, which makes no operational sense.

We are yet to hear about where the Palmerston police station will go, and we are yet to hear anything from the other Palmerston members. Members for Blain and Drysdale, where are you on the Palmerston police station issue? Why are you championing in your own government that we are only getting half a police station? We do not need half of one; we already have a whole one. Give us a whole police station or go home. The other half will not be delivered until 2020 or 2021. We need a fully-functioning watch house and a fully operational police station. Our police and our region deserve that.

We have a growing population. As the Member for Nelson said, it services an enormous region, so why are we getting half a police station?

The Opposition Leader has covered it in extensive detail, and I commend him for his passion in this area. We have been spoken to by many business organisations, community groups and individuals who are concerned about the state of the economy and the ability of this government to lead us through and out the other side.

I could not help but highlight some of the decisions this government has made that continue to perplex us. We welcome these continual reversals of decisions that result in good outcomes for Territorians, but we ask that you make the right decision the first time and save us all the trouble.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, if we go back to the previous Labor government—the Member for Johnston says he will build the boat ramp at Dundee, but we gave him the money and we started it. You finished it, but it is a mess at the moment. People are complaining about it.

You promised four bridges on the road out there and built one. We built two and funded the third one. If you want to go back ...

Members interjecting.

Mr HIGGINS: I thank everyone for their contributions ...

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, please pause. I remind honourable members of Standing Order 20: no interruption during debate.

Mr HIGGINS: This debate relates to the plans this government has in place. It does not have a plan, other than trying to point the finger backwards.

The thing that undermines that very clearly is—why are all the people from the other side of the House not speaking on these things? Why are they not sticking up for their constituents? What plan do they have for promoting their local issues? Obviously there is no plan there. It shows that this government does not want to be open and transparent. It does not want any criticism or anyone to trip up.

What clearly indicates that this government does not have a plan is when we look at the budget. I cannot remember a government coming into power and not reviewing the budget before releasing a mini-budget. That indicates that the budget was good, yet they want to stand here like hypocrites and say the previous government did nothing decent.

I admit there were some mistakes, but some good things were done by the previous government. Your support of the budget is a clear indication that it was good. People are tired of looking back. I want to look forward because it is only by looking forward that we achieve things for Territorians—our constituents. That is why we are here.

We are not supposed to point the finger and try to undermine each other. We are all here for the same reason, that is, for the betterment of the Territory. We just might want to get there a different way. It is about time some people on the other side of the Chamber realised that.

These economic summits are a great plan. I have already spoken about that. It is a good idea, but timing has been a problem. You will not finish them until after the budget cycle is pretty much over. Departments have already been told to submit all their paperwork and projections. You have to introduce the budget in May. You will finish your economic summits in March, which means you will not achieve anything this year; it will be next year. Or will we just pull things out of the hat again and announce things without looking at the budget?

There has been a draw down on the contingency fund. For people who do not understand what the contingency fund is, in simple terms it is often referred to by blocks of units where you have a body corporate, and you refer to it as the sinking fund. In other words, it is put aside for an emergency, such as a cyclone or any other natural disaster. That money is being drawn on by this government, which no other government has ever done. That is a disgrace. It is reflective of the problem you get by making decisions on a budget without an overall review.

The tradie voucher scheme is terrific. Some of the decisions that have been made are good, but they are looking into the future. We have said all along, since the election, that we need action now. We do not need fluffy words.

The issue with Warren Park is interesting. The minister opposite said they will deliver something else, just like the Member for Johnston did. They said, 'We will deliver something you could not deliver'. I do not know—Warren Park, by the sound of it, will not be what people think it will be, and we cannot deliver it until South Darwin hands back the lease. My last discussions with the rugby league people highlighted that it has not been finalised.

When we make these commitments, let us put a time frame around them. The date for that will be around 2020, a bit like the 50% renewables. When will you realise that you will never get the 50/50 right?

I have had enough to say on this. People get the picture; this government needs to make decisions. You are paid big dollars to make decisions, so it is about time you start to make them. And those decisions will have to be made quickly because the Territory cannot wait any longer.

I commend the motion to the House.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION **PET Scanner and Cyclotron**

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that this Assembly calls on the Northern Territory Government to immediately deliver a PET scanner and a cyclotron to the people of the Northern Territory. I wish to move the amended motion standing in my name, circulated to honourable members earlier today.

This motion goes to the core of what this government has become after just six months in office: a government whose judgement and decision-making ability is being questioned by Territorians.

This speech gives me no pleasure, but it is important to put it on the record and tell the tale of the Gunner Labor government's appalling handling of the delivery of the PET scanner and cyclotron for some of the Territory's sickest people.

The story of a PET scanner in the Territory has a long history. Originally the priority for doctors and patients in the Territory was the establishment of a cancer care unit, and former long-serving Liberal Prime Minister John Howard attempted to establish such a unit in 2005. However, thanks to the dysfunction and game playing of the previous Martin and Henderson Labor governments, a deal was not signed until 2010 with off-and-on Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

The Territory then moved to the next priority for cancer detection and treatment, and that was the delivery of a PET scanner and cyclotron to allow Territorians to receive diagnostic scans here at home, rather than having to go interstate. Delivery of this diagnostic equipment would mean 250 cancer patients could be treated in Darwin.

At the 2010 federal election the then Country Liberals candidate, and later federal Member for Solomon, Natasha Griggs, standing alongside Deputy Leader Julie Bishop, committed to delivering these vital pieces of equipment for Territorians.

Sadly the chaotic and dysfunctional Rudd–Gillard–Rudd government held on and refused to deliver the project for the Territory.

During the federal election campaign last year the Turnbull Coalition government committed \$15m to deliver a PET scanner and cyclotron at the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre. The former Member for Solomon, Natasha Griggs, was once again instrumental in delivering this commitment for Territorians.

The then Labor candidate, and now federal Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling, made the same commitments to Territorians that both a PET scanner and a cyclotron, and the building to house it, for \$15m, would be delivered at the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre.

Then came the Gunner Labor government and its outrageous departure from this agreed and accepted position that for \$15m the Territory would receive a PET scanner, a cyclotron and the building. Prior to the last Territory election both the former government and those opposite committed to the full delivery of a PET scanner and cyclotron at the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre.

Fast forward to just weeks after the election, and the new government decided to move the location of the equipment to the Royal Darwin Hospital, which, at the same time, increased the cost of the project by millions.

The Department of Health's costings show that to install the scanner and cyclotron at Royal Darwin Hospital would now cost \$21.3m. It became immediately clear that the government had not thought through the new plan. It became very clear very quickly that it did not anticipate that moving the location of this equipment from the Alan Walker centre to the Royal Darwin Hospital would cost in the order of \$7m more.

That is \$7m the government would have to find in the Territory budget, and which will now not go to other projects.

The Health minister then decided that despite having \$15m for the project from the coalition government, due to the blowout in costs caused by the decisions of her government, there was not enough money to deliver the project in full.

Is this the fault of the Gunner Labor government? Not according to them. They continue to point the blame at the federal government, which is truly shameful. Saying in Question Time today that the grants submission process was slowing down the delivery of this project was a desperate attempt to apportion blame elsewhere. Instead of getting on and delivering this project for Territorians, those opposite have carped, moaned and begged the federal government to provide more money. Somehow, covering the Gunner Labor government's costs blowout is now the responsibility of the federal Health minister.

When Territorians first became aware of the Gunner government's betrayal they were up in arms. They voted for a government that would deliver on its promise of a PET scanner and a cyclotron. They voted for a government that would deliver the project in full, straight away, at the Alan Walker centre.

The Minister for Health announced in November last year that the Territory government would commit \$5m to the project and get it up and running, but even a total of \$20m of Commonwealth and Territory taxpayer money is not enough to deliver both a PET scanner and a cyclotron in the newly anointed location of the Royal Darwin Hospital. It is astonishing.

We know that for \$15m we could get the whole lot. Why we cannot for \$20m makes no sense to Territorians. What is this government's solution? To true form, the Minister for Health came up with half a solution to half deliver the project. It was, in an unprovoked move, announced that only the PET scanner would be installed at the Royal Darwin Hospital. We could not afford both. Something had to be sacrificed.

Territorians were told a cyclotron might come later. In the meantime, radiologists and doctors would need to source the radioactive isotopes, which are essential to making the whole thing work, from somewhere else. When pressed about where these isotopes would come from, the minister and her Cabinet colleagues gave vague answers about flying them in from interstate. These isotopes have a very limited half-life, meaning the logistics of obtaining them at the right time and receiving them in the right condition could be incredibly difficult to manage.

Most bizarre were the statements from federal Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling, on Territory FM on 24 January this year. When asked why there would be a delay in bringing a cyclotron to the Territory, which he had promised during his election campaign, Mr Gosling said it was because of radioactive wee.

I know this sounds ridiculous, but to accurately reflect the reasoning of the federal Labor Member for Solomon, I quote his words from the interview, in which he said we need time to study the effects of radioactive wee.

Whilst this is one of the most ridiculous statements I have heard on this issue, it has the benefit of making some of the arguments posed by this Gunner government seem almost reasonable. Territorians have had enough of this government's lack of judgement. They are sick and tired of the political 'he said, she said' between the Territory and federal governments. Territorians want action now.

This sorry saga continues. This government demonstrates to Territorians that politics is more important than people, and that its position is more important than the lives of Territorians. They are praying for another of the government's frequent changes in tune. They want the PET scanner and cyclotron delivered now, and they do not care if it is at the Alan Walker centre instead of inside the Royal Darwin Hospital. It was always going to be at the Alan Walker centre. The opposition shares this view.

Last week I travelled to Canberra to meet with the federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, and the federal Minister for Regional Development, Fiona Nash, to ensure that, regardless of this government's game playing, the commitment for this \$15m project will remain. To my relief, both ministers were delighted to give me that assurance. That is the difference between the opposition and the members opposite; rather than firing off potshots to the media or carping over the phone for more money, the Country Liberals fronted the responsible minister to secure investment for the health for Territorians.

Minister for Health, for the sake of Territorians who desperately need access to these facilities, please drop your decision to change the location of the equipment, and deliver both the PET scanner and cyclotron now

to the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre. This is achievable within the \$15m budget. Territorians are more interested in when and what on this issue, not where.

The Gunner Labor government consistently lords that it listens to and consults with Territorians. It says it makes decisions that are in the best interest of the Territory. At the moment, the government's actions make this seem like hollow words. Where was the consultation on this decision? There was none. Territorians expect and deserve better.

Now is the time to deliver on an important federal election commitment and help those in our community during their time of need. Only you can deliver this; it is in your hands. It is time for the Chief Minister to deliver the PET scanner and cyclotron at the same time, in the same place and using the same budget, just as you promised you would in November.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope this government is listening. I hope, for the sake of all those Territorians waiting for this equipment, that Labor fully delivers its promise to Territorians. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Ms FYLES (Health): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this motion to the House. This is an important issue to me, to the government and to Territorians.

I want the opportunity to set a few things straight. I acknowledge that this issue is in my hands, and I will deliver this project. On becoming the Minister for Health in September last year, it was one of the first things I addressed. I went to Canberra to meet the then federal Health minister, Sussan Ley, and talk about this important project. Since then I have had numerous conversations with the new federal Health minister, Greg Hunt, and Senator Fiona Nash, who is the Minister for Regional Development and whom the federal government has advised will be funding this.

I will reflect on what this government has done in six months, as opposed to what the previous government did not do in four years. For Territorians facing cancer, or any medical condition that a PET scanner is used to diagnose—we are committed to delivering this project. We need to acknowledge that only seven or eight years ago Territorians did not have access to many of the cancer care services that we now see in the Territory.

I acknowledge governments of all persuasions, at the federal and Territory levels, as we now have oncology treatment in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. Last year we announced that we were fast-tracking \$5m for additional chemotherapy chairs at the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre.

It is obviously disappointing to have to place investment in chemotherapy chairs, but at the same time it is welcomed by Territorians because we can treat them here. We are providing pathways for people who are, sadly, diagnosed with cancer.

I have taken carriage of this issue. I feel the sense of responsibility of simply delivering this project for Territorians so they do not have to get on a plane to go interstate. Every time a Territory family has to get on a plane to seek medical treatment, not only are they dealing with a medical illness and the implications of that on them, their family and their friends, but they are uprooting. We all love to get on a plane and go on holidays, but when you are sent on a medevac it is not fun.

As the minister I am committed to delivering this project. I have met the previous federal Health minister, Sussan Ley, and I have spoken with Greg Hunt, the newly-appointed federal Health minister. I have also spoken with Senator Fiona Nash, who is the minister responsible for the regional grant program.

Last year, during the federal election campaign, the then federal Liberal Coalition committed \$15m towards this project, as did the Labor Party, and we welcomed that commitment from both sides of politics. As I understand from my agency staff in the Department of Health, that \$15m was worked up in good faith over a very short period of time. People genuinely thought it would deliver a PET scanner and a cyclotron, and the buildings for both.

Once the federal Coalition was elected to government it said the process of the acquittal of the funds would be through a regional grant process, so the Department of Health began working on that and coming up with costings so we had the concrete figures. The department worked diligently on that and came up with a figure of \$21.3m to deliver the project.

We acknowledge the federal government's \$15m contribution, but it simply was not enough to deliver the project. It was worked up in a short period of time and, once the departments of Health and Infrastructure worked through it, they came up with the initial figure of \$21m.

As the Minister for Health—who really wants to see this delivered in the Top End—I have been working with my agency intensively over the past few weeks. We have revised the figure so we can make sure we get the best value for money—not that it is about that, but making sure we are not wasting taxpayer dollars. I have continued to keep the federal government informed of this. They have asked us to go through a regional grant program.

I find it surprising that the shadow minister says she has visited Canberra and all is okay; we knew all was okay before that because of our relationships with federal ministers. We put politics aside. As ministers it is your job to deliver a project. We have been keeping them updated on our plans.

We have also been listening to clinicians at RDH. I have been there many times and toured both sites—Alan Walker and imaging. There has been comment around redoing the imaging foyer. This is about the best location for a piece of diagnostic equipment. A PET scanner is not only used in diagnosing cancer; it is also used for other conditions. The clinicians at RDH have advised me that the location would be best with ultrasound, MRI and X-ray, in the imaging area. Sometimes people might have an MRI and then need a PET scan. I am listening to clinicians and taking an evidence-based approach, unlike the previous government.

I am confident we will deliver the project. I am keeping the federal government updated and we are working through the grants process. The federal government has been acting in good faith and there has been positive engagement. I understand the grants application phase is nearing completion.

We support this motion to immediately deliver a PET scanner. We are getting on with the job of delivering it. In six months we have done more than the previous government did in four years. As Territorians expect us to—put the politics aside. We heard a long history from the member opposite, as well as a few swipes at members and former members, but this is about delivering. Every Territorian has the right to access essential cancer treatment services. Early diagnosis is important and treatment is vital to ensuring more Territorians survive cancer.

The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction without a PET scanner. It is a significant piece of medical technology. It is commonly used to identify and assess the presence and progress of cancers, but it can also be used to monitor the body's functioning with neurological diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, as well as cardiac diseases.

Patients requiring these services currently have to travel interstate, and that comes at a significant cost to government and is a burden to patients. We provide support through the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme, but we acknowledge the emotional cost, as I have spoken about, to patients and families. To be away from home when you are facing a major illness adds stress. We, as a government, are committed to working with the federal government cooperatively to deliver the PET scanner for Territorians.

I acknowledge the Department of Health staff. They have been working extremely hard. The timing has been intense over the last couple of months. Not only have staff been preparing applications and making sure the federal government has all the data and information it requires, but we have had clinical staff—we have not just sat back and waited for things to happen. We have been driving this project.

I have explained the historical elements of this project. The \$15m was in good faith. The figures do not quite get us there, but we are continuing to work on delivering this project so we can have the best possible patient service and ensure the most efficient cost overall for the project.

With the commitment of \$15m from the Australian Government we have made a big step forward in bringing this important project to the Territory. Once approved by the Australian Government, we will deliver the necessary facilities and resources to provide a quality PET scanning service for Territorians. We have taken advice from clinicians at the hospital, and we will continue to listen to them because we want an evidence-based approach.

I am looking forward to the formal agreement proceeding with the Australian Government. Construction of this important health asset will be delivered.

The Territory government, as I mentioned earlier, made a commitment to deliver 12 new chemotherapy chairs and associated functional spaces at Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre at a cost of \$5m. That means more Territorians can undertake their treatment in their hometown, being closer to family and friends. That was based on advice from clinicians. We are listening to them about what services they want to deliver.

The construction and operation of these facilities at Royal Darwin Hospital will not only provide a boost for the economy and jobs, but also contribute to the long-term health and wellbeing of Territorians. The project will not only provide the opportunity to enhance the delivery of diagnostic and treatment services for cancer, but it will be an important infrastructure project for the Northern Territory.

Debate suspended.

MOTION

Note Statement – Supporting and Growing Jobs

Continued from earlier this day.

Ms MANISON (Deputy Chief Minister): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the members who have contributed to the statement about jobs across the Northern Territory. We have heard that people see it as a priority, and they want to see government making the right decisions on investment, programs and stimulus to support jobs.

I have just had the opportunity to spend some time with the Chamber of Commerce for the last hour-and-a-half. It was fantastic to get some more feedback from the Chamber about how its members feel about some government decisions. We have a strong relationship with them and we appreciate their frank and fearless advice and guidance, which they give to all governments no matter their political persuasion. It was constructive advice, and they welcome much of what we are focusing on.

Our first focus is on continuing the roll-out of government contracts. We said prior to the election that there would be no handbrakes on the economy. It is important to ensure that we continue the previous government's \$1.7bn infrastructure program to deliver important services and keep businesses supported as well as supporting jobs. We have continued those high levels of spending, with considerable money going to construction and civil construction across the Northern Territory.

They were happy to hear that. They had been briefed by the Chief Executive of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics on the work the department is doing and how we continue to have record levels of government contracts in both November and December in regard to numbers and value. We are getting contracts out of the door to support local business.

They were happy that we have bought forward many of our election commitments as stimulus measures to support jobs, deliver on our commitments and make sure we deliver better services to Territorians. This opens up more opportunities for economic development and for better social infrastructure such as roads, transport corridors and housing. This will make a difference not only to social but economic outcomes in the Northern Territory.

I have spoken about the Home Improvement Scheme and our decision to bring it back, invest more in it and support the tradies who need it. I received feedback on Monday night that this has ensured the phones started ringing again for very small businesses, and the effect has been felt immediately. Everybody in this Chamber agrees that supporting local tradies is the right thing to do.

We introduced our Immediate Works Stimulus Package to inject short-term stimulus into the economy and provide long-term gains to the community, supporting churches, multicultural groups, non-government organisations, sporting organisations—those people who support Territorians every day. We are making sure we get some fantastic, long-term investment in infrastructure, which will, in the short term, give tradies and small Territory businesses the extra work to support jobs.

We have received overwhelming response for that program. The Minister for Housing and Community Development is rolling out the \$5m upgrades for urban public housing at a rapid rate. The work on remote health clinics is well and truly under way. The steel manufacturers are also starting to feel the effects of the investment in steel, including jobs in steel—a very important manufacturing base in the NT. We are also delivering some great infrastructure that will support tourism, sports and public transport—very important long-term gains for the NT.

I have said it before and I will say it again: we are incredibly proud of the \$1.1bn investment we will make in remote housing. We will make the biggest investment that any NT Government has made to remote housing. It is 10 years—beyond election cycles. It provides certainty going forward, and we will do everything we can to leverage more federal government support in this critical area, because we have shown the level of commitment of this government to improving the lives of people in the bush through housing.

Time and time again I hear from my colleagues representing the bush that housing is the biggest issue they face from their constituents. Every time you visit communities it is the hot topic. We have to do more, but we have made a significant commitment and we will deliver \$1.1bn worth of housing works to the bush and, hopefully, will leverage more money from the Commonwealth to make it an even bigger investment.

This will support jobs and create opportunities for people in the bush to work on housing and get jobs locally, and it will support local businesses in the bush. That will be a critical component of what this government is doing to invest in jobs and infrastructure. We will see great social and economic outcomes if we get it right.

Our changes to first home owner relief are having an impact on the ground. More than 250 successful applications—knowing we are keeping people in the NT. Supporting renovations to homes, and supporting businesses to invest in people and see the work that needs to be done—they have been some of the immediate actions we have taken as a government to support jobs.

The Chief Minister has had a very busy start to his week in Canberra, lobbying and building our relationships. In some cases he is rebuilding relationships, and our reputation in the NT, with our federal counterparts. He has met with the Prime Minister and senior Cabinet ministers, making sure they are on board with our capabilities in Defence and our determination to support Defence industries. We will do everything we can to lobby Canberra to make sure we get some more investment into Defence.

It is a competitive space. We have seen the work that has just been done in South Australia. Every jurisdiction will do what it can to get the Defence work, but there is a huge effort from the NT, led by the Chief Minister, to secure that work. Territory businesses want to see that. We know the great potential it will deliver for northern Australia.

We have made big changes to the Buy Local procurement policy targeted at ensuring we are supporting local jobs. I will not repeat the horror stories we have heard from time to time, but it seems clear that everybody in the House wants to see government procurement ultimately go into ensuring that we get value for the Territory by supporting locals and local businesses, as well as making sure the local people who are here for the long run and have worked to build the Northern Territory are not muscled out of the market by these big global players.

It is important we have the right policy in place to support Territory businesses that have done the right thing by Territorians for a long time.

I thank all members who made a contribution tonight. It is clear everybody is committed to seeing investment in jobs across the Northern Territory. We are a government with a thorough jobs plan. When we were elected to government we went about implementing that plan, and we continue to listen and work with Territorians to make sure we continue to do everything we need to do to invest in jobs, particularly when we know there is a challenging 12 months ahead.

Motion agreed to; statement noted.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr GUNNER (Chief Minister): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

On 1 December 2016 the Northern Territory lost a fearless fighter for workers' rights, wages and conditions. We lost a man who also campaigned hard for land rights for Indigenous Territorians, and who was virulently opposed to uranium mining. He was John 'Curly' Nixon, a wonderful family man, husband of Jenny and father of three daughters, Susan, Kath and Tracey.

Curly was born on 27 March 1933 in Wyndham where his mother Alice was working as a domestic, and later as a cook at the large meatworks. There is conjecture about when he was born, and there are at least three different years mentioned in historical records of the time: 1929, 1930 and 1933. I am informed that

1933 is the correct date, and the others made it into history because Curly put up his age to get work as a taxi driver in Darwin when he was 17, and as an underground hard rock miner in WA when he was 16. He described his birthplace, Wyndham, as 'not the posterior of Australia, but what fell out of it. Only the people make it good.' Curly left school at 13 and spent a short time in reform school before being released at the behest of the WA Premier of the time. He had many jobs as he drifted around Western Australia, including a roustabout for Wirth's Circus and as a fettler.

Derby was where he got his first job as a wharfie or, as he later described himself, as a 'manipulator of cargo'. He also worked as a wharfie in Wyndham, where his mother continued to live and work. In 1949 he came to Darwin and continued the pattern of taking jobs wherever they were available.

The outbreak of the Korean War and the formation of the United Nations intervention force to that benighted land caused Curly to enlist in the Australian Army. He saw heavy fighting against the North Korean Communist forces and later, and more worryingly, against overwhelmingly more numerous regular forces of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

Curly was shot in the jaw—which is surprising considering how much we heard him speak later in life—and was repatriated to a military hospital in Australia. After his discharge he moved to Alice Springs. While working for the Department of Works he became active in the North Australian Workers Union, the so-called 'one big union'.

By 1958 he was elected as Alice Springs Organiser for the NAWU, and so began a lifelong commitment to unions and their associated struggles for fair wages and conditions for ordinary Territory workers. He returned to Darwin in the early 1960s and continued his work as a union organiser with NAWU. There he met the love of his life, Jenny, who was working for the Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority at the time.

As an NAWU organiser he regularly came into conflict with his boss, the powerful secretary of the union, Paddy Carroll. He stood for election four times against Carroll, unsuccessful in each case. As he was later to say of those times, 'I got sick and tired of going out bush on a job, getting an agreement with the employer, coming back to Darwin and then the employer ringing up Carroll to get the agreement cancelled and a weaker agreement put in its place'.

He was part of the successful campaign in the late 1960s by the Waterside Workers section of the NAWU to secure an extra week's annual leave, from three to four weeks, as other workers were receiving at that time. Curly also took part in a campaign for special provisions for wharfies working in ships' holds in the oppressive heat during the humid months of October to April. The campaign was supported by Department of Health officials who argued the heat was above tolerable levels. The issue was resolved successfully in 1969 when workers were granted extra smokos and their mess room was air conditioned.

In April 1966 Curly accompanied Dexter Daniels on his first organising trip to Newcastle Waters with the redoubtable Lupnagiari, aka Captain Major. This led to the famous Wave Hill walk-off of August 1966, which began the successful campaign to secure land rights for Indigenous Territorians. His achievements in the labour movement were many and varied, but when asked in an interview, some years ago, what his greatest achievement was, he said simply and characteristically, 'Day-to-day bloody work'.

In reality, his long career as an activist for workers' rights led him to do the following: 10 years as president of the NT Trades and Labour Council; 15 years as president of the much-missed Workers Club of Darwin; 11 years as president of the Waterside Workers Union; North Australian Workers Union Organiser for eight years; ran for the Legislative Assembly three times, twice for the ALP and once as an Independent when he failed to win pre-selection; a union representative for Alice Springs for three years.

Curly was a superb 'no questions asked' fundraiser for worthy causes. He raised several thousand dollars in only 24 hours to buy the first breast milk pump for the old Darwin hospital. He also organised beer and entertainment for those workers who stayed behind to clean up after Cyclone Tracy, and put up workers at his slightly damaged house at Bees Creek.

His relationship with the Australian Labor Party was as colourful as his life. As Warren Snowden MP, who was mentored by Curly at the TLC in the late 1970s, said:

Curly was at the heart and soul of Labor in the NT. He was a colourful fixture at the annual conferences of the Labor Party, fearlessly, in his unique style calling members to account, including

Chief Ministers and ministers; it did not matter who. He was never afraid to speak out and he was a man of great opinions. He was loved by all and made a difference to the life of many.

Curly was a lifelong supporter of the Australian Labor Party, but that did not stop the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation from describing him as a 'pro-communist' and 'an industrial trouble maker'. Prime Minister, Paul Keating, visited Darwin in 1995 and awarded Curly his life membership to the ALP, saying to the large audience of members and supporters present:

You are all fortunate to be here tonight to see Curly get his award because they don't make them like him anymore.

The Territory today is a very different society than it was during Curly Nixon's time as organiser for NAWU and the Miscellaneous Workers Union, as well as a member for the Waterside Workers Federation; however, modern day trade unionists and workers need to understand the enormous difficulties faced by earlier generations of trade unionists, including Curly Nixon.

His life shows that our history is not only a succession of homemade heroic rural pioneers, as important as they undoubtedly were; it is also the history and life stories of generations of ordinary workers who made the Territory home. Curly Nixon thoroughly deserves special attention. He made the Territory a better place; a place where workers' wages are fair and conditions are just. We, the heirs and beneficiaries of his hard work, should be forever grateful. On behalf of the Northern Territory Government and the ALP, I offer my sincere condolences to Curly's wife, Jenny, and his daughters, Susan, Kath and Tracey. Vale John Curly Nixon; rest in peace.

The Territory has always batted above its weight musically, from the fabulous strings of the Rondella Band straight out of Parap Camp, to the early rock and roll of the Mystics and the sublime harmonies of the Mills sisters. Territory Indigenous musicians have contributed mightily to the Territory's rich musical history. I am sure I do not have to remind you of the contributions of Yothu Yindi with their worldwide dance hit *Treaty*, or the desert rock of the Warumpi Band whose classic song *My Island Home* is considered by many Oz Rock aficionados as an alternate national anthem.

More recently, the stunning success of Jessica Mauboy has demonstrated that we love music in the Territory—music from the heart and soul of this great land. All of these great artists and many more shared one essential characteristic: they all began with family singalongs around a back yard somewhere, whether it was Parap, Papunya, Yirrkala or Wulagi. Now another family has produced another great Territory musical act. Born out of backyard singalongs in the small community of Marlinja near Newcastle Waters, half way between Darwin and Alice Springs, is Rayella, a father and daughter duo of Raymond and Eleanor Rixon.

Raymond began his musical career with the seminal Barkly outfit, Kulumindini Band, from nearby Elliott in the late 1980s. Kulumindini produced three great independently-released albums on their own Marlinja Music label. They were inducted into the NT Aboriginal Music Hall of Fame some years ago. Kulumindini gigged around the Territory and Queensland for years, until they were forced to stop touring due to the ravages of kidney failure and Elisabeth's unfortunate passing from heart failure. Elisabeth Dixon was an important role model for Eleanor. She was one of the first Aboriginal women to be recorded singing her own songs, including the much loved *Oh! My Home Marlinja*.

Sitting around the family back yard as a young girl, Eleanor watched her aunty and dad, and knew what she wanted to do; she wanted to sing. Trained at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music in Adelaide, she returned home and soon teamed up with her dad and other family members to form Rayella. She was mentored through the Desert Divas Program, an initiative of Music NT, and supported by the Barkly Arts and the Winanjikari Music Centre in Tennant Creek. Eleanor's voice has been described by one rock critic as, 'like an angel whispering in my ear' and 'guaranteed to send shivers up your spine'.

Raymond's love of country and family has enabled him to write and sing songs that celebrate Mudburra culture and history, while Eleanor's material explores matters of concern like domestic violence and the importance of having a go, giving it a crack and not being held back by gender, race or language. There was considerable support provided to Rayella by their hard working local member, the Member for Barkly.

Important gigs include appearances at the famous Bush Bands Bash in Alice, tours to Victorian and Western Australian festivals, the MOFO Festival at the world famous Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart, as well as shows in Darwin, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. There were also many much-loved shows on the Elliott basketball court.

In the same year, 2015, Rayella played with Papunya's Tjintu Desert Band on the three week long Sand Tracks Tour to remote South and Western Australian communities that included Amata, Warakuna and Warbuton, among many others. Rayella has established links with the Opera Australia Chamber Orchestra and played with them at the last two Desert Harmony Festivals in Tennant Creek and in Melbourne. They have also recorded an EP together.

Rayella's mix of country, rock and reggae, sung in English and their first language, Mudburra, caught the ear of Violent Femmes' guitarist, Brian Ritchie. Early last year, Rayella and the Violent Femmes were both touring West Australia at the same time. They teamed up and played a special concert together at the United States Consulate in Perth. The collaboration was so successful that the Violent Femmes have booked Rayella to support them on their *Australia All Over* tour in March and April.

The tour has gigs in Melbourne, Geelong, Albury, Newcastle, Penrith, Wollongong, Brisbane, Tweed Heads, Sunshine Coast and Darwin. The Femmes and Rayella will play at the Darwin Entertainment Centre on 27 March. Tickets are available now, so get in quick as the show will sell out. From little things in Territory back yards, big things can grow. Best wishes, Rayella, and may you long continue to make the Territory proud.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to speak about Charles Darwin University and its continued support and focus on Indigenous students and communities. In October the Vice Chancellor of Charles Darwin University, Simon Maddocks, announced that a record-breaking number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completed courses in 2016. There were 682 students in total, which far exceeded the previous record from 2015 of 516 students. Many of those students came from remote areas. Some of them studied externally while others attended CDU campuses across the Territory.

One wonderful thing that CDU is doing is holding Indigenous valedictory ceremonies in Darwin and Central Australia to formally recognise the achievements of Indigenous students. These ceremonies started in 2015 and are held annually in the regional campuses in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy, and as required in remote communities. The ceremonies are extremely popular. The Nhulunbuy presentation alone, held on 11 November 2016, recognised more than 200 students who completed units of competency; it included 57 students who completed qualifications ranging from Certificate I in AgriFood Operations to a Master of Clinical Nursing.

Another great initiative is the community presentation ceremonies which started several years ago. These award ceremonies for local graduates are driven by the communities themselves. CDU assists and involves itself through its whole-of-community engagement initiative. These presentation ceremonies are held to enable graduates who are unable to attend formal graduation ceremonies in Darwin or Alice Springs to celebrate their achievements. Importantly, it enables them to celebrate with their local communities and with family and friends.

CDU has been in discussion with traditional owners about job prospects and incentives to get children to attend schools in remote communities. They found that there was a need to instil an understanding in young children as to why education is important. Holding these presentations in our communities enables children to see and experience the sense of achievement that an education can bring. Sometimes the ceremonies are held in conjunction with career expos to demonstrate possible occupational outcomes to local youth. Last year community presentations were held at Yirrkala and Yuendumu, where they also had a career expo.

Congratulations to Yalmay Yunupingu for receiving a Bachelors of Education at the Yirrkala ceremony. There were four VET students in Yuendumu and a further seven VET students from Yuelamu. Simon Japangardi Fisher was awarded an honorary fellowship from CDU, presented by associate professor James Smith from the Officer of Indigenous Leadership. Congratulations to Simon as well.

The community presentation ceremonies are not annual, and are held on a needs basis depending on the number of graduates each year. The reception has been very good, with the wider community showing up to participate in the celebrations, and traditional ceremonial body painting and traditional ceremonies being incorporated into the celebrations.

CDU hopes that as more communities choose to host these events, others will follow. Eventually they may be able to hold an annual event in each community. They hope that ceremonies might inspire others who attend them to enrol, as well as provide good exposure for the university as to what it can offer regional and remote students.

Some of the staff at CDU were heavily involved in planning last year's ceremony, and I thank them for their efforts. Vicky Williams from Katherine put a lot of effort into the local presentation ceremony to make sure it was a suitable, well-run and significant occasion for graduates. Rebecca Toll, the VET trainer and pathways coordinator at Yuendumu school with the Department of Education coordinated the Yuendumu presentation ceremony.

I also thank Melissa Royle, Coordinator of Events, Communications and Special Projects; Maryanne McKaige, Manager of Strategic Projects; and Ross Springgolo, Director of Strategic Services and Governance, who helped to tell me about these ceremonies.

I congratulate CDU on its record number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who completed courses in 2016 and facilitated in the community presentation ceremonies. I hope these initiatives will continue to expand and help the youth in our community see what is possible for them, and to aspire to attend school and further their education.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Braitling): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to acknowledge the life and work of Mrs Inika, a strong Pitjantjatjara woman, respected leader, fearless advocate and talented artist. She sadly passed away in December last year. I have spoken in this House about my time working for NPY Women's Council. All non-Indigenous workers there work side-by-side with an Anangu worker, and I was privileged to work alongside Mrs Inika.

Inika was born in 1952, near the old Black Hill Bore in the Musgrave Ranges of South Australia. Her parents were shepherds looking after Ernabella Station's sheep. One of her first memories was travelling by moonlight on a donkey to escape the fallout of the Maralinga atomic bomb tests. She attended school at Ernabella, Areyonga and Amata, learning bilingually, and starting her career as an artist.

She was a very talented wood artist, batik maker and painter. Inika also had a very broad professional life. In the 1960s she was trained as a health worker and worked at Amata Clinic for many years, including helping large Army hospitals aimed at preventing trachoma. She attended the first NPY Women's Council meetings with her mother. She often told me that all her work with NPY Women's Council was to honour her mother's legacy; it was her life's work. She was an active board member for many years, as well as a worker in mental health, youth health and media.

Inika was well known for her relentless advocacy, particularly in the area of stopping petrol sniffing on the Pitjantjatjara lands. Many Pitjantjatjara people who are adults now credit their life to the work of Inika, thanking her for never forsaking them. I was privileged to be there the day she helped cut the ribbon of the first fuel bowser with non-sniffable fuel in Amata. She saved many lives with this work, and in 2007 she received a Prime Minister's Award for Excellence.

Inika was an extremely charismatic and dynamic woman, an excellent public speaker, a wonderful singer—touring with the Pitjantjatjara choir, both nationally and internationally—and she danced at the opening of the Sydney Olympic Games. She also toured nationally with the stage show of *Ngapartji Ngapartji*.

As a talented artist she was also director of Maruku Arts and DesArt. I believe Inika's biggest contribution was as a teacher. She was a valuable holder of cultural and historical knowledge, which she shared and documented with many. Many photos and pieces of art she completed are in museum collections around Australia. She was also very involved in a local photo database, an important storage unit for Pitjantjatjara stories. She passed on cultural knowledge to young people, and also to people like me who are new to the Territory. She was generous with that knowledge. I learned a lot from her.

Inika's nickname was 'Mrs Never-give-up'. All of you stand on notice; I have learned advocacy from the master.

Inika's funeral is tomorrow. The Members for Stuart and Namatjira, who also knew Inika, and I are deeply saddened that we will not be there tomorrow. All three of us are committed to honouring her legacy of relentless advocacy for the people of Central Australia through our work in this place. Our prayers will be with her family tomorrow.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to give information and details about the lovely Australia Day festivities and ceremonies. We celebrated at Freds Pass Reserve with the Fun Run at some extraordinary hour, like 6 am. I was not there but I understand it was a good run. The Member for Nelson might have been there. He likes those crazy things. I arrived at about 8 am. It was a pretty humid day, as it

usually is in mid-January. The day was a combination of citizenship awards, fun activities, the national anthem and things of that nature.

I would like to place on the record my thanks to the people who made this day possible. It started with the Father from the Catholic Church giving a good rendition of 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi' as the prayer, which everyone thought was pretty funny. We had a Welcome to Country by Janine McClellan. Our award winners were also there, and 14 new citizens join the ranks in the rural area. Some have been here for some time, but some have just recently become citizens.

Seven students from the Litchfield area were presented with citizenship awards. I would like to congratulate them and say well done to Joey Mizzener from Bees Creek, Hannah Hamm from Good Shepherd, Calvin Kelly from Good Shepherd, Lachlan Brodie from Good Shepherd, Hepton Young from Middle Point, Jimmy Green from St Francis of Assisi and Joshua Puddle from Girraween Primary School. They will go on to be involved in activities for Australia Day awards next year.

I know some of those students. They had their families there, and a couple of the principals were there. Congratulations to them. They are all good kids who work hard. To get a citizenship award means they put a lot into their school community.

There are other awards. We had the junior, senior and community event. The Junior Citizen of the Year was awarded to Brittany Sims-Hampton. Many of you probably do not know Brittany, but those who are involved with rodeos probably will. She has been involved with horses since the age of about six. She started riding rodeo-type competitions when she was six years old, probably doing barrel racing, which she is well known for.

She was invited to compete in the National Rodeo Council of Australia National Rodeo Finals in 2016. Her forte on the rodeo circuit is barrel racing. She does exceptionally well. She will go on to bigger and better things. She is seen as a role model by a lot of her peers. She is always encouraging them to improve their horse riding skills and horsemanship, as well as sportsmanship, being fair and things of that nature, whether it is in school or competitions.

The Litchfield Council Senior Citizen of the Year for 2017 was won by Bushfires Northern Territory volunteer Dean McMannie. Like all our bushfire and Northern Territory fire service volunteers he has put in countless hours fighting bushfires and helping landowners with their land management and fire breaks. Those hours add up. Before you know it you have put in hundreds and hundreds of hours over the years. Well done to Deano for picking up that award.

There were four nominations for Community Event of the Year, but the one that took out the gong was the McMinns Lagoon Major Day Out. This event raises awareness of natural bushland in urban and rural settings, and the McMinns Lagoon area, in the rural area, is set on 40 hectares of rehabilitated wetland. It is a significant sanctuary for birds and native flora and fauna. On that day about 60 to 80 people came out and enjoyed the usual things you get in the bush, such as bush walking—watch out that is a snake, do not tread on it—bird watching tours, generally enjoying the bush and seeing all the work the volunteers have done to rehabilitate this natural habitat. Congratulations to all those residents and volunteers who made that a successful event.

I congratulate the organisers of the Australia Day festivities, in particular the Litchfield Council, the mayor, the staff and the volunteers. They did a lot to pull it together. It was probably the best one yet that I have been to, no disrespect to past Australia Day volunteers and activities, but this seemed to take it to the next level. It was very enjoyable.

Thank you to the Lions Clubs, Rotary, the Scouts, the Bendigo Bank, NT Ice, Virginia volunteer firefighters, Clayton Consultants, Fin Bins, Woolies, the Freds Pass Reserve, of course Rural Athletics—they organised an unusual and slightly eccentric event at 6 am in the morning, so thank you to them for organising the Fun Run, which was very enjoyable.

Congratulations to all those companies and people who volunteered their time or services for free. It was a great, lovely and really enjoyable day. Well done to everyone. Well done to the students and the recipients of the awards.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Mr Deputy Speaker, on 26 January we celebrate Australia Day. This is a very special day where we all get to celebrate mateship, appreciate the great country we live in and show a

great deal of respect for our First Nation people. It is a time to reflect on how lucky we are to live in this great country, and a time to acknowledge those who make this country that much better.

First I congratulate Sister Anne Gardiner on her award as Australia Senior Citizen of the Year. I sincerely thank her for everything she has done for the Tiwi Islands over many years. It is an outstanding achievement for an outstanding person.

I also acknowledge three fantastic students from schools in my local electorate, who are Alila Girvan from Bakewell Primary School, Jamie Rowley from Rosebery Primary School and Jagasis Singh from Rosebery Middle School. These three students are the recipients of the Australia Day Student Citizenship Awards which are provided by the Department of Education. The awards recognise each individual student's excellent work and citizenship within their school community. I congratulate all students who were nominated and received the Australia Day Student Citizenship Awards.

As the Member for Brennan, and an extremely proud resident of Palmerston, I congratulate all the winners of the Palmerston Citizen Day Awards, including Miss Natasha Overell, who won the Young Citizen of the Year; Miss Anita Newman, our citizen of the year; and the Palmerston Rugby Union Club president, committee, supporters, players and volunteers, who won Community Event of the Year for the Junior Rugby Sevens event they organised. These Palmerston residents, and many more, make a valuable contribution to the Palmerston community. It is important we acknowledge their achievements.

Natasha Overell is a mentor and role model to hundreds of young children and teenagers in our community, and is a member of the NT Tang Soo Do Karate Academy. For over 12 years Natasha has been involved in the junior karate program in various roles of responsibility, including class instructor. Natasha and her family are very community orientated and spend many hours giving back to our great community to help others grow in a positive lifestyle. Well done, Natasha; our youth are in good hands with your support, and I am sure mum and dad are very proud of you, just as we are.

Anita Newman is a teacher with a diverse group of Year 11 students at Palmerston Senior College. Anita's students wanted to nominate her for the award due to all the hard work she does with each individual student. Anita is also a coach, mentor and teacher who ensures all students are treated with respect and dignity. Congratulations to Anita. It is fantastic to know our Palmerston students are also in good hands with you on board. Keep up the great work.

Congratulations to the Palmerston Crocs junior rugby 7s, who conducted a successful five week tournament that links Palmerston players and supporters to our NT Hottest Sevens. The Palmerston Crocs have a hard working committee and team of volunteers who provide junior rugby games during the Darwin Rugby Union off season, which I have attended on many Friday evenings.

This club is a credit to the Palmerston community, and involves our local mums and dads, local netball team members and many passionate local volunteers and supporters. As a retired rugby player I am pleased to see the Palmerston Crocs club recognised for all their hard work.

The Australia Day ambassador, Mr Bob Shewring, also attended the Palmerston ceremony, and Bob was instrumental in the Bring Them Home campaign, which was a campaign about bringing home our soldiers killed in action and buried overseas. Bob collected more than 40 000 signatures and lobbied the Australian Government, which announced in May 2015 it would bring home our soldiers from Malaysia and Singapore, including Bob's mate Reg Hollier. Bob, you are a fine, true blue Australian who stands by his mate. Thank you, Bob, for all the hard work, and I appreciate the stories you told at the Palmerston Australia Day ceremony.

Congratulations to all winners of the Australia Day awards and runner up submissions, including Coralie and Connell Brennelly, who also do a marvellous job at the Palmerston Lions club. I must also mention the 50 Plus Club, which supports so many areas of our local community.

I welcome all our new Australian citizens and their families into Palmerston. I was pleased to see the mums and dads and their children at this special ceremony. Finally, I thank the Palmerston mayor, deputy mayor and Palmerston City Council, who organised such a wonderful event on Australia Day.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the amazing Malak Marketplace, which won this year's Event of the Year in the City of Darwin's 2017 Australia Day awards. I am passionate about Malak Marketplace and the positive impact it has for my electorate of Karama. Malak Marketplace is Darwin's first organic market, arts and crafts and health hub. It is the brainchild of Lena Paselli, May Aggabao and Sachi

Hirayama, who between them have created this award-winning marketplace with a unique multicultural and creative flair.

Between the three of them their mission is:

To supply fresh, local, organic produce and products at affordable prices to the Darwin community, with the focus on health and education, local arts and crafts, culture and entertainment. This is a market inspiring us all to make better choices in our everyday lives.'

In its first year of operation the Malak Marketplace has made a significant difference to the community. The purpose of their venture was to create an iconic, family-friendly space where on a Saturday afternoon and evening people can share culture, music, organic food and local entertainment. They sure have succeeded in each of these aspects.

The Darwin region is known for its many different marketplaces, so being able to stand out and have a noticeable difference is no easy feat. The Malak Marketplace has done this by putting a strong emphasis on organic products and environmental sustainability. It draws on the surrounding cosmopolitan community, and has established itself as a safe, sustainable community event in the northern suburbs.

This government has committed to this wonderful community event, and has already delivered on an election commitment with a \$20 000 grant towards the marketing and promotion of this amazing community initiative, which is something I am proud to have helped achieve.

If you are interested in eating well and supporting local farmers and artists, you will definitely enjoy the unique food and night market that is Malak Marketplace. I encourage everyone who has not already experienced the taste, sights and sounds of Darwin's dedicated farmers market to get along to the first night of the season on Saturday 29 April. This wonderful community market celebrates all the tastes of tropical life in Darwin, including the food, sounds, flavours and diverse cultures that bring communities to life. I am excited for the upcoming season of the Malak Marketplace, and I feel privileged for this great community initiative to be delivered in the great electorate of Karama.

I also want to put on the public record my praise for Ms Caiti Baker, a talented vocalist and frontwoman, and a proud Karama resident. Caiti is a soulful talent who grew up with a musician father in a home filled with music. In her early 20s she became half of the electro soul act Sietta, alongside another Karama resident, James Mangohig.

Caiti and James are a formidable duo who wowed both national and international audiences, and have a strong following in their hometown here in Darwin. Caiti has worked with and supported many artists to date, including Gurrumul, A.B. Original, Dan Sultan, Sun Little and Pete Murray. After branching out as a solo act, Caiti signed with Perambulator Records in Darwin, and released her debut single titled *Heavy on my Heart* in August 2016 to great acclaim.

We have a fantastic music scene here in Darwin. I was fortunate enough to support Caiti at her album release party last weekend, and witness the support from our wonderful community for one of our own local artists. Caiti's talent is undeniable, and she was recently awarded with a \$20 000 arts grant to showcase her talent in the USA. Caiti is grateful and excited to have this opportunity, and I know she will make her family, friends and the NT proud on this tour and beyond.

Caiti is a hard-working role model who continues to strive for excellence in a competitive industry, and her talent and work ethic have taken her to great heights. I wish her the very best with her upcoming opportunities, including exposure at WOMADelaide and in the USA. I look forward to following her continued success in the future.

Mr PAECH (Namatjira): Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the Assembly of an incredible opportunity I recently had to represent the NT and the Australian LGBT community. On 7 September 2016 I was privileged to be invited to the Victory Institute International Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Conference in Washington, DC. The Victory Institute works to achieve full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people by building, supporting and advancing a diverse network of LGBT public leaders, both within the United States and internationally.

Through its training and professional development programs, the Victory Institute assists hundreds of individuals to go on to influential careers in politics, government, business and advocacy each year. Many of the Victory Institute's trainees joined more than 1000 openly LGBT elected and appointed officials now

serving in positions around the globe. The international leaders conference is dedicated to increasing the overall leadership potential and active involvement of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in our communities.

For me, the conference was more than just hearing from many inspiring leaders about the influential and life changing work they are doing around the world; it was about how we engage local communities to ensure our movement remains strong. During the course of the conference I was fortunate enough to meet and speak with more than 500 LGBT elected and appointed officials and leaders, determined to continue the progress on equality.

United States Senator Tammy Baldwin kicked off the meeting, vowing to continue to fight for equality in the US Congress, and urged officials at the state and local levels to continue the fight as well. I was very fortunate to have the company of another Australian elected member, Alex Greenwich, the Independent New South Wales Member for Sydney, who is also a strong advocate and a committed MP for the Australian marriage equality campaign.

I must also acknowledge and pay thanks to the following people who made the international conference such a meaningful and worthwhile experience. Firstly, the Victory Institute president and CEO, Aisha Moodie-Mills' commitment, passion and drive for equality is an energy that radiates. Just being around her inspires you to fight harder for equality. I also thank Santa Fe Mayor Javier Gonzales, an equality warrior who speaks with confidence and conviction; he leaves you feeling excited and feeling that the future is in good hands.

I thank Ruben Gonzales and Ankit Gupta for the fantastic contribution they made towards making the conference so successful and beneficial to interstate participants. I also appreciate their friendship. Alex Greenwich, the Independent Member for Sydney, has a passion, drive and desire to see marriage equality become a reality in the Australian parliament, which was truly rewarding. I look forward to working with Alex, and many other elected officials, to continue the fight for marriage equality in Australia.

I thank Max Gallo, Matthew Clayton, Hector Brown and Dale McDermott for their wonderful friendships. I am truly thankful for the opportunity. It is very refreshing to have many people like this around the world. These are just a few of the inspiring people I have had the opportunity to meet. The conference was dynamic and inspiring, and it is clear that LGBT elected officials across the globe will use their collective power to oppose the anti-equality agenda, as well as work to overcome the inequality we see across the globe at the moment.

Events such as these are integral in the advancement of LGBT rights and politics worldwide. It gives us a chance to exchange our experiences and perspectives so that we can mutually support one another. We need to ensure that in the current political climate our movement remains strong and vibrant. It will not be easy, and we will not win every battle, but as global brothers and sisters we are fired up and determined to push forward to achieve equality. I look forward to attending the international LGBT leaders' conference this year, and to continuing to work towards global equality.

Ms NELSON (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak about some of the schools in Katherine. Some of the students have done really well during the first three weeks of school, and I would like to mention them on public record.

Katherine Primary School has kicked off the year with the Katherine South Primary Rugby Academy. There are over 60 students who have signed up to the academy. Last week the team captains were announced, so I would like to congratulate Xavier Matthews, Joshua King, Jescelle Remulla, Ava Osmotherly and Erin Dahl, for their leadership positions in the academy. There are some big plans for the academy this year, including a trip to Singapore to compete in an international touch footy competition.

We also have some green card award recipients at Katherine Primary School; William Shepherd, Tamiya Leonhardt, Caitlin Stephenson, Surya Thirupathy Kalaimathi, Liam Renfree, Keely Hutchinson, Jordyn Hohn, Simon Henley, Tayne McArthur, Nadia Brown, Kite Quilty, Ella-Rose Geisler, Joshua Sam, Trey McEwan, Caitlin Kenyon, Lilly Nowack-Mathieson, Jack Thomson and Tori Phillips. Congratulations to all of you.

I also want to mention that Clyde Fenton Primary School had a fantastic start to the year. It has had some wonderful participation with school leadership nominations and awards. The school average for term one in week two was 81.33% in school attendance. Congratulations, Clyde Fenton, you are doing really well. The

class with the best attendance for week two was class one and two with 95.6% in school attendance. Keep it up. I look forward to seeing you guys again next week during school assembly.

The house points this week go to Kingfisher, which got 630 house points; Jabiru came in first at 680 points, Pelican received 415 house points; and Brolga received 515 house points. There are some honour distinctions for week three; they are Olivia Donzow and Darcey Devereay. Congratulations on your 100 merits for week three. I look forward to seeing you guys next week as well. Honourary awards for Clyde Fenton go to Layleeshia Slater and George Rosas. I look forward to seeing you next week.

That is from two of my schools in Katherine. Thank you for allowing me to mention them.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.