

The committee convened at 8.30 am.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome, Minister Uibo and her team this morning to estimates.

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

MINISTER UIBO'S PORTFOLIOS

HOUSING AND HOMELANDS

ESSENTIAL SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I welcome you, minister, to today's hearing and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Ms UIBO: Good morning, Mr Chair. I too acknowledge that we are meeting today on Larrakia country and pay my respects to the traditional owners and the people who have looked after this beautiful country, past, present and future. I also acknowledge other First Nations people and Territorians, who are here today or listening to us this morning.

It gives me great pleasure to speak on my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for Housing and Homelands and the Minister for Essential Services.

Budget 2022–23 provides \$106m in operating funds to provide eligible Territorians access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing, and promote tenant and community safety through social and affordable housing programs and tenancy support services.

This budget significantly advances our government's agenda to support the development of the community housing sector in the Northern Territory in line with a 10-year community housing growth strategy, which was launched in April of this year.

The government has committed \$6.3m of operational funding and \$16m in capital funding over the 2021–22 and 2022–23 budgets to seed the fund to fast-track growth of the community housing sector in the Northern Territory. This will include resourcing the transfer of 1,000 urban public housing dwellings to the sector, commencing with 500 houses in Darwin and Palmerston currently out to tender.

Through investing in community housing we will see improved long-term sustainability of the social and affordable housing system; increased community housing-led asset renewal and new housing supply; and strengthened communities through improved asset and tenancy management, place-making and renewal.

Providing Territorians with access to suitable housing provides security and enhances people's opportunity to thrive in the Territory. Appropriate and affordable housing equips individuals, families and communities with the resources to improve their circumstances and lead enjoyable lives and creates conditions supportive of place-making community harmony and economic growth.

Through our housing and tenancy support program our government is committed to making a difference and improving the lives of our most vulnerable Territorians. Budget 2022–23 includes \$120.1m in operational funding for remote housing, which provides tenancy support and healthy living programs to improve outcomes for our remote tenants.

We understand the interrelationship between overcrowding and other social outcomes, including child vulnerability, educational outcomes, community conflict, domestic and family violence, crime, and unemployment. We are committed to reducing overcrowding and improving the lives of all Territorians, particularly those who live in remote areas, with the construction of additional and replacement of houses and extensions of homes.

As a result this government has invested \$1.1bn in addition to the operational budget for remote housing in our remote housing investment package. This specifically represents our commitment to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians and deliver on the Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes. program. This

program, which commenced in 2017–18, is the largest investment in remote housing ever seen by the Northern Territory.

Our government's investment has been matched by the Australian Government in funding \$550m for five years through the National Partnership for Remote Housing NT. Since 1 September 2016 this joint investment has resulted in 819 new homes being completed and 1,613 homes upgraded, with 715 new remote housing lots being developed and a further 187 are under way.

In addition to the significant and unprecedented investment in remote housing in the Territory, the Northern Territory Government also committed \$432.3m over eight years from 2016–17 for preparing land servicing and infrastructure for remote housing works.

Our government's investment in remote housing also creates employment engaged with partnership opportunities for our local communities. Through local decision-making arrangements, Territorians living in remote communities are increasingly having their voices heard and having a genuine say about the services and infrastructure they want. We remain committed to the dialogue and planning processes that enable our remote Territorians and communities to shape their future through investment, local decision-making and employment opportunities.

Town camps and homelands are fundamental to Aboriginal Territorians' health and wellbeing. They keep communities connected to country and play a critical role in the remote housing system. As a government we seek to proactively support Aboriginal Territorians to live on their ancestral lands and are developing a new homelands policy to support this. This is a strong commitment. As part of the development of this model our government is working with the four land councils and other stakeholders to develop shared approaches to homelands. In addition, to ensure that housing and infrastructure investment supports community-controlled local employment, we continue to invest in Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to deliver housing, municipal and essential services across town camps and homelands.

Budget 2022–23 continues to support town camps and homelands through \$48.7m to provide municipal and essential services and housing maintenance to homelands and outstations. Our investment in town camps and homelands infrastructure is also an investment in Territory people and businesses. Across all of our remote housing and infrastructure investment in the past financial year to 31 March, 49% of contracts have been awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises directly linked to local employment, upskilling and increased employability for Aboriginal Territorians.

Our government has demonstrated our commitment to expanding our services and footprint. To support this expansion agenda in our remote regions we are investing \$46.8m in the government employee housing program to secure administrative efficiencies for government, improve allocations of dwelling service delivery needs across all agencies and enable the full cost of delivering government employee housing to be reflected in agency budgets.

The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homeless people in Australia at 12 times the national average. Our government recognises the need to provide essential services to support our vulnerable Territorians who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The 2022–23 budget allocates \$40.4m for programs that deliver place-based housing and homelessness solutions to address these needs, including \$30.6m investment in our 19 non-government partners, targeted tenancy support and homelessness services across Northern Territory urban centres. We acknowledge our key partners, such as Yilli Rreung, Larrakeyah Nation, Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society, Anglicare, CatholicCare, Tangentyere, YWCA and others delivering these critical services across the Territory.

Our partners provide access to supported accommodation and specialist homelessness services to people who are homeless and sleeping rough, through key homelessness programs, including Batten Road Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program; visitor accommodation services; drop-in centres; and hubs, including dignity services, tenancy sustainability programs, short-term emergency accommodation, medium-term transitional accommodation, peak body services, private rental accommodation programs and support services.

The 2022–23 budget allocates \$1.4m for our peak partners Aboriginal Housing NT and NT Shelter for housing and homelessness advocacy across urban and remote locations and support-capacity development with community housing providers.

This government's unparalleled program for building and upgrading houses creating safe, healthy homes requires us to ensure that essential service infrastructure is adequate and maintained in good working order. In 2022–23 the Indigenous Essential Services program will total approximately \$124.5m for annual operation services managed through Power and Water Corporation's subsidiary Indigenous Essential Services Pty Ltd.

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities holds functional responsibility for the Indigenous Essential Services program. It has funded \$82.1m for Indigenous Essential Services to provide electricity, water and sewerage services to around 38,000 customers in 72 remote communities and 79 homelands across the Northern Territory.

The Indigenous Essential Services funding supports employment and training of remote Aboriginal Territorians as essential service operators which perform water quality testing, diesel generator services and maintenance of remote assets. This builds skills and engages remote Territorians at a community level to deliver services and creates employment opportunities.

Access to safe drinking water is essential for the health and wellbeing of all Territorians, particularly those living in our remote communities and homelands. In the 2022–23 budget our government includes \$13.5m for the rolling capital program to continue its commitment to strengthening water security and water quality in Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory.

Through the Indigenous Essential Services program our government will also spend more than \$1.5m on water quality monitoring and laboratory testing across remote communities. In accordance with the Northern Territory health requirements work has progressed to construct a water treatment plant for Laramba community to reduce uranium levels and ensure water is safe for residents to drink.

Other projects to improve water security include drilling bores and installing smart water meters. These projects have been identified in priority communities, including Laramba, Yuendumu, Engawala, Imanpa, Atitjere, Numbulwar and Warruwi.

Focus has been placed on Yuendumu to improve the reliability of the water source and supply to meet planned housing growth. Projects in Yuendumu to date include installation of bulk and replacement of smart water metres on all properties. Power and Water reported a saving of 22 million litres of water per year through that. Repair of significant leaks within the water network and water required to support new housing projects is now available.

The Northern Territory Government is committed to increase solar generation across the Northern Territory with a target of 70% in remote communities. The remote power system strategy led by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade aims to bring about change to power generation under the Indigenous Essential Services program. Equally important, this has been our work to maintain and upgrade remote power systems and performance of the electrical network supplying power to remote communities.

We are substantially ahead of the 2021–22 targets based on frequency and duration of power outages. The average accumulated power outage duration per customer at the end of March 2022 was 168.5 minutes, which is well below the target of 500 minutes.

I thank the committee members for their work and department staff who have done a phenomenal job in the lead-up to today. I will introduce the members accompanying me who will assist me with answering the committee's questions. They are Mr Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer; Mr Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Housing; Mr Dwayne McInnes, General Manager, Housing Program, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I invite the shadow minister to ask questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister, rather than waiting for the end of the questioning on the output. Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Mr YAN: I thank the minister and the public servants here today for the work that has been put in to providing information for this estimates process.

You talked about the importance of homelands and communities in relation to housing. Could you explain the change within your government's ministerial portfolios? Remote Housing and Essential Services had its own minister, as I believed too it was important. That has now amalgamated into Remote Housing and Homelands. Could you explain the rationale behind that?

Ms UIBO: The changes we made allowed for further synergies with the larger picture of what we are trying to build as a system of government. We have complementary projects happening in the urban, regional and remote space, in bringing together Housing and Indigenous Essential Services—also through Renewables and Energy. There is a lot of crossover in the work we are doing, particularly with energy, security, stability and opportunities in remote regions. Some of that work is aligned and complementary. Having the portfolios sitting with one minister is complementary.

Mr YAN: If it was better to do it this way, why was it split up before with different ministers for urban housing and remote housing? We will wait and see how it works.

You spoke about the \$6.3m with some additional funding for houses being transferred to external management. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr DAVIES: As the chief executive of an area responsible for housing, we are building a system, and it does interact. We have an Urban Housing interface with Remote Housing then into Homelands. We need to bring it together into a contemporary housing system. Putting it together in a way that government has now structured it enables us to get the right checking mechanisms around tenancy, tenancy payments, rent payments—who is in which houses. For us, building it into one model is a benefit in terms of an agency.

The \$6.3m is being allocated to support the community housing fast-tracking of the sector in the Northern Territory.

Mr WARREN: There is an allocation of funding to do a fast-track growth of the sector. We have 11 providers registered as community housing providers in the Northern Territory. They have about 1,000 houses already under management. We are trying to increase the number of houses those providers are managing so that they can become strong and self-sustaining. A key reason for the transfer approach is houses that are managed by community housing providers enable us to draw down on Commonwealth rent assistance. That is a 25% loading on top of whatever rent would normally be charged on the asset. It is a strong opportunity for us to bring more resourcing into the housing system, then leverage it to build more house, lease more houses and grow the total number of bedrooms available.

Mr YAN: Who are the 11 providers doing the community housing assistance?

Ms UIBO: They are Anglicare NT, Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation, AUS Projects NT, CatholicCare NT, Community Housing Central Australia, Julalikari Housing Incorporated, Salvation Army Housing, TeamHEALTH, Venture Housing Company Ltd, Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation and YWCA National Housing.

Mr YAN: You also spoke about the housing and tenancy support of \$110m. Could you provide more detail on what the \$110m provides?

Ms UIBO: A correction—it is \$106m for operating funds to provide eligible Territorians access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing through the tenancy and affordable housing program and support services.

Mr YAN: I understand the premise of the overview but what does it actually mean? What will tenants in rural, remote and town see for the \$106m?

Mr DAVIES: That funding is the operation budget sitting behind the Housing program. That not only includes the staffing model it sits behind it. It also picks up the grant programs we roll out to support tenants to maintain and sustain tenancies.

We are rolling out a new remote rent framework. We have put on 20 additional housing officers to brief families to bring them into the new remote rent framework. We have more than 5,000 remote properties. There is a lot of work to do across the system to sign up to new rent framework agreements.

For the break-up of how we spend it in an operational sense, I will hand to Mr Warren.

Mr WARREN: Your question is related to the \$106m. That is the appropriation for the urban part of our broader housing program. It includes the cost of our employee base and the cost of managing the urban public housing assets. You would be aware that we have approximately 5,000 assets, which have overhead

costs, such as utilities, in some cases power and water, and things like that. A lot of that funding is set aside for the administrative costs of running a housing asset network and the human resources to run the system.

The reference to tenancy is talking about our frontline tenancy officers who are connecting directly with the tenants living in our houses. They are taking applications from new applicants, processing applications, making decisions about the allocation of houses, managing the relationship with tenants when they are living in the house, conducting the annual or more regular inspections and things of that nature. That is an overview of what the \$106m relates to.

Mr YAN: Earlier I mentioned the breakdown of staffing and grant money for assistance, how much of that \$106m is involved in staff?

Mr WARREN: The employee component of that for the next year's budget will be \$10,568,000.

Mr YAN: In your opening statement, you spoke about government employee housing. I will speak about that in future outputs. I welcome the \$46.8m—I hope I have that one right—in government employee housing.

There has been a spate of reports regarding the poor standard of police housing. How many houses is NT Police renting from private home owners in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin and Palmerston?

Ms UIBO: For the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services, there are 129; 80 are government-owned assets and 49 are private head leases.

Mr YAN: Do you have a breakdown of the private head leases by region?

Ms UIBO: We can offer the breakdown of regional across all agencies, but not necessarily across NTPES. Would you like to put that question on notice?

Question on Notice No 8.1

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

Mr YAN: Of the 49 private head leases for police, could you provide a breakdown by region?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 8.1.

Mr YAN: Of the 49 private head leases, how many of are empty or vacant?

Ms UIBO: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.2

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

Mr YAN: Of the 49 private head leases for NT police, how many are empty or vacant?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 8.2.

Mr YAN: I will need to follow up on the 129 houses that are managed or owned by government. I will ask the same questions of those, which you may need to take on notice. I would like a breakdown of the 129 by region, and also how many are empty or vacant.

Ms UIBO: Yes, we can take that on notice. Remember that we have an output that is all about GH as well.

Mr YAN: Yes, I know. I want to get this one in before I forget.

Question on Notice No 8.3

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

Mr YAN: Of the 129 private houses managed by government for NT police, can I have breakdown by region? Can I have a report on how many of those houses are empty or vacant?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 8.3.

Mr YAN: In your opening statement you spoke about remote essential services, water quality, power delivery and having a remote or partly remote electorate. I am very much across and interested in this space.

As far as safe drinking water goes, there a number of issues in Central Australia with water quality in some communities. Some communities are trucking in drinking water. Your statement said that there is \$13.5m in rolling capital. Will that be sufficient to secure safe drinking water for those communities across the Territory?

Ms UIBO: The money allocated and budgeted for Indigenous Essential Services, particularly with a focus on safe and sustainable drinking water—which you have asked the question on—is our commitment through the work being run by Power and Water Corporation, which appears at estimates tomorrow.

I have carriage of that as the responsible minister, and Minister Lawler as the shareholding minister for Power and Water Corporation. Our commitment of \$13.5m is to focus on the improvement of the assets in the remote context. Power and Water Corporation has an ongoing program for replacing ageing assets across the Territory. In that sense, our funding for a focus on the identified communities.

Mr YAN: Do you have additional funding to deal with the communities struggling to get safe drinking water?

Ms UIBO: Our government has committed \$28m for 2021–25 to target a number of Aboriginal communities across the Territory, which are experiencing water stress and water quality concerns. It is a five-year program looking at longer-term solutions. This links in with our housing program to provide new and sustainable housing in remote areas identified as a high priority due to water stress at risk of being water stressed.

Mr YAN: You said that the \$28m for 2021–25 is for specific communities. Do you have a list of those communities or regions you are targeting?

Ms UIBO: This is looking at long-term solutions for the identified communities, which include Atitjere, Engawala, Imanpa, Epenarra, Numbulwar, Yuendumu, Warrawi and Angurugu. We have also been focused on Laramba as well as other work for Yuendumu. That led to a good story about water savings through the targeted work, which has allowed for identified new works to commence. It is the responsibility of government to have long-term sustainable solutions for housing. That work has culminated in being about to build houses, particularly in Yuendumu.

Mr YAN: I am aware that, for development, sustainable water is a priority before we can expand some communities, particularly Yuendumu. I will follow up in the coming years, particularly regarding drinking water and water security.

Mr McINNES: For water-stressed communities we have a much broader program. It is \$432m over 10 years. The purpose of that program is twofold. One is to create serviced land in remote communities through new

subdivisions or infill lots. The second purpose is to augment the existing services where the housing program puts additional stress on water supply or servicing in remote communities.

It is a large flexible program to address water security issues in remote communities. In Yuendumu, if we are putting additional pressure and need to increase the size of the pipe, we have a program to deal with that. We will not progress housing works unless we address the water supply or other headworks.

Mr YAN: In your opening statement you spoke about \$1.5m for quality water testing in remote areas. Are you able to advise if water testing happens on a regular basis in homelands?

Ms UIBO: The short answer is yes. We test water quality and drinking water to ensure it is safe to consume. Testing includes chlorine disinfection performance and maintained, with a target range of 95% at 99.73% to the end of the reporting estimates period, which is 31 March 2022. That occurs over the 79 homelands we are responsible for under the Indigenous Essential Services program.

Mr YAN: I get reports from homelands that water quality testing is not taking place in some of our more remote communities and homelands. The reason behind that question is that it is supposed to be happening and it might not be. That might be something you want to check on, minister.

Ms UIBO: There are about 600 homelands in total; only 79 fall under the Indigenous Essential Services program. If you let me know, offline, which homelands have concerns, we would be happy to work with the homelands provider if it is not under the IES.

Mr YAN: You spoke about solar power generation to communities. I welcome an alternative power supply to deal with the issues that people in communities face. You stated that you are working towards a 70% rate in remote communities. What is the percentage of communities with alternative energy generating capability?

Ms UIBO: This would be better directed to my next portfolio with the Office of Sustainable Energy through the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism. We can take that on notice now, and I am sure we will be able to answer this session or during the next.

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the construction of the remote housing you spoke of earlier, who decides which communities receive demountable-style buildings and who receives block-style buildings?

Ms UIBO: Some fast-track work has allowed the alleviation of some overcrowding or provided transitional housing for community members when new homes are being built in our remote communities. There is a process.

Mr McINNES: A number of factors determine whether modular-style homes or block homes are built in remote communities, the first being local decision-making through community consultation and the speed of which the communities want their houses. They are offered opportunities. A lot of communities have opted for the modular style. Other factors are water-stressed communities. The preference for water-stressed communities is to do modular-style dwellings as opposed to block, for the obvious reasons about the use of water.

Modular-style dwellings are also preferable for transitional housing; it is a quick way of getting housing into communities to use for transitional accommodation.

Through the Remote Housing Investment package, we have built 377 remote community housing; of that, 234 are block and 143 are modular. We expect that ratio to be similar throughout the program. In the northern communities, where weather is a major factor, communities do prefer block, as do we. In the central communities we have had favourable responses to and preference for modular.

The other factor we take into consideration is the location of the dwellings. For flood inundated areas, modular is the preference because they can be built off the ground. In Kalkaringi we will be replacing about 20 dwellings in a flood-inundated area. They will be built higher to lower the risk of flood, moving forward.

Mr BURGOYNE: What is the life expectancy of a modular home versus a block construction home?

Mr McINNES: All buildings built under the Remote Housing programs have the same life expectancy; they are expected to have a life cycle of in excess of 30 years. All go through rigorous testing before they are included in our housing program. We allow alternate tenders for what is built out there, but they have to undergo testing to ensure they are robust and stand up to the remote conditions.

Mr BURGOYNE: What is the average cost of each style of home?

Mr McINNES: The average cost for a remote dwelling across all styles is about \$498,000. Three-bedroom dwellings, which are often asked for—we have modular for \$519,000 and non-modular \$513,000. It is important to flag that, given the current world environment and the things happening on the east coast, we are starting to experience significant price increases in labour and steel costs. We expect those costs to rise.

Mr GUYULA: Based on the rate of new houses being built, is there a date in the future where the majority of houses will no longer be classed as overcrowded in remote Aboriginal communities?

Ms UIBO: That is a great question. I know you are passionate, as am I, about the challenges faced in our electorates and other electorates across the Northern Territory; the members for Arafura and Daly are in a similar boat.

The work our government is doing is unprecedented in the Northern Territory, which is why we came to government in 2016 and were trusted by Territorians to continue that legacy in 2020. Our investment in housing is about the alleviation of overcrowding in remote areas, which is why we have a remote housing package.

The investment in our communities has had real success, but we are not there yet. We know that, which is why we continue this work. It is also the reason we have a strong collaboration with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

We have been looking the construction of homes as well as design, location and style of houses and the needs of the families in those homes.

In your electorate, particularly Elcho Island, there has been changes to some of the designs to allow for more open living, which community and family members pushed for, more outdoor space and outdoor living areas, not just for the beautiful Dry Season but for when families have visitors, ceremonies and funerals.

Adjusting and transforming the thinking of government regarding remote housing has been a journey so far. We are six years into an eight-year term. It is something we will stay committed to.

The next area we are prioritising—now that we have \$100m from the federal Labor government which has just recently been elected—is our commitment to homelands. We specifically kept the homelands part of the Housing portfolio front and centre in the title because that is our next big step in changing and transforming the dwellings, homes and opportunities for living on country in our homelands and making them even stronger.

Homelands have been neglected for many years which is why we are committed to that, not just financially but to the relationships we have with our four land councils—Anindilyakwa, Northern, Central and Tiwi. That work will now be elevated and hopefully fast-tracked, through the relationship we advocated for with the focus on homelands by the federal Labor government. We are not there yet, but we will not stop doing that work.

Mr GUYULA: The \$1.1bn housing agreement does not extend to homelands. Can you advise if there are ongoing discussions at the federal level to vary the partnership agreements so that homelands close to bigger towns can be included?

Ms UIBO: There have been ongoing negotiations with the federal government to expand the remote housing investment package and program to include homelands. Negotiations under way are for the 2023–24 budget. The next round is to negotiate \$110m for the remote housing program for that variation through a new agreement, and there is the \$100m commitment from the federal Labor government to homelands in the Northern Territory.

We are hoping to bring all of that money together to identify the strong need for homelands improvements—through the steering committee with the four land councils, the National Indigenous Australian Agency and the Northern Territory Government. We will identify equitable distribution across the Territory and the 600-plus homelands and make sure all homelands are considered. More importantly, we will ensure the providers for homelands and the contractors who work on homelands programs—that it is fair, equitable and actioned.

Mr GUYULA: This government often speaks about its commitment to homelands but there is only \$48m in this budget for all of the Northern Territory's homelands. Why is there so little in the budget for these residents of the NT?

Ms UIBO: That unfortunately falls on a bit of a legacy issue for us. Prior to 2016 the money allocated over a longer period of time was cashed up and spent by the former CLP government. The funding allocation for homelands has been part of our commitment. We know it is not enough, but the collaboration and partnerships I mentioned in the previous two answers will allow for more investment in homelands and upgrades to homelands dwellings and amenities. We will work with service providers to ensure that homelands receive their fair share of investment.

Up until this point, we have been limited and restricted in the funding we could provide to homelands. Nevertheless, we remained committed to supporting town camps and homelands. We have a specific homelands and town camps division within the department, which are solely focused on the needs and aspirations of town campers and homelands residents. This money story will significantly change the amount of work and investment we are able to do to work with town campers and homelands residents to do the long-awaited and much-needed improvements.

Mr GUYULA: The current rising cost of fuel and materials means that maintenance and services in remote homelands have increased by up to 30%. Allocating the same amount of money as in previous years means there is less capacity for homeland resource centres to meet the needs of the homeland residents, and they must begin choosing which essential work can no longer be completed. What is the government doing to address the impact of rising costs for homelands?

Ms UIBO: Again, that focus and the commitment is there.

Mr GUYULA: What is the government doing to address the impact of rising costs for homelands?

Ms JARVIS: We fully acknowledge that there has been an impact as a result of the increased costs, particularly of diesel. We have a weighting system for municipal central services funding that goes to homelands to partially offset the increased cost of diesel supply. Having said that, in some homelands with poor infrastructure, a lot of their expenditure goes to servicing generators.

Another change to our capital program is the focus on healthy living principles. In our last capital round, which was just over \$6m, in excess of two-thirds of the program went to largely supporting power and water supply, acknowledging that if we can get better, more functioning provision of solar bores or more efficient generators that will maximise the fuel usage.

In the future we need to be working with our service providers so that there is an element of community education about the use of power. In many homelands people do not pay for their power and there is an impact on the installation, for example air con systems, of diesel generated power for homelands. There needs to be community education about how to maximise the power you have. There are also issues with water—turning taps off, notifying the service provider if there are taps leaking. There is a three-part step to that. Any further investment through Australian Government money will be focused on the urgent infrastructure needs such as power, water and housing.

Mr GUYULA: Have you had any correspondence with the new federal government regarding the pre-election commitment of \$100m for homelands? Has the federal government discussed when the funding will be delivered and to which organisation or body will the funding be given to?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I had a conversation with the new minister for Housing and Homelessness, Hon Julie Collins MP, who has been to the Territory in previous roles as shadow minister and as a minister in previous federal Labor governments. The conversation with Minister Collins was about how we can fast-track the delivery of the \$100m commitment from federal Labor to our homelands. I am hoping she will come to the Northern Territory soon to visit the areas—to strongly articulate and advocate the fast-tracking of that commitment and how it is equitably distributed across the Northern Territory.

This is an exciting opportunity for us. It is particularly exciting for the Aboriginal Territorians on homelands, the strong advocates who have been talking about the need for improvements as well as the uneven growth and expansion on homelands. During COVID many Aboriginal Territorians returned to and stayed on country to be safe. Some of the inhibitors and challenges for Aboriginal Territorians was the much-needed improvement for infrastructure on the old and ageing infrastructure on homelands. All of that ties in to a very

strong alignment between the Northern Territory Government and the new federal Labor government and what we will see benefit Aboriginal Territorians on country.

We have had the conversation with Minister Collins. If any of my colleagues would like to write and similarly advocate for Minister Collins to come to the Northern Territory and prioritise us, I welcome that support.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2022–23 as they relate to Housing and Homelands.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – HOUSING **Output 2.1 – Homelessness Services**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 2.0, Housing, Output 2.1, Homelessness Services. Are there any questions?

Mr YAN: In your homelessness services budget there is \$4.1m for a safe-care house. Can you describe the specifics of this program and what the budget is expected to provide?

Mr DAVIES: That safe-care house is in the industrial area. It is a building that was constructed a long time ago by the Health department. We use it as a bail support house, and on one end of it we run a safe-care house footprint for young people who are placed in the safe-care house for long periods of time to ensure that the trauma they experienced is dealt with. It is a 24-hour operation.

I can provide more detail if you would like. I do not want to go into too much detail in this session. The house is fully staffed. It is an operation that has two young people in it. They are young people who, if they were not there, would either be in the care of the youth detention system or the Health department.

We put these young people into the house, work with them intensively on trauma and support them to get them back on track. The \$4.1m is the operational cost of the facility. On the other end of that facility is the bail support with the Saltbush program.

Mr YAN: The \$4.1m for the safe-care house is covering the 24-hour operation of this facility for the two young people you were talking about and bail accommodation on the other side ...

Mr DAVIES: No. That is just the operation of the safe-care house. It is staffed 24 hours a day. There is intensive support, with psychologists and education programs. These are high-needs young people. The cost of housing them is significant—and the services that they access and are provided with.

We experience significant success with this program. It has only been established in the last couple of years. We have grown it and learned lessons along the way. We have been working with the Children's Commissioner on how it looks and the policy framework which sits behind it. The object is to get these young people, who have significant trauma and, unfortunately, without this support would end up in the criminal justice system as adults, on track.

One young person has transitioned from the safe-care house into a foster care arrangement. This person has two jobs, and she is well and truly on track. She is 17 and has her licence. Prior to that there were significant issues with this young person.

Mr YAN: I applaud the good work that being done in this facility. I understand the issues of being able to provide adequate and appropriate services in these scenarios. The question I raise is about \$4.1m to look after two people per annum. It is a lot of money to the Territory taxpayer. I get what it is being used for. You say there are two people in there. Obviously, you may have more throughout the year. What is the highest number you have had in this facility?

Ms UIBO: It is not part of the budget estimates process in these outputs for my portfolio. You could write specifically to Minister Worden because it is not anything to do with Output 2.1.

Mr YAN: The \$4.1m budget sits in this output.

Ms UIBO: No, it does not, Member for Namatjira.

Mr YAN: As far as homelessness goes, what are the key place-based solutions that will be delivered in 2022–23 to address homelessness and support those at risk of homelessness across the Territory?

Ms UIBO: We are proud of this work targeting specialist programs and supporting our non-government organisations for the delivery of those programs. They are often the experts in the field and are able to liaise with government to provide specialist support programs in urban and regional centres. Partnerships have been quite successful.

The categories include work on visitor accommodation, short-term emergency accommodation, medium-term and transitional accommodation, private rental programs, tenancy sustainability programs, the wraparound support services that many vulnerable Territorians may need to access and providing the bridge to those support programs. Some peak body funding is included in that delivery—and the drop-in centres and hubs in urban and regional centres, as well as the ongoing commitment with the Batten Road Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program service, which is a good news story.

Our commitment to homelessness services in the NT involves the Northern Territory Government contributing 67% of the total funding towards these programs and the Commonwealth Government contributing 33% of the total funding. We put more of our dollars in because we recognise the need to service Territorians within this cohort who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

We have a lot of work to do, but those support services and partnerships with our non-government organisations and Aboriginal service providers are making a difference in how we are providing better support and through care for homeless people or those at risk of being homeless. A lot of that work falls within Territory Families, but the connection to service providers of specialist homelessness services and the data collection regarding Territorians who access those services is important for advocating for more needs support through the federal government.

Mr DAVIES: The minister made it clear at the outset that the Northern Territory has 12 times the homelessness rate nationally. This is an important area for us. Regarding success and statistics, the Batten Road facility is jointly run by Yilli and Mission Australia. Since it started in late 2020, 5,000 individual families have received support. They were families housed there during COVID pandemic. Through that service, not only are the families being supported but we are getting visits from Centrelink for people to get their IDs, and a small school service is provided inside the centre. The services are aimed at supporting the families and getting them home if that is needed. The families contribute to the cost—it is not a free service. It is a 24-hour service where meals are provided.

We have a lot of work to do across the regions. At the moment \$26.6m of that funding is provided in five-year agreements for core service delivery in urban centres—Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. It is a big focus for us. It is about the broader system, and the whole housing footprint, which runs from urban to remote housing and homelands, dealing with overcrowding issues. It is all interrelated. This is a significant and important area for us. We would like more funding from the Australian Government and will be working with them on the programs which they are funding with us.

Mr YAN: Given the damage to more than 40 houses in Wadeye recently, what homelessness services will be provided to the Wadeye residents? Will it come from this budget output?

Ms UIBO: I acknowledge the families who have been impacted by the unrest in the Wadeye community and particularly the surrounding homelands. Unfortunately, many Territorians were displaced by the incidents that occurred and the impact it had on families.

I thank our public servants who responded to the critical needs of community members. I also acknowledge the Member for Daly, who has been working with families and been a strong advocate on behalf of the Territory Labor government to support the work on a wider scale across agency. I thank our non-government service providers in the region for their assistance and partnership in supporting the impacted families through the unrest.

The incidents occurred outside of the estimates reporting period. Nonetheless, there has been significant work, particularly through Territory Families, Housing and Communities, in being part of the short, medium and long-term planning of solutions and support for the members in Wadeye and the homelands region of West Daly. Some of the work and costings will happen through this quarter, which is leading up to the end of

financial year. It has not been budgeted through the announcements that occurred in May—in the budget announcement for the reporting period.

Some work has happened with the identification of damaged homes and properties that fall under the Remote Housing program. We have data and the staged approaches on identifying homes occupied by residents; identifying tenants who have vacated their homes but are eager to return; and identifying tenants willing to return within the next few months, particularly after the funeral in the Wadeye community.

Also there are tenants who may be unwilling to return in the short or medium term to their dwelling. A lot of the scoping and support work is under way. The works that will be required for the preparation and provisions of support services for, particularly in stage four, the tenants who are unwilling to return to their homes because of the current situation in Wadeye and the dynamics of the community.

We have put through lot of capital works and planning within the last six weeks. We are doing a significant amount of work on social services and supporting families as well as infrastructure and support through DIPL in identifying repairs, maintenance and possible new builds.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can we have the data on how many houses have been damaged, how many houses are uninhabitable, how many people are homeless, how many have left and how many have come back? I think that is really interesting for ...

Ms UIBO: Yes. Member for Araluen, the figures are:

- 125 remote houses and properties have been damaged throughout the past couple of weeks
- 66 houses have been secured, including 22 that were fire damaged
- 59 houses received immediate and urgent repairs to make them safe for tenants living at home—these may require further repairs
- 80 houses have been scoped with more to be scoped by the end of this week.

The partnership between Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics, Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the Thamarrurr Development Corporation supports tenants to return to houses; ensuring housing maintenance plans are ongoing for residents to return to their homes if they had vacated their homes.

Community meetings are scheduled for this week to discuss the staged approach for repairs to houses.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are many houses completely uninhabitable?

Mr WARREN: In cooperation with DIPL, technicians and engineers did the assessments. It is pleasing that even the houses subject to fire damage appear to be repairable. There is nothing that has been damaged beyond repair.

We have figures which Dwayne may wish to read out in more detail. We have identified urgent repairs to houses where the tenants have said they would like to move back straight away. We also made arrangements for some tenants who would like to be in their house during the day but not living in town at night.

There are a number of houses that need more significant repairs. We are identifying which tenants are most ready to move back. Because of the community challenges we want to make sure that tenants confirm they will move in before we do the repairs.

We identified 18 family groups ready to move back into their homes—once repairs are completed and we identify the 35 family groups ready to move back in, based on the dynamics around the funeral.

We are still planning with DIPL for the other families that may not be ready to come back to town yet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Does that mean 53 family groups in total were displaced? Eighteen plus 35?

Mr WARREN: There were 125 tenancies affected by this and, by our count, 545 people—adults and children—have been displaced or have chosen not to stay in town whilst the troubles are occurring.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the total number of tenancies in Wadeye?

Mr WARREN: There are 288 remote public housing properties in Wadeye. We are talking about 125 of those properties which have had some damage. We have a range of extra staff based in Wadeye driving our welfare response. That includes Housing experts, Families experts and our DIPL colleagues.

They are making sure we have tracked down and spoken to every tenant on our books, checked in about where they are staying and made sure they are sufficiently looked after. That includes ensuring they have access to food, have temporary accommodation—one of the big things has been getting tents to people who want to stay on a homeland instead of in town. Where we identify pressure being put onto a homeland, we have been working with West Daly Regional Council and Thamarrurr Development Corp to get emergency upgrades. That includes extra toilet capacity, so that families have the basics while we work through the challenges in town.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much do you think this will all cost? You talk about doing scoping. How much will these riots have cost government?

Ms UIBO: The work is ongoing. We cannot give you a solid figure at this point but I can pass to Mr Davies about the coordination because there are several agencies involved.

Mr DAVIES: I accompanied the Member for Daly to Wadeye, along with Minister Worden. We spoke to some families there and had a look at what has gone on. We went to a homeland where over 100 people from Wadeye are staying for safety reasons. Demountables were being put in to ensure there were sufficient ablutions and so on. There are some tents and a school program was provided by Catholic Education service.

There has been a strong response across agencies and local organisations, like Thamarrurr and the West Daly Regional Council, to get on top of these issues. I am working my people on a recovery phase. We have to move on and get people back into homes. The focus is to do as much work as we can early so that we get the housing infrastructure sorted out before the Wet Season. That always means some people transition out of homelands because of road networks into the towns. There is a lot of work going on in this space. We have put on additional staff and senior officers to coordinate this.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities has set up a cost centre to attribute the cost of what we are doing there. In DIPL, it will be able to tell us the cost of the repairs. It is early days. There will be the capacity at the end to calculate the cost.

Mr YAN: DIPL would need a basic estimated cost to start looking at future budgets for repairs. Do we have any idea of an estimated cost at this point?

Ms UIBO: You have hit the magic word, 'estimated' cost. From that, the actual works and the timing for the works will create the solid dollar figure for repairs and maintenance.

Mr McINNES: We had an estimate; I do not have an up-to-date estimate. The prior estimate was between \$4m and \$5m to undertake repairs on the damaged housing. That was based on 80 houses. We do not have the full scoping finalised. As mentioned earlier, they will be going back out this week to finalise scoping; there are still additional dwellings to be done. We will have a more up-to-date estimate once that has been completed.

Mr YAN: Regarding the homelessness due to what happened in Wadeye, what are the estimated costs for dealing with the 545 people who have been displaced? What component of the budget in homelessness services will that take up?

Ms UIBO: The department has initial estimated costs for staffing to support the Territorians displaced in Wadeye and the surrounding homelands regions.

Mr WARREN: We have spent \$160,000 on staff going to communities, staying and working with community members. We will continue to attribute our costs related to those visits into a special cost centre so that we can keep track of it. We are also working with the existing funded providers to use the funding they already have to do certain works. I mentioned West Daly and Thamarrurr as being in that bracket.

We also identified initial extra works that can be done, including bringing out extra demountable toilets to homelands. We have issued an emergency grant to West Daly Regional Council of \$200,000 to deal with getting more toilets installed and other urgent things related to water and telecommunications access.

Mr YAN: The bigger-picture question for taxpayers is whether these costs for homelessness services—Mr McInnes estimated \$4m to \$5m for 80 houses; that will probably be higher. Will government try to recoup any of the money from the people who damaged or set fire to NTG assets? They are NTG homes. Or are we, the government, and the taxpayers, be footing the entire bill for that?

Ms UIBO: I hope that the bigger question for taxpayers in the Northern Territory would be the safety of other Territorians and the need for an instant response for making Territorians across other parts of the Territory safe, regardless of where they live. I hope that would be front and centre of any taxpayer's mind in looking after other Territorians.

The recovery of possible damages would be a police matter. Regarding any investigation of property damages, if criminal charges were laid and the processes undertaken independently through the court on what that consequences may be—I cannot comment on that. I do not have a crystal ball.

The collective response from our government agencies, including police—which has been phenomenal—in regard to restoring safety as best as possible for Territorians living in Wadeye and the communities, has been outstanding. There have been long, stressful and sleepless nights for many public servants and non-government organisations. We acknowledge the challenges of delivering education throughout the unrest—with the Catholic Education office. I thank the school for the initiatives to support the families who are on country and displaced on homelands.

We will be happy to report once the figures come in, but our priority is to make sure Territorians are safe.

Mr YAN: Safety is a priority for all Territorians, wherever they live. You stated that a key part of the budget line for homelessness will be eaten by people displaced from Wadeye ...

Ms UIBO: That is not a statement I made. We have our budget related to the output regarding homelessness services. What you are asking questions about is the relationship and response to the Wadeye unrest and the impact on families in the Wadeye and Daly region.

That is something that both responses from the department have indicated is being cost-coded, because of the multi-agency approach. It does not relate to what is in the estimates budget and reporting period up until 31 March 2022.

Mr YAN: Yes, I understand that it has not been recorded yet. But there will be some costs against the budget line for homelessness services in the last quarter of this financial year. Would I be correct in saying that?

Ms UIBO: If any of the residents are accessing the homelessness services, if they are here in Darwin as an urban centre—Batten Road, for example, that will fold into the last reporting period for the quarter of the budget estimates period.

Mr YAN: That is where I was going. Will the budget for homelessness services now be affected by this event that was not planned—or wanted—but it happened? We budget for X services over a period, and occasionally we get unexpected things—cyclones, fires, floods—that may affect this. That was an alternative event, which will now have a significant effect on the homelessness budget. Will you need to increase or top up that budget? What effects do you expect to see on that budget?

Ms UIBO: Regarding the budget for homelessness services provided in the Northern Territory, there are several different programs funded through that budget line item. We do not anticipate that the bulk of the current funding and budgeting for homelessness services in the Northern Territory will solely be impacted by the unrest in Wadeye and the impact on families from Wadeye.

If anyone is accessing those services in the final quarter of this financial year, it will go through as part of the homelessness service budget and what has already been funded.

For infrastructure repairs there are line items within the housing budget. Infrastructure and support services, and access to things like ablution and safe drinking water on homelands, is through the homelands budget.

I will get Mr Ken Davies to talk through that, so you get an idea of where support services fall. There are several categories and budget line items that cover the response from my department in regard to Wadeye.

Mr DAVIES: The homelessness services budget is largely attributed to service providers. That is in five-year agreements. We cannot shift money around within that attribution, so that is funded—Batten Road, for instance, if someone comes in from Wadeye, we will know and can cost that against it. We will not be shifting money from inside the homelands homelessness services budget to fund the response at Wadeye.

The attribution for staffing will be an internal attribution in the Territory agencies' budget for personnel. We will put that in a budget line where we can record it. The repairs and maintenance done through the DIPL response for infrastructure will be costed. We will put into a budget line where we can see it, but we will not be shifting money out of the homelessness services budget from current providers we are funding to fund our response at Wadeye.

Towards the end of the financial year, part of the process we go through is look at where there have been extraordinary expenses, go through the minister to apply for a Treasurer's Advance, if necessary, and work through Treasury to rebalance the books to fund the cost.

That is what we did with the funding for the Alice Springs recovery centre at the Alice Springs quarantine facility for the cost of managing and administering that when Territory Families took it over during the pandemic. It was an extraordinary expense.

That is what we will have to do if we spend more than we have in some of those budget lines. We will not be going into homelessness services other than if there is a service provider that might need some additional funding that we will have to put in. We will not be shifting money out of the budget itself.

Mr YOUNG: I could not agree more. It is disappointing to see the line of questioning about prioritising what it costs taxpayers, rather than the care and welfare of other Territorians ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is budget estimates; it is about money.

Mr YOUNG: It is quite disappointing that is their priority. Can you outline how a service like Batten Road helps families? How many people have been provided with the service over the last year?

Ms UIBO: I appreciate that your electorate has been heavily impacted and you have been on the ground supporting people as they come into town for support and services. I thank you and put that on the record.

Batten Road is a great story that Minister Worden commenced under the portfolio of Urban Housing. I am very proud to have carriage of the Housing and Homelands portfolio now.

A huge acknowledgement to Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation and Mission Australia for their partnership in delivering services for Batten Road. This was a significant shift for us to provide available and secured support services to the facility, with 150 rooms and the capacity to expand to 180 rooms.

In the estimates reporting period of 1 July 2021 to 31 March 2022, a total of 10,489 episodes of accommodation was accessed through Batten Road. This equated to 259 people per day staying at the facility. Of the 259 people, 21% were accompanied by children.

As Mr Davies said earlier in a response, there is a contribution to access that facility and with that, more importantly, the wraparound support services through Yilli Rreung and Mission Australia. Further support is provided to Territorians staying at that facility.

On 1 April 2022, 237 people were accommodated at the Batten Road site. That was 181 adults and 56 children. We have work under way to support those people and a partnership with the Department of Education to provide education to the children.

We have a memorandum of understanding with the Australian Government for a \$10m investment in the facility to focus on making it more family friendly, which is the next big step—because of the numbers of families with children accessing the facility. We want to make it more fit for purpose. It is a demountable-style old workers' camp, which is not suitable for family groupings. Capitals works will be carried out throughout the financial year.

It is a great story to have a facility like this. We are collecting the data—and more importantly we are connecting Territorians to services they may not otherwise get if they were staying elsewhere. It is a very targeted and focused support service.

Thanks to the collaboration between my department and DIPL in regard to affordable transport options to assist residents across the Darwin and Palmerston network—particularly promoting and supporting independence. Because when people fall down they sometimes need a hand up. This sort of partnership is important in the next step, doing it in an appropriate manner to support vulnerable Territorians who ask for assistance.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Alice Springs is going through an interesting phase. There are people camping illegally everywhere—the bushes, around town, in the hills and in the middle of town. I have not seen that for many years. Are you aware of this? If you are, what are your plans? How are you addressing this? It is really diminishing the town. It is impacting the town and not in a good way.

Ms UIBO: Yes, I am aware of the pressures being experienced in Alice Springs. The work being done regionally in Central Australia to target support services for homelessness is ongoing and we will stay committed to that. We have \$10.55m for the homelessness program for Central Australia, for Alice Springs specifically.

Mr WARREN: Part of your question is about the response from the department in the space of homelessness and the funded arrangements.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is the illegal camping I am interested in. I know you have services in town, many of them have been there forever and you are funding them substantially—\$10.55m. People are camping illegally in the middle of town, in parks and the bush. What are you doing about that? Is it your responsibility to move illegal campers on?

Mr WARREN: We do not have any powers to remove campers from public places. We work in conjunction with the police night patrol services and council rangers to tackle those issues. From time to time we have joint operations where the different departments work together to show a pathway from illegal camping towards somewhere which is more suitable. We have providers that do outreach and wraparound support for people who do not have anywhere to go and provide options for people so they can get off the streets.

The biggest facility is the visitor park in Alice Springs, but that is part of a range of responses including some organisations that have case workers to engage with people in the river bed—to put it in Alice Springs context.

We have been talking to providers about making sure they have changed tack and are focused on getting out to do that case management in the field; they responded well. They are keen to be involved in field case work as well as the residential-based services that some of them provide.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you have any figures on how many illegal campers would be in town at the moment?

Mr WARREN: We do not collect that kind of data; it is outside of our remit.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you work with the council and the rangers?

Mr WARREN: Yes. We connect with council at a senior level so there is a coordination and understanding of the services are. I recently met with the council senior officers to make sure they had visibility of this \$10.5m worth of services which need to be part of the response.

Ms UIBO: Regarding the remit we have carriage of, we have infrastructure and investment support the pressures in Alice Springs town camps. The plans are 230 extra bedrooms across the town camps, which is great news for town campers in the Alice Springs community. Regarding home numbers, there are 65.

Mrs LAMBLEY: New homes—additional?

Ms UIBO: Additional. It is a great news story for Alice Springs town camps. Tangentyere Council has been working in partnership with my department on the works, investment, grants, designs and processes for what will suit town campers, and addressing long-term visitors on town camps.

We have been working on a whole-of-government response. You touched on a couple of other areas, including local government and Police, Fire and Emergency Services regarding the illegal camping.

We do have those public housing safety officers in Alice Springs who do some of that outreach work in particular supporting and connecting people to some of those homelessness services that they may access or may not be aware that they can access. It is about that connection and partnership to non-government

organisations to be able to switch to a little more of the mobilisation of their services as opposed to an office-based service.

There have been conversations with Lhere Artepe and the traditional owner group in Alice Springs, Mparntwe, about looking at the modelling in Darwin and Palmerston with Larrakia Nation. There is a possibility of an MOU between the two organisations to look at targeted support services for people on Mparntwe country and visiting Arrernte, who may not be from that country, and how to connect them to services. That is really positive work by Lhere Artepe.

We will support what traditional owners are looking for in terms of local solutions and connecting into local government. Mayor Matthew Paterson is keen to support connections to the support services which they may not regularly access.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1. We will now break for 10 minutes.

The committee suspended.

Output 2.2 – Urban Housing

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back. We will now consider Output 2.2, Urban Housing. Are there any questions?

Mr YAN: How will the \$6.5m in this budget for government employee housing reform be spent and what will be delivered for that cost?

Ms UIBO: The government employee housing is Output 2.5. You have skipped ahead a little; we are at Output 2.2, Urban Housing. Government employee housing sits in its own output at 2.5.

Mr YAN: Another initiative in this budget is \$1.8m for COVID-19 affordable housing capital program. What is this program and what will it deliver for the \$1.8m in 2022–23?

Mr WARREN: There is an allocation for COVID-19 stimulus in this year's budget. It is part of a program that rolls from this year into next year. The funding has been given for two purposes. One is to create a rental subsidy scheme for low-earning key workers. There is a total of \$3m allocated specifically for rental subsidy administered by Venture Housing. It is available on application by people for rental support.

The other part of the program is increasing the number of dwellings available in the marketplace. There are three parts to that program. We have supported Venture to acquire eight dwellings in Johnston that form part of their affordable housing network.

We have funded Venture Housing to build eight new dwellings in Katherine. That is part of a joint investment where we provided land in Katherine so that it can bring new houses online. We provided funding to Venture that will allow it to set up a headleasing program in Palmerston, which will bring 25 new single-person dwellings online for single workers living in the Palmerston area. That is the intent of the program.

Mr YAN: Is there any provision in the future for a program like this to be rolled out in Central Australia?

Mr WARREN: Just for clarification, the rental subsidy scheme is available in all regional centres. So far, in the draw-down, it is predominantly greater Darwin and Alice Springs-based workers receiving the subsidy.

In relation to the new dwelling funds, it is a one-off funding arrangement. It is just for the three projects I described. In our broader community housing growth strategy, there are both funds that we spoke about earlier, to move public housing across to community housing management in Alice Springs.

There are also funds available to do a capital project with a community housing provider in Alice Springs. We are in negotiations regarding a package that would include land that belongs to the government plus capital injection to purchase existing and build new in Alice Springs. Part of our intent is to grow the network in Alice Springs.

Mr YAN: Knowing that land is at a premium and difficult to come by, what area of Alice Springs is that? Are you able to discuss or disclose that?

Mr WARREN: The Housing department owns lots across the Northern Territory, particularly in greater Darwin and Alice Springs. They are lots that have never been constructed on, as well as lots that may have been demolished in the past and are waiting for renewal.

We have identified parcels of land in Bloomfield Street, Alice Springs, which are suitable for construction. They have the appropriate approvals in place. That is the land for this project. We have land available that we work on with the sector, distributing it so that it is used productively.

Another way is through the specialist disability accommodation network. We are in the process of assessing applications from providers to take seven vacant lots we have, split between Alice Springs and Darwin, to build specialist accommodation for people with disabilities. It is a fairly common practice for us to do that.

Mr YAN: How many public housing homes are there across the Territory? You may want to take this on notice because I would like to know this by region and type, for example family home, unit, flat.

Ms UIBO: The total urban housing dwellings managed is 5,909.

Mr YAN: Am I able to get a breakdown by region, then housing type?

Ms UIBO: The breakdown is Alice Springs 1,114 dwellings; Katherine 496; Greater Darwin region, which is Darwin and Casuarina areas, 2519; Palmerston region 1,533; Tennant Creek 200; and Nhulunbuy 47.

Mr YAN: I would also like the breakdown by type of dwelling.

Ms UIBO: Do you the amount of bedrooms ...

Mr YAN: No. what type of dwelling, is it a home, unit or flat?

Question on Notice No 8.4

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

Mr YAN: Of the 5,909 public housing assets across the Territory, could I have a breakdown by region of the housing type, is it a home, unit or flat?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.4.

Mr YAN: Of the 5,909 residences, how many people are being housed?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.5

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

Mr YAN: Of the 5,909 houses, could you advise how many people are housed in those dwellings by region?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.5.

Mr YAN: How many people are on the waiting list for urban housing by region?

Ms UIBO: In Alice Springs 1,522; Katherine 539; Darwin Greater Region, Darwin to Casuarina, 2,446; Palmerston 988; Tennant Creek 240; and Nhulunbuy 167.

Mr YAN: Based on those figures, which region do you consider is in the greatest need for more urban public housing?

Ms UIBO: All our regions are important. We recognise that we have pressures in our urban centres and regional towns and will continue to work on the further release of land. Some partnerships, which were announced through the budget release 2022–23 on securing lots, will provide public and affordable housing, particularly in places such as Katherine—with the development occurring there—and other regions. I do not consider any region above any other.

We keep the data so we can look at what land is available, making sure that we can secure the lots and leases to provide public and affordable housing.

That is also coupled with the work with community housing providers to look at better management processes to allow for more services to be accessed by people who are in public and affordable houses. A lot of that work is happening regionally. It is being managed regionally, but we are also keeping an oversight through the department. I do not consider any region above the needs of others.

Mr YAN: In addition, what is the waiting period for public housing by region?

Ms UIBO: We have this data, but will make sure that we have the right information for you. We will take that on notice, but should be able to answer it briefly.

Question on Notice No 8.6

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

Mr YAN: What is the waiting period for urban public housing by region?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 8.6.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The waitlist in Alice Springs is 1,522. What does that mean exactly? Is that per application, not the number of people waiting to be housed?

Ms UIBO: Yes, it is per application.

Mr YAN: Of those 5,909 properties managed by your agency, how many are vacant?

Ms UIBO: As of 31 March this year we have a total of 293 vacant properties of the 5,909.

Mr YAN: Do you have that breakdown by region?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I do. In Alice Springs there are 67; Katherine has 22; greater Darwin—Darwin to Casuarina—is 118; Palmerston region has 74; Tennant Creek has 8; and Nhulunbuy has 4.

Mr YAN: Do you keep records on how long properties have been vacant?

Ms UIBO: Yes, we do.

Mr YAN: Excellent. I would like a breakdown on the properties that have been vacant for more than one year, two years, five years and 10 years.

Ms UIBO: We will take that one on notice because it involves data over a longer period of time. We have data around average days of turnaround times. It also includes things like vacant properties awaiting demolition, which may require new builds. All of that is factored into the larger data set.

Question on Notice No 8.7

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

Mr YAN: Of the 293 vacant properties I would like a breakdown of how many have been vacant for more than one year, more than two years, more than five years or more than 10 years.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.7.

Mr YAN: What is the average turnaround time on vacant properties?

Ms UIBO: Territory wide it is an average of 130 days.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you have the number of urban homes due to be built in each region for the coming budget period—things that you have budgeted to build?

Mr McINNES: We have a program that has been provided to us totalling \$7.4m. That consists of 4 x 2-bedroom and 2 x 2-bedroom dwellings in Katherine; 6 x 1-bedroom in Tennant Creek; 4 x 1-bedroom in Tennant Creek; 3 x 1-bedroom in Humpty Doo; 1 x 2-bedroom and one independent unit in Katherine. That is it for the new builds that are currently planned.

Mr BURGOYNE: Nothing in Alice Springs, Darwin or Palmerston planned in the next financial year?

Mr McINNES: Not at this point in time.

Mr WARREN: Mr McInnes has given information about the government commissioned houses that will be delivered by the Infrastructure department. We also have works under way that are worth mentioning. John Stokes Square will bring 70-plus new dwellings online in the greater Darwin area early in the new financial year. We also have a leasing program that continues to bring on new dwellings.

Most recently we brought 30 dwellings on line in The Narrows under our headleasing program. We are also working with community housing providers to start delivery of new dwellings. With Venture Housing we have 41 dwellings coming into the social and affordable pool between Palmerston and Katherine. We are working with Community Housing Central Australia on a project that will bring new dwellings on line.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many homes have you sold from urban housing stock in the past 12 months, by region?

Ms UIBO: Twenty dwellings at the end of their serviceable life were sold through public auction in this financial year, with an expected net revenue of \$7.2m once settlements are completed, which are expected by 30 June 2022.

Mr BURGOYNE: You spoke about leasing them before, what is the overall cost to the department of leading homes?

Ms UIBO: We can get that data for you. I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.8

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

Mr BURGOYNE: What is the overall cost of leasing homes as part of the urban housing program for the financial year 2021–22?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Brainting has been allocated the number 8.8.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What you mentioned about possibly building more public housing on Bloomfield Street in Alice Springs is of enormous interest to me. Are you able to provide more details? What are you looking at building? Where exactly? It is a fairly intense area for public housing anyway, or has been. We have the Keith Lawrie complex, which has been the bane of my life for the last 12 years in terms of antisocial behaviour. There are a lot of problems in that area. What are you proposing? Tell me as much as you can, please.

Mr WARREN: The department has a parcel of land in Bloomfield Street. We are looking at small individual dwellings, not a multi-dwelling complex, like you would be familiar with in other parts of that street. We are aware it is a dense area, and one of the negotiations with the provider is about the style of construction so that it meets everyone's requirements for small, safe, sustainable tenancies that add value to the street not detract from it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: At which end? North or south?

Mr WARREN: It is around the middle. We are still having negotiations with the provider. We have identified the land and are having a discussion about co-investment. That will be part of a package of works that will include potentially acquiring other dwellings in Alice Springs—and supporting them to bring more bedrooms online across the community, not just in that street.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you let me know when you decide on more, please?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: How is the Territory government working with the new federal government to improve housing, and what are the changes we are hoping to see?

Ms UIBO: We are excited with the announcement of the new federal ministry which includes a Minister for Housing and for Homelessness, Julie Collins. Ongoing work from the department and my colleagues is advocating for needs-based funding for the Northern Territory. Often we put in a calculation that is population-based, but the needs and challenges in the Northern Territory are unique compared to other jurisdictions across the country. We continue to advocate for needs-based funding in that space.

We are looking at national coordination and commitment from the federal government for the stability of the programs in the Territory, boosting those programs with federal government support and keeping accountability for those programs. All of that feeds into the push for a national level of coordination in the housing space, which also involves our Northern Territory homelessness strategy. The federal government has made it very clear that is one of its priorities for Australians across the country.

Although it does not necessarily sit under Urban Housing, I reiterate the \$100m commitment from federal Labor for homelands. There are a couple of different elements in that space continuing to showcase the work we are doing in the Northern Territory, particularly on housing community models, and what we are about to venture into with the 1,000 public dwellings which will be transferred across. It is very exciting to showcase that. We will learn from other jurisdictions, knowing that their context is quite different to ours.

Mr YOUNG: A number of members have raised the cost of living. How is the government helping to increase the number of social and affordable homes?

Ms UIBO: We are proud to be working on social and affordable housing. We are providing more opportunities for Territorians to access housing they need, the availability of Crown land subdivisions for social housing and affordable land and home ownership for Territorians. This is a big piece of the work.

We have a working group that is part of the ongoing multi-agency collaboration across our government. DIPL and Territory Families, Housing and Communities are looking at having consistent policy in this space and on access for land, social and affordable housing and purchasing that land. It is something that has been focused on with land that has been returned to the CEO of Housing.

It is a change, but something we are proud to talk about. We are concentrating on delivering the recommendations from the land development review conducted by Mr Dick Guit. We will see positive impacts on social and affordable housing by bringing land to market.

Mr WARREN: We are trying to make sure accommodation is not a barrier for workers coming into regional areas. We are working with the industry sectors and real estate agencies on how we can lift the number of people accessing it in Katherine and Tennant Creek, in particular, so we can deal with the pressures there.

The last thing is to let the committee know we have a redevelopment scheduled for Shiers Street. It will increase the number of dwellings on that site. We are making more homes available to people with a low income or who are working and cannot access the rental market.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Remote Housing

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output 2.3, Remote Housing. Are there any questions?

Mr YAN: How many houses or dwellings are available in remote housing by region across the Territory?

Ms UIBO: Year to date, the actual figure is 5,497.

Mr YAN: Could I have a breakdown by region?

Ms UIBO: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.9

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

Mr YAN: Of the 5,497 dwellings, could I have a breakdown by region of where they are located?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.9.

Mr YAN: Of those regions, how many people are on the wait lists for remote housing?

Ms UIBO: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.10

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

Mr YAN: Of the 5,497 dwellings and the regions allocated to them, could I have a breakdown of the wait list for remote housing for those regions?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.10.

Mr YAN: In relation to remote housing, I would like the wait period for those regions.

Ms UIBO: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.11

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

Mr YAN: Of the regions discussed in relation to the 5,497 dwellings, could I have the wait period for remote housing for each of those regions?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.11.

Ms UIBO: I can offer the average months for the wait list per region, is that acceptable?

Mr YAN: That is also one of my questions for later. Of those 5,497 dwellings, how many of those are vacant across the Territory, and could I have that by region?

Ms UIBO: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.12

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

Mr YAN: Of the 5,497 dwellings, can you please advise how many are vacant and by region?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.12.

Mr YAN: What is the average time a person will spend on a waitlist to gain access to remote housing?

Ms UIBO: The average time for people on the waitlist for remote housing in the Top End region, as at 31 March 2022, is 13 months; in the East Arnhem region, 14 months; the Big Rivers region, 15 months; the Barkly region, 24 months; and in Central Australia, 10 months.

Mr YAN: What is the longest time a person has spent on a waitlist?

Ms UIBO: I have to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.13

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

Mr YAN: In the reporting period what is the longest time a person has spent on the waitlist to gain access to remote housing?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.13.

Mr YAN: What is our current total value of uncollected rent in remote public housing?

Ms UIBO: The figures are accumulative. It is for over a long period of time. It is not necessarily the per annum costs. I want to make that very clear and on the record. As at 31 March 2022, the uncollected rent for current and ceased remote public housing tenancy in the Top End region is \$22,361,963; in the East Arnhem region it is \$12,177,808; the Big Rivers region, \$14,534,745; the Barkly region, \$1,795,397; and in Central Australia it is \$9,799,995.

Mr YAN: What recovery methods are being used to recover any of that outstanding debt?

Ms UIBO: The department has undertaken a process to look at the uncollected rent, particularly in relation to that data, including debt across all regions of the Northern Territory.

Mr WARREN: Regarding uncollected rent, the broader issue is about managing the tenancies in place. The department identified that we needed to put extra human resources into our remote teams. In the later part of last year we recruited 20 extra tenancy officers for remote work to boost each of the five teams that have remote coverage.

The core driver for that was making sure that they could get out regularly and repeatedly to all communities to do check-ins with tenants about their tenancy. This goes to managing their payments and making sure that house inspections are being done, maintenance is being reported and that we have the latest and accurate data about who is in the house.

What we deal with in a remote context is large multi sub-family units living in houses. There are often multiple persons contributing to the total rent payment for the house. The challenge for us is to make sure that we keep all the current, eligible adults on the system as eligible and paying their component of the rent. We regularly find that as people move in and out of larger family units, people drop in and out.

This larger workforce is about having regular, direct contact with the family group in the house, making sure our records are up to date and that we have the right people signed up to pay. When people fall into arrears, we have a good reporting system that allows us quickly identify that. That is driving us to make proactive contact with tenants to figure out what has gone wrong and get them back into the payment system.

The other tool available to us for when a family has fallen behind, is to set up an agreement to pay. They will sign up to the agreement for a period of time to make an extra contribution over—for example, 12 months—to catch up on payments.

That tool is effective, but it is important to bear in mind that with very low income families, the contribution rate for the extra payments is often quite small. That is so we do not bring them over the rental stress threshold, which is 25% of their household income. We have to work with that challenge.

We have identified that the system for levying rent in the remote setting is very complicated and hard to understand for our remote tenants. The department has been working with sector partners to come up with a different way of levying rent.

Traditionally, departments have levied an income-based rent, which requires all persons living in the house to disclose all of their employment and income information on a regular basis, in order to figure out how much rent they should pay. We are finding that it is administratively burdensome and complicated for families where English is a second language. We often have families who might have a rebate—the rent-setting process—that expires. That can contribute toward them falling behind.

We made the decision to move toward a dwelling-based rent, which is simpler and easier to understand. We structured that based on the number of bedrooms in a house. Moving forward to September when that new rate takes effect, we will be levying rent explicitly based on whether it is a one, two, three or four-bedroom house. There will be a set rent that is understandable for everyone, every time. We will move away from the red tape and burdensome process that was going on.

Ms UIBO: Approximately 80% of remote residents pay rent and contribute on a regular basis. That is compared to urban, which is approximately 90%. The majority of public housing residents in urban and remote settings do pay rent.

The figures provided were long-term historical figures, which goes to the piece of work that the department is undertaking, as outlined by Mr Warren.

Mr YAN: Are you able to provide the number of houses built from scratch and completed in the last two financial years under Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes? I am after the number of new houses not including houses that have just had additions.

Mr McINNES: In 2020–21 there were 211 built, with 165 were new builds, 45 were replacements and one was GEH. In the year to date this year, 105 have been built, with 53 new builds, 49 replacements and three GEH new builds.

Mr YAN: Does replacements mean the demolition of an existing house and rebuilding on that site?

Mr McINNES: That is correct. However, it is not necessarily like for like if we take into consideration the makeup of the family, so if we knock over a three-bedroom we could replace it with a four or five-bedroom or with a duplex on the lot as well, depending on the size of the lot.

Mr YAN: Year to date we are 105. That looks like it is substantially down on the year before. Is there any reason for the lack of builds in this year-to-date period than in the previous year?

Ms UIBO: There has been slower movement to the program over the last nine to 12 months and beyond that, due to COVID and the pressures we experienced—taking into account several lock downs across the Northern Territory. This either slowed or stopped remote housing program works.

Some communities imposed their own restrictions on anyone from outside of the community—and sometimes from the community—re-entering the community. That could be for contractors or for personal purposes, so we had delays in our remote housing program. We respectfully worked with communities to make sure that we were doing the right thing—particularly the work we did with the four land councils to sort out the impact to our commitment for the delivery of new houses in remote communities.

The work has recommenced with the same momentum we had prior to COVID restrictions, noting the high demand on the construction industry and contractors, with a lot of works recommencing at the same time.

Mr McINNES: The other factor that impacted the momentum of the housing program was the reluctance of some contractors to return to community—obtaining certain services, such as blockies and concreters. In some communities it was also a misunderstanding of the CHO directions regarding contractors. Some of the delays were in communities where we had major housing programs under way. In Alpururulam we had a lot of buildings ready to go, but could not get trucks in there—the black soil country. Jilkminggan is another large program. There were self-imposed lockdowns.

To regain momentum we completed a number of procurement activities which provided a pipeline of works. Under that we have contracted a total of 591 houses, totalling 2,263 bedrooms. Of those, we anticipate we will get 1,633 bedrooms or 234 houses over the line by the end of next year. Once we finalise the rest of the tenders, in four remaining communities, we will have a total of 722 bedrooms under contract awarded. By the end of June next year it is anticipated we will have delivered up to 3,100 bedrooms, of which 1,950 are attributable to the Australian Government.

Mr YAN: In answer to Written Question 211, you advised that a single home built in Peppimenarti cost \$811,949. Is this the most that NT Government has spent on a single new home in a remote community?

Ms UIBO: Yes, it is the most we have spent on a single dwelling.

Mr YAN: Are you able to advise why that home was so expensive?

Ms UIBO: I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.14

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

Mr YAN: Can you advise why the single home built in Peppimenarti, which cost \$811,949, was the most expensive remote housing build?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.14.

Mr YAN: This is where it gets a little confusing because as part of those written questions submitted before estimates, the answer stated that the most expensive house built was \$739,000 and that it was largely due to the site preparation works. The Peppimenarti home was \$72,949 more than this. Can you advise if the previous figure for the house in Peppimenarti is the correct figure, or is it \$739,000?

Mr DAVIES: We will have to take that on notice. One of the things I learned with this program—coming into it after being in it 10 years ago—is that it is incredibly complicated. Joining the numbers, we would not have intentionally tried to mislead; we just need to get the facts and come back to you on it. There is nothing to hide; we just need to find out the story. I do not know why there is an incongruence, but there are a lot of numbers floating around in this program.

Question on Notice No 8.15

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

Mr YAN: In an answer to Written Question 252, you stated that the most expensive remote home you had built was \$739,000 and that was largely due to site preparation works. The house in Peppimenarti mentioned in Written Question 211 was \$72,949 more than this. Can you advise the correct figure for the highest cost home built in a remote community?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.15.

Mr YAN: I ask this because recently there were six new homes built in Palumpa by Kalidonis Pty Ltd at a cost of \$2,892,295. Effectively, it equates to \$482,000 for each home. This is about half the cost for each home, compared to that single home in Peppimenarti. Are you able to explain what the cost disparity is between those properties?

Ms UIBO: I will take it on notice, thanks.

Question on Notice No 8.16

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

Mr YAN: There were six new homes built in Palumpa by Kalidonis Pty Ltd at a cost of \$2,892,295, which equates to approximately \$482,049 for each home. This is about half the cost for each home, compared to the single home in Peppimenarti for \$811,948. Can you please provide advice on the cost disparity?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.16.

Mr BURGOYNE: In regard to the block and modular homes built in remote communities, has a dollar figure been assessed for the benefit the Northern Territory receives from the construction from these homes?

Ms UIBO: As a whole-of-government strategy, value for Territory is a big part of what we do across all of our agencies. Obviously, we want local jobs and businesses employed to do the work locally. It makes sense. Another layer of that is supporting Aboriginal business enterprises and local employment opportunities in urban and regional areas and on country.

Mr MCINNES: Regarding block versus modular, all housing built under the remote housing program is subject to the same guidelines, specifications and lifecycle. Requirements are 30-plus years for both block and modular. They are assessed for robustness no matter what product we use.

For modular dwellings, we will be undertaking an evaluation early in the new financial year on the early ones we put in place. We expect that process to take about six months to see how they stand the test of time. It will not just be limited to the modulars. We will look at the alternative products that may be out there, including tilt slabs and block work.

For Aboriginal employment, we are getting pleasing results with modulars. Some far exceed the local employment numbers in terms of outcomes. We have no concerns there. Aboriginal employment over the life of the program so far is at 46.7% and for FTEs, it is 44.1%.

The highest Aboriginal employment percentage we have achieved is with a modular company. That company has employed 14 apprentices, and two of them are about to complete their certificates. This is the first time that has happened in any remote housing program we have gone through.

Mr DAVIES: The modular building companies operating here have all made strong commitments. They have onsite residences and are accommodating young people, or people participating in the program, on site. Some of them have come in from communities where the building is being delivered. They are working on the program, in construction or transport, with a view that they will return and participate in the maintenance and ongoing sustainability of the program.

That is the upside of these modular builds. Because they have long-term work, they are not just moving in, building and moving on. We are seeing some great outcomes there. Rusca Bros is one example of a company doing a brilliant job of taking on young people and getting them through to their certification.

Output 2.4 – Town Camps and Homelands

Mr YAN: I am after a list of all the town camps in remote communities and urban areas across the Territory, including: how many homes there are in each camp; how many people live in each of our town camps; and the current land tenure of each of these town camps.

Ms UIBO: We will take the question on notice. Just to clarify for you, we do not keep the data or figures with regard to population. If you can drop the last bit of your question, we can answer the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.17

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

Mr YAN: Can you provide a list of all the town camps in remote communities and urban areas across the Territory? How many homes are in each town camp? What is the current land tenure of each town camp?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.17.

Ms UIBO: I can add an answer to a question for a previous output. We just received further details.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.14

Mr CHAIR: The minister will provide an answer about the Peppimenarti house and the cost of \$811,000 or thereabouts.

Ms UIBO: Yes. We will do an official written response so you have it in writing. The overall figure, which was provided in the written question relates to a duplex home. It is not just a single dwelling, it is two dwellings on the same lot, which is why it is a higher figure.

Mr YAN: In December last year you announced that you were granting \$500,000 to Aboriginal Housing NT to provide input and advice towards the new homelands policy. How is this policy developing, is it progressing? Can you tell us what the expectations are?

Ms UIBO: That highlights the importance of the Territory Labor government on homelands and what we are doing in the space of reform. We are fortunate to have a great team in our homelands and town camps division within the department and to have Ms Danyelle Jarvis who is here to speak to some of the specifics.

Ms JARVIS: The development of the homelands policy has taken a reset partly due to the advocacy on behalf of land councils and wanting us to better engage with the Australian Government. We had our initial response to the independent review that was put forward in 2020. Part of the feedback we received from the service provider sector was that they wanted more opportunity to participate and have input.

We provided funding under the direction of our homelands advisory group, which provided funding for the homelands sector through Aboriginal Housing NT.

We are looking to have a service provider forum at the end of this calendar year to bring in providers to hear recommendations from our initial response. We need to respond because there were a number of concerns about the sustainable regional model for service delivery for homelands. We have provided the \$500,000 over a two year period. How do we look at resetting our grants program so that we maximise the investment across the 400 homelands?

To do that work we felt we needed to engage a peak body; that is the genesis for two-year investment into Aboriginal Housing NT.

Mr YAN: Last week we asked Minister Lawler about \$100m in federal government funds for homelands, specifically about funding towards schools and facilities at Ali Curung and Mungkarta. Minister Lawler stated:

When Selena Uibo, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, is on the estimates, I suggest that conversations with her would be useful.

There were two separate projects; \$300,000 for primary schools, urban schools, and secondary schools.

...

... \$5m allocated from the Northern Territory Government to ... Homeland Learning Centres.

...

... usually a federal government responsibility to look after them.

... We have about 31 Homeland Learning Centres, so that \$5m has gone there.

...

... it is not my project so I will allow Selena Uibo to talk about it. It was an election commitment from federal Labor to have \$100m spent on homelands across the Northern Territory.

That is, over a 12-month period.

As part of that \$100m of federal homelands spending, will there be specific funding towards schools and facilities at Ali Curung and Mungkarta?

Ms UIBO: Some of the work is still ongoing in regard to the medium and long-term certainty of the service provisions in the Mungkarta community south of Tennant Creek. It is a beautiful little homeland.

Some of our commitment for Mungkarta—which has a population of approximately 55 people—is looking at the footprint we have as government, our partnerships with other service delivery providers, including non-government organisations in the region. We are working with the Department of Education on commitments for homeland learning centres and upgrades—and the partnership with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Some of our homelands education service providers are non-government. Mungkarta is connected to the Northern Territory Department of Education as an education service provider. It is a beautiful little school.

We have to improve telecommunications connectivity and mobile reception there as well.

The process of the larger work the department is undertaking on homelands policy is about the joint investment. We have commitments from the four land councils in regard to better services, access to service delivery and strong service providers—whether they are government or non-government—on homelands and on country.

We will continue to look at learning centres across the Northern Territory. It will involve community consultation, creating medium and long-term investment strategy for homelands and the needs of the residents—particularly for small places like Mungkarta—what their aspirations are and what they would like for their homeland learning centres and places of learning for children, young people and adults.

The audit from the steering committee on homelands will be essential for informing the works and the delivery of works across homeland communities. We expect that the audit will be completed by October 2022. This will include the assessment of houses and infrastructure in the Mungkarta homeland.

Mr YAN: I also spoke about Ali Curung.

Ms UIBO: Did you want to ask something about that?

Mr YAN: No, specifically it was about that \$100m commitment—Minister Lawler stated that you are now the responsible minister—and the development of those school services in those homelands.

Ms UIBO: To explain the difference, Mungkarta homeland is linked to education services by the Northern Territory Government Department of Education through Tennant Creek as its service centre hub. Mungkarta sits 82 kilometres south of Tennant Creek.

Ali Curung has its own NT Government school through the Department of Education. I am happy to be working with Minister Lawler in her Education and Infrastructure portfolios to identify upgrades, maintenance, repairs and replacements of buildings to better deliver education services in those two places—one a community and one homeland.

Mr YAN: When will you receive the new federal promise of \$100m in immediate funding for homelands and housing, and how many homes will be delivered with this funding?

Ms UIBO: The Australian Government has committed \$100m for work on homelands in the Northern Territory. A time frame or mechanism has not been set yet. I look forward to updating committee members and Territorians interested in this space.

Mr YAN: From the \$40m town camp upgrade funding, which town camps were upgraded?

Ms UIBO: Can I get you to repeat the end of the question, please? I want to see how much detail you would like, because we have a lot of information here. I want to answer the right part of the question.

Mr YAN: From the \$40m town camp upgrade funding, which town camps were upgraded?

Ms UIBO: To date, the information I have regarding our town camps reform framework—the framework is set for 2019–24. The works undertaken from 2019 to 2022—the information that I will provide is as of 31 March 2022. The town camps that have works and upgrades through that framework so far are:

- Bagot
- Kulaluk

- Minmarama
- Knuckey Lagoon
- Palmerston Indigenous village
- Railway Dam
- Amangal
- Pine Creek Compound
- Myalli Brumby
- Geyulkgan—which is in and around Katherine. It is Warlpiri Camp. I use Warlpiri Camp as a Katherine resident, as do most Katherine residents.
- Mulggan—in the beautiful electorate of Arnhem
- Gurungu—in Elliott north camp
- Wilyugu—in Elliott south camp
- Marlinja—just north of Elliott, toward Newcastle Waters
- Utopia homelands.

Mr YAN: I am interested to find out when we will see that funding flow to the town camps in Central Australia, because none of the town camps you listed are in the Alice Springs region.

Ms UIBO: We have a good story about the town camps in Alice Springs, particularly the local decision-making agreement with the Tangentyere Town Council, which also looks after the Alice Springs town camps. It is the answer to a question from the Member for Araluen about the investment into new builds. There will be 65 new homes built in the town camps of Alice Springs, which will be an increase of 230 bedrooms.

Exciting projects are happening with local contractors in Alice Springs. As recently as two weeks ago I was there and we announced the great work happening and has been tendered for Alice Springs town camps. We have great projects with local contractors in Alice Springs.

I acknowledge the work through the local decision-making agreement, which is part of another portfolio but ties into this. It is about Tangentyere Council driving and being a catalyst for the works to be designed, scoped and done locally, with oversight from Tangentyere.

Mr McINNES: We have a lot of work going on in the Alice Springs town camps. It recently started and is progressing at pace. We are pleased with what is going on there. There were four packages of works in the tender one process, totalling 26 dwellings—Karnte camp, Larapinta Valley, Little Sisters, and Morris Stoke and Trucking Yards. Tender two is 29 new homes across Charles Creek, Hoppy's, Hidden Valley, Ilpea Ilpea and Warlpiri—another four packages of works. In addition, we just awarded to Tangentyere nine dwellings in Mount Nancy as a third tender project. The works are around \$30m in total.

Mr CHAIR: Can I ask you about the expansion on the relationship between Tangentyere and the government so it is clear? Through the PAC we visited Alice recently and met with Tangentyere Council, but it may be worth expanding a bit to get that relationship on the record and well understood.

Ms UIBO: It is a good story of partnership, the way our government is empowering Aboriginal Territorians, organisations and communities to take control and have the decision-making process driven at a local level. Tangentyere Council has been critical in advocating for the new works in the Alice Springs town camps and has taken on the heavy responsibility of driving the operational side, supported by my department and Minister Lawler's department.

The local decision-making agreement that was signed by Tangentyere Council and the Northern Territory Labor government was one of our early LDM agreements that are on the record. I am pleased the PAC were

able to do a site visit. We had a lot of challenges with COVID and doing face-to-face visits but the PAC was able to do some site visits when it was appropriate.

The ongoing opportunities through the LDM Agreement with Tangentyere Council, the huge construction and investment with the \$30m-plus for the Alice Springs town camps tells a good story for local employment opportunities, tenancy management and repairs and maintenance at a local level. These are LDM agreements across the Territory which focus on that. It is where a lot of the recurrent funding sits for repairs and maintenance.

We have strong advocacy from Minister Paech. He is an Alice Springs resident and a strong supporter and advocate for town campers in supporting Tangentyere. The projects that have been accelerated for builds and early works in and around Alice Springs town camps is attributed to strong advocacy.

Borrooloola is planned to have 38 new homes, which is a great story; and Elliott, north and south combined, has eight new homes to support the residents, which is a really good story. There are lots of opportunities and accountability, Mr Chair, as you know through your work through the PAC.

That action, the dollars hitting the ground and the difference it will make to the lives of Alice Springs town campers who are part of the ALDM process in the various communities and regions that are already under way, is a great story.

Output 2.5 – Government Employee Housing

Mr YAN: What is the total number of government employee houses across the NT by region or town?

Ms UIBO: Greater Darwin region total is 40; Central Australia is 343; Big Rivers region is 336; Arnhem region is 490; Barkly region is 320; and the Top End region is 318. That totals 1,847. If we move to region by communities, it is a big list.

Mr YAN: I am happy if you table it for expediency.

Ms UIBO: I can table the list. We will ask the officials to get us table 4 of government employee housing by region and community without table 3 from the estimates folder. We can table that as a clean copy.

I will confirm with the Member for Namatjira that he is comfortable with extra information. We also have a table that breaks down government employment housing private headleases by region and community. We can put all of that into the tabling document for the committee.

Mr YAN: That would be wonderful. Thank you, Minister. How many new government employee homes were delivered in the reporting period?

Mr McINNES: Under the remote housing investment package we delivered one this year. We are working on a program with about 74 dwellings. They will be rolled out progressively throughout next year.

Mr YAN: Where was that one new property located?

Ms UIBO: I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.18

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

Mr YAN: Where is the one new government employee house located that was delivered in the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.18.

Mr YAN: How many existing government employee houses have been transferred to social housing in the reporting period?

Ms UIBO: I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.19

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

Mr YAN: How many existing government employee houses have been transferred to social housing in the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.19.

Mr YAN: The perennial question that keeps popping up—government employee housing in Elliott. I believe there were 10 units built in Elliott; how many are occupied permanently and not as visiting officer quarters?

Ms UIBO: A lot of work is happening in Elliott, which is a great news story. There have been public meetings recently for housing. The Northern Land Council has been very strong in advocating for the township and the north and south camps as well as the works to support Territorians in and around the community. I will pass to Mr Warren for the data and processes to centralise the government employee housing model so there is accountability across all agencies for the allocation of homes, usage of homes/dwellings, service delivery footprint and the partnerships with industry to identify pressures and needs for GEH or industry housing to better service Territorians in remote communities.

Mr WARREN: We have 27 dwellings in Elliott, of which, eight are assigned for VOQ—visiting officer quarter—usage. That means that the department allocated to use those dwellings is using a fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive-out staffing model.

The minister referenced the changes we are doing to the GEH administration at the moment. We have established an NT Government employee housing office based within this department. It is in the process of taking over a centralised control of all of government employee-owned and private headleased dwellings in the Northern Territory.

A big part of that centralisation process is getting all of assets onto our tenancy management system and progressively bringing the names of the tenants on to the system so that we can track at a house-by-house level exactly who is using it right now. The key reason is to get the best utilisation possible, because we are aware there are situations where a house may be under-utilised or been allocated, but is not being used to its full extent.

As a result of the centralisation, in the future financial year we will be able to bring detailed, rich data right down to individuals staying in each house.

There are 27 GEH houses in Elliott. Eight of them are being used as a VOQ by the departments they have been allocated to. The others are occupied.

Mr YAN: The units that were built in Elliott to free up housing for public housing and used by government employees, eight of those are now being used as VOQs, is that right?

Mr WARREN: I am letting you know the total number of government employee housing in Elliott. The 10 you are talking about are a subset of those. Across all of the GEHs in Elliott, eight are being used as a VOQ. I will have to take it on notice if you want to specifically test the 10 new dwellings you are talking about.

Mr YAN: Yes, thank you.

Question on Notice No 8.20

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

Mr YAN: Of the 10 new units built in Elliott, are any being used as visiting officer quarters?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 8.20.

Output 2.6 – Indigenous Essential Services

Mr YAN: In your opening statement you said that Indigenous Essential Services has a budget allocation of \$124.5m when it is actually \$82m. Are you able to explain what the difference might be, or is it an error?

Ms UIBO: Grant funding of \$80m is provided by the Northern Territory Government with an estimated \$43m in retail income. Those two amounts combined provide the overall figure of \$123m for the annual operations for services in regard to Indigenous Essential Services.

Mr YAN: When you look in BP3, Indigenous Essential Services is \$82,065m. You say there is an additional \$40m in grants which is attributable to that \$124.5?

Ms UIBO: The CPI adjustments regarding the financial year is due, which will increase the variation that amounts to \$82m. The other component is the estimated retail income.

Mr YAN: In your opening statement you said that you were moving towards a 70% renewable energy target in remote communities, as part of essential services. What is our current percentage of renewable energy on our remote communities?

Ms UIBO: The information I have been provided that relates to the current percentage of energy generation from renewables for remote communities is 12%.

Mr YAN: What was the time line on the 70% target?

Ms UIBO: This question relates to the energy portfolio, the Office of Sustainable Energy, which will be discussed later today. The question would be better directed during that session.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.6.

Output Group 3.0 and 4.0 are the responsibility of other ministers.

Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

Ms UIBO: I would like to add one more page, which provides the breakdown of the private headleases by region and community, to the tabled document provided to the committee. It will provide a more fulsome response to the Member for Namatjira's question.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.2

Ms UIBO: There are six houses currently vacant, five in the Barkly region and one in East Arnhem. This is due to ongoing recruitment positions in these regions.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.3

Ms UIBO: Of the 129 properties managed by the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities which are occupied by the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Services, 20 are currently 20 vacant. The majority of these regions have current recruitment under way, which will see this number decrease once positions are filled.

The breakdown for the region is:

- East Arnhem—government employed housing 32; occupied 26; vacant five; visiting officers' quarters one
- Barkly region—45 government employee housing, occupied 39; vacant five; visiting officers' quarters one
- Big Rivers region—17 government employee housing; 13 occupied; three vacant; visiting officers' quarters one
- Central Australia—14 government employee housing; occupied seven; vacant five; visiting officers' quarter two
- Top End—21 government employee housing; occupied 18; vacant two; visiting officers' quarters one.

This is a total of government employee housing 129; occupied 103; vacant 20; visiting officers' quarters six.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.4

Ms UIBO: The asset types: bed-sitter—two in the Darwin region. That is a total of two across all regions. There are 475 units in Alice Springs, 817 in the Darwin region, 245 in the Katherine region, 677 in the Palmerston region and 94 in Tennant Creek. That is a total of 2,308.

Flats—28 in Alice Springs, 261 in Darwin, 14 in Katherine, 16 in Nhulunbuy and 97 in Palmerston, that is a total of 416.

Duplexes—26 in Alice Springs, 50 in Darwin, eight in Katherine, 14 in Nhulunbuy, 89 in Palmerston, which is a total of 187.

Townhouses—126 in Alice Springs, 270 in Darwin region, 30 in Katherine, Palmerston 117, Tennant Creek four. That is a total of 547.

Houses—395 Alice Springs, 1097 in Darwin region, Katherine 199, Nhulunbuy 17, Palmerston 553, Tennant Creek 101. That is a total of 2362.

Hostel accommodation—41 Alice Springs, Darwin region 21. That is a total of 62.

Cabins—20 in Alice Springs with a total across of 20 the Territory.

Hall type accommodation—one in Alice Springs, one in Tennant Creek. That is a total of two.

Community Centre—two in Alice Springs, one in Darwin region. That is a total of three.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.6

Ms UIBO: Public housing wait times are published online twice a year as at 30 June and 31 December at the online address nt.gov.au/property/public-housing/apply-for-housing/apply-for-public-housing/waiting-list. Waiting times for public housing vary depending on each applicant's circumstances. They are affected by a number of factors, such as the general demand for public housing, the number of priority applications and ability and the turnover of suitable housing in each location.

The wait times for priority public housing as at 31 March 2022 are:

- Darwin—one-bedroom four to six years; a two-bedroom, two to four years; and for three-bedroom or more, it is two to four years
- Palmerston—one-bedroom, four to six years; a two-bedroom, two to four years; a three-bedroom or more, two to four years
- Nhulunbuy region—a one-bedroom it is four to six years; a two-bedroom, four to six years; a three-bedroom or more, four to six years

- Katherine region—four to six years for a one-bedroom; two-bedroom, four to six years; three or more bedrooms, four to six years
- Tennant Creek region—one-bedroom, four to six years; two-bedroom, four to six years; three or more, four to six years
- Alice Springs region—one-bedroom six to eight years; two-bedroom, six to eight years; three or more bedrooms, six to eight years

Estimated general wait times for public housing as of 31 March 22:

- Darwin/Casuarina—one-bedroom, eight to 10 years; two-bedroom, four to six years; three or more bedroom, four to six years
- Palmerston region—one-bedroom, one to six years; two-bedroom, two to four years; three-bedroom or more, four to six years
- Katherine region—one-bedroom, six to eight years; two-bedroom, four to six years; three-bedroom or more, six to eight years
- Nhulunbuy region—one-bedroom, six to eight years; two-bedroom, four to six years; three-bedroom or more, four to six years
- Tennant Creek region—one-bedroom, eight to 10 years; two-bedroom, eight to 10 years; three-bedroom or more, six to eight years
- Alice Springs region—one-bedroom, six to eight years; two-bedroom, six to eight years; three-bedroom or more, six to eight years.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.9

Ms UIBO: The breakdown of remote housing dwellings by regions as of 31 March 2022 is as follows:

- remote public housing, including town camps—Top End, 1,614; Arnhem, 969; Barkly, 408; Big Rivers, 1,016; Central Australia, 1,421; with a total of 5,428.
- industry housing—Top End, 30; Big Rivers region, one; Central Australia region, one; with a total of 32.
- emergency housing—Arnhem region, 37; with a total of 37

The totals are: Top End, 1,644; Arnhem, 1,006; Barkly, 408; Big Rivers, 1,017; Central Australia, 1,422. That is a total of 5,497.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.10

Ms UIBO: Remote public housing waitlist as of 31 March 22. Applications do not reflect the number of applicants as an application for remote public housing which may consist of more than one person. That goes to the question, Member for Araluen raised earlier. The numbers are:

- new applications—town camps 836; Arnhem, 783; Big Rivers, 462; Barkly, 153; Central Australia, 578, with a total of 2,812
- applications for new relocation—town camps, 38; Arnhem, 42; Big Rivers, 49; Barkly, 29; Central Australia, 59; with a total of 217.
- total town camps, 874; Arnhem, 825; Big Rivers, 511; Barkly, 182; Central Australia, 637; with a total of 3,029.

These figures are applications for remote public housing only and do not include other tenure types.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.11

Ms UIBO: Remote housing wait period breakdown by region—the answer for the average wait times for people on the waitlist for remote housing as of 31 March 2022.

In the Top End the waitlist average is 13 months; in East Arnhem the average is 14 months; in Big Rivers it is 15 months; in the Barkly the average is 24 months; and in Central Australia, the average is 10 months.

Mr CHAIR: We will consider the NT Home Ownership and Business Line after lunch.

The committee suspended.

NT HOME OWNERSHIP

Mr CHAIR: We are now on NT Home Ownership. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement.

Ms UIBO: Accompanying me at the table are Mr Ken Davies Chief Executive Officer and Ms Kim Charles Chief Financial Officer.

I have three answers to questions from previous session, if this is an appropriate time to answer.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.8

Ms UIBO: The overall cost to the department for leasing homes as part of the urban housing program for the reporting period to 31 March 2022 is \$13.7m. The full 2021–22 Budget is \$16.7m. That includes 205 houses under social headlease and 395 under affordable rental housing.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.18

Ms UIBO: Three government houses were completed in 2021–22; one in Wurrumiyanga in Tiwi Islands, which is a two-bedroom dwelling located at Lot 741. That is the location the Member for Namatjira asked about. The additional two homes, built after the estimates reporting period up to 31 March, were completed in June this year. Two of those GEH dwellings are located in Wadeye community. They are two-bedroom houses located at Lot 626 and Lot 627.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.20

Ms UIBO: Six of the 10 government employee houses in Elliott are being used for visiting officers' quarters out of a total 27. The question was related to 10 units asked by the Member for Namatjira.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.19

Ms UIBO: One government employee housing dwelling was transferred in May 2022. This was located in Batchelor.

**OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – INCOME
NT Home Ownership**

Mr MALEY: The Wadeye Lots 626 and 627—were they damaged or destroyed in the recent disturbances at Wadeye?

Ms UIBO: No.

Mr MALEY: In relation to income, Budget Paper 2021–22 had \$11.2m. The revised was \$10m and this budget paper is \$10.2m; there is a \$1m reduction. How did that come about?

Ms UIBO: Does this question relate to the Output 5.1, NT Home Ownership?

Mr MALEY: Yes. It talks about income, and we are talking about home ownership. The income in the budget paper is NT Home Ownership. I just read out the figures: 2021–22 had \$11.2m; the revised was \$10.2m; and the budget for this year is \$10.2m. Essentially it means there is a \$1m reduction from the budget in 2021–22. How did that \$1m reduction come about?

Ms UIBO: The variation in 2021–22 and the decrease in 2022–23 are mainly due to existing clients paying down on their loans.

Mr MALEY: That means the existing clients are paying extra, which is why it has come down or are they paying their normal rate? I am confused; if you pay down would that not be set for at least one year? Are they paying extra on top of their loans, which is why it has been reduced to \$1m?

Ms CHARLES: Less revenue is coming in because the total loans have been getting paid back over time. During the period we have had less revenue because we have had less loans to pay back.

Mr MALEY: You were out \$1m in your forecasts or estimates, which is why it has gone down from \$11.2m to \$10.2m. How did we lose \$1m?

Ms CHARLES: It is not lost; it is a planned reduction—a budgeted decrease—because our actual collection of revenues has gone down. That is because members of the scheme have been paying back the loans over time. There is less revenue coming in over time.

Mr MALEY: If it was a planned reduction, how can there be a difference of \$1m? If it was planned, it would have been in the budget papers. It was at \$11.2m. In one year it has gone down. How can that be a planned reduction? If you knew that already it would have been factored in Budget 2021–22.

Ms CHARLES: Part of the estimates process is that we measure what revenue we have collected and make adjustments in accordance with that. Over the last two years it needed to be tested regularly. We had COVID impacts and loan freezes, which was an initiative that government provided for people who were experiencing mortgage stress. We do a test twice a year and adjust as required.

Ms UIBO: Before we conclude, I sincerely thank my department; the officials who attended today; the officials who are madly writing notes and taking into account the questions and providing answers in the back room; and all the public servants who provided support to me and the team today.

I appreciate the great work of the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities across all regions in the Northern Territory; and the support and partnership we have with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics and the work that has been done to prepare for this estimates.

Mr MALEY: The opposition thanks the department. Thank you to everyone who has done a lot of work.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration the NT Home Ownership business line.

The committee suspended.

RENEWABLES AND ENERGY

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back. We will now consider Renewables and Energy.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Renewables and Energy portfolio.

Ms UIBO: The Northern Territory Government is focused on implementing plans and strategies that will ensure all Territorians benefit from economic development and opportunities through renewable energy. We are laying the foundations that will grow our economy and create jobs in this thriving industry.

In all regions across the Territory, Territorians have shown strong, continued support for renewable energy options. Tangibly we have seen this in the number of households that have installed rooftop solar during the initial stages of the transition to renewables. More recently, and as the transition must progress towards storage solutions that work to maximise benefits of rooftop solar, Territorians have again put up their hands to take part in this process. I will describe this more fully shortly.

We estimate that from the start of July 2022 the Territory will achieve 16% renewable energy, not including the four large-scale solar farms which are in the process of being tested for compliance. Through the goals identified as part of our COVID comeback strategy and the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission recommendations, we are building momentum towards the government's target of 50% renewable energy by 2030.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade is our lead department for economic and industry growth with a key focus on my Renewables and Energy portfolio through the Office of Sustainable Energy. The office is implementing a number of planned strategies and programs that support this goal along with delivering market reforms and facilitating pathways to renewable energy integration. More broadly, across government, all agencies and the government owned corporations are supporting the adoption of renewables.

The Territory government is committed to bringing our aboriginal and remote communities along our renewable energy journey. That is why we are implementing the remote power system strategy with a goal of 70% renewable electricity generation for the 72 communities serviced by the Indigenous central services. This will have almost 40,000 residents across the Territory being provided with the majority of their electricity through renewable energy instead of expensive diesel-powered generation.

Formal consultation with community leaders will commence shortly and is expected to take around three months to complete. The aim of the consultation is to provide more detailed information on the plans for the goal of 70% renewable electricity; understanding community desires, aspirations and expectations; and identifying local community organisation interest and capacity to participate in project delivery.

We are also focused on maximising opportunities for local industries creating jobs for Territorians and strengthening local skills and expertise.

We previously committed \$2.3m in funding over four years to support planning activities and an additional \$2m over two years for a framework that will deliver on these cleaner and reliable renewable energy systems.

The Territory government seeks to maximise the levels of external investments in the delivery of assets and services. We are already kick-starting the remote communities' renewables rollout with the Wurrumiyanga solar trial on the Tiwi Islands, to which we previously committed \$4.3m in capital works funding. It is expected that a construction contract will be awarded shortly, and completion is expected by mid-2023.

In a sign of things to come for the Territory's regional and remote communities, in February Jabiru was powered by 100% solar for the first time during the day. The milestone follows the completion of construction and commissioning of the new Jabiru hybrid renewable power station, which will power Jabiru with at least 50% renewable energy over the long term, using a hybrid model of solar generation, battery and diesel power.

In Alice Springs, the Intyalheme Centre for Future Energy is progressing its work focused on removing barriers to further renewable energy penetration in the Alice Springs electricity system. Intyalheme was established in 2017 with \$5m of funding from the Territory government. It has leveraged \$5.4m from the Australian Government and \$4m of in-kind contributions from the Alice Springs Future Grid project.

In 2021–22, the project has achieved progress on the investigation of wind resources around Alice Springs, a study supporting low socioeconomic participation in the transition to renewable energy, development of a commercial micro-grid and commencement of the Territory's first trial virtual power plant. The future grid project, which is due for completion by mid-2023, will design a pathway for achieving a 50% renewable energy target in Alice Springs by 2030, with lessons learned transferable to other grids.

The government published its plan to achieve the 50% renewables target in the Territory's largest electricity system in October 2021, the Darwin-Katherine Electricity System Plan. The key features of the Darwin-Katherine electricity system plan are the development of a renewable energy hub to connect large-scale

solar farms; batteries to secure the system and store surplus solar; virtual power plants to aggregate and coordinate small-scale renewables; new agile thermal generators compatible with hydrogen to secure energy when the sun is not shining; and demand management initiatives to shift demand from the evening to the day to maximise the use of solar energy.

The development of the system plan was coordinated across government and the government-owned organisations, which is enabling its rapid implementation. Work on the master planning and concept development for the renewable energy hub commenced in November 2021.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade—DITT—has been working closely with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics with site selection. DITT is in the process of developing relevant governance rules and undertaking power system studies for the renewable energy hub, assisted by expert economic and engineering consultants. A strategic business case addressing the key findings and optimal results of these studies is expected by early 2023.

In line with the system plan, in late 2021 Territory Generation announced its purchase of 22 megawatts of new agile and hydrogen-compatible gas-fired generation as part of its fleet transition plan. The new generator is expected to be operational in the second half of 2022.

In addition, in December 2021 Territory Generation awarded the tender of a 35-megawatt battery energy storage system which will manage fluctuations caused by solar and unlock further capacity for households and industry to connect additional solar systems. The battery is expected to be operational by April 2023.

Across the Territory the government is making targeted investments to support the transition of our electricity systems to renewable energy. In 2021–22 nearly \$2m in contracts were awarded through the Territory government's quotation and tenders-on-line forum for the supply and delivery of solar installation work.

In a home and business battery scheme update in Budget 2022–23, the government announced \$2.4m for the extension of the successful Home and Business Battery Scheme to support Territory home owners and businesses to install batteries with their rooftop solar systems.

As at the 15 June 2022, 1,681 applications have been received with 1,224 approved since the inception of the program. This represents \$27.3m in approved works across the Territory. In 2022–23 the Home and Business Battery Scheme will continue to provide grants of \$450 per kilowatt hour of battery capacity capped at \$6,000 per grant. In addition, the funding will provide for a minimum of 400 grants supporting 5.3 megawatt hours of battery storage capacity.

Installing a battery means that rather than exporting electricity to the grid, the household or business is able to store the electricity for future use, which is a major cost-saving measure. Batteries also improve the security and reliability of the system by helping to smooth out demand from the grid. To support the Territory's transition to renewable energy, it is essential that electricity customers have the right incentives.

During the year the government made the difficult decision to wind up Jacana Energy's premium feed-in tariff—FiT. For households and business customers who have solar rooftop systems and who receive premium feed-in tariff, there has been no incentive to smooth their demand on the grid by consuming the electricity produced by the solar systems or by installing batteries.

From 1 July 2022 customers who have been on the premium feed-in tariff for four years or more will transfer to the standard feed-in tariff. Four years is estimated to be the average time it takes to recover the cost of the initial investment in a rooftop solar system under the premium feed-in tariff rates. On the standard feed-in tariff, customers will continue to save money on bills, not only from generating solar for their own energy use but also through receiving credit for any unused electricity that the rooftop solar system sends back to the power grid.

In addition to supporting the transition of our systems, the Territory has potential to support other communities to transition to renewable sources of energy. The Territory remains at the forefront of efforts to export renewable energy.

Renewable hydrogen has been identified as a zero emissions alternative to natural gas. Some of Australia's largest trading partners, including Japan, the Republic of Korea and China, have committed to using clean hydrogen to decarbonise their energy systems. We are positioning the Territory to take advantage of the increased local and international interest in renewable hydrogen.

The Territory has a significant edge when looking to establish itself as a renewable hydrogen hub. Our extensive and high-quality renewable energy resources, infrastructure and ability to deliver on critical and major projects mean that the Territory is well placed to maximise the emerging opportunities in this field.

The Northern Territory Hydrogen Master Plan released late last year supports the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission goal of a \$40bn economy by 2030 by providing a plan for the development of the promising industry in the Territory aligned to the National Hydrogen Strategy. The master plan identified key focus areas, including ensuring that the Territory has an enabling regulatory framework, building local skills and capabilities, land use planning and coordination with other sectors and commercial application so that we can take full advantage of renewable hydrogen.

In Budget 2022 the government allocated \$5m until 2026 to complete the key activities to implement the master plan and build the Territory's competitiveness for investment. The Territory has significant promise with renewable hydrogen development illustrated by current prospective major projects.

The Territory government has awarded major project status to the \$15bn Desert Bloom project. The joint venture by Australian companies, Axcentium and Ahurei, is trialling its new Aqua Aerem technology at Tennant Creek. The Aqua Aerem technology captures water from the atmosphere—arid environments—to ensure a sustainable water resource for large-scale hydrogen production for export and domestic markets in the Territory's driest regions.

The year 2022–23 will be pivotal for renewables as this government builds the momentum towards implementation of the renewable energy target of 50% renewable energy by 2030.

The officials accompanying me this afternoon are Mr Shaun Drabsch, Chief Executive Officer DITT; Ms Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer DITT; Ms Anne Tan, Deputy CEO Mining and Energy, DITT; and Mr Matthew Sargeant, Executive Director Office of Sustainable Energy.

Mr MALEY: How many home batteries have been installed?

Ms UIBO: The total approved for installation is 1,224.

Mr MALEY: When you reduced the solar tariff from the premium down to 9.3 commencing on 1 July—you were saying that will save the government \$12m, is that correct?

Ms UIBO: Yes, the estimated savings from winding up the premium FiT tariff have been estimated at \$12m per year, which can be achieved once the feed-in tariff is phased out.

Mr MALEY: And you were going to use that money to fund the battery scheme, is that right?

Ms UIBO: We are looking to redirect that saving to wider initiatives, including the community battery system, and initiatives that include social housing and virtual power plants.

Mr MALEY: If there is \$27.3m approved in relation to the battery scheme and only a \$12m savings, where will the other money come in relation to funding that battery scheme? You said that there are 1,224 batteries approved and there was \$27.3m. That is a cost for those batteries. I remember earlier in the year you saying that the \$12m, which you just confirmed will be used to fund that—yet there is a big difference between \$12m and \$27m, which has already been approved and there is still more outstanding.

I am wondering where the money will come from, between the \$27.3m to the \$12m you are saving, you now have to spend on these batteries.

Mr DRABSCH: The \$27m you refer to relates to the total value of works undertaken for the battery scheme since April 2020. We have approved 1,224 grants since that time, which has yielded funding to customers of \$7.2m. That \$7.2m of grants has stimulated \$27m worth of work, so there additional works have been undertaken and funded by the customers. That is not government funding as such.

Mr MALEY: You said in your opening statement that the battery scheme was \$27.3m, is that correct?

Mr DRABSCH: That is the total value of works the scheme has stimulated.

Mr MALEY: How did you work that out?

Ms TAN: The \$27m is based on the value of the works that have been constructed as a result of the grant program. Each grant recipient can receive a maximum of \$6,000, but the level of works undertaken to access that \$6,000 could be greater than \$6,000, so the 27 is really the total value of all the works that have been undertaken to access individual \$6,000 grants.

Mr MALEY: How much in relation to just the \$6,000 grant have you given out? Is that 6,000 times 1,224?

Mr DRABSCH: \$7.2m.

Mr MALEY: You are saying that between 27.3 and 7.2 is private money spent by private people?

Mr DRABSCH: That is correct. Many people who took up the scheme have also installed solar panels on their roof. The fact that we provided the grant stimulated the purchase of the battery, the solar installation, inverters and so forth.

Mr MALEY: You said that it takes an average of four years to recover the cost of the system, which is why you gave it an extra four years. That works out to be about \$330 per month. If someone borrows \$15,000 or \$16,000 for a solar system, it will take four years to pay that back, which will be at about \$330 per month.

Ms UIBO: The winding up of the premium FiT will be calculated on the four-year process. Anyone who is connecting now, under the scheme, will be under the standard feed-in tariff. Of the customers who are on the premium FiT, it has been calculated and estimated that it is about four years under the premium FiT costings to have the investment in the rooftop solar panels paid off.

Mr MALEY: Remember when you first said in 2020 that from that day on, people with an existing solar panel would stay on the premium FIT—it was like the grandfather thing, before the election commitment. Then anyone new gets the .09c with the \$6,000 battery.

Now you are saying that, people who had the premium for four years go back to 9.3 cents; the four years is enough money to pay back the estimated cost of the solar systems when installed. Is that correct?

Ms UIBO: Yes, that is correct. Jacana Energy is working directly with all the customers who fall into that category. It is a household-by-household plan.

Mr MALEY: Are you just giving an estimate of how much you think people have saved by having solar panels for those four years at a premium tariff?

Ms UIBO: It is not necessarily an estimated saving. It is the paying off of the investment that a household has put on for the solar.

Mr MALEY: I think your words were 'to recover the cost of the system'.

Ms UIBO: Yes, for the individual.

Mr MALEY: That is what I am saying. The individual has four years at the premium, which pays off the initial cost of the solar panels—about \$15,000. If you do the maths, that makes it about \$330 per month. You are saying that an individual would have saved, for the last four years, \$330 per month to pay to recover the cost of the system.

Ms UIBO: I am not using the figures that you are ...

Mr MALEY: I am just using your figures.

Ms UIBO: Yes, but you are adding your own little spiel onto it. I am being ...

Mr MALEY: I am not adding, I am just using your figures with maths—which is just plus and minus ...

Ms UIBO: You are adding in extra figures that I have not ...

Mr MALEY: Your figures.

Ms UIBO: They are not quoted as my figures. We have given some of the official response. To be clear, it is about the investment that a household has made for the solar panels. It is separate or different to talk about the power bill the household has been receiving.

Mr DRABSCH: It is important to recognise the value of the original scheme, which was an incentive scheme to encourage people to put solar panels on their roofs. It was like an infant industry argument to stimulate the utilisation of that technology. It is clear now that we have 80 megawatts on the roof, behind the metered solar, that the incentive has worked. Just as with every other jurisdiction—in fact, more than five years ago, every other jurisdiction wound up that scheme.

That scheme provided a high level of revenue and income—not only savings—to particular applicants of the scheme. They generated excessive power, sold that power into the system and received the retail rate, rather than the wholesale rate, for that power.

The government determined that incentive system worked, so it was now appropriate to change focus and address other priorities as it pursued its renewable energy target.

Mr MALEY: You mentioned ‘between retail and wholesale’. Can you give me the difference between what the retail and wholesale price is?

Mr DRABSCH: The retail price of the premium FiT was about 26.65 cents for domestic and 31.02 cents for business. That has gone down to 9.13 cents, which is now the standard FiT. The important thing to point out is that there is still an income to users of solar panels who are feeding power into the system. They are still getting paid what other wholesale providers of energy are paid.

Mr MALEY: I am concerned because people thought the incentive was going on forever and would pay off their system. You are saying those systems can be paid off in four years?

Mr DRABSCH: That is the advice of our office. The Department of Treasury and Finance looked at other schemes operating around Australia. On that basis, the government determined that it was a fair way to step away from the grandfathering announced in 2020, which allowed people to recover their initial investment, but still generate the benefits of an income at the standard FiT—also the savings of having solar panels so they do not have to buy energy off the grid at the retail price.

Mr MALEY: Some senior Territorians have paid that money with the incentive to have a reduced power bill for essentially the rest of their lives. That is now not happening. What do you say to those people who now have to pay power bills again? Obviously, \$6,000 does not cover it because there is a difference between 7.2 cents and 27 cents in relation to the battery.

Ms UIBO: Whether they are seniors or otherwise, they will still receive the benefits of rooftop solar. The initial investment would be recovered over that calculation of the four-year period in terms of what people paid for the physical installation of the rooftop solar, at the standard FiT of 9.13 cents.

They would still be saving and have measures that will enable benefits. They would not be purchasing as power generation off the electricity grid. Having those incentives has been fantastic but it has now become a normal and standard practice for Territorians to look at renewable energies and installation of renewable energies at home to reduce their footprint on the environment and receive economic benefits under the standard tariff.

Mr MALEY: In relation to those benefits, it is like someone buying a car. If you buy a new car and pay it off it is expected to last beyond the period of paying off and you have a car essentially for free. As with the solar system, people have spent the money and hope that their solar panels will produce an income or at least reduce their power bills in the future—for 10 to 15 years. If someone was going to have the premium feed for the next 10 years versus the new 9.3 cents or 9.2 cents, whatever it is, and you said that they would continue to benefit; how much benefit will they receive on the lower feed-in tariff rate? Have you done the modelling?

Ms UIBO: It is different to purchase a car which initially depreciates even when you buy a new car unless you buy a solar car. Then you may get the benefits. To use that example is not appropriate when talking about the initial investment—the current savings that people are experiencing to the long-term sustainability of the grid and the usage of savings that will benefit still under the premium FiT. Scaremongering of our process, initiative and changes making are not appropriate.

Mr MALEY: I was asking a general question and you have not answered it.

Ms UIBO: You asked the question several times and it is the same answer. Territorians will still benefit under the standard FiT.

Mr MALEY: How much?

Ms UIBO: It will be up to the usage of every house. Unless you want me or the department to knock on the door of every person in that category, every person's usage of the energy and electricity grid is different; every household's usage of the electricity system is different. To categorise a block of benefits under the standard FiT, the 9.13 cents per kilowatt per hour, inclusive of GST, there will still be benefits to those households. The usage of those households will be individual. The benefits for the individual homes that have, through this process and the four-year feed-in tariff, and recovery of their initial investment for the installation of solar systems, will still have savings for their usage of energy through their bills, through this standard FiT. They will see the long-term benefit.

The analysis about car buying is completely different. We are talking about ongoing benefits for Territorians. The introduction of the battery scheme will provide individuals with the security of being able to capture the usage of the electricity they are getting from the solar generation rather than plugging into the system and purchasing it.

Mr MALEY: You are saying that you can use an estimate of all the people who have rooftop solar till, say, four years to recover the costs, as an estimate. You have not done each individual; it is an estimate of everyone. You cannot give us an estimate of people who will benefit from the 9.3, which is what you are saying now? You are saying it has to be individual. Yet you told this committee that the average to recover the cost is four years. You cannot say what the average benefit will be.

Ms UIBO: The modelling has been done on the systems people purchased. We have average figures. We looked at other jurisdictions that do not have this scheme and have not for five years. The Territory is a bit behind. That is okay; we are about ensuring we have what we need in the Territory. We are addressing what Territorians need and the transitional process to have the stability in the grid and energy security.

The work has been modelled and done responsibly. If you are talking about the way solar credits are calculated, Territory Generation can answer that in the GOC session tomorrow. If you want technical advice on calculations and measures—Territorians have done a great job in taking up the initiative. It has been so well responded to that it is almost a normal practice for what people are thinking about regarding their footprint on the environment—and wanting to know how they can benefit from the economy of energy and the opportunities in renewables—to have savings and benefits for their household. That is still an option in the Territory through the standard FiT.

Mr MALEY: Have you or your department done modelling to work out the estimated average benefit for households that have solar feed-ins going from the 26 down to the nine?

Mr DRABSCH: To undertake that modelling would require understanding the average consumption. The way we worked out an average for the saving is that there are average costs for the purchase of solar systems. The savings available to people beyond the removal of the premium FiT is that for every kilowatt-hour they sell into the system they get 9.13 cents, and for every kilowatt-hour they do not use from the grid they save 26.65 cents.

Mr MALEY: You said that the people who have roof top solar will have a benefit of 9.3c, what is the benefit? If you cannot give me an individual benefit, I accept that. What is your estimated benefit across the Territory for people who have that scheme?

Ms UIBO: I will pass to Ms Anne Tan who can talk about some of the scientific modelling and the evidence that has been used to make the decision.

Mr MALEY: I am after the benefit—you are trying to back up what you said.

Ms UIBO: You are asking three or four questions without letting us answer.

Mr MALEY: I will ask one question then. What is the benefit the average person is going to receive for the 9.3c premium tariff per month?

Ms TAN: We have not done the modelling to understand the benefit on average across all of the group of individuals who already accessed the premium FiT.

Mr MALEY: You do not have a model?

Ms TAN: There is no modelling for that. If I can answer your question in a slightly different manner. Since the winding up of Jacana's premium FiT, there has been a significant increase in the number and proportion of applicants who have come through to the Home and Business Battery Scheme to augment existing solar installations. These are people who most likely would have been on the premium FiT, but with its removal, they have decided to access the Home and Business Battery Scheme to augment their systems to incorporate a battery.

There has been a significant increase in that regard. Through the stats, we saw that previous to the removal of the premium FiT, about 20% of the HBBS applications received were to add a battery to an existing solar system ...

Mr MALEY: Did you say 20% for the battery? How many people who have solar panels just applied for the battery? Can you give me the numbers, not a percentage?

Ms TAN: Yes. This is people who have existing systems and have come back to apply for an HBBS. In May 2022 there were 113 applications; to 15 June 2022, there were 66 applications. These are people who have existing solar systems and are now seeking to augment their solar systems to capture the benefit of a battery.

Mr MALEY: That means a total of 179 people who already have solar panels have applied for the scheme?

Ms TAN: In those two months.

Mr MALEY: Is that how long the scheme has been going for?

Ms TAN: No, the scheme has been going on since April 2020. Prior to May 2022, we were observing that the number of existing solar system holders who were coming in to apply for the scheme were under two digits—an average of about five per month. With the removal of the premium feed-in tariff, that escalated dramatically and in May there were 113.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is that scheme called?

Ms TAN: The Home and Business Battery Scheme.

Mr MALEY: That has cost the government \$7.2m so far?

Mr DRABSCH: Since 2020.

Mr MALEY: Is that how much money is spent? We spoke earlier about the estimated \$12m in savings. That does not kick in until 1 July, so we have not had any savings yet. Where did the \$7.2m come from? You said that it would come from the savings. We have not started saving yet because it has not kicked in. People are still being paid the premium until 1 July. Is that correct? The new scheme does not kick in until 1 July?

Ms UIBO: Yes, it will rely on the four-year period since they have been on the premium feed. The four-year period is the buffer.

Mr MALEY: I understand that. In the last two months, 179 people have gotten the batteries, which cost \$7.2m. Is that correct?

Mr DRABSCH: No, that is since 2020.

Mr MALEY: How much money has been spent in this reporting period in relation to this battery scheme?

Mr DRABSCH: Since 1 July 2021 until 14 April, we have approved funding of \$2.77m, responding to proving 491 locations.

Mr CHAIR: Prior to that, there was more, because there were 1,224 approved total. It goes back a couple of years. It is \$2.77m this reporting period?

Mr DRABSCH: This current ...

Mr CHAIR: It is \$7.2m all up for the 1,224?

Mr DRABSCH: That is correct.

Mr MALEY: We have not actually had any savings yet. The \$12m savings is a forward estimate coming in the next year? How did you get the \$12m estimated savings?

Mr DRABSCH: That is the current cost of the premium FiT as it stands.

Mr MALEY: Each year?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes. As the minister pointed out there is progress in working towards that amount of saving as the people fall off the scheme. Everyone who installed in 2017 or before will step off the premium FiT from 1 July and go to the standard FiT, then progressively anyone who has installed since that time will have four years to recover the initial investment while still generating benefits and savings on an ongoing basis.

Mr MALEY: You spoke about the four solar farms. Can you update the committee where they are? You said that they are testing for compliance. Where are they at? When will they be connected into the grid? Why have they not been connected so far?

Ms UIBO: This is a large-scale project with solar generators in the Northern Territory. We are trying to capitalise on the renewable energy of the sun. With the projects that have been commissioned, we have a responsibility to ensure there is compliance to a high standard in relation to the energy grid.

Large-scale generators are being commissioned: two in Batchelor; one in Katherine; and one in Manton Dam. The process compliance for connectivity is being worked through with Power and Water Corporation. The work is to do with the stability of the grid when there is connectivity of solar and the feed-in to make sure it is secure.

Mr MALEY: Can you tell me how long they have been testing for compliance? My understanding is that they have been completed for a while, but how long has the testing system been in place?

Mr DRABSCH: You are correct. The construction of the Katherine solar farm of 25 megawatts was completed in late 2020, followed by the commissioning process done by ENI, the investor. That work was undertaken in collaboration with Power and Water Corporation, then there was the process of compliance testing to ensure it could be plugged into the grid.

The compliance testing process started around the middle of last year. That has taken an extended period because there have been a number of technical issues to address. PWC is better placed to talk about that.

Mr MALEY: Has your department or the government paid the solar farm owners any money over the last two years?

Mr DRABSCH: Those solar farms are developed on the basis of contracts with electricity retailers, so there are power purchase agreements in place. Those agreements are based upon payment for electricity delivered.

Mr MALEY: The government has not paid those solar farm owners any money in the last two years?

Mr DRABSCH: ENI has a power purchase agreement with Jacana, so that is a question for them. There has been some trial provision of power of small volumes; there might have been revenue from that.

Mr MALEY: Your department has not paid the solar farm any money?

Ms UIBO: Mr Drabsch has answered that twice. Just to give you an idea, regarding compliance and the National Electricity Rules (NER), it takes between 18 to 43 months to ensure that large generators are compliant and working well.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When will they be compliant?

Mr DRABSCH: That is a matter for the providers to sort out their technical issues to the satisfaction of PWC.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much do these solar farms cost?

Mr DRABSCH: The Katherine 25-megawatt farm was about \$40m.

Mr MALEY: No income for two years from your department?

Mr DRABSCH: My department does not pay electricity providers but they would not have been receiving as much income as they were hoping for.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Who paid the \$40m?

Mr DRABSCH: The original plants were constructed by the—I cannot recall the name—but ENI purchased those and completed the construction in Manton and Bachelor. The works were already under way when ENI purchased existing assets.

Mr MALEY: Are you raising any court action for recovery of costs from the private owners against the NTG?

Ms UIBO: No.

Mr MALEY: You spoke earlier about a 70% target for our remote communities; they are currently at 12%. Over what time frame do you think the 70% target will be?

Ms UIBO: It is part of the renewables strategy, which goes to 2030.

Mr MALEY: You are at 12% and you have until 2030 to get to 70%.

Ms UIBO: Yes, that is what we are aiming for.

Mr MALEY: Have you read the report, *Achieving the Northern Territory Renewable Energy Target* by HoustonKemp that went through Cabinet a few years ago?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I have the report.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a summary of that report? My understanding is that it will be very difficult to reach 50% by 2030 unless there is new technology. Is that correct?

Mr CHAIR: Are you asking for a summary of the report from the minister?

Mr MALEY: Yes. She said she has read it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is this the one that was redacted except for the front and back pages?

Mr MALEY: But it has been released now. I have a copy if you want one.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When was it released?

Mr MALEY: An independent released it.

Ms UIBO: The work that was done in that report has since been superseded by our Darwin–Katherine electricity system plan, which has been published and is publicly available. There has been exploration of the capturing of energy sustainability and security of energy that has since been—we have done the work in regards to that and that has been superseded by the Darwin–Katherine electricity system plan. The document we have is governing the processes and implementation for that system.

Mr MALEY: Does anyone in your department know what the cost of that HoustonKemp report was?

Ms UIBO: It was out of this estimates budget period, so it was done prior to the middle of last year.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was \$119,000.

Mr MALEY: Essentially there was a report done and \$119,000 has now been superseded by a new report. Why has the new report superseded the old report? What has changed?

Ms UIBO: Technology moves on. Looking at what was optioned and possibilities a year or two years ago—technology moves very quickly. Regarding the work that has been done to reflect the current technology, that is why we have the new report and plan because it is based on the current availability and technology in the industry—government and industry and the latest and most appropriate plan for the Territory.

Mr DRABSCH: The important thing to understand about the Darwin-Katherine electricity system plan is that it was constructed by my Office of Sustainable Energy, led by Jim McKay, who is a former chief engineer at Power and Water Corporation. He procured a number of consultants to support him in the analysis and modelling and came up with a comprehensive program, involving six focus areas to achieve the 50% renewable target in a way that maintains the stability of the system and ensures it is affordable.

We did some modelling and the ultimate finding was that with the acquisition of substantial new solar energy—on top of the 60 megawatts, which is built and is yet to be connected—another renewable energy hub of 180 megawatts; storage batteries; replacement of thermal generation with more efficient hydrogen-capable machines; reducing the total volume of gas-fired generation; high-spec security batteries; virtual power plants; community batteries—such as being trialled at the Alice Springs future grid—and demand management initiatives. It would reduce the cost of providing energy to the Darwin-Katherine system by some 10% compared to the base case alternative.

Mr MALEY: Could you give a breakdown of the cost of that report?

Ms UIBO: It is not part of this estimates in the budget reporting period.

Mr MALEY: Is not this Darwin-Katherine hub ...

Ms UIBO: The question was asked by the Member for Araluen in 2021. You could look back for the answer.

Mr MALEY: You are saying that this report superseded the 2020–21 report?

Ms UIBO: We have moved on—technology. Which is what you think Estimates Committee would do—ask questions that are relatable to the budget in your hand.

Mr MALEY: I am asking questions. You are saying that the Darwin-Katherine hub is already out of date because technology is moving on?

Ms UIBO: What was the first part?

Mr MALEY: Are you saying that this Darwin-Katherine plan is already outdated because technology has changed?

Ms UIBO: No. This plan is the current plan; it supersedes what was in the previous report. That is what has moved on due to the technology and the information available at the time. This is the most current plan; it is the one you can ask questions on.

Mr MALEY: I am, but I am saying that the cost of that in relation to technology moving on, as you just explained—when will that be out?

Ms UIBO: You are asking about an old report that does not relate to this one.

Mr MALEY: I have moved on from that; I am asking about the total cost. In your opening you said that expert consultants did that report.

Ms UIBO: No, I did not talk about the report you asked about. You are now talking about—this is the plan, not the report.

Mr MALEY: An expert consultant did that plan for you? How much did you spend on consultants?

Ms UIBO: No, it was not a consultancy. The Office of Sustainable Energy, which is part of our core business of providing government policy direction for sustainable energy, created the plan.

Mr MALEY: In your opening you spoke about expert consultants. Which expert consultants were you talking about? You were speaking about the Darwin-Katherine hub, thermal generators, demand management, commencing 21 November and then you said 'expert consultant'.

Ms UIBO: I talked about expertise, focusing on maximising opportunities for local industries, creating jobs for Territorians and strengthening local skills and expertise.

Mr MALEY: Get to the part where you talked about the new generator; you mentioned it.

Mr DRABSCH: The Office of Sustainable Energy led the work. Officers, including Matt Sargeant, who is here, worked on the project. A number of consultants were commissioned as part of it, totalling about \$500,000 in costs. A couple merged with virtual power plant analysis and power system—Acoustica—with costings. Dynamic Analysis was the name of the consultancy, which talked about the renewable energy hub costs and energy affordability. Those consultancies were procured as part of the development of the system plan but that was primarily core business of the Office of Sustainable Energy.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us an exact breakdown of how many consultants and the costs? You can take it on notice if you want to if you want to do it in a more formal way.

Mr DRABSCH: (inaudible) was \$90,000; GHD—sorry, I overlooked them—security needs of the Darwin–Katherine system, which was \$160,000; Acoustica, \$80,000; and Dynamic Analysis, \$150,000.

We also have substantial investments planned in our budget for the implementation of the Darwin-Katherine electricity system plan, including the establishment of the renewable energy hub.

Ms UIBO: To give some comfort to the committee members, the system plan is updated every two years because of the way technology changes. I am just reiterating the earlier points I made.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – MINING AND ENERGY Output 7.4 – Office of Sustainable Energy

Mr YOUNG: What planning for the hydrogen revolution is the government undertaking?

Ms UIBO: This is an exciting area for exploration in terms of the opportunities we have in the Territory and recent major project status projects that are focused on hydrogen.

I direct you to the Renewable Hydrogen Master Plan that the Northern Territory Government released last year. It continues to drive the policy on exploring how we can capture and utilise the opportunities of hydrogen in the Northern Territory. It is happening nationally and globally.

We want the Northern Territory to be well-placed and not left behind, so that it can capitalise on the benefits of energy supplies, the potential to have domestic use in the Territory and export energy that can be captured through hydrogen nationally and internationally.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

No questions.

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to Renewables and Energy. On behalf of the committee, I thank you, minister. Thank you to Mr Drabsch and your team; I have seen you a few times this week. No doubt there has been a power of work from you, your staff and everyone else.

Ms UIBO: I thank the officials who accompanied me today and the Office of Sustainable Energy. I reiterate the excitement in the Territory to capitalise on the new energy. The team has worked with other departments to look at the opportunities in the Territory and, more importantly, has worked hard with industry to make sure that we have opportunities for medium and long-term energy exportation and domestic use.

Mr DRABSCH: This is my last appearance for the estimates process this fortnight. I thank the members of the committee for their interest in the activities of the department and for the questions. I hope we have provided assistance for them to understand the important progress in the work we have been undertaking.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you to everyone involved; it is a very big department. We will have a short break for a changeover.

The committee suspended.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

TREATY AND LOCAL DECISION MAKING

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back. Minister Uibo, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make a brief opening statement regarding Treaty and Local Decision Making and Aboriginal Affairs. Then we will take questions on the opening statement.

Ms UIBO: In the interest of time I reserve my right to make an opening statement. The officials accompanying me from the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet are Bridgette Bellenger, General Manager Territory Regional Growth; Mischa Cartwright, Executive Director Office Aboriginal Affairs; and Anthony Shelley, Executive Director Strategic Aboriginal Policy.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will consider estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2022–23 as they relate to Treaty and Local Decision Making and Aboriginal Affairs. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

As there are no questions, that concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 12.0 – TERRITORY REGIONAL GROWTH

Output 12.1 – Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 12.0, Territory Regional Growth, Output 12.1, Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs. Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: I believe there is an \$8m one-off payment for the Blue Mud Bay implementation action plan. Can you let us know where that is up to?

Ms UIBO: Our commitment to Aboriginal Territorians and the work that has been done through the Blue Mud Bay implementation action plan continues, with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet working closely with the Northern Land Council to meet those implementation action-plan items.

Our government has released \$2m to the Northern Land Council for the establishment of the Aboriginal Sea Company, with continued Aboriginal capacity-building programs up to the value of \$0.36m per annum, with expanded Aboriginal coastal licences, and commenced a review of the barramundi fishery industry.

In regard to our requirements under the agreement for the implementation action plan for Blue Mud Bay, the Northern Territory Government is required to release \$8m to the Aboriginal Sea Company, which has now been established. The commitment for our government remains. This funding will be used to support the participation of traditional owners in relation to fishing and aquaculture industries in the Northern Territory.

That funding has been budgeted for and we are working to release it now that the Aboriginal Sea Company has been established.

Mr SHELLEY: The \$8m has not yet been paid. It is subject to the execution of a funding agreement. The funding agreement has been finalised in negotiations with the NLC. We expect execution within days. The remaining \$8m will be due to be paid within the next few weeks, or shortly.

Mr MALEY: In relation to community safety, in general, for Aboriginal communities and regional areas, given the violence in Wadeye over the last month or so, what more can be done to support remote communities in relation to public safety? What will you be doing?

Ms UIBO: Our government believes firmly that every Territorian deserves the right to be safe regardless of where they live. The work being done by our government in cross-agency collaboration is as big part. We have multiple agencies working—remote, regional and urban—on community safety plans where we experience pressures, tensions or unrest. There is that collaboration through government across all of our Northern Territory communities, regardless of where they are.

We have been conscious of the different roles our agencies play and what interfaces with individuals, families and communities on a larger scale. That work is usually collaborated by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. We interface with all government agencies to provide coordinated approaches to community safety. We also utilise and capitalise on the relationships with our NGO sector, Aboriginal organisations and peak bodies for local solutions for community safety.

Mr MALEY: Can you list two policies or things you are doing to increase public safety in remote communities—not just say ‘We will work together’. I accept that. In light of the violence over the last eight weeks or so, can you list some action you are taking to reduce the violence and make it safer in communities across the Territory?

Ms UIBO: I want to make it clear that I do not agree with the comment that all communities have violence ...]

Mr MALEY: No, I did not say that.

Ms UIBO: I am making it clear, because there was a focus on that. The coordination is part of what we have in terms of an agency. I can get Ms Bellenger to talk about the specific examples you provided regarding Wadeye and the West Daly region.

There are communities that have community safety plans. They are usually led by the Police, Fire and Emergency Services either from that community or from within that region—which has responsibility for a community. It involves other organisations or agencies on the ground delivering services to that community. It is often driven by the Aboriginal Territorians in those communities who want to make sure that local solutions are appropriate. They request, through their government or non-government service providers, what they would like to see in regard to support for community safety.

This involved the federal government and the National Indigenous Australians Agency—NIAA. Night patrols are federally funded. There are local government initiatives as well. We have strong support through the auspices of grants from the federal government to local government in our regional councils, which are often the recruitment and staffing providers for things like night patrol.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us some action or steps taken to increase community safety across the Territory in light of what is happening in Wadeye and Tennant Creek?

Ms BELLENGER: One of the key MOG changes at the start of this term of government was bringing local government and NIAA—we have the three tiers of government meeting of regional coordination committees in each region. Local government will often bring community-specific safety issues to that forum.

Mr MALEY: You stated that it was at the start of this term of government. Are you talking about two years ago?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, I am. We put men’s sheds in to a couple in a communities recently. There was one in the Barkly region, and we are looking at that option for Wadeye. One of the issues we had is that women and children often had to leave the house to go to safe houses. People told us that sometimes it is the man who needs to leave to cool off. That activity is being looked at across the Territory. It probably sits with Territory Families rather than us, but it was a key initiative with some success.

Other arrangements we have is with food security. In Wadeye, for example, where people living at homelands do not feel safe coming into community. We are working with local organisations to take food there, so that people do not have to leave the homeland.

Mr MALEY: You said that there was a men's shed in Tennant Creek. When was that started?

Ms BELLENGER: Recently. I would have to check with Territory Families about when that started, but I believe that it was earlier this year.

Mr MALEY: You said that you were looking at one for Wadeye. How far progressed are you with that? I understood there was a men's shed at Wadeye. I remember going there, so there was already one there. Are you expanding it?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes, and we are looking at going into homelands and taking people out. Another initiative is the school programs, where we take young people back to country, so they are not in town for all of the school holidays. That is something that we put into communities previously and will do again.

Mr EDGINGTON: You indicated that the treaty report will be made public on or around 29 June. Given that is only next week, do you think it only serves to further undermine the open and transparent approach that this important document demands?

Ms UIBO: Our government is very proud to be the first government to embark on a treaty process. In the Territory's history, this has been asked for by communities and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Territorians for over three decades.

We are the first government to undertake and be committed to exploring the options through the report provided to the government. That will be publicly released on Wednesday 29 June. We will provide a draft response to the report: a three-week response; three years of work by the Treaty Commissioner; and over 30 years of requests for processes of treaty and the exploration of treaty in the Territory. It will deserve a fulsome responses from our government. This is an overall body of work which has been undertaken independently by the Treaty Commission regarding a framework that can be adopted in the Northern Territory about how to progress treaty.

We are excited to be the government to provide responses. I acknowledge the Treaty Commission office, the Aboriginal Interpreter Service and our four land councils, which have been critical in this journey of treaty so far. We will continue that under this Labor government.

Mr GUYULA: In my Question on Notice 160 last year, the former minister referred to a review of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, which was under way to look at future resourcing for the service. What was the outcome of the review into the AIS? Could you advise what the current budget is and if there was an increase in funding for the 2022–23 year?

Ms UIBO: I remember the question last year, and I know your advocacy and support of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. It is an important service across the Northern Territory.

We are proud that the work done through the review is being implemented. The Aboriginal Interpreter Service staff are responsive that we are following through with the implementation of recommendations from this review. Mischa Cartwright and her team have been proactive in setting up the recommended working groups that were outlined through the review process. That work is under way.

We have key partnerships with stakeholders, particularly in your region, on the work of our interpreters. For example, the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation is focused on building an interpreter workforce in the Yolngu region and, in turn, creating more opportunities for employment for Yolngu staff on country, in community and traveling to work remotely or virtually with their skill set.

Northern Territory Health is supporting Aboriginal liaison officers and training through the AIS and supporting their staff to work through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters—a body I know you are aware of. We are working on the development of a plain English health dictionary with Menzies and the Northern Territory Primary Health Network.

Ms CARTWRIGHT: The Aboriginal Interpreter Service is important. We have established a change management committee, which is made up of Aboriginal interpreters from within the agency and across the regions, to help with the implementation and actions of that review. There were 27 recommendations in areas

such as governance, service delivery, people and information technology. We are focusing on the people element. We need to increase careers and our interpreters in the regions. We are looking at that and the engagement of a consultant to work with us to map out career pathways for our Aboriginal interpreters and ensure they are recognised for the valuable language skills they have.

We have established a customer experience advisory committee, which is made up of NT Government agencies which engage with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service; and non-government agencies, like NAAJA; external Aboriginal organisations, like Congress in Central Australia; and the APY lands, to look at what we are delivering and how we can improve and strengthen the delivery.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes our consideration. Thank you to you and your team, minister.

Ms UIBO: I thank the officials who appeared with me today and acknowledge all of the back-of-house support and preparation from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I thank all the staff who do amazing job, particularly in our regions. We have six regions across the Northern Territory. I know that a lot of them are listening in. Thank you for the work you do across the Northern Territory, particularly in the support of Aboriginal Territorians and the government initiatives that we will continue to work on and improve so that all Territorians have the best opportunity to thrive. I thank all committee members for their work and the DLA staff.

Mr EDGINGTON: From the opposition, I thank the minister and all the staff in the departments for the work you have done. It is a pity we did not get to some of the detail on Aboriginal Affairs, but we will send some written questions.

Mr CHAIR: We will have a short break.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER AH KIT'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF CORPORATE AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. We will now consider output groups relating to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development.

I welcome you, minister, to today's hearings and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you. I will invite you to make a brief opening statement, then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions and, finally, non-output specific budget-related questions.

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

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms AH KIT: Thank you, Mr Chair, and Estimates Committee members. It is a pleasure to join you to today to discuss the important work being undertaken in my four portfolios.

I welcome the staff members accompanying me at the table today. Chris Hosking, is on my left, Acting Chief Executive, Department of Corporate and Digital Development; and Ewan Perrin, on my right, Executive Director of Digital Government. I thank the officials joining me today, who will be able to sit in at the relevant times. I look forward to the committee's questions.

Mr CHAIR: I will make a bold statement. That was not an opening statement, it was more of an introduction. We did not cover much, so we will move straight to the Appropriation Bill that relates to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr YAN: I welcome the minister to her first time at estimates as a minister. Congratulations and welcome to estimates. I will try to be nice.

Ms AH KIT: Thank you. I appreciate that.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – CORPORATE SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT Output 1.1 – Workforce Services

Mr YAN: What compliance reporting strategies have been developed and implemented for NTG payroll systems?

Ms AH KIT: As you can appreciate there are a number of important oversights that need to occur to ensure that the compliance matters are adhered to. I will hand over to Chris Hosking to go into a bit more detail about the compliance mechanisms within the department.

Mr HOSKING: The department pays all of the Northern Territory Government payroll. That is in excess of 20,000 people each fortnight. We have a range of assurance measures in place to oversight that. First and foremost, we are subject to strong scrutiny through the Office of the Auditor-General, and we have a rolling program of audits. Being a centralised payroll service across all of government makes it a fairly concentrated activity for the Auditor-General to examine our operations.

Anomalies in the payroll, such as payroll overpayments, constitute less than 0.1% of the overall value of the Northern Territory Government payroll. In addition to the oversight by the Auditor-General we have an internal assurance function within our payroll services work unit that develops standard operating procedures for our payroll clerks; maintains an internal assurance function; undertakes new employees when they start working in payroll to teach them the rules, certified agreements and how to process within the payroll system.

There is a wide range from external scrutiny through the Auditor-General to an internal assurance function and then the on-the-job training we provide to payroll clerks as part of their employment.

Ms AH KIT: It is worth noting that there is an incredible small team within the department who do process more than 20,000 pays every fortnight. That is across an entire variety of enterprise bargaining workforce agreements. More than 1.3 million transactions are processed, with an incredible 50,000 transactions every fortnight. You are on the money in saying that those compliance and assurance mechanisms are important to keep that low number of people who perhaps have something go wrong with their pay.

Mr YAN: You stated that there is close oversight from the Auditor-General, particularly about payments. We received a report from the A-G on payment errors across Northern Territory Government employees, and some are quite high—in excess of \$60,000 for one employee. The A-G made specific recommendations about how DCDD and other agencies manage their pays. Are you able to elaborate on what process has been implemented to reduce those errors? If I remember correctly, the A-G made reference to enterprise agreements and the interpretation of them.

Ms AH KIT: The Auditor-General looked at this issue closely. We thank her for doing that; she is thorough. It gives us an opportunity to take away the recommendations and input them to reduce the error rate.

Mr HOSKING: I am familiar with the recommendations. A lot of work has been done in response to those recommendations. We took on board and accepted all of the Auditor-General's recommendations and have been working to embed them in our practice and ensure appropriate governance structures around them. We have a new governance framework for payroll entitlements, where we work regularly with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment on the interpretation of certified agreements and awards and the application of industrial law to public servants' entitlements.

We also involve the Commissioner for Superannuation based in the Department of Treasury and Finance in that governance structure to ensure we have the correct legal interpretation and application of superannuation and taxation law to those entitlements. We have a senior oversight committee at senior official level that oversees that. We have a committee with senior officers from the respective departments that meet regularly and we regularly convene working groups of staff who work in our payroll area—our

information systems that are involved in the payment of entitlements and those involved in the interpretation and application of those rules.

Further to that, we designed standard processes where we mapped the process we go through from a new enterprise agreement being negotiated, through to looking at what changes are required to our IT systems—whether they can be programmed in readily or we need to look at manual ways of applying those rules that are dealt with in an EBA process—and then how we train our payroll staff.

This continues to be quite challenging. We have 13 certified agreements in the public service and the battle to attract and retain skilled and qualified professionals to the Territory means those rules are diversifying all the time. To be able to pay people accurately and efficiently—standard rules are a lot easier to deal with in our systems than the more diverse ones we are seeing these days. That is a necessity to get people to come and live and work in the Territory and have an attractive employment proposition.

We worked with our colleagues in the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment to have DCDD operational people involved in the payment of entitlements at the enterprise bargaining discussions to ensure that when new allowances, conditions or employment provisions are being negotiated through the industrial bargaining process, we consider them early and look at whether they can be picked up in our systems and dealt with in an efficient, automated way or if that is challenging for our systems to deal with.

The administrative efficiency does not constrain the industrial bargaining process, but we work hard to find ways that are efficient, and hopefully automated, to deal with that processing and achieve the same intent through industrial bargaining. We are getting good results with that process.

A number of these measures have resulted directly from the recommendations of the Auditor-General. I have no doubt the department will be getting a follow-up audit at some point. We hope to show a much-improved report card when we have implemented and bedded down those new arrangements.

Mr YAN: You also mentioned your internal assurance functions. Do you have a dedicated team working on that or are those functions picked up by supervisors/managers?

Mr HOSKING: No. In response to the Auditor-General's recommendations we established a dedicated team headed up by a senior officer. Their role is to develop the standard operating procedures to have consistent practices across all our payroll teams. They also have oversight of the training of new payroll officers and the more experienced ones as they progress to more senior levels. Whereas before it was supervisor-at-elbow training, we now have a dedicated construct with a relatively senior position having oversight.

Mr YAN: Knowing the complexities of higher duties allowances—and those being responsible for a number of overpayments—has DCDD been able to monitor the higher duties matters, through change and these processes, that resulted in a significant number of overpayments?

Ms AH KIT: Monitor, as in to try to stay ahead—keeping an eye on ...

Mr YAN: Quite a lot of the overpayments were the result of doing higher duties or higher allowances continuing after people returned to their nominal role. I am trying to find out if there have been specific checks and balances put in place to monitor that to reduce that risk in future.

Ms AH KIT: My understanding is that there are three reasons why the overpayments usually occur within the agency. One is because a public servant has failed to take appropriate action, which is why we encourage public servants to check their payslips when we all get paid and make sure it all adds up. If you have received an overpayment and should not have, please report it so we can address it as soon as possible. The second is usually the workplace. It could be that the employer or the employment agency has not picked up the anomaly. The third could be a data entry error.

It is an ongoing process to encourage everybody to double-check that their pays are correct. We have quality assurances within the department, which continues to monitor that closely.

Mr HOSKING: Where higher duties is concerned we codify an end-date in our system. Unless we receive notification to the contrary, the higher duties will expire and the payment will stop. As the minister correctly points out, overpayments result from one of three things. We make a mistake and, occasionally, we make a human error. We do over a million transactions a year and occasionally a human being makes a data entry error, which results in an overpayment.

Generally, it is a fairly even split three ways between those or an employee forgetting to notify us of a change in their circumstances. Quite often, overpayments will result when we do not get timely notification that someone is finishing up or there is a change in their circumstances. Unfortunately, we get the notification after the payroll cut-off which means they might get a minor overpayment.

The significant ones, similar to those you referred to—anything in the tens of thousands of dollars—will usually result from either a human error or a breakdown in the communication to notify us of a change. Yes, something like higher duties going unchecked for a long time could result in that. I am pleased to say they are a very small minority these days. We are much better at staying on top of that.

Mr YAN: Just as a matter of interest, what is your FTE component for the payroll team for Territory government?

Mr HOSKING: I will not have the precise number at my fingertips. I have them at levels, not by the actual discipline. It is in the order of 100 FTE but I will happily take a question on notice.

Mr YAN: No. I am happy with that. I was interested to find out approximately how many FTEs sit in that payroll space.

Output 1.2 – Employment Services

Mr YAN: What has it cost the NTG jobs online service for government?

Ms AH KIT: Can you provide clarification? Is that the Northern Territory Government jobs page?

Mr YAN: It is the online service for government. That would be the online portal. What does it cost us for the reporting period?

Ms AH KIT: That system has been in place for a long time. There might not be a direct figure for the reporting period.

Mr HOSKING: The jobs online portal used to search jobs or lodge a job application is part of a much larger IT system used to manage recruitment within the public service. We surfaced that component of it which presents the portal. It often gets referred to as a web page, although it really is not. It is a small component of a much bigger system we have had for a number of years.

Given it is not something delivered during the reporting period, I do not have a precise figure with me. I could take a question on notice to get you what it cost to operate during the reporting period. It was delivered some years ago and has been in place for a long time. We would make some adjustments to it now and then when policy settings or rules change, but in the main it has been in place and operating for some years.

Mr YAN: Yes, I am interested to get that figure.

Question on Notice No 9.1

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

Mr YAN: What does it cost to deliver the NTG jobs online portal for the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.1.

Mr YAN: You noted that it is an old system. Is there any consideration for replacing the portal or doing an upgrade to the NT jobs online portal?

Mr HOSKING: NT jobs online is being examined at the moment, not the underlying system but the public presentation of that, which is—perhaps in a legacy presentation it has the ochre look and feel; it looks like our online systems did some years ago. We are working with the Department of the Chief Minister and

Cabinet to look at the re-presentation of the online portal and a range of other entry points to government to align to the latest Northern Territory Government jobs theme.

That will include sites that are targeted intakes of specific employment categories, such as nurses, police officers or other professional disciplines. There are a number of digital entry points to jobs in government. There is work happening to examine standardising the presentation of those across all those platforms. Work has not commenced to make system changes; we are at the design and analysis stage, but it is being looked at as we speak.

Mr YAN: Do you know if there is a time frame on this piece of work? Will we see something implemented in 12 months or two years?

Ms AH KIT: I not aware of a time frame; I am happy to ask the CEO if he is aware and, if not, I am happy to take it is a question on notice.

Mr HOSKING: Not as yet. It is at the early scoping and analysis stage. Because it is a broader piece of work, beyond just the jobs online that the Department of Corporate and Digital Development manages, it is being led by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. At this point a precise time line to deliver a project has not been struck. We are doing the work to enable that. I suspect there will be a level of urgency in delivering it. Unfortunately, a date has not been tied down yet.

Mr YAN: I notice from BP3 that budget line 2021–22 is \$18,321 and was revised up to \$20,148 for 2021–22. Then it was budgeted back down \$18,177. What is the reason for that increase from \$18.321m to \$20.148m in the last reporting period?

Ms AH KIT: The note I have relating to the variation in employment services output for 2021–22 was primarily due to a one-off carryover of funding for the HR systems projects.

Mr HOSKING: The revised budget in the former year at just over \$20m represents a carryover held in that year to complete a project called 'my commencements', which is the ability for new starters in the public service to commence their employment online rather than the traditional sit down with someone and fill in a bunch of papers and provide copies of identity, qualifications and so forth. We have built an online solution where you can do that digitally now and it is live. It is in addition to the on-boarding process with new employees, it calculates the employee's first pay, applies the tax and pays the money into their bank account.

It was driven by the efficiency of making it a more seamless process for people entering government and getting them their first pay expediently, rather than having to manually process it, which was the case in former years. The step down you identified from \$20m to \$18m shows that project being completed and the funding expired.

Mr YAN: Anecdotally, how is the system working?

Mr HOSKING: Very well and it probably exceeded all my expectations. In one of your earlier questions, we touched on the complexity of paying people, in the public sector context. We went to exhaustive measures to validate that the computer was producing exactly the same gross tax, net treatment, for everyone's commencement pays. Only when that was 100% verified did it go into production. We have been using it since about March with good results. It means new people joining up get their first pay much quicker, which is a good thing.

Mr YAN: I know from bitter experience, new starters getting their first pay is probably the most difficult part of their entire Northern Territory career.

Ms AH KIT: With more than 4,000 new commencements every year, you can imagine how helpful that system is proving. Well done to everyone who designed that and got it up and running.

Output 1.3 – Procurement Services

Mr YAN: How many applications were made to purchase goods and services outside the NT in the 2021–22 reporting period?

Ms AH KIT: Are you inquiring specifically about DCDD or across government?

Mr YAN: All the applications generally come through to DCDD. I am asking for all applications that come through DCDD for approval for purchase outside of the Territory?

Ms AH KIT: The Department of Corporate and Digital Development does not approve procurement. We support the agencies to undertake their own procurements and help with a lot of backend and prepare the tender documentation and a lot of administration. We would have details for the department's own requests to look outside the Northern Territory for services, but we would not hold details for all the other agencies. The ministers, CEOs or delegates of those agencies would have those details.

Mr YAN: I know procurement functions were centralised with DCDD a number of years ago. In effect you are saying that the procurement activities, whilst managed by DCDD, are still the responsibility of the agencies. Is that correct?

Ms AH KIT: Yes. We support the agencies to undertake the procurement process and they get overall sign-off and approval. We help to prepare the documentation, do a lot of the administration but do not approve the procurement.

Mr YAN: How many applications were made internally by DCDD to purchase goods and services outside of the NT in that reporting period?

Ms AH KIT: There were 410 contracts awarded to Territory enterprises from DCDD. That equates to 73% of the contracts awarded. There are reasons we cannot award to Territory enterprises, we would love to award everything to Territory enterprises. A lot of it comes down to business-critical requirements not being available in the Northern Territory, which means that we have to look elsewhere. For example, we have had some ICT software and hardware licences and support. Our market and our move towards plug-in hybrid electric vehicles. They are just a couple of the examples for why we have to look outside the Northern Territory.

Mr YAN: In effect, of those 410—73% Territory enterprises, means 27% external. The exemptions that were approved makes up that 23%?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, I think you are right. I will confuse myself if I go through this list.

Mr HOSKING: That 27% of contract awards which were not to local Territory enterprises may not have been done under a certificate of exemption; they may have been open public tender processes that were simply won outright in an open tender process by a non-Territory enterprise.

Out of all those procurements, there were only 17 instances of certificates of exemption where the department went to non-Territory proponents directly rather than through a public tender process. In the main, they relate to software licensing, for which there is no vendor available in the Northern Territory, or property leasing on premises where it is the only suitable premises in a particular location.

Mr YAN: As DCDD is responsible, in most respects, for overseeing procurement activities, does your agency provide audits into procurement actions of your own agency and other agencies?

Ms AH KIT: No. That would be undertaken by the Office of the Auditor-General or the procuring department or agency. They have their own internal auditing mechanisms.

Mr YAN: Does DCDD conduct audits into its own procurements activities?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, the department does. Annually, the department undertakes an internal audit in regard to the Buy Local policy. The audit is then submitted to the Buy Local Advocate.

Mr YAN: From those internal audits regarding the Buy Local policy, have any procurement actions been found to be non-compliant?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, there have been examples at the lower end of the tier one procurement where paperwork was not as rigorous as it should be. There have been none for any of the major procurement activities.

Mr YAN: Do you have any figures on those anomalies on those tier one procurement activities?

Ms AH KIT: We do not have that detail on hand today. I am happy to take a question on notice.

Question on Notice No 9.2

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

Mr YAN: Of the internal audits done into Buy Local by DCDD, can you please advise the amount of tier one anomalies?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.2.

Mr YAN: Police recently tendered for the installation of CCTV technology, including design, supply, installation, testing, commissioning, repair and maintenance of CCTV for locations across the Territory, including Alice Springs. CCTV trailers used by NT police, while maintained by a Territory business, are sourced from interstate. There is comparable technology available in the Territory. How does this comply with NTG procurement processes?

Ms AH KIT: This relates to police procurement; it is the responsibility of the Northern Territory Police. The compliance component would be the responsibility of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. We would have supported Northern Territory Police to prepare for its procurement processes, but the overall sign-off would have been with Northern Territory Police.

Mr YAN: DCDD, as the agency responsible for procurement services, does not have oversight of the implementation and procurement activities specifically relating to the Territory.

Ms AH KIT: The Department of Corporate and Digital Development does not have a policy agreement. We support the agencies to prepare for the procurement process to opt-in those services. I understand that the same questions were asked at the last estimates committee, and the same responses were provided.

Mr YAN: I will touch on Buy Local, because we mentioned that and some possible issues with tier one activities. In December 2022 the report published by the Buy Local Advocate raised multiple concerns. What change has been made within DCDD since that report was released to make sure that this agency is complying with the Buy Local remit within the Territory?

Ms AH KIT: The department prides itself on ensuring that we are compliant with the Buy Local remit. We look at the way that we conduct our work and efficiencies.

Mr HOSKING: Generally, with the lower value procurements, the areas that we had to tighten our processes in things like getting an explicitly documented prior approval, prior to making a purchase. Quite often those purchases are at a very low dollar value. At that lower tier it is not always necessary to get contestable quotes. It can be done on a single quote. We need to make sure that the procurement documentation is maintained in such a way that when an audit is conducted, the auditors can examine the documentation and determine that we are following the appropriate procedures.

The audit finding is not necessarily that the department has not been following the right process, it is documenting that and making sure we have all of correct paperwork that the auditors can examine as evidence of that process.

For higher tier procurements that is a standard and routine thing, as you would expect. If it is a relatively simple purchase—some of them are under \$100—the same principles from the procurement rules apply. It is about making sure that we are being rigorous with our documentation and record-keeping, so that when the audit sample is taken, we can show that we are following those procurement guidelines. I am very confident that we have, but we have not always been exemplary at evidencing that in our documentation, so that is where we have put our focus.

Mr YAN: Have there been any complaints received by DCDD relating to the Buy Local Advocate?

Ms AH KIT: I can confirm that there have been no complaints received within the reporting period.

Mr YAN: Excellent, that is great news. Does DCDD have any oversight of the Procurement Review Board and how it operates?

Ms AH KIT: That sits within Minister Kirby's portfolio for Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade.

Output 1.4 – Information Management Services

Mr YAN: What system changes and improvements have been implemented to the government's records and management systems and what has that cost?

Ms AH KIT: We are at Output 1.4, Information Management Services. I prepared to address that under Output 2.2, Agency Business Systems and Support Services. Could we come back to that at that time?

Mr YAN: I am happy to do that.

Output 1.5 – Finance Services

Mr YAN: How many training sessions has the finance service division delivered to other government agencies to assist them to better manage their financial resources?

Ms AH KIT: The department does not train agencies. It is more of a transactional relationship. The department's chief financial officer is responsible for advocating for departmental-specific training. We pay agencies' invoices and look after department assets, the depreciation. We issue invoices on their behalf. That is the role of DCDD with regard to finance's support to agencies.

Mr YAN: DCDD is not providing any training to any other agencies to manage financial resources. Each agency is responsible for doing that.

Ms AH KIT: That is right. The finance work was not centralised in the machinery of government changes in 2019; it remained with the agency.

Output 1.6 – Property Leasing Services

Mr YAN: The budget line for property leasing services increased by \$2m. Can you explain why?

Ms AH KIT: The budget for property leasing services is to cater for CPI increases. It is very technical. I was listening but I will hand over to the chief executive who can explain it more eloquently than I can.

Mr HOSKING: There are two elements to the variation in the property leasing budget. Because the budget pays rent on government-leased premises, the budget has a parameter treatment to allow for CPI increases, because our lease agreements have CPI clauses where the landlords' rent is periodically reviewed. There needs to be a parameter treatment within the budget to enable that. The second element, which continues to cause movements in the property leasing budget, is a change to the Australian Accounting Standards, called AASB16—I will not attempt to say with the acronym stands for—which has required us to capitalise leases as an asset.

Previously leases were treated as an operating lease and a cash expense; now we are required to assetise the lease and apply depreciation treatment. That resulted in some swings in the numbers and continues to do so. That is a national thing; all Australian organisations these types of leases have had to adapt to that revised accounting treatment.

Mr YAN: Off the top of your head, do you have an idea what that CPI is on those leases?

Mr HOSKING: The provisions in the lease are codified to market CPI at the time, so when we have downturns in the CPI the rate increases are moderate. At the moment CPI is quite high; we will need to deal with that in future CPI reviews we do with our leaseholders. It is whatever the CPI is at the time, the rent review is due.

Output 1.7 – Vehicle Management Services

Mr YAN: How many vehicle management services are different to the budget statement for NT Fleet?

Ms AH KIT: The vehicle management services unit is a small unit which has been centralised under the machinery of government changes. They are now located in the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. NT Fleet relates to the government business enterprise that operates separately.

Mr YAN: This team now sits within DCDD. How many FTEs are there?

Ms AH KIT: There are nine FTEs in that unit.

Mr YAN: What does this unit specifically do in relation to vehicle management services that would not be handled by NT Fleet?

Ms AH KIT: I will rattle some of these off because they are very important work. The small unit supports agencies with vehicle needs, including providing advice on fit-for-purpose vehicles, replacement options and costs. The unit coordinates vehicle replacements in line with the Northern Territory Government vehicle policy; provides strategic advice to ensure optimum vehicle utilisation within agencies and vehicle administration services; reconciles fuel cards; prepares fuel and fleet invoices for payment; and delivers a suite of management reports to agencies. The unit supports to agencies in the use of the vehicle booking system; develops policies and guidelines to support agency management of their vehicles; manages vehicle accident processes, including coordinating insurance and third-party claims; and arranges vehicle repairs.

Mr YAN: How does this group work alongside NT Fleet? Are the partners in fleet management for the Territory or does this group sit aside from NT Fleet?

Ms AH KIT: Prior to the machinery of government changes, these fleet vehicle officers used to sit in their own agencies. They have now all been brought together. They are co-located on the NT Fleet premises. They are still providing the vehicle management services to their agencies but are not involved leasing Northern Territory Government vehicles; NT Fleet government business enterprise is responsible for that.

Mr YAN: That clarifies it for me because I used to manage fleets within Corrections in Alice Springs. Over time, agencies grew their own internal fleet management, who liaised with NT Fleet. I was wondering where this group came from. They do important work and support their agencies.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – DIGITAL GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT

Output 2.1 – ICT Network Services

Mr YAN: What is the status of the big IT projects—the big ones being Attorney-Generals/Courts, Police, Health and Education—where they are replacing old systems? We have been on this so far for three years.

Ms AH KIT: I have that ready to discuss under Output 2.4, Digital Projects, as an output.

Mr YAN: Are we able to deal with it here? I will be breaking 2.4 down into specific projects rather than an overarching. I am looking at the status of the big projects, then will dive in a bit deeper under 2.4.

Ms AH KIT: An update on SerPro, the new system for Northern Territory Police: the project team is working together with NT Police sworn officers to put the finishing touches on the system, in readiness for a go-live later in 2022—this year. I am pleased to say that the project is on track to be completed on budget.

We also have the Care system being delivered by Liquid Logic. The new system is in the final stages of being built, and the DCDD project team is working together with Territory Families, Housing and Communities to ensure the final solution design aligns to the unique operating environment in the Territory. The Care project is on track to be completed on budget early in 2023.

The biggest project at the moment is the new Acacia system for the Department of Health. It is a \$259m multi-year investment. The idea was that it would replace six obsolete clinical IT system. As you can imagine, the department has done an incredible amount of work over a number of years to get this to where it is now, with the main goal to deliver one patient/one record at the point of clinical care. Acacia has already been deployed in 'read only' mode for about 5,000 clinical users in Health; it will progressively replace NT Health's legacy systems starting in Katherine in late July.

The last one I have is Veritas, which is a digital court system you made reference to. Veritas is on track to go live in the last quarter of this year shortly after the new SerPro policing system goes live.

Is that the specific current status you were looking for?

Mr YAN: Yes. On those big projects, the current status of those projects? I will probably dive into a little detail a little later, but the status of where they are currently at?

Mr HOSKING: I will build on the overall outline the minister provided. As the minister mentioned, the major health project has been live in 'read only' for some time. It is providing a valuable clinical reference tool for clinicians. Our first major regional go-live will occur in late July in the Katherine region. It will then be deployed region by region across the Territory, eventually being used by somewhere between 7,000 and 8,000 clinical users, which is quite transformative.

That project has had some impact to its time frame from COVID. The Health Department had to focus on the public health emergency. Those are not ideal circumstances to be progressing a major system initiative, but we have persevered and are ready for the go-live in Katherine next month.

That is the start of the deployment. There is still a lot of work to do after that. Six legacy IT systems will be replaced with one new digital solution and approximately a dozen specialist third-party software systems related to dental, pathology and radiology, and a bunch of other clinical specialties integrated in real time.

Clinicians will have one digital tool that will give them all of the information about their patients. While it is a bit of a cliched term, it will be quite transformative for Health in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory will be positioned in front of all other states and territories with digital health. That is quite special.

Similarly, the SerPro project has had some impact due to COVID but we managed to work through it. The system we are deploying through SerPro is used in a number of policing jurisdictions worldwide, most of which were first responders in the COVID emergency. The software vendor had to do a lot of work with other global police forces to assist in the COVID response which has had some impact on our time frames. I am pleased to report we are on schedule to deploy the new system live across Territory Police later this year, and that is being delivered within budget.

Similarly, the new child protection and youth justice system for Territory Families, Housing and Communities, has had a significant challenge. We executed the contract for that one early in the pandemic. Our vendor is based in the UK, where it had a particularly tough time with COVID. For the first 18 months of the project, we have been working day shift while they work night shift. We do it all by videoconferencing. It is the first time we had to trial one of those virtual delivery approaches. Amazingly, it has worked very well and we have almost been able to mitigate all of the impact of COVID. Normally we would be requiring technical resources to come to Darwin and have boots on the ground here. That will go live early next year; it is currently on track, on time and on budget.

The digital courts system, Project Veritas, is already live in the civil courts and the NT and Civil Administrative Tribunal. We have had that system in production for some time. The next deployment later this year will go into the criminal courts. The implementation of that is closely aligned with the implementation of SerPro, which means we will have digital integration across the continuity of the justice processes. From policing to courts, prosecutions, prisons and back again, we will have connectivity across all digital systems.

Similarly, Veritas has had some COVID impacts on the time frame but, at this point, we are tracking to go live about November. We are within our budget. We had to absorb some time frame impact relating to the pandemic but managed to contain those costs. All of those major initiatives are tracking very well.

The significant challenge it brings to the department is that we have four major system go-lives happening in this coming financial year, which is a lot of work converging at the same time. That creates some sequencing issues and resource pressures for us. But we have been tested strongly throughout the pandemic and are out the other side of that now without public health emergency restrictions. We are in a race for the finish line and are very nearly there.

Mr YAN: For ease for you and your team, I will take my other questions and move them into Output 2.4.

Do any of the contractors currently engaged to provide ICT services for DCDD use out-of-state employees to work in your agency?

Ms AH KIT: A lot of our software vendors are not located in the Northern Territory. As much as we try to incentivise and entice people to move to the Territory to conduct their business, it is not always possible. We are lucky to have the digital technology to have these projects created by people who are not based here.

Mr HOSKING: Quite often we are dealing with software vendors who are national or global, so it is not always easy to get them here on the ground in the Territory. COVID has made that much more difficult.

When we engage contractors who to work on our projects—by contractors, I mean specialist ICT resources, like programmers, business analysts, testers, project managers and others with specific technical skill that we contract from the market. We strongly preference them coming to live and work in the Territory because we want them to pay rent and contribute to the Northern Territory economy, but that is not always possible. The ones who are not in the Territory are a small minority.

We have 356 contractors, of which 299 reside locally and 57 are interstate. Quite a minority are not based in the Territory. With our major vendors, we often deal with global software companies so we will have a contingent of their resources here when they are working on a project, but often their development shop or core capability may be located somewhere else in the world.

Intersystems, which is the vendor delivering the new Acacia health solution is based in Boston, Massachusetts; it is a big global. As part of the procurement and contract development we put an obligation on them to open an office in Darwin, so they have a Darwin office now. They employ people here subcontract to a local Darwin IT business. That way we ensure some of the work goes into the local economy. We get the benefit of the big global software vendor—which has its clinical software in more than a thousand hospitals worldwide—with a physical presence in the Territory working closely with our project teams and involving a local Territory business in the delivery model.

Wherever possible and wherever these projects have that level of scale, we work hard to get a chunk of that benefit anchored in the Territory. I hope I am not disclosing their commercial obligations in a public hearing but that vendor has a contractual obligation to maintain an office in Darwin post the project, so when the new system is in day-to-day operation they will continue to have a presence in the Northern Territory, which is fantastic. They do a bunch of local development initiatives such as an internship program with the local university and incentivising Aboriginal employment.

We try hard to use the contracts because they are material contracts to leverage good local content outcomes for the Northern Territory. In the main software vendors respond to that really well.

Mr YAN: Do you have any out-of-state employees working for DCDD?

Ms AH KIT: We have two departmental employees in DCDD located outside of the Territory. They are technical experts who provide support to the Northern Territory Government with our PIPS payroll system. Without access to two employees with that expertise, it would be difficult to manage that system on our own.

Mr YAN: If they are that critical, what is the department doing to provide assurances and redundancies to maintain PIPS should we not have access to those two people?

Ms AH KIT: We are cognisant of the technical expertise that lies outside the Territory in regard to the PIPS system, so we put in place mentoring and skills transition with a big focus on growing our own. We know we need to get to a stage where we have local Territorians based here who are able to manage our systems and provide the level of expertise we need going forward. It is making sure we have potential gaps covered through the mentoring and the skills transfer.

Mr YAN: What is the funding this year for the Banned Drinker Register? Are you able to explain what is covered by those costs?

Ms AH KIT: Unfortunately, we do not have the specific budget relating to the operation of the BDR. I can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 9.3

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

Mr YAN: What is the funding this year for the Banned Drinker Register? Can you provide an explanation of what is covered by those costs?

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

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.3.

Mr YAN: What is the current outage rate for BDR equipment? What happens on the retailer side when the BDR machines are down and do not operate?

Ms AH KIT: I understand that there may be technical difficulties experienced by the point-of-sale operations and that workarounds are in place.

Mr HOSKING: In the BDR environment, the computers and scanners in the retail outlets are supplied by the government; they are currently being refreshed as they are old. We have a body of work in progress to upgrade them with a more sophisticated scanning solution to deal better with the various types of drivers' licences and IDs that are currently used. Some states have progressed to digital drivers' licences; we are introducing scanning solutions to accommodate that.

We will be replacing all devices over the second half of this year. Instead of a computer and scanner, the retail outlets will have an iPad, which uses photographic rather than scanning technology.

We have redundancy built in. If there is a total outage of telecommunications resulting in the BDR not being able to operate, or because of a network outage—unfortunately we still have things like fibre optic cables being cut from time to time or network outages in monsoonal weather conditions—the bottle shops will have to look at some form of manual workaround. They are few and far between. The new solution we are deploying over the second half of this year will address the legacy footprint of old computers. Some of them are well past their usable working life.

There is an intense focus on the BDR in the second half of this year. We hope to have it fully completed by about November.

Mr YAN: I note that you will be replacing all of the devices. What will that cost across the Territory?

Mr HOSKING: The replacement cost of the iPads and the stands in total is about \$750,000.

Mr YAN: That is hardware, what about the software to support that?

Mr HOSKING: The software changes have already been executed into the IT system at a cost of \$135,000. The hardware is the second stage of that upgrade process.

Output 2.2 – Agency Business Systems and Support Services

Mr YAN: There has been a significant change in the budget line from \$53,294 to \$66,405. Can you explain what that change relates to?

Ms AH KIT: The department has put in \$10m per year for the last five years to the cost of developing the Acacia health system. This is year six. As we get to the new budget the \$10m which has been allocated each year for the last five years will go from the development of the system to support the operations of it. I believe that an extra \$3m was provided through the budget process to support ongoing operations of that system.

Mr HOSKING: We anticipated this question as it is a material variation in the output. As the minister detailed, when the original funding proposal for the Acacia solution was approved, it included \$10m per year for five years of repurposed funding from the operating budget for health IT systems into the project. That \$10m is not new money, it is simply being reflected in the project budget over the last five years. Now we are near six, it reverts to the operating budget to support the new systems.

That means when the original funding decision was struck the decision-making body did not have to find new money, it was repurposed from within. The other \$3m that makes up the \$13m variance was funding approved in 2018 when the Care solution for Territory Families was approved in the 2018 budget. That is a \$64.4m project, but it had a \$3m ongoing funding allocation to support the operating cost of the system once it is delivered. They are the two key components: \$10m and \$3m, making up a \$13m increase in the output, but \$10m was existing budget and \$3m was new money approved in the 2018 budget.

Mr YAN: That is a big jump. It is nice to know where it came from and to see foresight and ongoing funding for IT systems. I know too well what happens when government does not provide ongoing funding for new IT systems.

Output 2.3 – Across Government Systems and Support Services

No questions.

The committee suspended.

Output 2.4 – Digital Projects

Mr YAN: How many projects are EPS managing?

Ms AH KIT: There are about 24 projects being managed.

Mr YAN: What role does EPS play in managing and delivering these projects?

Ms AH KIT: It is an end-to-end management oversight of a project from initiation to completion.

Mr HOSKING: The EPS—enterprise project services—that DCDD provides to agencies is targeted at delivering effective, professional project management of digital and IT projects. Earlier, we touched on the challenges with managing major IT projects. There was a time when, as a government and sector, our report card had a few black marks on it. All jurisdictions have had similar issues with major IT projects.

The undertaking of projects on behalf of agencies is something that DCDD started in 2014, initially with asset management system project, which got a lot of public attention and media—notoriety might not be too strong a term. Since then we have taken an expanded role in delivering projects on behalf of agencies.

That is everything from the initial business case stage. This is where an agency has a need or identifies something that could be addressed through the delivery of a major IT system or digital project. That goes all the way through to developing the proposal. We often assist agencies to secure funding through the budget round and manage the tender process to go to market for a new solution. We then move into the delivery stage of design, build, testing and execution of that new system, all the way through to developing benefit realisation plans to ensure that the benefits we seek from that investment in digital technology are realised once the system goes into steady state.

It has been an evolution; that model has steadily become more refined over the years. Increasingly, the operating model we work on these days is quite often when the funding proposal goes up. To secure the necessary funding for a new IT project it will be allocated to DCDD in the budget and we will manage that project through to completion.

Prior to 2019 when machinery of government changes resulted in further centralisation of corporate functions, we would have handed it back to the agency—if it was a Health IT project we would have handed the new system back to Health or Police as we are doing now that DCD manages the operations of those systems on behalf of agencies.

The hand-off happens internally within DCDD between our teams and provides us with an opportunity to make that transition from project to steady state operation seamless. Those are the things we are working on at the moment. We have touched on SerPro, Acacia, the Care system and Veritas for the courts earlier, the construct that we are working at the moment gives us the ability to get in early and prepare for the day-to-day operation of those systems.

When it goes live and the new system is being managed by doctors, police officers or judges in the courts—whoever the users of the new system are—that transition out of project and into day-to-day operation should be seamless.

We have some major deliverables in the upcoming six to 12 months. The role of DCDD enterprise project services encompasses all of that. It is very much the full project lifecycle, and it is mostly funded through a one-off allocation of funding for a specific initiatives.

It is able to scale up when we have more work on and scale back as projects complete. We are probably at a peak point in the cycle with the 24 projects that the minister mentioned—a number of which are big, high-value projects that will transform the IT tools which primarily support the social services delivered by the Northern Territory Government.

Mr YAN: I appreciate that explanation. A few people will be interested in what EPS does. How many contractors is EPS currently employing or retaining on those 24 projects?

Ms AH KIT: There are 176 contractors residing locally and 22 residing outside of the Northern Territory.

Mr YAN: How many FTEs sit in ESP?

Ms AH KIT: There are close to 100 FTEs sitting in EPS.

Mr YAN: What is the staff turnover on your current projects—FTEs and contractors?

Ms AH KIT: I cannot offer a number right now. I am happy to take that question on notice. The intricacies are that the contractors are not just specifically working on a project, they are working on a number of projects. To record their absence or exit would be tied to the work project.

Mr YAN: I understand what you mean. The project ends and the contractor ends with that project. You will have turnover of contractors on projects that are still ongoing if you have 24 projects on the books. There will be some churn with your FTEs and contractors on those projects. That is the number I am after.

Question on Notice No 9.4

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

Mr YAN: Minister, what is the staff turnover on your current projects, being FTEs and contractors?

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

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.4.

Mr YAN: I noted that there has been the introduction of a contractor retention scheme within EPS. Is this reflective of the current contractor turnover rate requiring that implementation?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr YAN: Have you had any results or any improvement with your contractor turnover since the implementation of the contractor retention scheme?

Ms AH KIT: In the early stages of this work, yes.

Mr HOSKING: The retention framework you referred to is an arrangement we have codified in our contracts exactly as you say, to try to encourage retention. What we experienced in the Territory during COVID, particularly because the Territory managed to have no community-based transmission up until about November last year—we were a bit of a safe haven for these types of resources.

A lot of that type of digital project work on the eastern seaboard slowed, or in some cases projects were shut down during COVID as the southern states had much harsher lockdowns than we did. A lot of organisations put their major IT projects on hold; some actually cancelled them. A lot of resources were left to look for other work, which benefited the Territory significantly. We had an influx of skilled high-end digital specialists, many who were prepared to do the mandatory 14-day quarantine to secure paid engagements here in the Territory.

What we have noticed, and the reason the scheme was put in place, was that late last year as the COVID trajectory started to slow, work on the eastern seaboard picked up significantly, and there has been a lot more movement in the contractors, more competition for those skills and movement in the rates, which makes the procurement and engagement of those resources more challenging.

The retention scheme has been put in place to incentivise contract resources to see the work they are engaged in through to completion. We noticed quite an impact to our resource pool around Christmas because a lot of those resources travelled home, and some did not come back. With the introduction of the provision you mentioned, some of that has slowed a bit and things have stabilised. It is progressive over time, and we are hoping that continues to improve. The early signs are very positive.

Mr YAN: I want to dive into some of the major systems, as you have given a general overview. I will start with the Care system with Territory Families. How is its development tracking?

Ms AH KIT: The project is tracking well. It is on time, on budget and due for completion and roll out in early 2023.

Mr YAN: What was the budget allocation for Care?

Ms AH KIT: It was \$64m.

Mr YAN: What is the spend to date?

Ms AH KIT: Up to the reporting period, it is \$24.8m.

Mr YAN: You stated that it is currently on budget?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr YAN: Have there been any variations to the contract so far?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, there have been some variations relating to timing of the software components.

Mr YAN: Has there been a cost associated with those variations?

Ms AH KIT: There have been no change in costs to the project.

Mr YAN: Is there a deployment date for Care?

Ms AH KIT: Whilst a date has not been set, it is something the department will be working on with Territory Families, Housing and Communities; however, the project is due to be completed early next year.

Mr YAN: As part of the development to date, have you undertaken any user acceptance testing?

Ms AH KIT: That has not been conducted yet; it will be conducted closer to the delivery date.

Mr YAN: Another system under development is Sage. How is the Sage system development tracking? This was announced in 2021.

Ms AH KIT: The Sage budget management system is being prepared to go live in the coming weeks.

Mr HOSKING: That is correct. The development of a whole-of-government budget management system, referred to as Sage, was an initiative for DCDD out of the 'A plan for budget repair'. That system is in the final stages of user acceptance testing, and we expect to be launching the pilot deployment of the system with two Northern Territory Government agencies in the coming weeks. That pilot deployment will then inform a further round of modification and starting later this calendar year. We will be looking to on-board NT Government agencies one at a time.

The pilot, or the very first deployment, is on schedule to happen over the coming weeks, which is a busy time for our CFOs and finance teams. We are approaching the end of the financial year. It presents the opportunity to start the new financial year on-boarded to the new system, hence the timing. We are in the very late stages of user-acceptance testing.

Mr YAN: Have there been any issues highlighted so far during the user-acceptance testing?

Mr HOSKING: Yes. Like any software development cycle, we identify bugs in the code, but at this point there are none of any severity that would prevent our go-live. The Sage system is a program we have developed

in the Territory using local software developers employed through local IT businesses. It is a purpose-built solution system to meet the Northern Territory Government's requirements. It also aligns to a public sector budgeting cycle, which is different to a commercial budget management system that is revenue-driven, rather than through a budget funding allocation.

It is a bespoke development to meet individual government departments and how they operate their budgets. By virtue of being developed through that software development approach, generally there are a few more bugs than with a commercial software product. At this point in time all the bugs are easily remedied and we expect to be live in a few weeks' time.

Mr YAN: Was there a budget allocation for Sage?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, \$7.9m.

Mr YAN: What is the spend to date?

Ms AH KIT: It is \$6m.

Mr YAN: Are you tracking on budget?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr YAN: What is the status of Acacia, or the CCSRP system?

Ms AH KIT: The deployment of the Acacia patient administration component of the system for Katherine was deferred several times during 2021, due to the impact of COVID-19 on hospitals and clinician availability. The deployment will recommence in Katherine in the third quarter this year, followed by other major regions. The date we have scheduled for that is 29 July in Katherine.

Mr YAN: Yes, I understand COVID played a part in delaying that pilot. I am glad that we will see it in July. What is the overall status of CCSRP?

Mr HOSKING: The read-only version has been delivered and in use by clinicians for some time. That has taken all the clinician information across the six systems that are being replaced into the new Acacia system and synchronised it in real time. When a nurse in a remote community writes to the legacy system they use today, it updates Acacia, then clinicians in hospitals can view that to ensure they have a complete record of clinical care. Up until now, it has been in read-only mode, which has been useful, but the writing to the system happens in the old system.

In late July in Katherine we will start the rollout of the production version where the patient administration functions will be done in Acacia. Once that is rolled out across all hospitals, we will be able to retire the first of the old systems that is due to be replaced. At this point we are rolling into Katherine in July and scheduled to do Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals in November, after which there will be Central Australia and the two small regional hospitals in Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy. RDH is by far the largest and most complex clinical settings. That will be the most work.

There are subsequent tranches of Acacia to be delivered. There is additional functionality with patient work flows, digital medication management and the replacement of the legacy system that is used in remote primary care settings in the bush. We have about 50 remote primary clinics that have a system they use as part of the scope of the replacement.

There are still several years' worth of work to complete the full Acacia program through to program closure. We are probably, in rough terms, at about the halfway point.

You asked about the state of the project. It has had a number of impacts to the time frame related to COVID, Primarily, that is related to the availability of clinicians. We cannot deliver a major software solution without being heavily engaged with clinical stakeholders. For a long time that was suspended due to the pandemic.

We have had some delays to the time frame. The initial scope of the solution will still be delivered in its totality. We are at a point where we will probably have some funding pressures later in the program because there is a cost to keep the project afloat. We will need to deal with that later, once we get a clearer run on it.

To answer your question about the state of the program, it is late as a result of the pandemic, but it is on scope. It is well within its funding parameters, but we expect that to come under pressure in the latter stages of the project.

Mr YAN: What is the current spend to date?

Mr HOSKING: It is a total budget of \$266m; the spend to date during the reporting period is \$160m.

Mr YAN: You are tracking on budget currently, but later in the program you may suffer some budgetary pressures?

Mr HOSKING: Yes, there is a residual funding allocation in the project of \$100m. We know we still have a fair way to go and we expect that to come under pressure much later in the program.

Mr YAN: Have there been any variations to the contract for CCSRP?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, there have been some variations. They relate to the sequencing of the functionality of the system and have had no impact on the cost of the project.

Mr YAN: Mr Hosking said that there could be future pressure on the budget. What is your final expected implementation budget? Do you expect it to be higher than \$266m? Do you have an idea what it might be?

Mr HOSKING: Not at this stage. It is too early to try to do that with any real precision. I made those remarks based on the experience of having to progress a really complex, difficult project through a global pandemic. Unfortunately, that timing was not ideal. Those were circumstances we could not control.

Mr YAN: I understand that; I appreciate your candid answer. You said November for RDH and Palmerston deployment. I notice you did not mention Central Australia. Do you have a possible deployment date for Alice Springs?

Mr HOSKING: That is in early 2023. I do not have the precise date but rest assured, every regional hospital is in that rollout. We are heavily focused on the two we have in the six-month time frame ahead of us.

Mr YAN: I will move on to SerPro now. What is the current status of the SerPro system?

Ms AH KIT: The SerPro program has been completed. We have not commenced the testing process yet. We are looking at a go-live date later this year.

Mr HOSKING: The software build of the new solution was completed recently and the system we are using is a software product is called Niche RMS, which is used in several other Australian policing jurisdictions. It is used in Queensland and South Australia, and we leveraged heavily off our police colleagues in those jurisdictions. It is also utilised in many countries worldwide, particularly those with similar Westminster systems of government—Canada, the UK and others. The vendor is Canadian-based.

The software build was completed recently, and we are doing some of our backend system testing before we get into more detailed user-acceptance testing later in the year. We have commenced the very early training and education for police officers. We developed instructional videos and training material, where they can do online, self-paced familiarisation with the new system but there will be more structured classroom-style training much closer to the deployment.

SerPro is replacing the legacy PROMIS system that has been there for a long time. For practical reasons, it is very hard to do that swap out in a modular way, so it will go live across the Territory on a common date. That means we have to prepare police officers across the Territory for a go-live on a specific day. We will be working our way through the regional centres, bringing police officers in from some of the more remote localities to be trained, doing as much training as we can using digital tools and online learning platforms and use sworn police officers as part of our user-acceptance testing cohorts.

We have a bunch of policing scenarios for police to sit in front of a computer, run a process the way they would in PROMIS today to make sure it works as it should in the new system. We anticipate having the testing, bug fix and all the last fine-tuning checks and balances done over the coming months.

The actual go-live date is something we have to work closely with police for operational reasons. We have pinpointed the week in the weekly cycle that is the least invasive for the police officers, Interestingly, it is a

Sunday lunchtime, which was a surprise to me. We also need to work in with police operational requirements. If they have major exercises or something happening, we need to work around that.

We have targeted several dates later in the year, later in the process when all the testing is done, everything is signed off, our assurance reviews are done and we are confident to go live. We will launch it on a date that works for police and work closely with the police department to make the final call on the day that is most manageable for them. At this stage the objective is to have the new system live before things start to slow down for Christmas.

Mr YAN: Now that the software part of SerPro is done, what is the current spend on SerPro?

Ms AH KIT: The full program budget for SerPro was \$45m. The spend as at 31 March 2022 is \$35.1m.

Mr YAN: With the remainder of the work to go, will that remaining budget be sufficient to complete the project?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, but only just.

Mr YAN: Have there been any variations on this contract?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, there have been some variations for the SerPro program but no cost implications.

Mr YAN: 'Yes, but only just'. I like your optimism. I will not ask you what you expect the final implementation budget is; I may wait until next estimates to ask you the actual implementation amount.

Mr HOSKING: I will be prepared for next year. To put a fine point on that, we have modelled that budget through to all final vendor costs and resource costs. When I say 'only just' I make the point that there is not a lot of wiggle room left in that. However, we are intensely focused on that and are getting fantastic support from the Police department. With the support we get through the Police Commissioner, his senior officers and those working with us on this, it is being delivered in a partnership. We are at the pointy end now. It is in the final race for the finish line. I am optimistic that we will deliver within the time frame. I look forward to your questions at estimates next year; hopefully, we will be reflecting on a positive report card.

Mr YAN: When the Justice Legislation Amendment (Electronic Document) Bill was passed in February, it was done with a sense that the transition from PROMIS to SerPro was imminent. Would you say that the rollout is behind schedule?

Ms AH KIT: SerPro is a bit behind schedule due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in the Territory.

Mr YAN: Are police using a back-up or off-the-shelf system called Evidence.com that provides pretty much the exact requirements police and the DPP need?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, Evidence.com is used for the purpose of storing the footage of body-worn cameras.

Mr YAN: Will that still be in place once SerPro is live? It will sit alongside it specifically for that purpose?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr YAN: Have police provided the project manager within EPS with any feedback regarding the project and its implementation dates?

Ms AH KIT: There are Northern Territory police officers sitting on the project implementation committee, so police provide feedback on the SerPro program regularly. DCDD is here to support and work with agencies to build these systems, not build it without their input.

Mr YAN: How many police staff are employed or outsourced to this project?

Ms AH KIT: At any one time there are five sworn police officers engaged with the project. There are also a number of police officers on the governance committees overseeing the project. The CEO also advised me that we have about 100 SerPro champions donating their time to this project, which is fantastic.

Mr YAN: That is good news. We spoke earlier about the change in the budget line with that \$10m and \$3m, which are the ongoing costs. What are the expected ongoing costs for SerPro?

Ms AH KIT: The rough costs for the operation of SerPro, annually, would be around \$3.5m.

Mr YAN: This came about during questioning with the justice bill in February—why is this project required to report to Cabinet quarterly?

Ms AH KIT: When funding was handed down for the three major projects of SerPro, Care and Acacia, the Cabinet directive was that quarterly reporting take place.

Mr YAN: I will move on to my favourites now: Veritas and Odyssey, being a bit of an IJIS buff from back in the day. What is the project status of Veritas; this was announced quite some time ago?

Ms AH KIT: Veritas is on track to go live in the fourth quarter this year, shortly after SerPro goes live. I was just clarifying with the Chief Executive that there was no need for SerPro to go before Veritas, but the plan is that they will be going live within weeks of each other.

Mr YAN: Who is the developer managing the Veritas Odyssey project?

Ms AH KIT: The software vendor is called Tyler Technologies.

Mr YAN: What was the initial budget allocation for Veritas?

Ms AH KIT: It was \$13.7m.

Mr YAN: What is the current spend, to date?

Ms AH KIT: It is \$10m.

Mr YAN: Is that tracking on budget?

Ms AH KIT: Similar to SerPro, it is tracking on budget, but only just.

Mr YAN: I will be back next year to follow up and see how we are going with Veritas and Odyssey. Have there been any variations on the contract?

Ms AH KIT: Yes there have been variations relating to fixed pricing of costs that were variable before. We have been able to pinpoint the exact costs, to be able to manage the budget.

Mr YAN: Is there a cost to those variations?

Ms AH KIT: No.

Mr YAN: You said we have a deployment date to go live—fourth quarter 2022. Anything to do with IJIS—user acceptance—testing is critical as it is so difficult to interface with, into and out of. Has there been any UAT to date?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, some testing has been undertaken. We have done system testing and are getting ready to do the user-acceptance testing.

Mr YAN: Who will be managing the user acceptance testing?

Ms AH KIT: The DCDD project director is managing the testing in partnership with the executive director of the courts within the Department of Attorney-General and Justice.

Mr YAN: I will wait to see what issues may be highlighted during the UAT. Knowing the difficulty of interfacing with IJIS/PROMIS and with the replacement with Veritas, will there be any flow-on effects and costs to other systems that are effectively used to interface with IJIS and now will have to interface with Veritas, or will Veritas feedback to IJIS? Will those other systems still take their data from IJIS? Will you leave IJIS sitting there in any shape or form in the background?

Mr HOSKING: You are on the money; the implementation of Veritas is part of the phasing out of IJIS. The intent is that when Veritas goes live we will have the SerPro system addressing policing, allowing us to retire PROMIS.

We will have the Odyssey system being delivered through Veritas managing across courts and prosecutions. We currently have the IOMS system used in the prisons when an offender is in custody, and we will have digital integration across those systems so an offender is known and recognisable as they traversed the different settings.

The objective of the Veritas project is to replace IJIS so we are not—where we can avoid it—building an interface back to IJIS, because we are looking to get off that platform eventually. We had to do some—in the interim—but we will be progressively removing the interfaces between SerPro and Odyssey, or Odyssey and IOMS and so forth as part of these projects.

The new interfaces are being built and implemented as part of these projects. The one area we still have a dependency on IJIS is the Fines Recovery Unit because IJIS is used to manage the debt for fines and infringements, and the Odyssey solution is not suitable for that usage.

When Veritas is finished—now that I say this I will have to answer this question next year—we need to work out what to do with fines recovery, because IJIS will still be needed for that for the time being. While it is not as complex as managing criminal justice and court prosecutions, it is still an important part of that process. Veritas will look to what we do next, but we will not be able to leverage that Tyler Technologies software to do that; it is not the right tool for the job.

Mr YAN: I know about the fines recovery part of IJIS and how everything was built around that. To replace that and integrate it with anything else is quite difficult. I look forward to talking to you next year to find out how well your integrations with IOMS and across to Veritas and Odyssey goes, because I know the complexity of moving between IJIS and IOMS real-time and the complexities that causes for Correctional Services and AGD. It is quite critical work. I am hoping it works for you.

Mr HOSKING: Consider me on notice.

Output 2.5 – Data Services

Mr YAN: In the interests of time, Mr Chair, I have questions for Data Services I will put in writing to the minister.

Output 2.6 – Digital Communications

No questions.

Output 2.7 – Digital Connectivity and Strategy

Mr YAN: Are there any plans to install a tower for 4G coverage at King Ash Bay to service the people living in that region?

Ms AH KIT: I am not aware of any plans, off the top of my head.

Mr YAN: Along the Plenty Highway we have seen an increase in tourism and traffic from Queensland. With the move to seal the Outback Way, there will be an increase in traffic along that arterial thoroughfare from Queensland to Western Australia. Is government starting to plan to implement towers along that Plenty Highway region across the Northern Territory to Queensland, which will then service those communities east of Atitjere, the outstations and Bonya through to the Queensland border?

Ms AH KIT: Our remote co-investment programs have been focused on delivering connectivity into remote communities for citizens' use, not focusing on transport corridors.

Mr YAN: Speaking about the co-investment with remote telecommunications and Telstra, what budget has been outlaid for that co-investment program during 2022–23? How many remote communities will have their telecommunications services established or upgraded?

Ms AH KIT: The current budget is \$28m through the co-investment program, which is a 50% partnership with Telstra.

The communities that had connections completed were Milikapiti, Pirlangimpi and Wurrumiyanga. All works on the Tiwi Islands are complete. There was a Yuendumu to Alice Springs transmission upgrade completed.

Under construction, we have Canteen Creek, Epenarra and Nyirripi. In the design phase, we have Cahills Crossing, Laramba, Larrimah, Top Springs—I understand has been completed—Willowra and Yuelamu. Avon Downs is on hold; there is a land claim covering the selected site.

Mr YAN: That is what the \$28m will cover for the coming financial year?

Ms AH KIT: That is right; that is the 14 sites that have been approved.

Mr GUYULA: Mobile service is slow and unreliable in a number of communities in my electorate. What work is being done by this government to address inadequate services in remote areas?

Ms AH KIT: Since coming in as minister a couple of weeks ago one of the biggest I learned is that 10% of the Northern Territory is without connectivity. That is something that our government takes very seriously. Remote telecommunications is the responsibility of the federal government but the Northern Territory Government has been working closely with Telstra to fund our remote telecommunications co-investment program. In the previous answer I read out the 14 remote sites. The Northern Territory Government is committed to getting connectivity to as many people at their place of residence.

Mr PERRIN: Th NT Government has a role in advocacy for better telecommunications in remote areas. The Australian Government has responsibility overall for telecommunications; our role is to advocate with them and with other players, including the telecommunications industry, to get some assistance, particularly for services for remote NT residents. It is often difficult because the telecommunications provide may not find it to be commercially viable to deliver services to some areas. That is why we co-invest with some of them, to provide some of the capital funding to get the towers and cells out there.

We also do a lot of advocacy and participation in the national telecommunications programs, like the Mobile Blackspot Program, National Broadband Network, Regional Connectivity Program—there is a couple of different rounds of that—and the co-investment program we have with Telstra on remote telecommunications.

Mr GUYULA: (inaudible).

Ms AH KIT: Under the remote small cells program, mobile telecommunications infrastructure has been installed in 72 communities across the Northern Territory. The remote small cells program will target small isolated communities with populations ranging between 20 and 60 people.

Site locations are determined through the remote small cells program assessment framework, which is agreed by Telstra and the Northern Territory Government. The program cost of \$5.8m is equally shared between the Northern Territory Government and Telstra.

Mr GUYULA: In the 2021–22 budget, there is \$4m allocated to the remote telecommunications co-investment program. What was the breakdown of how that \$4m was spent, in which communities and what is the number of people employed for the program?

Ms AH KIT: Are you looking at which communities were targeted? Part of your question related to employment. Are you looking at the number of people who are working on each of those projects?

Mr GUYULA: I am talking about my electorate in East Arnhem Land and mainly talking about the services. I am not sure whether this question fits into that, or whether it can be asked in another area.

Ms AH KIT: I will go through the list of communities that were targeted through the current budget. We have completed work in Milikapiti, Pirlangimpi and Wurrumiyanga. We have work under construction in Canteen Creek, Epenarra and Nyirripi. We have in-design work being created for Cahill's Crossing, Laramba, Larrimah, Top Springs, Willowra and Yuelamu. As part of this year's program we also have Avon Downs, which is on hold because there is a land claim covering that site at the moment.

Just to go a bit further, under the remote telecommunications co-investment program 45 communities have had telecommunications connected, with those 14 I just raised, for this financial year.

Mr GUYULA: I have not heard about the communities in my area. What will you do about them?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: I think the Member for Mulka is asking—with the small cells, because we know that money is there—if any homelands or outstations are on the list for this coming budget.

Ms AH KIT: Only the 14 locations I read out are being covered within the current budget.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: My understanding is that there are two lots of money.

Ms AH KIT: Yes. I am reading from the list for the NTG Telstra remote telecommunications co-investment program; that is the co-investment of \$14m a year between Northern Territory Government and Telstra. Then there is the remote small cells program, which is a different bucket of funds. That was the information I gave about mobile telecommunications infrastructure that has already been installed in 72 communities across the Territory.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Maybe the Member for Mulka wants to know whether there are any within his electorate on that list of 72 sites.

Ms AH KIT: There is a list of the top 20 identified remote small cells program sites. They have been identified in conjunction with Telstra. We are working with Telstra to identify the top 20 sites for that remote small cells program. Unfortunately, I do not have the list of the 20, so I am happy to take that on notice to check if any of the communities in your electorate have been considered for that round.

I am a bit confused about the Member for Mulka's question. Is that relating to the remote telecommunications co-investment program or the mobile telecommunications infrastructure through remote small cells program, or both?

Question on Notice No 9.5

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

Mr GUYULA: In the 2021-2022 budget there is \$4m allocated to the remote telecommunications co-investment program. What was the breakdown of \$4m spent, in which communities, and what is the number of local people employed for this program?

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

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Mulka has been allocated the number 9.5.

Ms AH KIT: I have just been advised that the 20 sites agreed to by the Northern Territory Government and Telstra have not yet been made public. We are working with Telstra to do an announcement so I am not sure what that list of 20 looks like or whether any of your electorate communities are on there, but if I can get that information in a timely fashion, I will do so.

Mr GUYULA: Are there any key performance indicators to guide the government in working for better digital services in regional areas?

Ms AH KIT: I am advised there are not key performance indicators per se. We keep a close eye on outages in communities. Often those are outages that the Northern Territory Government is not able to prevent, but Telstra is great in sharing information about remote connectivity and any outages with us.

Mr YAN: You spoke about the remote community small cells sites, what was the budget allocated to that?

Ms AH KIT: The budget is \$5.8m—50:50 partnership between us and Telstra.

Mr YAN: It is another co-investment?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, 72 communities in the Northern Territory have had mobile telecommunications infrastructure installed.

Mr YAN: They have had it already installed, excellent. You stated that there will be an announcement on the 20 upcoming sites very soon.

Ms AH KIT: Absolutely.

Mr YAN: I look forward to hearing what communities they will be.

Mr YOUNG: In my electorate of Daly there are a number of communities with poor connectivity, Dundee being one of them. A number of residents and small businesses have been reaching out to me to see how they can get better telecommunication services to Dundee. I have been working closely with Telstra. What is the government doing to ensure residents in Dundee have reliable connectivity?

Ms AH KIT: This has been raised a number of times. I am pleased to say that a new 4G tower has been built on a Dundee site. The service will be on air in late July/early August this year. It is great news for locals, but there will be the transition with the old tower being decommissioned and the new tower coming online for local residents.

A huge thank you to Telstra and to you for your advocacy for the local residents to make sure this important work was undertaken. The good news is that 4G tower is out there.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Within my electorate of Arafura, during the Wet Season there are a lot of outages. A lot of the outages are simple-fix solutions. I speak with Telstra on a regular basis. A lot of them have to do with little faults with the solar not working or there being no power supply. Then, because they are on a microwave link—I am sure Mulka would have the same problem, and Daly where it is a lot more coastal—the systems would go down and it can take two days up to two weeks to get it back up because there are no backup generators or solar.

I raised this with Telstra on many occasions and suggested that maybe they employ someone local—the essential service officer—to look at making sure the generators and solar batteries are full. When systems go down out bush, they can go without it for up to weeks. I have experienced it.

I know for a fact that when a site goes down, it would be a simple drive for about half-an-hour or an hour, instead of flying a helicopter to the site where it will cost \$5,000 to \$10,000. If you have someone on the ground, they can work in with Telstra and fix the problem. It creates employment for a local.

Maybe we might need to look into that, or have that discussion with Telstra in the coming weeks or months.

Ms AH KIT: Our government is always looking at practical solutions. You have the lived experience, as do the remote community members, not only in this room but in our wider parliament. I am always open to any of those suggestions.

I am relatively new to the ministry and this portfolio. I have not had the opportunity to meet with the Telstra CEO, Andy Penn, yet. I will be meeting with Mr Penn in the near future. I will be sure to raise that. If there are any other practical solutions from any of my parliamentary colleagues about remote connectivity in remote communities, I would love to hear about them.

Thanks again. That is a practical solution I look forward to discussing with the Telstra CEO.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES **Output 3.1 – Corporate and Governance**

No questions.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

No questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: This concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. On behalf of the committee I thank the officers who assisted the minister today.

Answer to Question on Notice No 9.1

Ms AH KIT: The annual cost of operating the jobs portal is approximately \$7,000.

Answer to Question on Notice No 9.2

Ms AH KIT: The tier one audits—we sampled 50 tier one transactions, three were found with non-compliance issues.

Answer to Question on Notice No 9.3

Ms AH KIT: The budget for this financial year is \$2.56m which covers vendor telecommunications, network and hardware costs.

NT FLEET

No questions.

DATA CENTRE SERVICES

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: On behalf of the committee I thank the Corporate and Digital Development agency staff who provided advice today.

Ms AH KIT: I take the opportunity to thank Acting Chief Executive Chris Hosking, Ewan Perrin and the entire team at DCDD for the marvellous job they have done. The department has stepped up and gone through some changes over the last couple of years to achieve efficiency. They have gone above and beyond to support Territorians in the Northern Territory Government through our response to COVID-19. I am proud and grateful to be the newly minted Minister for Corporate and Digital Development.

The committee suspended.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement.

Ms AH KIT: Mr Chair, I introduce the officers joining me at the table. From the Department of Industry Tourism and Trade we have Scott Lovett, Deputy Chief Executive Tourism, Services and Hospitality; and Larnie Batten, Director of Study NT.

I will take the opportunity to deliver a short opening statement to give a bit of a recap of the important work undertaken in my International Education portfolio.

With international borders reopening, international students are returning to the Territory. Our focus for 2022–23 is having a stronger presence in our key markets. We are working with our international education and training providers and education agents to promote the Territory as an ideal destination for international education and training, in turn increasing international student enrolments in the Northern Territory.

International education and training is an important sector for the Territory. Attracting higher numbers of international students to the Territory is a key focus to grow and diversify the economy. International education and training is a priority economic sector for the Territory. In 2019–20 it generated \$172m in export revenue, growing 37% from 2018–19.

As at March 2020 there were 3,000 international students enrolled with Territory education providers. Just over half were studying higher education courses; 40% were studying with vocational education and training providers; and the remaining were studying English language with government and non-government schools.

Throughout the international border closures the Territory was the only jurisdiction to welcome international students back to study. In 2021–22 Study NT:

- ran scholarship marketing campaigns into key markets

- partnered with Austrade to promote the Territory on Vietnam television
- launched the international accommodation grant, supporting 33 international students with the move to the Territory
- supported local international education and training providers to get back into market quickly through the launch of the marketing cooperative fund
- hosted a three-day familiarisation tour with education agents
- hosted the Symposium on Leading Education Recruitment—SYMPLED—conference in Darwin
- supported current international students through the International Student Wellbeing Grants
- welcomed international students at the Minister for International Education’s annual welcome reception at Parliament House.

Chief Minister Fyles hosted that reception in March and acknowledged the Study in Australia’s Northern Territory scholarship recipients; announced the 2022 Study NT student ambassadors; and awarded the 2021 International Student of the Year to Jimena Esposito.

With the temporary lifting of restrictions for hours worked, many international students are taking up short-term or casual roles in the tourism and hospitality sector. That is helping solve, at least in part, workforce shortages affecting the Territory.

In 2022–23 Study NT received an additional \$500,000 in budget allocation to focus on promoting the Territory as a study destination for international education and training in key markets of India, Nepal, Vietnam, Philippines and China. The additional funding will be used to promote the Territory in markets and engage with international education agents who, prior to COVID-19, recruited up to 75% of international students to Australia.

That was all to give the committee an overview of the important and exemplary work that Study NT undertakes, and I am happy to open it up to any questions from the committee.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you, minister, and thank you to your support staff who are here today. You touched on the \$500,000 increase in the output relating to additional funding for targeted international education marketing activities. Can you explain what those marketing activities are, and did you say that they were targeted in India, Nepal, Vietnam and China?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, and the Philippines. As you would appreciate, we are on a mission to recruit as many international students as possible to the wonderful Northern Territory. We know we are not alone in that endeavour. A number of our jurisdictions are also on the same path.

Mr LOVETT: The extra money will be used predominantly in our international markets. The global industry has been affected by COVID. We are on a recovery phase. We have a target to hit 10,000 international students as set out in our international education and training strategy.

We are looking to support our private providers and Charles Darwin University in its significant growth aspirations with the CBD campus. That activity will be led in market by Larnie, the Director for Study NT, in partnership with the Australian government through Austrade and Study Australia partnership.

Mrs HERSEY: With the 10,000 students the NT is looking at attracting, how many international students were studying in the Territory prior to COVID being declared, and how many are there now?

Ms AH KIT: There were close to 5,000 international students studying in the Northern Territory prior to COVID. At the end of 2021, we had approximately 4,300 international students enrolled.

Mrs HERSEY: How many of those students were studying online and how many were living in the NT?

Ms AH KIT: We do not have that information readily available. I am happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 9.6

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

Mrs HERSEY: How many of those international students were studying online and how many were living in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 9.6.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you explain the variation between the 2021–22 budget and the 2021–22 estimate on page 93 of BP3, of \$1.104m to \$1.133m—a \$29,000 increase? Is this an overspend?

Ms AH KIT: Out of the total increase of \$29,000, \$4,000 was spent on the international student handbook; there was \$4,000 for the return of unspent grants; and \$21,000 was spent on other COVID non-vaccination efficiency dividends. I would be happy to ask the department to explain it in greater detail.

Mr LOVETT: It was a COVID non-vaccination efficiency dividend EBA bonus payment top up, so it is a whole-of-agency efficiency dividend, which has been placed across all of the departments.

Mrs HERSEY: The unspent grants—\$4,000—was that reallocated to another area?

Mr LOVETT: It is an accounting treatment. It is unspent grants from one year, which roll over as an increase into the next financial year.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you provide a breakdown of how the \$1.604m for this output is allocated? For example, how much is for staff salaries, travel, advertising material, grants et cetera?

Ms AH KIT: I will read a breakdown of the expenditure: \$384,000 was allocated to employee expenses; \$124,000 on operational expenses; and \$148,000 was allocated to grants.

Mrs HERSEY: How many grants were funded by the \$148,000 for grants? Was it just one?

Ms AH KIT: The \$148,000 worth of grants relates to the International Student Wellbeing Grants.

Ms BATTEN: Study NT runs a number of grant programs, including the International Student Wellbeing Grant program; the Study in Australia's Northern Territory scholarship program, which is a grant; and the accommodation grant, which the minister spoke about earlier. The scholarships and accommodation grants go to students through education and training providers; and the wellbeing grants go to local businesses, education providers, community groups and not-for-profits to deliver events and activities for international students.

Mrs HERSEY: Out of that, how many students received a grant, and how many community groups received a grant?

Ms BATTEN: There were 33 students awarded the student accommodation grant. Twelve students were awarded the Study in Australia's Northern Territory Scholarships. A number of wellbeing grants were paid out over the year totalling around \$41,380. I do not have the breakdown of who received those grants, but we can provide it on notice.

Ms AH KIT: I am happy to take that question on notice, if you would like that detail.

Question on Notice No 9.7

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

Mrs HERSEY: Out of the \$41,380, how much went to community grants?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated number 9.7.

Mrs HERSEY: What current government support initiatives or grants are provided to private and international student education providers?

Ms AH KIT: Study NT offers the international education and training marketing cooperative fund, providing one-off grants to Territory education and training providers. The total expenditure was \$147,481. That has been committed in grant funding to 11 providers for on and off-shore marketing efforts, including agent familiarisation tours, social media marketing, off-shore recruitment trips and agent engagement.

Mrs HERSEY: Do we know who those 11 providers are?

Ms AH KIT: I do not have the details on me. I am happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 9.8

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

Mrs HERSEY: Can the minister tell me who the 11 providers for on and off-shore marketing efforts are?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated number 9.8.

Mrs HERSEY: Why are you not the minister for all international education? There is international education that comes in from primary schools, for example Haileybury. Why are we splitting it between the Education department and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, which is higher ed?

Ms AH KIT: I take responsibility under the International Education portfolio for Haileybury Rendall and any of the other schools that have higher education international student opportunities. It all comes under me. I just happen to have the portfolio that sits within the huge Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. I am heading out to Haileybury in the next couple of weeks; I am pretty excited.

Mrs HERSEY: How many international students left the Territory before completing their studies over the past two years? Do you know how many of those students have since returned?

Ms AH KIT: That data may not be available as it is held by Austrade. I can take the question on notice to see if we can find it, but we may not be able to get our hands on it.

Mrs HERSEY: I will go with that option.

Question on Notice No 9.9

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

Ms HERSEY: How many international students left the Territory before completing their studies over the past two years, and how many of those have since returned?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 9.9.

Mrs HERSEY: What was the estimated revenue to the Territory from international students prior to COVID, and what is it now?

Ms AH KIT: In 2018–19, the amount was \$126m. That grew to \$172m in 2019–20, which is a 37% increase.

Mrs HERSEY: What was the number in 2019–20?

Ms AH KIT: In 2019–20 it was \$172m. Also, because that was the number for 2019–20, the department is looking into new figures for 2020–21.

Mrs HERSEY: You do not have them as yet?

Ms AH KIT: No. That it is due to a lag on reporting from the federal government.

Mrs HERSEY: Do we know when? Is there an expected time for that figure?

Ms AH KIT: We expect that in the next couple of months, so anywhere in between.

Mrs HERSEY: Did the Northern Territory Government allocate any funds to flying international students back to the Territory or accommodating them during COVID? If so, how much did it cost?

Ms AH KIT: No, we did not pay for any flights or accommodation during the reporting period.

Mrs HERSEY: Has any research been undertaken in regard to international students who arrive, study and then stay in the Northern Territory versus those who do not complete the study, or choose to work elsewhere?

Ms AH KIT: The department is undertaking work because we understand that it is not just important to focus on attracting international students, but we need to retain them in the Territory. I will hand over to the department to provide more detail on their important work.

Mr LOVETT: Yes, there is a longitudinal study being undertaken right now with external consultancy to look at the economic and social contributions of international students across the Northern Territory. It is being done over a time horizon and is taking into account the economic contribution and the important social contribution these students make to the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you know when that will be done?

Mr LOVETT: We expect to have that done by the end of this calendar year.

Mrs HERSEY: There is also a budget output for international education in the Department of Education of \$2.138m, which is \$500 more than this output. Can you clarify how responsibility for international education is divided between them? Before said you took carriage over the primary and whatever, and Minister Lawler has an output for international education as well. I am just trying to ascertain what her budget is for, if you take carriage of both.

Ms AH KIT: I would not be able to explain Minister Lawler's educational budget. That would be a question that is best posed to Minister Lawler.

Mrs HERSEY: Just to clarify, you are responsible for all international education?

Ms AH KIT: All international education in the Northern Territory, which includes schools, yes. The promotion and marketing of international education in our schools throughout the Territory comes under my portfolio.

Mrs HERSEY: Is international student satisfaction measured in any way? Are there any surveys or anything done for international student satisfaction?

Ms AH KIT: As a part of that longitudinal study, international students who are participating are being asked about their satisfaction in regard to the provider as well as their experience in Darwin as a destination or for where they are studying in the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: Is that done in some kind of survey to them?

Ms AH KIT: Yes, as part of that longitudinal study.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you have results from that? Do you publish those results or are they out there for people to see?

Ms AH KIT: Once the longitudinal study is completed later this year, it will incorporate the results from that survey and that will be made public.

Mrs HERSEY: And later this year would be when?

Ms AH KIT: Before 31 December 2022.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you be a bit more specific?

Mr LOVETT: We are working as quickly as we can. We know the work is urgent but as the minister said, we have a commitment to get it done by the end of the calendar year.

Mrs HERSEY: Is that the time frame, just by the end of the calendar year?

Mr LOVETT: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide further detail on how government is supporting the wellbeing of international students?

Ms AH KIT: We understand we have thousands of international students who need to be supported over here, and COVID did not make things any easier for them. It was wonderful to see our wellbeing grants rolled out. One of the biggest initiatives that sticks in my mind that is well known is the Kindness Festival that we are celebrating in Darwin this weekend. That was created by a group of international students who wanted to step up and make sure there was connectivity for every international student studying in the Darwin region. It has been an absolutely wonderful initiative. It is one of many that we have supported.

I remember going to CDU and meeting with Ben Poveda Alfonso and seeing the community rally together watching restaurateurs and local operators prepare food and drop it off so that these international students could grab their little food packs and know they felt supported going back to their homes. It was a really tricky time. I will ask Larnie to expand more, because it is such a wonderful program. There is \$150,000 towards those wellbeing initiatives, and it is great to see so many different organisations and community groups take that opportunity to jump on board and support our international student cohort.

Ms BATTEN: We have the international student wellbeing grants, which have been running since 2018. Over 8,000 international students have enjoyed more than 90 events and activities that support the mental health and wellbeing of international students. During COVID we ran two rounds per financial year to increase the support for international students.

We have indications from students that level of support is no longer required, which is great. One round for 2022–23 has just closed, and \$150,000 in grant funding will be going out to businesses, community groups, and education and training providers to support the wellbeing of international students.

Some of the activities and events we held, include professional development for international students; resume writing; interview techniques; wellbeing activities; mental health resilience projects; and, as the minister mentioned, the establishment of Kindness Shake. They have been supported for many years through the wellbeing grants. These are just a few of the activities that are funded.

Mrs HERSEY: Has consideration been given to incentives for international students to choose the NT over other states and, if so, what are they?

Ms AH KIT: The incentives in place are the scholarship program and the accommodation grants.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the budget for the Study NT office?

Ms AH KIT: There is currently 4.38 FTE in Study NT, and the budget is \$1.6m.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you explain what their levels and roles are?

Ms BATTEN: There is a Director for Study NT, which is a SAO2 role; two senior project officers in the team as AO7s; and an administrative support role at an AO3.

Mrs HERSEY: Has Study NT resumed sending delegates to attract international students to the NT and, if so, what is the budget?

Ms AH KIT: At this stage the focus has been on local development. We have that marketing fund to support local providers. The \$500,000, which is an increase in the budget gives the Study NT team the opportunity to send a delegation overseas. I know they are very excited about that. We are targeting five countries. It is important to piggy back off the work CDU has done through Vice-Chancellor Scott Bowman and his recent delegation overseas.

I am grateful to have such a wonderful team. It is a very small team, and they do incredible work. It is important that they send a delegation over there as well.

Mrs HERSEY: Are there any plans in the future for anyone to go? Has anything been booked or planned?

Mr LOVETT: The operational plans are being finalised for the next financial year's activity. In general broad terms those five markets will be covered. The partnership with local providers, particularly Charles Darwin University and other private providers, will be front and centre as will our work with Austrade and the Study Australia partnership. The plan is imminent.

Mrs HERSEY: That is exciting. Does Study NT work to any KPIs and, if so, what are they?

Ms AH KIT: The overarching goal Study NT is focusing on is to reach the 10,000 international student quota by the end of 2025. It ties in with the importance of that delegation going over and targeting those five countries.

Mrs HERSEY: Reaching that 10,000 would be the tangible outcomes of Study NT.

Prior to COVID, the largest cohort of international students choosing Australia were from China; however, Chinese students are a much smaller proportion of the students who choose to study in the Territory. Is anything being done to appeal to this large pool of students that we do not currently attract?

Ms AH KIT: We are not able to travel into China; it is closed off. It is difficult for us to send a delegation and try to have face-to-face conversations to sell the Northern Territory as an international education destination. China sits third with regard to our cohort of international students. We have 282 students, or 10.2% of our international student population.

We will continue to maintain our networks and relationships with international education counterparts in China, trying to entice international students from all five destinations to the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: When international students arrive, is there a welcome program? If so, how many students access it?

Ms BATTEN: Each year we hold the Minister for International Education's annual reception to welcome international students. This year we had over 200 attendees, including newly arrived international student education and training providers, delegates and businesses. We work through our education and training providers; students are involved through the provider. We do not have direct contact with the students. Each student receives a welcome handbook through their education and training providers, produced by Study NT.

Mrs HERSEY: Was that the one you were talking about—\$4,000 for the handbook for the students?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there a homestay network in the Territory and, if so, could you provide details, including how many homes and how many students access it?

Ms AH KIT: There are homestays available through a private company. It is a small quota and is not part of the data that Study NT would possess.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there a student ambassador program up and running? How many student ambassadors do we have, and what are their roles?

Ms AH KIT: Study NT runs an amazing student ambassador program, which was established in 2016. This year's cohort has 20 international student ambassadors.

Ms BATTEN: The ambassador program has been running for a number of years; it is very popular with the international students in the Territory. We generally receive more than 100 applications over the course of the 12-month program. Ambassadors undergo personal and professional development, attend networking events and meet delegations. They recently met our Minister for International Education, they attend the welcome reception and mentor and support other students who are studying.

They have a great role. We use them to promote the Territory to their respective countries. Our ambassadors come from a range of nationalities and are across most of our education and training providers.

Mrs HERSEY: What criteria is there for the ambassador program?

Ms BATTEN: There is an application form they need to fill in. We ask them about their own community engagement, volunteering experience, social media reach, how they network with their peers, where and what they are studying and why they think they can represent the Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there a limit on how many ambassadors? You said there are 20. Were there only 20 applications?

Ms AH KIT: I understand that there were more than 100 applications for the 20 international student ambassador positions. That is limited by the funding provided to Study NT to operate the program. In saying that, it is wonderful to have 100 applications for 20 positions. I have spoken to a number of international students who have applied and been unsuccessful, but it is wonderful to see them out and about engaging in local events, joining local multicultural events and supporting and integrating into the community. It is a fantastic program that is well-revered.

As I said earlier about the Kindness Shake initiative, the international students who were the ambassadors at that time, stepped up to lead us through that difficult time. They are continuing with the Festival of Kindness, this Saturday, which is the second one. They are incredible ambassadors.

It is a very difficult process, and I do not envy Study NT—Larnie and her team—to try to decide which one of those 100 applications will join the table of 20 each year.

Mrs HERSEY: You said 'reliant on the budget'. What was the budget for the ambassador program?

Ms AH KIT: I am advised it is approximately \$30,000.

Mrs HERSEY: How many CRICOS-registered places are there in the Territory? How many were there in 2018?

Ms AH KIT: We do not have that information at our fingertips, but we can get that from the Australian Government. I am happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 9.10

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

Mrs HERSEY: How many CRICOS-registered places are there in the Territory? How many were there in 2018?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms AH KIT: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 9.10.

Mr YAN: I listened to questions earlier about budgets within your remit and Minister Lawler's remit. There is an international education budget line item of 9.5 within Minister Lawler's remit for \$2.138m, and you have a budget remit of \$1.604m. I would like to get a breakdown of exactly what that budget of \$1.604m in your remit is. I would like to get a breakdown of what Minister Lawler is responsible for under \$2.138m, but I do not think you will be able to give that to me.

Could I get an idea of what your budget responsibility is with that \$1.604m? I am a little confused about what both budgets do. I am trying to get it clear in my head.

Ms AH KIT: My portfolio looks after the marketing and promotion of international education. The line item in the Department of Education, under Minister Lawler, would be about the registration of the international students at the schools.

Mr YAN: That might clear it up for me. Minister Lawler is responsible for what takes place in the schools with her \$2.138m, and you are responsible for marketing internationally with your \$1.604m?

Ms AH KIT: We still promote the secondary schools.

Mr YAN: Yes, because Minister Lawler is responsible for primary and secondary, and you are specifically talking about tertiary with your promotions. Is that correct?

Ms AH KIT: We do all of it.

Mr YAN: Okay. You are promoting primary, secondary and tertiary.

Ms AH KIT: Yes, and VET.

Mr YAN: Thank you, that clears up some things for me.

Mr CHAIR: It being 6.30 pm, that concludes the time we have for you, minister, for all your portfolios. On behalf of the committee I thank you, your agency, the department staff and everyone who has contributed to your testimony today.

Ms AH KIT: I also put my thanks on the public record. It is an enormous amount of work that our public servants undertake to prepare for estimates. Some of them do not get a guernsey, year-in and year-out. We appreciate all of your work.

In my Disability and Multicultural portfolios, I appreciate all the department's efforts in preparing the briefs and making sure I was as well-prepared as I could be. Thank you to Scott, Larnie and everyone across my four portfolios. Thank you to my brand-new ministerial staff for getting me ready. More importantly, thank you Mr Chair and all the Estimates Committee members for doing the hard yards, asking all the questions and making sure we are accountable for public spend.

Lastly, thank you to all the DLA staff. It is an incredible effort. As a former Speaker, I understand exactly what you guys go through, and I appreciate it. Thank you, one and all.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you very much for your time. Thank you to all the staff.

The committee concluded.
